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'Baisies Ceste Feuille': Queer(ing) Rhetoric in Verse Romances and the Dits, from Chretien de Troyes to Christine de Pizan

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**‘BAISIÉS CESTE FEUILLE’:
QUEERING RHETORIC IN VERSE ROMANCES AND THE *DITS*,
FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES TO CHRISTINE DE PIZAN**

Charles Samuelson

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Advisor: Sarah Kay

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Abstract

This dissertation studies the two most prominent lyrico-narrative genres of the French Middle Ages, verse romances and the *dits*, which have not previously been examined together. Critics have underscored the “self-consciousness” of each genre; considering them together, I argue, will serve both to contextualize and to deepen our knowledge of the modalities and stakes of linguistic indeterminacy in texts associated with each. I also argue that their juxtaposition highlights the startling queerness, defined with such thinkers as Judith Butler and Lee Edelman as the resistance to any stable conception of identity or figuration, characteristic of both. Within the dissertation, I explore different ways in which texts that we now associate with each genre foreground the indeterminacy at the heart of language and of gender and sexuality—and also at the heart of the relationship between language, gender, and sexuality. I therefore trouble the border between verse romances and the *dits* in order to open up new readings of how verse romances and *dits* perturb other distinctions, be they literary—such as the opposition of lyricism to narrativity or the neat separation of narrative levels—or ethico-political, related, for example, to the contours of the normative subject or to the hetero/homo binary. By defining and articulating queerness in terms of the relationship of language to sexuality, rather than uniquely in terms of “sodomy,” I offer a new and wider account of the unflagging queerness of medieval French courtly literature, while I explore the complex intersections between contemporary theory and medieval literature in order to make the case for the particular importance of vernacular poetics of the period to the history of the intertwinement of discursivity, gender and sexuality, which figures so prominently in modern theory.

Introduction

“Baisiés ceste fueille!”: Queer(ing) Rhetoric in Verse Romances and the *Dits*, from Chrétien de Troyes to Christine de Pizan¹

He [Chrétien de Troyes] has certainly been “the one who has given the measure” for twelfth century and subsequent romance writing... But just as the herald’s cry sounds like a riddle that provokes questions from the spectators who first hear him, we modern readers of Chrétien may be moved to ask what and how his romances are measuring. (Matilda Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 60)

This dissertation studies together the two most prominent lyrico-narrative genres of the French Middle Ages: verse romances, whose heyday went from the mid-twelfth century through the thirteenth, and whose most important figure is Chrétien de Troyes; and the *dits*, which criticism now primarily associates with the fourteenth century and with Guillaume de Machaut.² Although these represent two of the three most studied and taught genres of medieval “French” literature (the third being lyric poetry, where the Occitan material dominates), they have yet to be examined together.³ Instead, Guillaume de Lorris’s and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* is often considered an end-point for the fabulous eruption of twelfth-century courtly literature whose most prominent manifestations were verse romances, and then as the *point de départ* largely responsible for inspiring later *dits*, but seldom as both romance and *dit*.

¹ The citation is from Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre du Voir Dit*, ed. Paul Imbs, v. 2419. All editions of primary texts refer to editions cited in the bibliography, unless otherwise specified.

² Didier Lechat discusses the differences between thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *dits* and provides a bibliography. For our purposes, the most obvious difference is in terms of length, with thirteenth-century *dits* rarely approaching the length of many later ones, with the notable exceptions of Baodouin de Condé’s *Prisons d’amour* and, as we shall see in Ch III, Nicole de Margival’s *Dit de la panthère*. See Lechat, “Dire par fiction,” 11.

³ The notable exception to this statement are texts that concentrate on lyric insertion, as we shall see in Chapter III. The most important text not about lyric insertion to treat both verse romances and the *dits* is Michel Zink’s *La subjectivité littéraire*.

Yet there is considerable justification for bringing these two genres together. They are, critics agree, the most “self-conscious” or “meta-narrative” medieval genres: that is, the narrative genres most concerned with the relationship between, on the one hand, the circumstances of creation and the performance of the text (its *énonciation*) and, on the other, its content (the *énoncé*).⁴ Perhaps because of the unusual weight placed on the *énonciation*, critics have held that neither genre defines itself by association with a particular subject matter; they have been characterized as “protean,” “*fourre-touts*,” or “*second-degré*.”⁵ Yet to argue that neither genre has a particular subject matter is also to overlook the obvious; for these are the two genres which elaborate lengthy verse narratives about “courtly love,” which we can initially define simply as love stories told for and about aristocrats. This notion of “courtly love” is inherited from lyric poetry, with which both genres have a privileged relationship; indeed, as of the thirteenth century, lyric pieces were “inserted” into verse romances and *dits* far more often than into any other genres.⁶ This reflexivity—this interest in the intertwinement of *énonciation* and *énoncé*—may, then, be the legacy of the equivalency, established by troubadour and

⁴ For example, Sophie Marnette has demonstrated that the narratorial and/or authorial “I” is more likely to intervene in verse romances than in other contemporary genres: see *Narrateurs et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*. For considerations of the *second-degré* quality of the *dits*, see Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, “Le clerc et l’écriture: Le *Voir Dit* de Guillaume de Machaut et la définition du *dit*.”

⁵ The terms *protean* appears in Matilda Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 2, 109, 208. For an overview of definitions of the *dits*, using the term *fourre-tout*, see Monique Léonard, *Le dit et sa technique littéraire*, 9-32. For the term *second-degré*, see Cerquiglini-Toulet, “Le clerc et l’écriture,” 143.

⁶ See Maureen Boulton, *The Song in the Story*. The stress that she places in the introduction on the fact that multiple genres could and did accommodate the phenomenon is somewhat inconsistent with her ensuing choice to study almost exclusively verse romances and *dits*.

trouvère lyrics, between the acts of singing (and/or of composing) and of loving, which Roger Dragonetti, Paul Zumthor, and Robert Guette have famously demonstrated.⁷

These (very) basic similarities among the terms by which critics define each genre in turn invite us to redraw the map of medieval French literature by studying together two genres that, it seems, we have held apart for largely institutional reasons. Scholars frequently specialize in either the High or the Late Middle Ages, and even those who have written on both have by-and-large considered them separately, implying, as I understand it, that there is plenty to say about each without needing to bring the two together.⁸ I shall argue, however, that the juxtaposition of verse romances and the *dits* “opens up readings” of each, to borrow Derrida’s famous phrase to which we will return.⁹ And consistent both with the sense of Derrida’s phrase and with later interpretations of his work, these readings foreground both the deconstructive rhetoricity and the queerness characteristic of both genres. By *deconstructive rhetoricity*, I mean, in the broadest terms, their mutual emphasis on the fundamental instability, even impropriety, of language, and their extreme self-consciousness that, at the same time as language purports to define order, it also subverts it, whether in literary, philosophical, or ethico-political terms. By *queerness*, I mean that each genre insists on the inextricability of this rhetoricity from sexuality—and *vice versa*. Heterosexuality thus appears not as a natural, univocal

⁷ See Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*; Roger Dragonetti, *La technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise*; and Robert Guette, *D’une poésie formelle en France au Moyen Âge*.

⁸ Douglas Kelly, Kevin Brownlee, and Sarah Kay are examples of scholars who have written about both the High and the Late Middle Ages, while by-and-large considering them separately. On the French side, Michel Zink stands out for his extraordinary range.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 220.

impulse, but rather as a set of contingent discursive codes that don't add up, and that we can and should question.

Because I argue that the interest of texts belonging to each genre lies in how they challenge limits and exaggerate indeterminacies, this thesis will be relatively unconcerned with assigning limits or definitions to these genres. Instead, this introduction will proceed in four parts: first, two *accessi ad artem* will contextualize and articulate what is at stake in, respectively, the deconstructive rhetoricity and the queerness of verse romances and the *dits*. Only once these theoretical notions have been better established will I touch on questions of genre in a briefer final *accessus ad artem*, before proceeding to an *accessus ad auctores*, an outline of this thesis' *dispositio* which explains my choices of which texts to bring together under different deconstructive/queer rubrics.

Accessus ad artem I: Deconstructive Rhetoricity

Paul de Man's 1977 *Allegories of Reading* is, as he writes in the first chapter, inspired by the tension between what he calls "grammar" and "rhetoric," a tension whose implications he traces through many of the great "romantic" and "postromantic" authors, to use his terms. Though he acknowledges that "concise theoretical exposition" of it is "beyond [his] powers," de Man nonetheless ascribes his basic understanding of the opposition of grammar to rhetoric to Kenneth Burke and Charles Sanders Peirce.¹⁰ Following Burke, he sees rhetoric "as a dialectical subversion of the consistent link between sign and meaning that operates within grammatical patterns," and referring to Peirce, he describes "the process by which 'one sign gives birth to another' as pure

¹⁰ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Meaning*, 9.

rhetoric, as distinguished from pure grammar, which postulates the possibility of the universal truth of meanings.”¹¹ To describe this opposition summarily, we might say that de Man echoes Thomas of Chobham’s early thirteenth-century notion, here summarized by Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, that “grammar and dialectic deal with a stability of meaning,” while “rhetoric governs the ambiguation of meaning.”¹² As de Man writes, “Grammar and logic stand to each other in a dyadic relationship of unsubverted support,” while “Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration.”¹³

As recourse to Thomas suggests, the basic opposition that de Man stages between rhetoric and grammar has ancient origins and was of prime interest to medieval clerks writing in Latin. Turning to ancient and medieval texts even helps illuminate de Man’s complex *point de départ*. Ancient and medieval rhetoric and grammar, as Copeland argues in her remarkable study of the history of their interrelation, “could not so easily be distinguished,” because “the two disciplines overlapped in their most fundamental procedures, rhetorical *inventio* and grammatical or hermeneutical *enarratio*.”¹⁴ But, she then illustrates, such overlap can both cloud differences between these two *artes* of the trivium and, insofar as each sought to justify its own distinct orientation or claim jurisdiction over certain domains, have the effect of foregrounding them. As Copeland and Sluiter both insist and show throughout their massive edition of medieval writing on rhetoric and grammar, the differences between these *artes* are most dramatically felt in the principle arena to which they both lay claim: figurative language. From Antiquity

¹¹ De Man, *Allegories*, 8-9.

¹² The quote is from R. Copeland and I. Sluiter, in *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric*, 38.

¹³ De Man, *Allegories*, 7, 10.

¹⁴ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 2.

through the Middle Ages, they write, “grammar, in its drive towards correctness, treats the figures and tropes last as a form of deviation from correctness,” whereas rhetoric consistently “treats figurative style as the last of its compositional components or canons, as if to suggest that the edifice under construction is now ready for its surface, its outer walls, its uppermost layers.”¹⁵ Traditionally, then, figurative language represents, for grammar, a “deviation from a proper ‘norm’ of ‘correctness’ and ‘proper words,’” while “in rhetoric it is amplification of form and meaning.”¹⁶ Rhetoric therefore embodies what de Man calls the “figural potentiality” of language, the turn away from proper meaning or even, by extension, the impossibility for language and meaning to “remain still or where they should” (to borrow from Derrida’s description of haunting), while grammar instead betokens a fundamental belief in correct, logical, natural or original meaning, and a desire to return to it should it have become obscured.¹⁷

In medieval literature, the text which perhaps best dramatizes this tension between grammar and rhetoric, as well as both the stakes and the limitations of their binary opposition, is Alain de Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae*.¹⁸ Nature explicitly embraces a grammatical outlook, condemning, as William Burgwinkle writes, “some figures as metaphors of unnatural sexual practices, especially *metaplasmus* (highly irregular grammatical change), *barbarismus* (mistakes in forms of words, such as gender), and *syneresis* (contracting two syllables into one), since they suggest the mutability of all language and coupling.”¹⁹ Yet, Burgwinkle adds, “she [Nature] freely acknowledges

¹⁵ Copeland and Sluiter, 32.

¹⁶ Copeland and Sluiter, 35.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Les Spectres de Marx*, 30. See Ch. IV for discussion of spectropoetics, esp. the introduction.

¹⁸ Alain de Lille, *La plainte de la nature/De planctu Naturae*.

¹⁹ William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature*, 181.

using *antiphrasis* and oxymora, rhetorical figures which, one could argue, also subvert the natural order she claims extends even to grammar.”²⁰ It is telling that the errors Burgwinkle quotes are grammatical, never taken up by rhetoric, whereas when Nature seems to go against her own message, it is largely through figures associated with medieval rhetoric. Following Burgwinkle and others who have studied the “de-constructability” of the *De Planctu*, Noah Guynn observes that, “For Alain, rhetoric, even more so than the other *artes*, plays a contradictory, morally dubious role.”²¹ We may, then, characterize Alain’s text as torn between a grammatical outlook, explicitly embraced by Nature, and a rhetorical one, which resides in what Burgwinkle calls “those gaps” which have the effect of “making abjection [or linguistic and sexual deviancy] look glamorous.”²² And true to de Man’s notion that, “The two readings,” the grammatical and the rhetorical, “have to engage each other in direct confrontation, for the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it,” the grammatical and rhetorical paradigms subvert each other, as the rhetorical reading represents precisely the queerness that the grammatical one denounces, thereby not only subverting but indeed perverting Nature’s grammar.²³

There is, though, something unsatisfyingly reductive about such a reading of the *De Planctu*; for even though it can account for the rhetorical deviancy that runs counter to the text’s explicit argument, the binary opposition of grammar to rhetoric finally has the effect of circumscribing the text’s engagement with abjection (or its rhetoricity) into an overly neat—or overly binary—system. To use a pseudo-Foucauldian metaphor, it

²⁰ Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 181.

²¹ Noah Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages*, 101.

²² Burgwinkle, 194.

²³ De Man, *Allegories*, 12.

quarantines abjection, when the point is rather that the textual gaps and deviations are infectious, unable to be definitively located, circumscribed, or contained. Not to question the binary opposition of grammar to rhetoric thus has the effect of neutralizing the potency of the latter, in a gesture that de Man dubs the “grammaticalization of rhetoric.”²⁴ Indeed, the great merit of brilliant readings of Alain’s text by such scholars as Larry Scanlon, Burgwinkle, and Guynn, is that they resist stopping the text’s deviatory movements by resorting to an artificial binary that, in its binarism, would necessarily resemble Nature’s problematic logic.²⁵ Instead, these critical assessments function de-constructively, according to one characterization of de-construction which Derrida proposes in *Psychè: l’invention de l’autre* (text which, I note in passing, he dedicates to de Man on the occasion of his death): de-construction, writes Derrida, functions “[en] tournant ces règles dans le respect de ces règles mêmes afin de laisser l’autre venir ou s’annoncer dans l’ouverture de cette déhiscence.”²⁶ Burgwinkle describes his way of reading the *De Planctu* in similar terms: “I propose to follow Alain’s own prescribed reading and writing practice: push the word to its allegorical and etymological limit, chart the text’s assaults on its own logic, and read it against the grain.”²⁷ The implication of both Derrida’s and Burgwinkle’s modes of reading is that the binary of reading “for” or “against” a text finally doesn’t hold up. Both imply that to follow modalities inscribed in the texts to their logical “limits” ironically amounts to dramatizing their gaps, or to reading them “against the grain.”

²⁴ De Man, *Allegories*, 15.

²⁵ See Larry Scanlon, “Unspeakable Pleasures.”

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Psychè: Invention de l’autre*, v. 1, 59. He is referring first to Ponge’s *Fables*, then applies this notion to de-construction.

²⁷ Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 172.

I am insisting on the pertinence and the limitations of the opposition of grammar to rhetoric in Alain's text because it figures the movement I follow in this thesis. Each chapter may be said to dramatize some form of the conflict between grammatical and rhetorical paradigms. This is most evidently the case in the first chapter, which takes the grammatical difference between the first- and third-persons and "rhetoricizes" it. Rather than understanding this grammatical opposition as betokening radically opposing conceptions of subjectivity (as Benveniste would have it), such texts as Christine de Pizan's *Duc des vrais amans* manipulate pronominal confusion in order to emphasize the indeterminacy at the heart of conceptions of subjectivity, with such indeterminacy reflecting rhetoric's movement away from stability or propriety. Although it does not evoke any explicitly grammatical issue, the second chapter traces a similar movement. I contend that what narratologists, following Genette, term metalepsis, or the interreference of one narrative level into the time and space of another, is not an exceptional occurrence, but rather effectively the rule for authorial/narratorial intrusions.²⁸ Close readings routinely showcase a subtle imbrication of these interventions with the *énoncés* they recount, with such imbrication in turn both preventing us from assigning clearcut borders to narratological levels or from knowing which level has semantic priority over the other. The effect of these metalepses is to problematize notions of determinacy: of narratological hierarchies, but also, we shall see, of the ethical signification of various interventions, as the possibility that an author/narrator can intervene from a clearcut position and say what s/he means, which reflects a certainty and stability that can be dubbed grammatical, gives way to a larger and messier indeterminacy or rhetoricity. As

²⁸ Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, 244.

Debra Malina writes, “the metaleptic cycle forces us to read deconstructively: we must refrain from shutting down meaning, re-containing narrative and its subjects within our usual frames, and instead remain open to unresolvable ambiguities...”²⁹

At the end of the introduction, I will describe in more detail the organization of the chapters. Here, I am describing ways in which the grammatical/rhetorical opposition manifests itself in the first and second chapters in order to suggest how this opposition both informs the thinking throughout the dissertation and doesn’t hold up according to its own terms; for in the second chapter, there is nothing technically “grammatical” that is being associated with the grammatical paradigm. This looseness with the terms “grammatical” and “rhetorical”—which, in its dramatization of linguistic aberrance, may itself be rhetorical—in fact represents an important factor motivating my recourse to de Manian de-construction. Unlike medieval thought, which associates certain domains, figures, etc., with grammar, certain with rhetoric (and certain with both, certain with neither), de Manian de-construction understands grammar and rhetoric as paradigmatic and therefore themselves figurative, symbolizing belief in the propriety and potential stability of language and meaning, in the case of grammar, or the opposite, in the case of rhetoric. This terminological openness—or aberrance—in turn allows us to stretch the implications of the opposition of rhetoric and grammar past conventional limits; it is crucial for any attempt not to confine or quarantine rhetoric’s abjection. Another important, and interrelated, difference distinguishing modern de-construction from articulations of the rhetorical and grammatical arts in the Middle Ages is that this opposition is frequently a *point d’arrivée* in medieval Latin treatises, while it is a *point de*

²⁹ Debra Malina, *Breaking the Frame*, 19.

départ for de Man (as it is for this thesis). Treatises like Thomas's *Summa de arte praedicandi*, for example, sought to distinguish grammar from rhetoric as part of a vast project to chart the relationship between different domains of knowledge.³⁰ This desire to delimit and plot knowledge was, to use the term Chrétien plays on in the conclusion of *Yvain*, among the principal *fins* of such texts as Isidore's *Etymologiae*, Thierry of Chartres's *Heptateuchon*, Gundissalinus's *De divisione philosophiae* or Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiae*, to borrow the several examples that Copeland and Sluiter provide of this vast endeavor.³¹ De Man would hold that such a *fin* is a *parti pris* in the name of grammar, necessarily a "grammaticalization of rhetoric," because it ascribes positional stability to the *artes* (including rhetoric), which is antithetical to rhetoric's definitional aberrance. The effect of de Man's using the tension between grammar and rhetoric as a figurative starting-point rather than an end-point is, then, to give rhetoricity either a fighting chance or the upper hand; it will allow him to practice readings that emphasize what he calls the "anxiety" or "bliss" of "ignorance," a "suspension," for as long as the critic can maintain it, of her/his inevitable (but, de Man would argue, inevitably unsuccessful) gesture which attempts to tame a text's deviatory tendencies.³² In his words, "Literature as well as criticism—the difference between them being delusive—is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms

³⁰ Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de arte praedicandi*. Fragments also translated in Copeland and Sluiter, 614-38.

³¹ These are some of the examples that Copeland and Sluiter provide when describing medieval "classifications of knowledge": see Copeland and Sluiter, 4. I discuss *Yvain*'s conclusion in the opening to Ch. IV.

³² De Man, *Allegories*, 19.

himself.”³³ Similarly, driving this dissertation is my conviction that the “rigor” of the medieval texts examined is precisely their self-conscious “unreliability.” This is perhaps most evidently the case in various Late Medieval texts such as the *Voir Dit*; for if, as Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet famously argues, the text is modeled on the image of Fortune’s wheel, the order it provides is only one of disorder (as I explore in more detail in Ch. IV).³⁴ In fact, Machaut’s description of Fortune in the *Remède de Fortune* nicely describes de Man’s conception of rhetoric: its “mobilité/en mouvant” (mobility in moving) paradoxically serves as its “estabéleté” (stability).³⁵ It follows that my self-defined task in this thesis is to use my own “rigor” not to let illusions of stability cloud how texts self-consciously embrace language’s unstoppable movement, which, by virtue of being unstoppable, necessarily veers into deviancy.

Medieval rhetoric was frequently distinguished from dialectic by its orientation in particulars, not universals.³⁶ De-construction is, following Derrida’s above-cited formula, also concerned with using particulars to express knowledge, because it functions by turning and re-turning a given text; this is also how de Man structures his *Allegories of Reading*. It therefore makes sense to provide a taste of how de Manian rhetoricity may inspire fruitful readings of medieval texts. The subject of the third chapter is the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century phenomenon of lyric insertion. Critics have persistently understood this practice in extremely binary terms, be it in terms of the opposition between writing and orality (or song), narrative and lyrics, synchronicity and diachronicity, or what Cerquiglini-Toulet calls *montage* and *collage* (note that many of

³³ De Man, *Allegories*, 19.

³⁴ Jacqueline Cerquiglini-[Toulet], “*Un Engin si Subtil*,” 56-89.

³⁵ Guillaume de Machaut, *Remède de Fortune*, vv. 2359-40.

³⁶ See notably Boethius, *De Topicis Differentiis*, Book IV.

these binary oppositions are imperfectly reflected in the opposition between verse romances and the *dits*).³⁷ I am interested less in combatting this binarism *per se* than in unearthing what it obfuscates. In readings of Jean Renart's *Rose*, Jakemés's *Roman du Châtelain de Couci et de la dame de Fayel* and Nicole de Margival's (probably) contemporaneous *Dit de la panthère*, I argue that each narrative deconstructs—again, precisely according to the modalities of Derrida's formulation—what Roger Dragonetti calls the “rhetoricity” of trouvère lyrics, by which Dragonetti means the tendency of trouvère lyrics to displace the referent from an actual love story onto language and discursivity itself.³⁸ The surrounding narratives do not, that is, only function to place the lyrics into a “narrative setting” characterized by diachronic temporality and mimetic referentiality; instead, they also exaggerate the lyric challenge to the stability, even to the possibility, of the referent. Reading the larger narratives as extending, rather than squashing, the tropological indeterminacy of the lyrics, opens up new readings of their means of engaging both with the lyrics and with the philosophical and ethical ramifications of linguistic deviancy, as we shall see.

I have been borrowing this expression to “open up readings” from Derrida's description of his ambitions in the *Grammatologie*: “la critique traditionnelle...n'a jamais fait que *protéger*, il n'a jamais *ouvert* une lecture,” he writes.³⁹ Derrida's implication (which is only questionably compatible with the above-cited formula from *Psychè*) is that the critic should prioritize the rigorous practice of her/his own *inventio* when reading a text over fear of violating the text's explicit terms. This in turn belies a belief in the

³⁷ See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-[Toulet], “*Un Engin si Subtil*,” 23-32.

³⁸ Dragonetti, *La technique poétique*.

³⁹ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, 220, his emphases.

binary opposition between, to use Derrida's terms, "protecting" and "opening," that does not hold up in the texts studied in this dissertation. While I do not examine Marie de France's *Lais* directly, their infamous "prologue" provides the clearest example of how courtly texts can trouble this opposition between "protecting" and "opening." I cite excerpts:

Ki Deus a duné esciënce
E de parler bon' eloquence,
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
Ainz se deit volunters mustrer...

S/he to whom God has given knowledge, and good eloquence when speaking, should not be quiet or hide her/himself, but rather willingly reveal her/himself.

Custume fu as anciëns,
Ceo tes[ti]moine Preciëns,
Es livres ke jadis feseient
Assez oscurement diseient
Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
E ki apendre les deveient,
K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
E de lur sen le surplus mettre.⁴⁰

It was the custom of the ancients, as Priscian demonstrates, that in the books which they long-ago made, they would write rather obscurely for those who would come later and who would learn/study these works, so that they could gloss the letters and with their learning, add their supplement.

Marie is here juxtaposing rhetorical and grammatical paradigms. She bows to the notion, recurrent in medieval grammar and frequently ascribed to Priscian, that it is the task of the contemporary author to find the now-obscure original significance in the writings of the *auctores*. Yet her notion that she should "reveal herself" (*se mustrer*) and "*de [son] sen le surplus mettre*" (with her learning, add her supplement) speak more to a Ciceronian

⁴⁰ Marie de France, *Lais*, vv. 1-4, 9-16. All translations from the Old French in this dissertation are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

rhetorical paradigm, according to which the contemporary author should translate according to the spirit, not the letter, of the original text, modifying it or deviating from it as s/he draws on her own *inventio*.⁴¹ Benoît de Sainte-Maure also foregrounds this juxtaposition in his prologue to the *Roman de Troie*, writing that, while “I will follow the letter of the Latin and the text, and I do not wish to add anything else” (“Le latin sivrai e la letre;/Niul autre rien n’i voudrai metre”) he will nonetheless mobilize his own *inventio* when it is fruitful: “Ne di mie qu’aucun buen dit/N’i mete, se faire le sai...” (I am not at all saying that I will not myself add some good bits of text, if I am capable).⁴² Like Benoît, then, Marie seems to embrace some amount of deviancy or aberrance; in fact, her subsequent move, away from Latin texts and toward Celtic *lais*, represents another *turn* that may even render this Latinate passage impertinent, since the Celtic texts, she announces, are translated “pur remembrance” (for memory’s sake) and not necessarily because of their hidden significance.⁴³

Benoît and Marie thus invite us to consider their texts as including some deviations that embrace, to a certain extent, eruptions of anachronism. And to make a leap from how Marie and Benoît relate to their predecessors to how we read Marie and Benoît today, it seems fair to argue that critics tend to value their “rhetoricity” over their “grammaticality,” insofar as we are, for example, more interested in how Marie subtly constructs the *lais* than in their putative original form. We are likewise more interested in what Benoît does to Dares Phrygius’s text than in lauding his fidelity toward it, like—to

⁴¹ The reference is to Cicero’s *De optimo genere oratorum* 5.14-15. See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation* for discussion of medieval understanding of this paradigm, 2, 11-13, and *passim*.

⁴² Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, vv. 139-40, 142-3.

⁴³ Marie, *Lais*, v. 35.

provide one more example—we are by-and-large more interested in how Jean de Meun manipulates Guillaume de Lorris’s *Rose* or interprets various Latin thinkers than in how he would help clarify their original intentions and meaning (as if Jean clarifies anything!). There may, then, be a considerable irony frequently underlying critical approaches to texts like Marie’s, Benoît’s, Jean’s, or all those studied in this dissertation; for while “rhetoricity” may be valued over “grammaticality,” on the one hand—although this valuation is relative, not absolute—on the other hand there is a recurrent modern critical impetus to “elucidate” the sense of these texts *without* “de [notre] sen le surplus mettre,” that is, without adding our own anachronistic deviations, which would be at best distracting, at worst misleading. Therefore, while we laud rhetoricity over grammaticality, we often find ourselves striving to analyze these texts grammatically, attempting to glimpse their original significance in their original contexts. Put negatively, this means that if we conceive of our tasks as critics as primarily “glossing these texts according to their letter” we are paradoxically not respecting all that they set out to do or even what we find most remarkable about them. Put affirmatively, this means that the rhetoricity characteristic of many medieval texts makes the space for the use of modern theory, not despite, but because, it runs the risk of deviation and anachronism, because such is precisely the spirit—not the letter—of these texts, to return to their freer incorporation of Ciceronian *translatio*.

I want to insist on this notion that we can understand these texts as themselves inviting us to mobilize our modern *inventio*, and specifically frameworks which emphasize the aberrancy of language, in order paradoxically to read them according to their own terms by reading them according to ours. Another way of framing this paradox

is in terms of intentionality. As we shall see in more detail in Ch. IV, there is something too easy about the gesture of writing off authorial intentionality as irrelevant in our post-Barthesian and -Foucauldian world. For although Foucault does hail the death of the author, the frequent ascription to him of the impetus always to contextualize has the effect of emphasizing other sorts of intentionality, since, it follows, texts are intended to mean something within their given epistemological and social contexts. The intentionality of the author gives way to a contextual intentionality—whether articulated in terms of an “episteme” or the agenda of “power”—that is left relatively intact.⁴⁴ If allowed to stand, this necessarily limits the potential implications of medieval texts, which couldn’t “intend” to be, say, feminist, pro-gay or queer, according to twenty-first century understandings of these terms, because this would be beyond their epistemological limits and, in any case, probably not what Power was going for.⁴⁵ Furthermore, this possibility of contextual determinacy would, as it regards the Middle Ages, bring us back to authorial intentionality, because medieval rhetoric, no doubt for reasons as much political as poetical, routinely granted it a prominent, if not determinant, role in textual *inventio*. As Conrad of Hisau summarizes it, “*intentio* is authorial intention, what, to what extent, and about whom or what he or she [the author] proposes to write”; only one letter apart, *intentio* drives *inventio*.⁴⁶ It would then seem that contextualization within medieval rhetorical contexts would push us to grant a larger role

⁴⁴ *Les Mots et les choses* is the place to look for epistemological considerations; *Surveiller et punir* and then *l’Histoire de la sexualité*, especially the first volume, for analyses of “power.”

⁴⁵ I will discuss in Ch. II Matilda Bruckner’s observation about *Partonopeu de Blois* that, “I do not intend to make this anonymous romancer into a feminist defined by twentieth-century standards, although the narrator does frequently picture himself in his interventions as identifying with ladies, their point of view, their actions, and their values.” See *Shaping Romance*, 150.

⁴⁶ Cited in Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval Romance*, 37. His translation.

to intentionality than we might otherwise be inclined to today, because medieval texts would be intended to mean in epistemological and social contexts which stressed stressing the author's intentions.

Fascinatingly, though, if intentionality is a concept left relatively intact by rhetoric (and potentially even by Foucault, in some backward form), the texts we will examine in this thesis obsessively dramatize how intentions do not determine how actions are received, and thus only very problematically relate to their signification. (I note in passing that neither ethics, which very early considered intentions as thorny problems not necessarily determining the morality of actions—with Abelard being a crucial pre-Nicomachean figure in thinking about such questions—nor philosophy, with Aristotle's vastly influential considerations on contingency in the *Physics* predicated on how actions do not necessarily produce the intended result, took intentionality for granted⁴⁷). To give an example of this *mise en cause* of intentionality in a courtly text, the *Roman de Silence* repeatedly returns to how intentions backfire.⁴⁸ The two *jongleurs* with whom Silence travels come to regret their hospitality toward him/her, saying, “Tel caiel norist l’om adiés/Ki li cort a la janbe apriés./Tel fait meïsmes le vergant/Dont on le bat” (It’s like the dog that one feeds, who runs at his leg afterward; one makes oneself the stick with which one is then beaten).⁴⁹ Silence will return, almost word for word, to this theme, when deploring her/his own success at capturing Merlin: s/he exclaims, “Jo ai fait al fuer de serjan/Ki quiert meïsmes le verjant/Dont on le destraint et castie...” (I behaved in the

⁴⁷ For insightful discussion of Abelard and his relationship to intentionality, see Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. For a good *mise en relation* of Abelardian thought and medieval literature, see Tony Hunt, “Abelardian Ethics and Béroul’s *Tristan*.” For Aristotle’s discussion of contingency, see *The Physics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1.

⁴⁸ I will discuss and develop this example in Ch. II.

⁴⁹ *Silence: a Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, vv. 3255-58.

manner of a servant, who himself goes looking for the stick with which he will be forced and chastised).⁵⁰ If this self-consciously narrated text repeatedly illustrates how intentions backfire, it would be illogical for us to put too much stake in Heldris de Cornüalle's *intentio*, because the *intentio* of the text seems to be paradoxically to show how intentionality is not determinant; indeed, it is depicted as almost directly inverse to actual results. The *Voir Dit* also brings the problematization of intentionality into the diegesis. Guillaume cannot figure out how true Toute Belle's love for him is, and Toute Belle will say to Guillaume, "vous ne me poés plus courecier en monde que de moi mettre sus ce que je ne pensai onques" (you cannot anger me any more in this world than by accusing me of what I would never have even considered in my mind).⁵¹ The very possibility of "mettre sus" what she doesn't necessarily think or intend is thus incorporated *into* the *dit*. It follows that to read the text according to its own modalities, we can "put onto it" what it does not necessarily "think," especially if what we "put onto it" is the exaggeration of the investigation of semiotic instability, which by all accounts the *Voir Dit* sets into motion, and which spirals past the protagonist's good intentions. If, that is, the language that drives and sustains the relationship escapes the protagonist's control, threatening his love, we can also read the larger text accordingly, with an ear to how it both allows and even paradoxically intends for us to push it into spiraling beyond the author's intentions.⁵²

This possibility, which stands in perfect opposition to the recurrent notion, best articulated by Deborah McGrady, that Machaut sought complex ways to "control" his

⁵⁰ *Silence*, vv. 6442-45.

⁵¹ *Voir Dit*, l. 32, p. 538.

⁵² Ch. IV will develop this notion in relation to the *Voir Dit*.

readers, implies challenging not only the viability of rhetoric's starting-point, *intentio*, but also that of its end-point, *perfectio*; for texts increasingly appear as imperfect objects that we should focus less on protecting than on extending, pushing or exaggerating.⁵³ As Kelly notes, if *inventio* begins in *intentio*, it culminates in *perfectio*, or *parfaire* in the vernacular.⁵⁴ Yet certain vernacular texts explicitly challenge their own perfection. The *Voir Dit* is, again, a case-in-point. Machaut initially uses the verb in its rhetorical sense, writing early on that, before Love had asserted its power over him,

Je n'avoie vraiment
 Sans, matiere, ne sentement
 De quoy commencer le scëusse
 Ne dont *parfiner* le peüsse...⁵⁵

I truly didn't have the knowledge, the material, or the feeling with which to begin (the text), nor with which to perfect it.

Throughout the *dit*, he will describe Toute Belle's love for him as *parfait*: for example, "Elle m'amoit de cuer parfait/Par dit, par pensee, et par fait" (She loved me with a perfect heart: in words, thoughts, and deeds).⁵⁶ He then says of one of her later letters,

Bien avés vëu l'escripture
 De ma dame plaisant et pure,
 Qui est parfaite, sans deffaut
 De quanque a bonne et belle faut.⁵⁷

You have now seen the writing of my pleasant and pure Lady, who/which is perfect, without lacking anything that is necessary to be good or beautiful.

The ambiguity of the referent here, where *parfaite* could refer either to Toute Belle or to her writing, is telling; for if the text explicitly calls into question the "perfection" of

⁵³ Deborah McGrady, *Controlling Readers*.

⁵⁴ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 134-35.

⁵⁵ *Voir Dit*, vv. 61-64.

⁵⁶ *Voir Dit*, vv. 597-98.

⁵⁷ *Voir Dit*, vv. 6271-74.

Toute Belle's love, we can and should in turn call into question the "perfection" of the larger text. Indeed, Guillaume explicitly struggles to reorder the epistolary exchanges, and given that critics have been no more successful in establishing their definitive sequence, it seems probable that neither author nor narrator establishes a definitive order (*ordo* in rhetorical parlance) for the text.⁵⁸ We need not, then, presume that texts such as the *Voir Dit* are "finally" perfect, and the final chapter sets out precisely to investigate what we lose from reifying or canonizing Machaut's works as models of perfection or even of "authorship"—or conversely, what we stand to gain from insisting on imperfection. This chapter will consider Machaut's *oeuvre* alongside Chrétien's, since they together represent the two most formidable, or perfect, "authors" of *dits* and verse romances. It explores the poetic and the ethical implications of "perfection" being an ideal always both tainted with impurity and irresolution and threatened by its ties to abjection. "Qui tout me donne, tout me tost" (Who gives me everything, takes away everything), says Guillaume to Toute Belle, in a wonderful moment that testifies to this deconstructive notion that exaggerating the text in the sense in which it is already turning amounts to dramatizing its underlying gaps and insufficiencies.⁵⁹

I have begun to preview the methods of reading practiced in this dissertation. But, to make two somewhat bizarre statements, I am, at one level, hesitant to call this dissertation "new," insofar as I am using de-construction (however new one considers it) precisely to challenge notions of "newness" (my point has been that these texts are always both new and not new, which raises the question of how to respond appropriately to their newness) and also hesitant to introduce this thesis at all, because, as I have said, it

⁵⁸ Chapter IV takes up this question in its introduction.

⁵⁹ *Voir Dit*, v. 2472.

is a thesis about particulars, by which I mean that the particular texts examined are its *matiere*. It is nonetheless true that, over the course of these case studies, a new universal does emerge, which is a certain conception of verse romances and the *dits* as unrelentingly subversive. The subversiveness both of individual texts and of their respective genres has been debated by scholars for decades, although this question has been of far more interest to scholars of High Medieval romance than to those looking at the *dits*. To give examples of two particularly compelling arguments, Roberta Krueger has argued that subversiveness is an unintended consequence of verse romances, what a female audience could have gleaned from hearing them despite the genre's fundamental complicity with patriarchy.⁶⁰ For Guynn, on the other hand, seemingly subversive elements in fact represent highly complex ruses of power: as he writes,

medieval allegory typically exploits the instability of discursive meaning in order to generate anxieties about the *actual* instability of regimes of power and of the cultural and ideological fictions that support them. These anxieties in turn are used to sanction greater oversight and control within existing hierarchies.⁶¹

Highlighting the deconstructive rhetoricity of verse romances and the *dits* stands to make an important contribution to the study of these courtly genres because, unlike Krueger, it situates subversiveness, figured by rhetoricity, as a deliberate and fundamental property of both (although this same rhetoricity paradoxically challenges the viability of intentionality and the possibility of essentiality); whereas, contrary to Guynn's thesis, it refuses not the possibility of "greater oversight and control," but rather the notion that there is any reason to think this gesture could be successful, since, to quote de Man, "one more 'turn' or trope added to a series of earlier [ones] will not stop the turn towards

⁶⁰ See Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender*, esp. 1-32.

⁶¹ Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics*, 4. His emphasis.

error.”⁶² Certainly, I acknowledge, as Leo Bersani writes in different contexts, that “subversiveness” is a vague term whose potency has waned as it has been over-used and abused by critics; furthermore, as Judith Butler observes, “there is no criterion for subversion.”⁶³ Butler does, though, seem to admit one way of defining it: “Subversion is the kind of effect that resists calculation.”⁶⁴ In this thesis, I argue that it is perhaps more “the kind of effect that resists” reduction, logic, propriety or neatness. In fact, I am turning to this deconstructive methodology precisely because it provides tools that allow us to follow or push rhetoricity on its windy path: a path that, we shall see, is so consequential because it implies disturbing our most fundamental convictions by exposing gaps, faulty assumptions, gnawing, knotting, and naughty inconsistencies.

Accessus ad artem II: Queerness

Deconstructive rhetoricity is, though, only about half the story I wish to tell—in a word, because it does not necessarily foreground sex. Every text examined in this thesis is a story of “courtly love,” focusing, at the most literal level, on erotic and/or sexual relationships; and it is no doubt a testament to the amazing success, or incredible powers of seduction, of literature about sexuality—for medieval and for modern audiences—that we may consider electing to write about erotic/sexual relationships as almost self-evident rather than as a contingent move which texts and authors obsessively make. The fact that

⁶² De Man, *Allegories*, 113.

⁶³ Bersani, for example, refers to “subversion” as “a word I’ve come to distrust, since it doesn’t seem to mean much more than engaging in naughty parodies.” *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 41. Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” 29.

⁶⁴ Butler, “Critically Queer,” 29.

these texts which exaggerate deconstructive rhetoricity also unanimously grant a starring role to depictions of sexuality in turn raises the question of the particular relationship of the one to the other. By stressing deconstructive rhetoricity, the previous *accessus* may have misleadingly implied that the subject matter of these texts is incidental to their rhetorical deviancy, whereas I now turn to how (deviant) sexuality is inextricable from this de-constructive rhetoricity.

Much of this thesis' thinking on the relationship of rhetoricity to sexuality was inspired by the work of Lee Edelman. Introducing the French edition of his essays, David Halperin writes, "Pour Edelman, l'homosexualité, *c'est* la déconstruction," and certainly Edelman stands out among queer theorists for his particularly pronounced engagement with rhetoricity.⁶⁵ His "underlying assumption" in his 1994 *Homographesis* is

that sexuality is constituted through operations as much rhetorical as psychological—or, to put it otherwise, that psychological and sociological interpretations of sexuality are necessarily determined by the rhetorical structures and the figural logics through which "sexuality" and the discourse around it are culturally produced.⁶⁶

Many medieval texts emphatically depict "sexuality" as tied to "rhetorical structures." This is perhaps most blatant in such texts as Jean Renart's *Rose*, where Jouglet's narrative and the many ensuing performances of lyrics prompt and sustain Conrad's love for Liénors; in *Flamenca*, where Guilhem falls in love with Flamenca through hearing "vera novella" (true words about her), and their ensuing exchanges take the form of a troubadour *coblas*; or in the *Voir Dit*, where Toute Belle first hears of Guillaume's poetic

⁶⁵ David Halperin, "Préface," in Lee Edelman, *L'impossible homosexuel*, 11. His italics.

⁶⁶ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis*, xiv.

reputation, with lyric and epistolary exchanges then dominating their love affair.⁶⁷ But Edelman does not stop there; for after ascribing to de Man this notion of the priority of rhetoric over what he calls “psychological” conceptions of sexuality, he then deconstructs de Man’s de-construction. He writes,

As contextualized in de Man’s essay...the “power of seduction” [de Man’s concept of “rhetoric”] designates a specific property of poetry while “authority” [“grammar”] pertains to the discourse of philosophy as it is hypostasized in our culture; but the relation in his essay between these two modes of discourse keeps coming back to the question of the body.⁶⁸

Because de Man repeatedly describes both rhetoric and its relation to grammar in bodily, sexualized language, this not only suggests that sexuality is always-already discursive, as de Man would have it, but also that sexuality is not “simply ancillary to...some trans-historical deconstructive insight into the structural contradictions at work in any representational system as such”; for otherwise, de Man would not need to “return” obsessively “to the very site of such erotic speculations” when illustrating rhetoricity.⁶⁹ We can even describe the very relationship between rhetoric and sexuality, as Edelman dramatizes it, in both sexual and rhetorical terms. At one level, because we do not know which comes first or finally has priority over the other, their relationship itself takes the form of the rhetorical figure *metalepsis*, inextricably confusing notions of cause and effect (this is the subject of Ch. II).⁷⁰ But this relationship can also be described, as Edelman does, in sexualized terms: “the body of writing and the writing of the body

⁶⁷ *Flamenca*, v. 1777. For discussion of the relationship of discursivity to sexuality in *Flamenca*, which is not a text studied in this dissertation, see my “Queering temporality and the gender binary in *Flamenca*.”

⁶⁸ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 235.

⁶⁹ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 225, 233.

⁷⁰ For discussion of *metalepsis*, in modern narratology and ancient/medieval rhetoric, see the introduction to Ch. II.

remain locked in what we might, for strategic reasons, choose to call an embrace,” he writes of Wordsworth, “an embrace like that wherein ‘the Babe’ is seen to be ‘nurs’d in his Mother’s arms.’”⁷¹ The undecidability of the priority of sexuality over rhetoric (or *vice versa*) can, that is, be demonstrated *au second-degré*; for this very undecidability can be equally satisfactorily articulated in sexualized and in rhetorical terms.

This notion that sexuality and deconstructive rhetoricity are locked in a sort of *metaleptic embrace* will serve as the working definition of queerness in this thesis; I will explore the obsessive attraction to, and different articulations and ramifications of, the interrelation of rhetoricity and sexuality. Understanding queerness as describing not the putative anteriority of rhetoric to sexuality, but rather as the eroticized suspicion of the very logic of anteriority (or the eroticization of the suspicion of the referent), serves to open up new avenues for queer readings of medieval literature for two principal reasons. The one, which we have already touched on in various ways, is more abstract, but nonetheless crucial: such a conception of queerness avoids the gesture of positioning rhetoric as foundational (here, foundational to sexuality), when de Manian rhetoric is defined by its antifoundational drives, and thus cannot be a “first principle”—to use the Aristotelian notion—precisely because it figures the *mise en cause* of the possibility of first principles.⁷² More concretely, this means that Renart’s *Rose* or the *Voir Dit* may not, for example, depict language or literature as anterior to sexuality. In fact, such an argument obfuscates something crucial about each text’s engagement with lyric poetry in particular; for rather than putting sexuality onto poetry *a posteriori*, each text may be

⁷¹Edelman, *Homographesis*, 235.

⁷² For a study of Aristotle’s contribution to thinking on “first principles,” see Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*.

drawn (even attracted) to poetry precisely because it always-already stages the “literary” acts of composing or singing and the act of loving as entangled with each other (as, again, Dragonetti, Zumthor and Guiette most famously demonstrate). Each text, then, is not reversing a sort of mimetic conception of the relationship of love to literature (whereby literature, or narrative, mimetically represents love *a posteriori*), but rather exaggerating—de-constructing—the persistent entanglement of the two. Renart’s text, Ch. III holds, pushes the distancing of the Lady already characteristic of the lyrics into the pushing away of Liénors; it is this deviatory, *second-degré* space that both makes room for Guillaume’s and the Emperor’s homoerotic relationship as well as for a larger *mise en procès* of the possibility of the referent in courtly love. Machaut’s *dit*, in a related but different movement, dramatizes not the equivalency, but the *supplémentarité* (in the Derridean sense), of the relationship between “literature,” “poetry” or “rhetoricity,” on the one hand, and sexuality, on the other. Ch. IV examines how the *dit* brings the terms of lyric conceptions of sexuality to their (il)logical limit, dramatizing how each, literary language and sexuality, infects the other and exposes the inability of either to stand alone, above suspicion—although this challenge to conceptions of presence and stability seems itself to procure a form of (perverse) pleasure in the *dit*. And, as Ch. II suggests, Froissart’s *Prison Amoureuse* represents *à son tour* a turn of Machaut’s *dit*, notably turning, as it were, Toute Belle into a man, and thus exaggerating the implications of the *second-degré* nature of the *Voir Dit*’s relationship to lyric conceptions of sexuality. In these texts and others, I therefore argue that this twisting and turning of the imbrication of

sexuality and rhetoricity routinely spirals beyond the limits of normative conceptions of rhetorical and ethical order, and is therefore queer.⁷³

Before moving to the second major implication of understanding queerness as the “metaleptic embrace” of rhetoric and sexuality (where I discuss why I do not focus sodomy *per se*), it is worth relating this conception of queerness not only to de Manian de-construction, but also to Foucauldian thought. This is important because Foucault has, by all accounts, inspired queer theory in a way that de Man has not. We may liken de Man’s notion of rhetoric’s anteriority to sexuality to Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis,” insofar as the latter also stresses how discursivity precedes individual emanations of sexuality. And Foucault’s famed “repressive hypothesis” may present similar limitations; for while, on the one hand, there is something important and liberating in the antifoundational gesture by which heteronormativity is, by virtue of its discursivity, stripped of its claim to “naturalness”; there is, on the other hand, something disturbingly foundational in the ascription of any sort of definitive anteriority to “power.” In other words, while the point, as it is routinely (and probably correctly) interpreted, is to criticize these complex, subtle and multi-pronged manifestations of power, there is a sense whereby implying the possibility of divorcing power from sexuality finally amounts to letting power off the hook too easily, by allowing us to locate it in a binary schema—when the more insidious, haunting point seems to be that we can never really see, isolate or define either “power” or sexuality. Such disturbing messiness may be

⁷³ Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “ethical” in its medieval sense, to mean both “ethical” and “political.” The association of ethics and politics reflects how, in the Aristotelian tradition, the government of oneself and of the ideal state were considered to be two sides of the same coin. See the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See also Rosenfeld’s *Ethics and Enjoyment* for readings of Aristotelian ethics in the late Middle Ages; for study of their relevance to the High Middle Ages, see Cary Nederman, “Aristotelian Ethics before the *Nicomachean Ethics*.”

better served by a conception of “power” as always-already not only infecting but also infected by sexuality, in a relationship we just can’t wrap our heads around or get to the bottom of. To return to Alain’s *De Planctu*, there is a sense whereby any opposition of power to sexuality is like getting stuck in the binary opposition of Nature’s grammar to the text’s rhetoricity, which is finally a *parti pris* in the name of quarantining, dichotomizing, limiting and controlling. In this thesis, I strive to dramatize how these medieval texts resist this reductive and binary closing gesture, and can be fruitfully read accordingly.

The more tangible benefit of understanding queerness as the metaleptic embrace of sexuality and rhetoric is that we are not restricted to discussing queerness in terms of tangible acts, namely sodomy, which has dominated gay/queer readings of medieval literature and culture. My point is certainly not to denigrate studies of sodomy, but rather (initially) to view these as starting points rather than end-points for discussions of queerness. This movement is already implicit in the evolution of critical dialogue. In the 1980s, John Boswell heroically brought medieval sodomy “out of the closet” in his epochal work on what he calls “gay subcultures.”⁷⁴ More than anyone else, William Burgwinkle has continued to investigate the place of sodomy in medieval French literature and culture. As he writes,

The mere evocation of sodomy seems to me to stain all that surrounds it such that distinctions between the sodomitical and normal, between me and it, masculine and feminine, the lawful and unlawful, the symbolic and the imaginary, become impossible to sustain.⁷⁵

⁷⁴John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*.

⁷⁵ Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 2.

As this citation makes clear, Burgwinkle, unlike Boswell, considers sodomy as referring as much to a heuristic figure as to particular sex acts. Consistent with the well-documented notion (notably voiced in the twelfth century by John of Salisbury, but that would persist into the nineteenth century) that sodomy is *the* sin too sinful to be named, Burgwinkle associates sodomy with silence and absence; sodomy is, in fact, understood not only as a trope for the unmentionable and the invisible but even metonymically becomes *the* significance of textual gaps, oversights, and deviations.⁷⁶ The silence surrounding sodomy, then, becomes loud, but this silence is imperfect; for Burgwinkle's work implies that the absence that is sodomy is sufficiently present for it to be recognized as the specific notion determining conceptions of absence. Edelman takes an analogous position as it regards modern culture:

By attending to the construction of "homosexuality" as the reified figure of the unknowable within the field of "sexuality," this book [*Homographesis*, but the same investigations would characterize *No Future*] will explore how "gay sexuality" functions in the modern West as the very agency of sexual meaningfulness, the construct without which sexual meaning, and therefore, in a larger sense, meaning itself, becomes virtually unthinkable.⁷⁷

It is not clear, however, that Edelman's "modern West" includes the medieval period. Burgwinkle's work implies that it should; yet the question seems to me unresolved. For despite the endlessly commented passages from the *Eneas*, Alain's *De Planctu* and its posterity (*Silence*, moments in Jean de Meun); and also despite still unremarked eruptions of homosexuality in Late Medieval literature (say, digressions about Sodom and

⁷⁶ See notably Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 19-45, for his chapter on "locating" sodomy. For his study of different ways of "imagining" of sodomy, from Peter Damian to John of Salisbury, see 46-73. Interestingly, the oft-repeated description, "peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nominandum," dates from the nineteenth century, not from the medieval period. See Edelman, *Homographesis*, 5 and 243 n2.

⁷⁷ Edelman, *Homographesis*, xv.

Gomorrah and Adonis in the *Voir Dit*), there still seems to be room to doubt that sodomy is necessarily *the* “construct without which sexual meaning” in medieval literature “becomes virtually unthinkable.”⁷⁸ I am not saying that sodomy cannot occupy this role, but rather that its relative infrequency in texts, even if its absence is precisely the point, still leaves someone like me—who, as a medievalist working in queer theory, wants to believe in homosexuality’s pertinence—uncertain as to how loud sodomy’s silence finally is, and thus how indispensable (the figure of) male same-sex penetration is for the “construct” of “courtly love.”

But if medieval literature does not as routinely focus on “gayness” as modern literature does, this does not necessarily mean that it is any less queer according to the definition I have been using. In fact, I submit, medieval literature serves as an opportunity for pushing queer theory past the inconsistencies and implicit limits it has set for itself. Contrary to Bersani’s notion that queer theory too often removes “gay sex” from the equation, I believe that it too exclusively focuses on it.⁷⁹ If we understand one of the signature moves of queer theory as Butler’s de-construction of the gender-sex opposition, where she shows that sex is always-already discursive (and thus always-already gender), then there is no reason to give “sex,” understood as vaginal or anal penetration, or oral stimulation, etc., a free pass, since sex acts would also be always-already discursive, tied to conceptions of intimacy that have no necessary relation to the

⁷⁸ For gay *exempla* in the *Voir Dit*, see Ch IV. Useful discussions of the *Eneas* include Noah Guynn, “Sodomy, Courtly Love, and the Birth of Romance,” in *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages*, 51-92, or Simon Gaunt’s chapter on “romance” in *Gender and Genre*, esp. 75-85.

⁷⁹ He writes, for example, “Queer theory frequently takes the sex out of being queer.” Bersani, *Rectum*, 42.

physical acts themselves.⁸⁰ Butler does investigate the contingency of sex acts, notably when considering Kristeva's notion of abjection, but queer theory has by-and-large been reluctant to continue in this direction, no doubt because once queer theory stops discussing (practitioners of) same-sex sex, it seems to have removed its own specificity, its principal *raison d'être*.⁸¹ Specificity is a particularly thorny question for queer theory, which constantly returns to the paradox that if its identity lies in questioning the possibility of the solidity of identity, it cannot logically have a clearly distinct identity itself. If, that is, queer theory studies indeterminacies at the heart of gender and sexuality, it would constitute a violation of the spirit of indeterminacy to purport to have a determinate subject matter, like sodomy. It is, then (and almost paradoxically), a logical inconsistency within queer theory that it seems so frequently to remain attached to gay sex as a sort of *signifié*, when by its own reasoning it should only be understood as a contingent *signifiant* that we do not, it follows, need to be discussing.⁸² We may in turn wonder how the persistent fixation with sodomy may be limiting to queer theory, or what queer theory would look like without seeming necessarily attached to it. There may even be something liberating about not needing to talk about gay sex as *the* figure for sexual liberation.

Medieval literature helps clarify this abstract point, by obsessing over sexualities that are queer without necessarily being gay and which therefore allow glimpses of queerness without any clear connection to gayness. If, that is, it is uncertain that gay

⁸⁰ I am referring, of course, to *Gender Trouble*.

⁸¹ See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 107-26.

⁸² Edelman holds more precisely that the "meaning" of queer sexuality is that it exposes heterosexuality as meaningless; it is thus a *signifiant* instantiating how there is no possibility of a *signifié*.

sexuality is an obsession of courtly literature, it unquestionably fixates on another transgressive sexuality: that of the *losengier*, the flatterer who indiscriminately seduces women without being attached to any one in particular. Inherited from lyric poetry, the *losengier* either appears or is evoked in each text studied in this dissertation, frequently introduced as early as the prologue. Rather strikingly, the figure of the *losengier* corresponds remarkably to Edelman's description of the modern gay man. Numerous texts—especially when they refer to this category in the prologue as if it were self-evident (as in, say, *Partonopeu*, *Silence*, the *Dit de la panthère*, or the *Voir Dit*, to give examples from both genres and each century)—“metaphoriz[e it] as an essential condition, a sexual orientation,” and no doubt they do so because considering the *losengier* as a category of people we can definitively circumscribe reflects a desire “to contain the disturbance it effects as a force of dis-orientation.”⁸³ The anxiety is in part generated by the fact that we can no more visibly identify the *losengier* than we can the modern homosexual. As Edelman writes,

Unlike gender difference...which many feminist and psychoanalytic critics construe as grounding the notion of difference itself, “homosexual difference” produces the imperative to recognize and espouse it precisely to the extent that it threatens to remain unremarked and undetected, and thereby to disturb the stability of the paradigms through which sexual difference can be interpreted and gender difference enforced.⁸⁴

Similarly, the *losengier* threatens to remain “unremarked,” and even if there is no indication that he can be called “gay,” he becomes the figure for indiscrimination and indeterminacy. As Claire Nouvet has brilliantly discussed in readings of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, the *losengier*'s sexuality is also defined as moving

⁸³ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 14.

⁸⁴ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 11-12.

indiscriminately through women, and as refusing attachment.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the *losengier* threatens to expose the indeterminacy of the connection between (normative) sexuality and language by showcasing their potential divorce. Fascinatingly (even metaleptically), this divorce can be articulated in either direction: either the excessively hetero *losengier* prioritizes his sexual drives above all else, and thus his willingness to say anything in order to seduce women reflects the subordination of language to sexuality; or alternately, he is turned on by his own indeterminate use of language, or use of language not grounded in the referential attachment to one woman that “true love” ideally provides for lovers. Either way, the result is the same: the *losengier* is dangerous because he problematizes the relationship between rhetoric and sexuality. And if he elicits an extreme phobic response, this is because *fins amants* and *fins amadors* are conscious of their resemblance to—and, I would suggest, even their potential complicity with—this figure.⁸⁶ As Edelman writes of Otto Preminger’s *Laura*,

There is a sense...in which the film that has labored to demonize the gay man [substitute: *losengier*] as the face of an intolerably ironizing facelessness, must nonetheless recognize that the gay man’s facelessness is ultimately its own: that the camera [read: courtly literature] can succeed in disavowing the irony induced by the gaze of—and the gaze at—the gay man only by confronting its own implication in a systematic figuralization of the body that is figured (and disfigured) by (and in) the “gaze” of the camera [read: literary language] itself.⁸⁷

Sexualizing rhetoric and/or rhetoricizing sexuality, the *losengier* thus provokes normativity’s phobic response without either explicit gay sex or gender transgressions—although his role is, of course, gendered (male) and defined in terms of his sexuality. Not only does he therefore offer a glimpse of what queerness, defined as the metaleptic

⁸⁵ See Claire Nouvet, “Writing (in) Fear.”

⁸⁶ For another “feminist” takes on the *losengier*, see the chapter on the *Châtelain de Coucy* in Krueger, *Women Readers*, 183-216.

⁸⁷ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 230.

embrace of rhetoricity and sexuality, might look like without gayness or gender indeterminacy, but in so doing, he also upsets queer theory's (generally implicit) narrative of progression from women's rights to gay rights to more fluid, so-called "non-binary" conceptions of gender and sexuality that many call "queer." For the figure of the *losengier* suggests that investigating the deeply problematic, indeed disturbing, relationship between rhetoricity and sexuality may even precede the politicized desire to escape from traditional confines of gender roles or from heteronormativity. Consistent with the terms I have been using, though, my aim is not to reverse, but rather to trouble, this narrative of progression. I have therefore been fixating on a figure who is queer without gender indeterminacy or gayness as a corrective to the notion that examining the problematic relationship of rhetoricity to sexuality is necessarily an *effect* of gender transgressions and of gayness' coming out of the closet—say, how we might reason the perceived threat posed by the drag queen. Instead, this thesis' working conception of queerness is metaleptically imbricated, and thus always-already present, within what we now call the struggle for "women's" and "gay" rights, which is always-already colored by the perverse attraction to the problematic relationship of sexuality to rhetoric.

At one level, then, defining queerness as I do allows for elements that we may now call "proto-feminist" or "pro-gay" to make more sense in their medieval contexts; for if we stress courtly literature's obsessive attraction to deconstructing the connection between sexuality and rhetoric (and thus to investigating sexual and rhetorical deviancy), then "proto-feminist" or "pro-gay" elements in medieval literature need not be understood as partaking of a political agenda, no doubt anachronistic, aimed at fighting

for women's rights or gay rights *per se*.⁸⁸ Conceiving of progressive elements as not necessarily sharing the ambitions or even the terms by which we understand them today is valuable, because this move in turn allows us to discuss queerness in a wide variety of texts without needing to identify certain authors, even certain texts or their contexts, as committed to (or alternately, as positioned against) a struggle for equality. Thus, if some of the texts studied here explicitly breach issues related to gender politics—Christine de Pizan being by far the most striking example—many do not, and none “comes out” explicitly in defense of homosexuality (although, as Boswell notes, some medieval Latin texts did).⁸⁹ A major advantage of defining queerness as the metaleptic embrace of rhetoric and sexuality is, then, that it allows us to see how these texts put into motion a movement that, when continued, does have extremely progressive ramifications in terms of gender and sexuality, whether this turn is explicit or not, and whether it is intended or not (and neither of these questions should be decisive, in any case). All the texts studied in this dissertation, in other words, perform turning movements spiraling out from the problematic embrace of rhetoricity and sexuality; these movements are or are not brought to bear, and to different extents, on what we now call “gender” and “sexual politics,” but in any case, the deviatory movement they put into motion and by which they conceive of both sexuality and language (and their imbrication) suggests that it is *both* in exaggerating—or de-constructing—the terms of these medieval texts *and* in keeping with our own contemporary terms that we can relate queerness as defined here to the more

⁸⁸ I take up the relationship between “feminism,” “gay rights” and the poetic performance of queerness especially in Chapter II, in relation to *Partonopeu de Blois* and the *Prison amoureuse*.

⁸⁹ See his “Appendix 2,” “Texts and Translations,” for examples. Boswell, *Christianity*, 355-402.

concrete concerns of queer/feminism such as women's issues, gay rights, trans-questions, and so forth.

Yet I am suggesting something ironical, if not paradoxical: namely, that we don't have to be talking about sodomy for a text to be queer (indeed, most texts don't), but I am turning to verse romances and the *dits* because they do allow queerness to be related to gender and sexual politics more emphatically than lyric poetry does. The logic of this gesture away from and then back to gender and sexual politics depends on carefully distinguishing contingency from irrelevance; for gender and sexual politics (loosely defined as concern with questions of women and/or non-heteronormative expressions of sexuality) are *contingent* to my working definition of queerness, but not irrelevant to it. Medieval literature makes this complex move far more understandable. At one level, medieval literature, and especially Late Medieval texts, make it easy to resist the temptation to equate contingency to irrelevance. For example, Christine de Pizan's vast (nearly 24,000 vv.) *Mutacion de Fortune* argues that radical contingency, figured as Lady Fortune, has always dominated human affairs; the text makes it, then, impossible to argue that contingency is irrelevant, since it is *the* most relevant thing to universal history.⁹⁰ Christine's *Mutacion* also makes the move, in its prologue, of bringing contingency to bear on questions of gender, as Christine describes how Lady Fortune, following the death of her husband, metamorphosed her into a man.⁹¹ If we follow the text's logic,

⁹⁰ Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la mutacion de Fortune*. This explicit preoccupation with contingency's extreme relevance hearkens back, at the very least, to Jean de Meun; I will also argue that we can trace it back to High Medieval verse romances, even if it tends not to be so dramatically foregrounded in the person of Lady Fortune. Studies of contingency and Lady Fortune include Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces* and Catherine Attwood, *Fortune la contrefaite*.

⁹¹ For a recent summary of differing viewpoints about this gender metamorphosis, and a critical bibliography, see Miranda Griffin, "Transforming Fortune," esp. 64, n18.

Fortune could not have needed to make her into a man; it is, in fact, unclear what would it mean for the embodiment of Contingency necessarily to “have” to do something. At the same time, it is not a pure coincidence that contingency is brought to bear on gender; by opening with an elaborate gender metamorphosis, Christine’s text demonstrates that questions of gender are particularly important loci for foregrounding discussion of contingency and its implications. In Christine’s *Mutacion*, questions of the contingency of gender even underlie general discussion of contingency; for the universal history is predicated on Christine’s gender metamorphosis, without which she could not, according to the text’s logic, become a writer or *the* writer of this universal history.

To clarify my understanding of the relation of queerness to gender and sexual politics, let me momentarily violate my principle of metaleptic confusion. I will not argue that gender and sexual politics necessarily follow my definition of queerness; this is arguable in the case of some texts, but, in any case, it is not obviously fruitful to speculate on whether, say, Christine is more concerned with gender politics than with rhetoricity, or whether it is the other way around in *Partonopeu de Blois* or Chrétien’s work. I nonetheless submit that foregrounding my conception has, ironically enough, the advantage of opening up new readings of the ethical implications of courtly literature in the realms of gender and sexual politics; for it allows us to read this movement that implies the radical contingency and fundamental indeterminacy of normative conceptions of gender and sexuality into texts which don’t explicitly touch on either (and are far less likely to touch on the latter). In other words, the “queer feminism” of the *Charrette*, of *Partonopeu* or of the *Bel Inconnu*, appear as logical “limits,” to return to Burgwinkle’s description of his practice of reading the *De Planctu*, of each text’s engagement with the

imbrication of rhetoricity and sexuality. Foregrounding a conception of queerness as the metaleptic embrace of rhetoricity and sexuality therefore liberates us from the tedious and potentially counterproductive task of having to wonder, say, whether Athis and Procelias or Richard the Lionheart and Philippe Auguste “actually” sleep with each other, or if references to Ganymede or Troy necessarily imply gay sex.⁹² We simply don’t have to lose sleep attempting to locate referents for gay sex where they are not forthcoming. But it is not only that this conception of queerness “opens” readings; it is also that it allows us to *faire de nécessité vertu* as it regards gender and sexual politics. For once we see implication, however fleeting or deliberate, “for” women or gays as contingent to queerness, we can then, in turn, affirm this contingency as not detrimental to, but rather the logical extension of, progressive gender and sexual politics. It is, in other words, fitting for theories that insist on the radical contingency of conceptions of gender and sexuality only to evoke gender and sexuality in a contingent manner. To treat gender and sexual politics as necessary to queerness may, in fact, amount to a gesture that fundamentally undercuts their contingency, analogous to what de Man calls the “grammaticalization of rhetoric.” I therefore begin with a definition of queerness as the metaleptic embrace of deconstructive rhetoricity and sexuality, but bring this to bear on specific aspects of gender and sexual politics *both* when the texts themselves explicitly do and when they do not; this move, though, is always predicated on the notion that bringing queerness to bear on social issues, while *a* logical extension of the terms (or

⁹² For discussion of Richard and Philippe Auguste, see Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 73-85; for the gayness of references to Troy, see for example, Penny Simons and Penny Eley, “The Prologue to *Partonopeu de Blois*.”

turning) of the texts, stands to lose more than it has to gain from being considered necessary, rather than contingent.

As should be clear, the implications for medievalists of using this conception of queerness are enormous. Rather than identifying occasional queer moments in various texts, I argue that the verse romance and *dit* traditions are relentlessly queer, obsessively attracted to the immensely problematic “metaleptic embrace” of rhetoric and sexuality. Dubbing a tradition unrelentingly queer is, however, an overly monolithic statement, and it therefore necessarily falls to the ensuing pages, and their dirty engagement with these texts, to back up such a sweeping claim: to make it not only convincing, but meaningful. The implications of this thesis for queer theory are also worth noting. At one level, my claim is quite simple, and not entirely original: the French Middle Ages rank among the most important moments in the history of the intertwinement of rhetoric and sexuality, which has figured so prominently in queer theory. The goal, then, is to partake in the larger effort to call out queer theory’s relative lack of interest in the age that developed codified, explicitly politically motivated literary representations of heteronormativity, and that witnessed the rise of institutionalized homophobia in the Latin West.⁹³ It is also to query this relative ignorance, which is perhaps not purely the result of modern institutional factors (there aren’t that many medievalists) or of the tacit acceptance of the

⁹³ See Boswell for the rise of homophobia in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Certain of Boswell’s conclusions have been resisted; this one has not. By all accounts, (male) homosexuality (here: sodomy) went from being avoided to explicitly denounced in the period we are studying. See also Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 19-45. Carolyn Dinshaw has proven by far the most influential medievalist literary scholar to those working in queer theory: see *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*; *Getting Medieval: Sexuality and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*; and *How Soon is Now?*. Her work has rather little to do with the French tradition, though; this implies that the queerness of what was no doubt the most influential vernacular tradition has been largely ignored by most of those working in queer theory.

Renaissance-inspired notion that the Middle Ages were the Dark Ages. For the worry is that queer theory's unwarranted ignorance of the Middle Ages is complicit, however deliberately, in a narrative that relies on a sense of progress that, finally, isn't that subversive or queer. Foucault famously argued that we should be extremely wary of our "sexual liberation" versus our Victorian predecessors; this notion has inspired countless directions in queer theory.⁹⁴ We should be equally suspicious of any notion that we have done a more thorough job investigating the queer imbrication of sexuality and rhetoricity than our medieval ancestors did. Obviously, queerness is not a quantifiable medal that we award to the queerest minds or even epochs; yet, by not looking as seriously as it should at the medieval period, although it exercised such a decisive role in the history of sexuality's discursivity, queer theory is effectively allowing a narrative to persist according to which queerness is a "new," "modern" invention, and thus the result of the very (hetero)normative notion of progress that, following Foucault, we ought to be challenging. This is neither fair nor true.

Accessus ad artem III: Genre

In medieval rhetoric, prologues were consistently divided into two parts: the *extrinsic* prologue, "that is, an introduction to the nature of the whole 'art' under consideration," and the *intrinsic* prologue, where "the commentator introduces the particular book to be expounded."⁹⁵ Before moving to a summary of the four chapters

⁹⁴ "Nous, victoriens," in *La volonté de savoir*.

⁹⁵ Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 377.

(the thesis' *dispositio*), I wish to conclude this pseudo-*extrinsic* prologue by briefly bringing deconstructive rhetoricity and queerness to bear on questions of genre.

This thesis concentrates on texts that we now call verse romances and *dits*, because these are the two genres that, I believe, most foreground deconstructive rhetoricity and queerness. These are, that is, the two genres most characterized by, and obsessed with, indeterminacy: namely, the indeterminacy of language (rhetoric), of gender and sexuality (one way of defining queerness), and of the relationship between the two (what I have been calling queerness). In this respect, the name of each genre is telling; for they could hardly be less specific: *roman(s)* simply means written in some dialect of Old French, not Latin, whereas *dit* means something that includes words. The terms used to describe these texts are, furthermore, not stable; Chrétien's romances would, for example, be persistently referred to as *dits* in the thirteenth century.⁹⁶ Their very names, then, lend themselves to this notion that these two genres become figures for literary indeterminacy, in a manner similar to Edelman's understanding of the "gay male body." He writes,

The gay male body...must be marked and indeterminate at once; consequently, it is imagined to be marked as indeterminate with the result that indeterminacy effectively ceases to be indeterminate and becomes, instead, the gay male body's determinate mark.⁹⁷

Because these genres are, in terms of both form and content (the two conventional means of defining genre, following Jauss), "marked as indeterminate," their indeterminacy

⁹⁶ For example, Huon de Mery refers in his *Torneiement Antecrist* to "Les diz Raol et Crestien," and the author of *Hunbaut* to, "Les bons dis Crestien de Troies..." Both examples are taken from Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 35, 37.

⁹⁷ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 237. His emphasis.

becomes their “determinate mark.”⁹⁸ And if indeterminacy is their defining feature, it is not only finally futile, but even a violation of their spirit, to strive to locate markers of determinacy. Certainly, Edelman’s notion that “indeterminacy effectively ceases to be indeterminate” accommodates the fact, underlying most critical attempts to define these genres, that there is something “cohesive” about these genres beyond (or because of) their fundamental indeterminacy. The oneiric settings characteristic of the *dits* or the *merveilles* of romance serve as good examples of how something spatially, temporally, and logically indeterminate becomes a determinate mark of each genre. Yet the larger effect of Edelman’s notion is to invite us both to check our impulse to render determinate, and to use the deconstruction of the opposition between specificity and indeterminacy to highlight our fear of looking the latter in the eye—which, he argues, is precisely what gayness forces heteronormativity to do, and what I will argue that verse romances and the *dits* invite the critic to attempt.

The problematic nature of locating linguistic, formal, semantic, gender or sexual determinacy in the texts studied in this dissertation, then, is precisely the point, and makes me reluctant to rely overly on “genre theory,” which generally has the effect of emphasizing the limits of indeterminacy by defining something like a formal and semantic field containing each genre.⁹⁹ Again, it would be wrong to say that nothing holds together verse romances, on the one hand, and the *dits* on the other. Of course,

⁹⁸ For the most cohesive introduction, still widely cited, to High Medieval French literary genres and their relationship with genre theory, including Jauss, see Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 3-10. For the history of the genre of romance, the volume, *Romance: Generic Transformations from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee, remains a great reference. See the opening pages of Ch. I for a bit more discussion about using genre theory. See also Hans Robert Jauss, “Littérature médiévale et théorie des genres.”

⁹⁹ See the Brownlees’ “Introduction” (1-22) for a survey of different ways in which “genre theory” has been brought to bear on romance in *Romance: Generic Transformations*.

verse romances tend to deal with the *matières* of Rome, Brittany or France, and are generally composed in octosyllabic couplets, and so forth. Yet, not only do we already know this, but it is also misleading to use these extremely broad similarities to imply that each genre had or sought a coherent, stable identity. I am not merely echoing the critical commonplace according to which medieval and modern notions of genre do not perfectly overlap: to give but one example of this notion, Kelly writes that, “in the Middle Ages, generic definitions are not remarkable for their consistency nor even for a genuine desire to classify and conceptualize,” and therefore, “The problem for modern readers derives from the fact that the Middle Ages did not have a theoretical conception of genre...”¹⁰⁰ Rather, I am querying the barely disguised assumption underlying many accounts of genre in vernacular literature: namely, that the “pre-modern” period was also somehow “pre-genre.” Verse romances and the *dits* are, I submit, less “pre-genre” than “anti-genre,” relentlessly committed to violating boundaries and suspicious of accepting conventions even as they recognize that they necessarily forge them. In fact, medieval authors with some sort of education in the trivium must have been aware of a rather pedantic desire to define genres in Latin language treatises; for example, John of Garland divides “historical fiction” (*argumentum*) into epithelium, epicedium, epitaph, apotheosis, bucolic, georgic, lyric, epode, secular song or hymn, invective, reprimand or satire, tragedy, elegiac, and comedy, before providing brief definitions of each.¹⁰¹ Not writing in Latin, vernacular writers probably elected not to obey these precise distinctions. It is less probable that Chrétien didn’t know the differences between, say, the comic and the tragic, than that his work positions itself against such prescriptive conceptions of genre.

¹⁰⁰ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 96, 318.

¹⁰¹ John of Garland, in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 656.

Perpetual deviants, both verse romances and the *dits* are, I find, more fruitfully described as antigenres than as genres. This conception also has the advantage of being able to accommodate the notion, on which Cesare Segre and Caroline Jewers have (among others) insisted, that romance always-already incorporated self-parody into itself.¹⁰² Therefore, if it is no more possible for texts from both genres not to obey and even to forge various conventions than it would be for one to write a text without grammar, I will emphasize their rhetorical deviancy *qua* antigenres as a corrective to a tradition of criticism that has often had the effect of ascribing varying degrees of determinacy to each genre, and because it allows different readings to emerge, which resist or suspend the closing gesture of containment and reduction implicit in many modern accounts of these medieval genres.

Accessus ad auctores

How, then, to write a dissertation about indeterminacies? By artificially determining *loci* that allow for the rhetorical and ethical indeterminacy characteristic of these texts and by extension their “genres” to emerge. Each chapter pairs (at least) one verse romance with a *dit*, reading them alongside a different theme conducive to deconstructive, queer readings. The first chapter examines subjectivity. It opens with a grammatical difference: verse romances are traditionally associated with the third-person pronoun, the *dits* with the first. Yet, contextualization within medieval grammar suggests that Benveniste’s famous contention, according to which the first- and third-persons

¹⁰² See Cesare Segre, “What Bakhtin Left Unsaid: the Case of Medieval Romance,” and Caroline Jewers, *Chivalric Fiction and the History of the Novel*.

betoken radically opposing conceptions of subjectivity, is largely anachronistic.¹⁰³ Using a theoretical lens inspired by suggestive resonances between Butler's *Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* and Alain de Libera's ground-breaking rethinking of medieval subjectivity in the *Archéologie du sujet*, I argue that texts from both genres relentlessly problematize clearcut determinations of interiority and exteriority, and are particularly concerned with how we become subjects through interpellation by power. The grammatical opposition between the first- and third-persons therefore gives way to the rhetorical indeterminacy at the heart of the politicized, gendered and eroticized subject. The chapter first studies Christine de Pizan's *Livre du duc des vrais amans* (1404-5), a text alternately classified as a verse romance or as a *dit*, and which both foregrounds pronominal confusion and explicitly brings poetic indeterminacy to bear on questions of gender and sexuality. Contrary to a critical tradition that holds quasi-unanimously that Christine neither problematizes the identitarian category of women nor brings her potentially progressive views on gender to bear on sexuality, I contend that the *Duc* develops a conception of subjectivity remarkably in keeping with Butler's feminist-queer deconstruction of the heteronormative subject. Christine's text also effects the ensuing move in Butlerian thought, which is to locate the possibility of subversion *within* the context of patriarchal subjection, not beyond it; she is not, to use her expression from the *Advision*, constructing "chastiaux en Espagne."¹⁰⁴ The chapter then asks the question: is Christine's queering of subjectivity in the *Duc*, which has alternately been considered as a verse romance and/or a *dit*, indebted to one tradition or to the other? Moving back in time, from Machaut's *Fonteinne amoureuse* (1360) to Chrétien's

¹⁰³ Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, v.1, 251-66.

¹⁰⁴ Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l'Advision Cristine*, 83.

Charrette (1176-81), I argue that this indeterminacy is characteristic of both genres' depictions of subjectivity. I therefore hold that Christine's queer-feminist resistance to the stable, heteronormative subject is inseparable from her keen literary—or "rhetorical" in the de Manian sense—sensitivity.

The first chapter sets out to rhetoricize and to queer an apparent grammatical difference between the two genres. The second chapter instead opens with a rhetorical similarity between texts from both: their implication of what Wayne Booth calls "dramatized narrators," or an author/narrator who evokes the creation and performance of the text within the text itself.¹⁰⁵ Paradoxically, as we shall see, at the same time as the narrator insists on her/his own role, her/his distance from the stories s/he recounts begins to crumble; for the borders separating the *énoncé* from the *énonciation* routinely appear, on closer inspection, as hazy and indeterminate. These narratological metalepses, to borrow Gérard Genette's famous coinage, are also frequently metaleptic in the rhetorical sense, because their effect is to render us uncertain as to which, the *énonciation* or the *énoncé*, finally has priority over the other. In readings of *Partonopeu de Blois* (1182-5), *Silence* (ca. 1250-1300), and Froissart's *la Prison amoureuse* (1371-3), I then explore how the metaleptic intertwining of narratological levels bears on the relation of rhetoric and sexuality: how each text not only evokes questions of gender and sexual norms through their themes and through explicit narratorial statements, but also performs a deeper, more subversive and deviant resistance to ethical norms by queering narrative poetics. I contend that the effect of narratorial intrusions is to stress what J. Hillis Miller, following de Man, calls the rhetorical "unreadability" of these texts, and that this

¹⁰⁵ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 151-53.

rhetorical “unreadability” performs the ethico-political “unreadability” of gender and sexuality as these texts portray them.

While the second chapter “rhetorizes” an already-rhetorical similarity between the two genres from a narrative point of view, the third approaches both genres from a lyric one, but the argument is fundamentally similar. Contrary to a critical tradition that, as previously mentioned, could hardly have understood “lyric insertion” in more binary terms, I argue that Renart’s *Rose* (1208-10), Jakemés’s *Roman du Châtelain de Couci et de la Dame de Fayel* (1285-1300), and Nicole de Margival’s *Dit de la panthère* (1290-1328), de-construct—in the precise Derridean sense to which we have been referring—the lyrics. They exaggeratedly turn the inserted lyrics in the sense that they were already turning, and in so doing, they extend the metaleptic embrace of sexuality and rhetoricity already characteristic of the lyrics. More precisely, rather than ascribing referents to lyric pieces and inserting them into narrative frameworks characterized by their diachronic temporality, the act of lyric insertion can also be understood as exaggerating a certain structuralist conception of the lyrics according to which they tropologically refer to themselves and to their own literary language. I then examine how this rhetoricity, which lyric insertion foregrounds, bleeds into the surrounding narratives, in turn cautioning us against taking for granted either the diachronic temporality or the pretensions to mimetic referentiality of the larger texts. This would suggest that the tropological movement of each text finally lends itself better to the notion that the lyrics “lyricize” the narrative than to the oft-repeated argument that the narratives “narrativize” the lyrics. It is, though, perhaps more accurate to say that the “narratives” not only *protect* but also *open*—in the sense of exaggerating and challenging, reading with and against the grain—the lyrics. A

mon tour, I attempt to “open” these narratives, showing how this tropological deviancy amounts to a fervent challenge both to heteronormativity’s claim to naturalness and to its propensities to contain deviancy or abjection. Simply put, heteronormativity appears as not very hetero, certainly not that interested in women, and not even necessarily as desirable.

The final chapter brings together the two most studied and formidable “authors” of each genre, indeed of the French medieval period, Chrétien de Troyes and Guillaume de Machaut, who—strikingly—have never been discussed together at length. Yet I bring them together not to consider them as towering, canonical figures, but rather to ask what we overlook by doing so. This chapter mobilizes a tripartite theoretical apparatus: initially, it draws on Derrida’s notion of the ghost, from the *Spectres de Marx*, to figure an alternative way of considering the voices of these authors, one which does not imply that these authors were ever meaningful presences in any determinate or authoritative manner. To render Derrida’s ghastly speculations more obviously pertinent to techniques operating in medieval texts, I relate them to de Man’s notion that irony betokens radical negativity, and is thus unable to foster positive knowledge. De Man’s understanding of irony implies challenging the long-held and recurrent critical notion that Chrétien’s and Machaut’s irony necessarily signals the presence of authorial control; and close textual analysis will demonstrate why this anti-authoritarian and anti-positive conception of irony is justified and fruitful when reading Chrétien’s romances and Machaut’s *dits*. Finally, with Edelman, I argue that uncontrollable irony has ethical as well as rhetorical implications—and more specifically, a privileged relationship to queer sexuality. In less theoretical terms, readings of Machaut’s *Jugements dou roy de Behaingne* and *de*

Navarre, Chétien's *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, and the *Voir Dit*, first look closely at the interactions between the *énonciation* and the *énoncé*. In each of these texts, I examine how the *énonciation* is metaleptically embedded in the *énoncé* in such a manner as to challenge any pretension to stability by the former. The effect of imbricating the two is, then, not to foster the authority of the (canonical) author, but rather to query the possibility of his exercising meaningful authority. This meta-poetic imbrication of *énoncé* to *énonciation* is, furthermore, consistent with the intradiegetic modalities of each narrative, whereby different moments are uncomfortably glancing at each other—or whereby the narratives advance by a series of ghastly, ironic echoes. The question then becomes: If irony does not betoken knowledge, stability, or authority, why should these texts wish to be ironic? Contrary to a critical tradition that has largely restricted irony to its literary implications, I focus on its ethical ones, arguing that each text cannot be divided into an *énonciation* primarily concerned with the modalities of literature and an *énoncé* about love and sex. Rather, it is precisely when these texts are discussing sexuality that they are also discussing literary discourse, in a manner reminiscent of the lyric equivalency of *aimer* and *chanter*. This in turn implies that if these texts function dangerously ironically, it reflects not their relationship to sexuality as considered from beyond it, but rather their participation in, or performance of, an ironic conception of sexuality. In other words, I argue that sexuality, as these texts stage it, is ironic, and queer; and this, I hope, will represent a radical, haunting queering of the legacies of these ghastly figures.

Prologues in verse romances and the *dits*, as we shall see over and over again, bear complex and elusive relations to what follows. This “prologue” has highlighted the

matieres and frameworks, medieval and modern, with which I am working, and many of the questions I shall raise. A new literary history of medieval French literature, which moves from verse romances to the *dits*, should emerge; I believe that this will not only deepen our knowledge of linguistic and poetic indeterminacy in both (their “deconstructive rhetoricity”) but also serve to highlight the crucial ethico-political ramifications of linguistic deviancy, or the queer relation of this rhetoricity to questions of gender and sexual identity. *Ci commence le conte...*

1. Queer(ing) Subjectivity in Verse Romances and the *Dits*: Rethinking Christine de Pizan's Rhetorical and Ethical Debt to Guillaume de Machaut and Chrétien de Troyes (*Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans* [1404-5], *La Fontaine Amoureuse* [1360] and *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* [1176-81])¹

In the introduction, I argued that verse romances and the *dits* are genres characterized by their relative indeterminacy. Even amongst medieval genres, to which modern conceptions of genre seem imperfectly to apply, these two genres stand out as particularly resistant to critical attempts to define their contours.² This dissertation posits that it will be useful to study these two genres together, because this generic indeterminacy reflects a larger engagement with the indeterminacy of language and of identity, which I argue lies at the heart of texts attributed to both genres. If it is not new to locate forms of instability and uncertainty in texts grouped with either, I attempt to demonstrate how their juxtaposition stands to widen and deepen critical accounts of the subversiveness—more specifically, the queerness—of texts grouped under both umbrellas.

Focusing on the indeterminacy of these genres should not imply that existing accounts of them are without merit, and a slightly more systematic comparison of features which critics have identified as definitional to each will bring us to this first chapter's *problématique*: questions of subjectivity. Introducing her vast study of thirteenth-century *dits*, Monique Léonard summarizes various axes by which criticism, generally referring to the Machaldian and post-Machaldian *dits* of the fourteenth and

¹ For the dating of each text, which has little bearing on my argument, see each of the critical editions used. A preliminary form of this chapter was presented in February, 2014 at the Medieval French Seminar at the University of Oxford.

² For more discussion about the relationship between medieval and modern conceptions of genre, see also Keith Busby, "Narrative Genres."

fifteenth centuries, has attempted to define the *dits*: critics have characterized the genre as a *fourre-tout*; insisted on its reliance on the first-person pronoun; and/or highlighted its self-reflexivity.³ Two of these elements significantly overlap with how critics have defined verse romances. Like the term *dit, romanz*, which initially simply means “in the vernacular,” encompasses a wide range of texts, many of which do not correspond with the modern association of verse romance with chivalry.⁴ Simon Gaunt nonetheless argues that, “from its earliest manifestations writers of romance are aware of its generic singularity.”⁵ The “singularity” of romance may, however, be described as its relative lack thereof; for not only, as Gaunt notes, is the genre “vast and in some respects less homogeneous than other vernacular genres,” but its “essence” may lie “in its protean adaptability, its experimental and hybrid nature,” as Matilda Bruckner holds.⁶ Whether in terms of medieval uses of the term or of modern critical accounts of the genre, verse romance may, therefore, also be described as a “catch-all genre,” by virtue of incorporating a hodgepodge of disparate elements within it. The self-reflexivity of verse romance is also critical commonplace. For Michel Zink, “le roman se définit dès le début comme un genre intellectualisé,” and Caroline Jewers has, among others, studied its self-consciousness: as she writes, “romance contains prototypes of all the ironic, self-reflexive, and parodic properties we find so attractive in the modern novel.”⁷ The

³ Monique Léonard, *Le Dit et sa technique littéraire*, 9-32. She also discusses critical accounts of the didacticism of the *dits*. For a recent and incisive discussion of “didacticism,” see Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought*, esp. the “Introduction” (1-18) and her opening remarks on Machaut (95ff).

⁴ In the first ten entries for “romanz” in the Tobler Lommatzsch *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, for example, we find the lives of Saint Thomas and Saint Michael (which modern criticism would associate with hagiography) and the *Bestiaire d’amour*. Each of these texts refers to itself as “romanz.”

⁵ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 73.

⁶ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 73. Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 208.

⁷ Michel Zink, *Introduction à la littérature médiévale*, 60-61. Jewers, *Chivalric Fiction*, 7.

pronouns would then seem to represent the most concrete and compelling difference between these two genres of verse narratives, as verse romance is associated with third-person narration, the *dits* with the first. At stake is not a merely grammatical difference, because critics routinely understand this grammatical distinction as greatly bearing on questions of subjectivity. The most influential account of the first- to third-person distinction remains Benveniste's, where he asserts that third-person pronouns "sont entièrement différents de *je* et de *tu*, par leur fonction et par leur nature," and that the first- and third-persons notably betoken radically opposing conceptions of "subjectivité."⁸ Perhaps, then, verse romances and the *dits* fundamentally differ in their relationship to subjectivity, in a possibility all the more feasible given modern criticism's tendency to associate medieval depictions of subjectivity with questions of genre.⁹

Such a notion fails, however, to account either for Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, written in the first-person but tagging itself as a romance, or for how criticism has more generally undermined the perfect association of either genre with either pronoun.¹⁰ Among others, Sophie Marnette has tracked the importance of the narratorial *je* in verse romances, while Didier Lechat focuses on how the *je* of the *dits* is, "disséminé et fragmenté en autant de figures mythologiques, ou autres," with the

⁸ Benveniste, "La nature des pronoms," *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale*, vol. 1., 256.

⁹ The book-length studies of subjectivity in medieval French literature are: Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence* and *The Subject Medieval/Modern*; Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*; Virginie Greene, *Le Sujet et la mort dans la Mort Artu*; and Michel Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire*. Note that with the exception of Haidu's second book and Zink's study, each other study has a strong anchoring in one genre.

¹⁰ For interesting discussion of the relation of the *Rose* to courtly romance, see David Hult, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*, 186-262. For discussion of the *Rose* as a *dit*, see Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, "Le clerc et l'écriture." For another useful introduction to questions of genre and subjectivity in the *Rose*, see Sarah Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 33-51.

first-person thus relying on the third for self-definition.¹¹ In this chapter, I should like to go further, by arguing not that the balance of pronouns is inversed from one genre to the next, but rather that both verse romances and the *dits* are defined by similar conceptions of subjectivity. Texts from both genres, I shall contend, focus on how political circumstances, and specifically gender and sexual politics, foster and de-construct the neat contours of the subject, which in turns renders over-reliance on the binary opposition of first- to third-persons misleading when studying their engagement with subjectivity.

Such an argument entails challenging the medievalness of Benveniste's understanding of subjectivity, which we can do both in grammatical and in more philosophical terms. The most prominent modern narratologists have routinely voiced suspicion about this opposition.¹² Such suspicion seems especially warranted when approaching medieval texts, because, by all accounts, medieval grammarians and rhetoricians put rather little weight on this grammatical distinction. It is evoked only fleetingly by Priscian and later commentators of his grammatical treatises, and seemingly not at all by the more speculative grammarians of the High and Late Middle Ages.¹³ Given the weight that modern critics have placed on the opposition of the first- and third-persons, it is surprising that it is barely mentioned in Copeland's and Sluiter's massive edition of medieval writing on grammar and rhetoric.¹⁴

¹¹ Sophie Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue*, 33-38. Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 57.

¹² For their denunciations of this distinction's over-prevalence in modern criticism, see both Genette, *Figures III*, 251-52 and Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 150-51.

¹³ See, for example, Priscian, *Institutiones* 17.14, in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 181.

¹⁴ Perhaps the most extended interrogation of the first-person pronoun in their volume is Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, "Epistola II" 14-93, *Epistolae and Epitomae*, in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 250-51.

If recourse to medieval grammar invites us to query the medievalness of reading too much into the difference between grammatical persons, this does not necessarily imply the incompatibility of medieval and modern conceptions of subjectivity; it merely suggests that this distinction is not a promising place to begin. The recent appearance of the first volumes of Alain de Libera's *Histoire de la subjectivité* has, I think, opened up important new avenues for re-considering the complex relationship between medieval, modern, and post-modern conceptions of subjectivity; his work provides a rigorous philosophical framework which lends both credence and nuance to Peter Haidu's self-consciously polemical thesis that, "the modern subject was born in the Middle Ages."¹⁵ At the risk of over-simplifying, de Libera argues that, before Thomas of Aquinas, there were two competing models of subjectivity: one associated with Aristotle, the other with Augustine. For Aristotle and his followers (including Boethius), the "I"—whether approached in terms of the intellect, the soul, or the subject—can be inferred from accidental actions: as de Libera paraphrases it, "nous raisonnons d'après la routine grammaticale: 'Penser est une action, toute action suppose un *sujet qui l'accomplit*...'"¹⁶ Augustine rejects the pertinence of the Aristotelian distinction of substance and accident as it regards the human soul.¹⁷ He instead proposes a model of the human soul in the image of the Trinity, where the intellect, its knowledge, and its love (*mens, amor, notitia*) are both three and one: "l'âme, son amour et sa connaissance sont trois, et ces *trois* ne font qu'un."¹⁸ For de Libera, Aquinas's great move is to reconcile these seemingly

¹⁵ Haidu, *The Subject Medieval/Modern*, 1. Alain de Libera, *l'Archéologie du sujet*. I will concentrate on the first volume, *La Naissance du sujet*.

¹⁶ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 41.

¹⁷ De Libera, *La Naissance*, cf. 238.

¹⁸ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 268, proposition a3. His emphasis.

incompatible traditions, by creating a third category, “intermédiaire entre substance et accident,” which creates “un statut propre à la puissance psychique.”¹⁹ This allows him to maintain a larger Aristotelian framework while nonetheless considering, like Augustine, that the soul is not explicable in terms of the opposition of substance to accident or even of subject to object.

In this chapter, I will argue for the pertinence of this Perichoretic, “miraculous” or illogical, conception of subjectivity to verse romances and the *dits*, where such a conception rejects the clearcut determinations of interiority and exteriority that the first-to third-person distinction would imply; in fact, it even queries the possibility that grammar could account for the emergence and being of the subject.²⁰ In my argument, I will also draw on Butlerian queer theory, particularly her *Psychic Life of Power*. I turn to Butler’s reflections both because they evidence extremely important (and surprising) similarities to the Perichoretic model of the soul, and because she foregrounds the convoluted relationship of subjectivity to ethics, politics, gender, and sexuality, concerns so emphatically on the horizons of verse romances and the *dits*.

Using Butler in relation to medieval philosophy and literature necessitates some justification. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler’s working hypothesis is that the subject is formed paradoxically: “the story by which subjection is told is inevitably circular, presupposing the very subject for which it seeks to give an account.”²¹ This paradox by which *I*, telling the story of becoming *I*, both presupposes the (grammatical) subject and

¹⁹ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 331.

²⁰ This represents a major difference with nearly all speculative grammar, which was concerned with the ontological implications of grammar. The term Perichoretic is the Greek equivalent for the Latin *circumincessio*, and describes the relationship between the three parts of the Holy Trinity.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 11.

also requires the complete sentence in order to explain the formation of this *I*, is also found in influential domains of medieval thought. Her argument closely resembles the problem Berengar of Tours highlights in his eleventh-century argument against the “material” presence of Christ (*praesentia sensualis*) in the sacrament; according to de Libera’s paraphrase, “Une proposition ne peut se maintenir identique durant son énonciation si, précisément, son terme initial se trouve modifié pendant que le terme final est prononcé.”²² For de Libera, although reflections on the Eucharist are of interest to the “archeologist of the subject,” they are secondary to medieval theo-philosophy’s total obsession with the mysteries of the Trinity and of the dual human and divine nature of Christ.²³ This paradox of “I” as cause and effect of subjectivity also describes what de Libera dubs “la nouveauté capitale” of the Perichoretic model of the soul.²⁴ Because “les actes mentaux appelés ‘connaissance’ et ‘amour’ existent dans l’âme et s’y développent dans une sorte d’involution mutuelle,” it follows that the *mens* is always-already both subject and object of itself, as it is the subject driving the actions of knowing and loving, which are turned back on itself from the get-go: “On ne peut comprendre toutes les harmoniques de la *mens* augustinienne, si l’on n’accepte pas de voir, au moment où on les pose, *sujet* et *objet* se parenthétiser.”²⁵ Complex as this may sound, the point, for our purposes, is relatively simple: for medieval theo-philosophers in this Augustinian line *and* for Butlerian queer theory, the subject is by its nature both reflexive and contradictory in logical, temporal, and grammatical terms (where these three are quite difficult to disentangle).

²² Alain de Libera, *La Philosophie médiévale*, 290.

²³ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 119.

²⁴ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 257.

²⁵ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 268, 277. His italics.

De Libera's account of medieval subjectivity may even be helpful in nuancing the trajectory of Butler's reflections on the subject. In the earlier, celebrated and controversial *Gender Trouble*, Butler seemingly understands the subject in a manner that de Libera may, because of its reliance on grammar, consider somehow Aristotelian, and that the modern reader might call Nietzschean. According to this account, "the doer is merely a fiction of the deed—the deed is everything," to quote Nietzsche.²⁶ For *Gender Trouble* and its understanding of the *Genealogy of Morals*, the subject is *created* by the verb; not entirely dissimilar, although the emphasis is quite different, the medieval Aristotelian and Boethian argument is that the subject can be inferred (or "denominated") from the verb: *omne accidens denominat subiectum*.²⁷ In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler, no doubt responding to what many read as her refusal of the possibility of agency in *Gender Trouble*, will change her tune somewhat, arguing that, "the subject is *neither* fully determined by power *nor* fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both)."²⁸ It follows that,

Agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled. One might say that the purposes of power are not always the purposes of agency. To the extent that the latter diverge from the former, agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs.²⁹

²⁶ Quoted in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

²⁷ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 50. Note that the question of the relationship of nouns to verbs was a veritable obsession of many grammarians. Priscian and Donatus believed in the "logical priority" of noun over verb (the opposite of what Butler is arguing here), whereas, say, Petrus Helias would argue that, "it is not the case that the nominative takes the verb into a construction, but the verb takes the nominative in order to complete the construction. Therefore, the verb governs the nominative case, but the nominative does not govern the verb..." (in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 458-59). For our purposes it is only essential to retain that there was an ontological weight placed on grammar, specifically in relation to categories of substance and accident.

²⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 17. Her emphases.

²⁹ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 15. Her emphases.

This conception of agency's relation to power is similar in form to the Augustinian notion that knowledge and love directed outside of the *mens* represent an excess of knowledge and love initially directed back toward the *mens*: "l'âme peut, par l'amour même qu'elle se porte, aimer autre chose et, par la connaissance même qu'elle a d'elle-même, connaître autre chose."³⁰ Like in Butler's notion of agency, knowledge and love of other things or people are thus "enabled" by a fundamental reflexivity which they then exceed. If, furthermore, we focus more directly on Augustinian accounts of "agency," we may note that, in substituting "God" for "power," we are not worlds away from his account of sinning, where if man sins or does evil, he is doing something unintended by God while nonetheless remaining made in His image and always belonging to Him.³¹ My goal is not to "catholicize" Butler, but rather to note that similarities between her evolving conception of the subject and the Perichoretic model lead not only to a certain conception of the subject as profoundly illogical in its reflexivity, but also to a corresponding view of the subject as exerting an agency dependent on its convoluted relation to its (impossible or miraculous) creation and being.

If, in the preceding paragraph, I suggested that substituting "power" for "God" represents a useful modern way of engaging with the hugely influential Perichoretic model of the soul, I am also turning to Butler because she does not effect the substitution of "God" for "power": because, that is, vernacular literature, long understood to be enmeshed in feudal politics, can have a critical relationship to "power" that differs from theology's relationship to "God," which strives to be uncritical. In other words, because

³⁰ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 316.

³¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*.

Butlerian theory engages with questions about subjectivity that significantly overlap with the Perichoretic model of the soul while also conceiving of the subject in relation to secular power and specifically to gender and sexual politics, it may serve as a useful bridge for imagining how certain concerns of medieval “theo-philosophy” could manifest themselves in the ethico-political realms of courtly literature.³² My goal is not to imply that medieval theo-philosophy plus Butlerian politics simply equals vernacular literature, but rather to use this approximation as a jumping-off point for analyzing the ethico-political and philosophical complexity of subjectivity in verse romances and the *dits*. In this chapter, I shall attempt to develop this queer conception of subjectivity that moves from the paradox of “I” as *cause* and *effect* of politicized, gendered, and eroticized subjection—both subject and object (and neither), inside and outside, active and passive—to various possibilities of exercising subversive agency, in three medieval texts: Christine de Pizan’s *le Livre du duc des vrais amans*, Guillaume de Machaut’s *la Fonteinne amoureuse*, and Chrétien de Troyes’s *le Chevalier de la charrete*.

I begin with Christine’s text for four reasons. First, it both explicitly problematizes the opposition between first- and third-person pronouns and links the destabilizing of grammatical norms to gender politics. Second, queering this romance challenges the critical commonplaces according to which Christine does not problematize the identitarian category of women and is disdainful of sexuality, however progressive her views on gender may be.³³ Analyzing the indeterminacy of the subject in the *Duc*

³² De Libera considers that it is an inability to see the philosophical implications of medieval theology that has led many modern studies to neglect the importance of medieval thinking to the history of the subject. De Libera, *La Naissance*, 81.

³³ Kevin Brownlee juxtaposes most directly the tension between progressive views on gender and disdain for sexuality in Christine in “Widowhood, Sexuality, and Gender in Christine de Pizan.” Studies of Christine’s views on gender are ubiquitous; the principal questions have been whether

stands, then, to open up the larger possibility of a queer Christine, for which criticism has insufficiently accounted. Third, because the *Duc* has alternately been considered as a *dit* and/or a verse romance, it is excellently positioned for discussion of generic continuities between the two. Finally, queering the *Duc* also amounts to re-conceiving Christine's relation to earlier French writers; it implies that her debt is as much ethico-political as it is rhetorical or poetic, and that the two are far more curiously entangled both in Christine's work *and* in earlier male-authored texts than criticism generally allows. I then turn to Machaut's *Fontaine amoureuse* and Chrétien's *Charrette* to substantiate this claim that the *Duc* queers an already queer subject. While the fourth chapter will study Chrétien and Machaut together in terms of authorship and irony, in this chapter I attempt to show the seriousness and complexity of the engagement of texts attributed to each with the problematic construct of the subject as s/he emerges in relation to gender and sexual politics. Furthermore, this notion that the *Fontaine amoureuse* and the *Charrette* are more interested in the subject's paradoxical relationship to his or her subjection than on asserting the space of interiority or the agency of the individual lends itself to a narrative diametrically opposed to the classic one, according to which Chrétien's and Machaut's *oeuvres* both represent crucial steps toward the birth of the modern individual who privileges his interiority and values his ability to exert agency.³⁴ Reading Machaut and

Christine's views may be qualified as "feminist" and/or whether or not they need to be better contextualized in fifteenth-century politics. It also seems to be generally accepted that she both views gender largely as a construct but nonetheless considers that there are some "natural" differences between men and women. For the most recent bibliographic guide, see Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographic Guide, Supplement II*.

³⁴ The classic study on the individual in Chrétien is, Robert Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*. Various early articles concentrated on Machaut as a step toward the modern individual, such as Friedrich Wolfzettel's "La poésie lyrique en France comme mode d'appréhension de la réalité." For a more recent Machaldian piece taking up the question of the

Chrétien with and through Christine will point to a very different narrative, according to which the construction of the politicized, gendered, and eroticized subject is a highly fraught, contingent and problematic *process* that these texts analyze critically—and, in turn, push us to re-examine.

I. *Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans*

Christine's *Duc* opens with the jarring depiction of the subjection of an inferior female to her lord's desires:

Combien que occupacion
Je n'eusse ne entencion
A present de dictiez faire
D'amours, car en autre affaire
Ou trop plus me delictoie
Toute m'entente mettoie;
Vueil je d'autrui sentement
Commencier presentement
Nouvel dit, car tel m'en prie
Qui bien peut, sans qu'il deprie,
Commander a trop greigneur
Que je ne suis. C'est un seigneur
A qui doy bien obëir. (1-13)³⁵

Although I had neither the leisure nor the intention at present to compose a *dit* about love, since I was putting all my energy into another project, which I was enjoying more, I will now begin a new *dit* about someone else's feelings; for he who asks me to do so can, without begging, dispense orders to people more important than myself. It is a lord, whom I must obey.

This seems to be a strikingly direct example of Althusserian interpellation. Power calls out, and compels its subject to “turn” toward it: in Butler's words, “The form...power

individual, see Anne-Hélène Miller, “Guillaume de Machaut and the Forms of Pre-Humanism in Fourteenth-Century France.”

³⁵ All references are to Thelma Fenster's edition. See also the recent bilingual edition, ed. Dominique Demartini and Didier Lechat, also referenced in the bibliography.

takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning...³⁶ Christine's prologue takes an unusual turn, however, when she announces in its final lines that she will appropriate the Duke's personal pronoun: "Et par son assentement/Je diray en sa personne/Le fait si qu'il le raisonne" (And with his assent, I will tell in his person, the story as he understands it; 38-40). While Benveniste defines *je* as a pronoun "qui peut être assumé par chaque locuteur, à condition qu'il ne renvoie à chaque fois qu'à l'instance de son propre discours," Christine's assumption of another's *je* blatantly upsets this rule.³⁷ Rather than lending itself to a conception of subjectivity that is compatible with this grammatical paradigm, the prologue instead situates the emergence of the subject in politicized contexts which problematize it. The interrogation of the *je* resonates strikingly with Butler's reading of Hegel's account of the subjection of bondsman to lord in the "Unhappy Consciousness":

The lord postures as a dis-embodied desire for self-reflection, one who not only requires the subordination of the bondsman in the status of an instrumental body, but who requires in effect that the bondsman *be* the lord's body, but be it in such a way that the lord forgets or disavows his own activity in producing the bondsman, a production which we will call projection.³⁸

The Duke ostensibly desires "self-reflection," and in order to attain it, he requires the subordination of an inferior Christine. By assuming his pronoun, Christine becomes, in various senses, the Duke's subject, since her hand corresponds to his person or signature and it will only be via such projection onto her that the Duke can produce his "own" story.

³⁶ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 3. Judith Peraino also discusses at length the notion of "turning" in troubadour poetry in her, *Giving Voice to Love*, 33-36.

³⁷ Benveniste, "La Nature des Pronoms," 253.

³⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 35, her italics.

Because Christine becomes the Duke's *je*, the prologue makes us hesitate as to how inside or outside we are, and will be, to Christine's and the Duke's persons. It will also come to have the effect of challenging the neat separation of the extradiegetic plane from the diegetic. The narrative will evoke the consequences of courtly love for women, and the narrator's depiction of herself as at the mercy of a more powerful man therefore "appears to engage deliberately" with the terms of the ensuing narrative.³⁹ As has been remarked, the mirroring of diegetic and extradiegetic worlds opens the possibility that this prologue is neither biographical nor referential, but rather, performative.⁴⁰ Ironically, then, the *je* enters into the concerns of the narrative by virtue of claiming she would prefer not to. Curious echoes linking this prologue to Christine's October 2, 1402 *epsitre* to Pierre Col in the *Débats du Roman de la Rose* support the possibility that the prologue is textual or performative. This epistolary traces a similar movement from writing *à contrecœur* to Christine's assertion of her right to speak via discussion of pronouns:

Et combien qu'occupée soy autre part, ne mon entencion n'estoit de plus escrire sur ce, encore te respondray en gros et rudement... Et comme verité pure me contraigne a toy respondre ce que plus volentiers tairoie (pour ce que la matiere n'est a ma plaisance), le feray selon mon rude stile. Mais si comme m'escrrips que je te pardonne se tu parles a moy par *tu*, samblablement te pry, comme ce soit le plus propre selon nos ancians—comme tu mesmes dis.⁴¹

And although I am busy elsewhere, and it was not my intention to write more on this matter, still I will respond to you simply and without polish... And since pure truth constrains me to respond to you what I would have rather preferred to pass over in silence (because the material is not pleasing to me), I will do so in my unpolished style. But just as you write to me that I should pardon your use of the pronoun *tu*, so too I beg the same of you, as it is the most fitting, according to our ancient ancestors, as you yourself say.

³⁹ The quote is borrowed from Gaunt's description of the relationship of the *Roman de Silence* to modern theory in "The Significance of *Silence*," 202.

⁴⁰ See Demartini and Lechat, "Introduction," 19.

⁴¹ "October 2, 1402: Christine's Response to Pierre Col," in *Debating the Roman de la rose*, 140-42.

The *Duc*'s prologue may represent an intertextual allusion; it certainly reflects a literary posture that Christine has adopted elsewhere. Echoes linking the prologue and this *epistre* also have the intriguing effect of opening up the possibility that "Christine's" relationship to the *Rose* either was, or became, more nuanced than critics have allowed.⁴² For the prologue seems to betoken a different attitude toward courtly literature than the *Débats*, since in the *Duc*, Christine will, however reluctantly, participate in the creation of a courtly narrative.

It is justifiable to put so much weight on this prologue, because throughout the story of the Duke's love with an anonymous lady, Christine will continue to allude to it rather explicitly. For example, the Duke won't describe his chivalric prowess because, "c'est honte de compter/son mesmes fait" (it is shameful to speak of one's own feats; 1085-86). When the Duke is too timid to address his beloved, she exclaims, "Dont pour nous .ij. me couvient/Parler" (So I must speak for both of us; 2707-8). Such instances, which I will develop in more detail, suggest that the text showcases an important reflexivity, because, to use Butler's formulation, it repeatedly "turns back upon itself."⁴³ This reflexivity is crucial, because it fosters a problem similar to that which, for Butler, characterizes the relationship of bondsman to lord in Hegel's text:

The bondsman signs, as it were, for the lord, as a proxy signatory, as a delegated substitute. Thus the signature does not seal ownership of the object by the bondsman, but becomes the site of the redoubling of ownership and, hence, sets the stage for a scene of contestation.⁴⁴

⁴² Classic discussions of Christine's gender politics include Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority* and Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women*. For more precise discussion of her relationship to Jean de Meun, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Christine de Pizan and the Misogynist Tradition"; Kevin Brownlee, "Discourses of the Self"; E.J. Richards's introduction in *Debating the Romance of the Rose* (xxi-xxxvi); and Sylvia Huot, "Confronting Misogyny: Christine de Pizan and the *Roman de la Rose*."

⁴³ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 6, 81. See also Demartini and Lechat, "Introduction," 18-19.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 38.

Each time that Christine, who signs for the Duke, recalls the prologue, she opens the text up to such a contestation of signatures between the Duke and herself. These re-turns to the prologue raise the question, to whom does the text belong, in grammatical or referential, material, and even artistic terms?

One way to read the trajectory that this “contestation of signatures” will take in the *Duc* is along the lines of Butler’s description of the evolving relationship between the bondsman and the lord in Hegel. The bondsman, she writes, “slaves away and [gradually] becomes aware of his own signature on the things that he makes, he recognizes in the form of the artifact that he crafts the markings of his own labor.”⁴⁵ Similarly, despite her hesitation in the prologue, Christine comes, over the course of the *Duc*, to take pride in her poetic output. Judith Laird and E Jeffrey Richards have interpreted this text as Christine’s *ars poetica*, something like her response to Machaut’s *Remede de Fortune*, and such a reading is warranted by the emphasis the *je* places on the diversity of the inserted lyrics.⁴⁶ Late in the text, the *je* reflects,

Si fu mainte chançon faicte
Puis de dueil, puis de repos,
De nostre fait. A propos
De divers cas je disoye
Balades que je faisoye,
Lais, complaintes, autres dis... (3505-10)

And thus were many lyrics/songs made about our story, alternatively of mourning and of moments of respite. About different predicaments I composed ballades that I created, or lais, complaintes, and other pieces.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 36.

⁴⁶ Judith Laird and Earl Jeffrey Richards, “Tous parlent par une mesmes bouche.”

Gloating at the diversity of lyric output notably recalls Machaut, but it is seemingly more unusual that the Christinian *je* also takes great pride in the text's narrative form, in the sole instance where she genders herself:

A tous dicteurs qui savoir
Ont en eulx, celle savoir
Fait, qui ce dictié dicta,
Qu'en trestous les vers dict a
Rime leonime ou livre
Et tel tout au lonc le livre—
Voire, de si forte forge,
Ne sçay se nul le voit fors je,
Que si foible rime en vers
N'y a, et droit et envers,
Que un voyeu devant ne sonne
Ains la syllabe que on sonne
Derraine aux rimes parfaire;
Ainsi l'a voulu parfaire
Pour monstrar son esciënce,
Car labour a, et sciënce
De lonc procès demener
Par tel rime... (1-18)⁴⁷

To all poets who possess knowledge, she who authored this *dit* proclaims that in all the verses she has employed *rimes léonines* (very rich rhymes), and this for the entire duration of the book: truly, rhymes of such a kind—and I don't know if anyone but me sees this—that there are none of those weak ones anywhere—either here or there—in the poetry, where a vowel isn't pronounced before the final syllable that is pronounced to cap the rhyme. Thus she desired to perfect it to show her learning; for it takes labor and skill to undertake the lengthy execution of such a rhyme scheme.

It is unusual—to my knowledge, unheard of—for an author to draw attention to the unusual rhyme scheme s/he has used throughout an extended verse narrative. We might, then, be tempted to argue that over the course of the narrative, the *je* seems to overcome the reservations she expresses in the prologue.

⁴⁷ Fenster's edition begins the line count at 0 after the first *explicit*; these lines are pp. 196-98.

This is not, however, how critics have understood the *Duc*; for while the *je* does seem increasingly enthusiastic about a text she will laud *qua* poetic achievement, criticism has always held that, in ethical terms, Christine dramatically inserts herself into this narrative in order to express her lack of enthusiasm for the material, by designating one character, Sébille de Monthault de la Tour, as her mouthpiece.⁴⁸ Late in the text, Sébille, to whom the Duke's Lady has appealed for assistance in conducting her affair, writes a lengthy and powerful letter in prose, where she argues that courtly love invariably harms women. Critics have risked the outmoded gesture of identifying one diegetic character with the "author" for various reasons. At a more concrete level, Christine will reproduce Sébille's epistle, with minimal changes, in her seemingly didactic *Livre des Trois Vertus*, where it is held up as a model last-ditch effort to guide a princess back to virtue; and if it is presented as didactic in the later work, the argument goes, then it must be in the earlier one, too.⁴⁹ The assumption that Sébille is Christine's ethical mouthpiece also relies, I think, on two more general ones. The one, that we know what Christine thinks about gender and sexuality; she by-and-large believes that gender is a masculine construct which unfairly constrains and belittles women, and that un-chaste desire is an un-Christian and immoral tool wielded by patriarchy. The other, more basic assumption is that we can know what Christine thinks, because she writes "sincerely" and

⁴⁸ For statements suggesting that Christine unequivocally sympathizes with Sébille, see Liliane Dulac, "Christine de Pisan et le Malheur des 'vrais amans,'" 230-33; Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers*, 237; Kevin Brownlee, "Rewriting Romance: Courtly Discourse and Auto-Citation in *Christine de Pisan*," 173, 181-83; Thelma Fenster, "Who's a Heroine?" 118-20; and Demartini and Lechat, "Introduction," 50. Tracy Adams takes a more nuanced view in, "Pour un nice semblant," esp. 5ff; she considers that Sébille "re-inscribes" the conception of the lovers "from a negative perspective" (9).

⁴⁹ Christine de Pisan, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, I.27.

“autobiographically.”⁵⁰ I wish to query—or queer—these critical commonplaces, by arguing that the *Duc* instead destabilizes or deconstructs any notion of a coherent *je*, whether in grammatical, philosophical, or ethico-political terms. In order to demonstrate the intricacy of the *Duc*’s critical analysis of the subject, I will first develop the problematic indeterminacy and ambivalence of the *je* in the narrative preceding Sébille’s letter. I will then bring this ambivalence to bear on the famed epistle, before briefly examining the possibility of a larger queer *je* across Christine’s *oeuvre*. Rather than reading the *Duc* through the *oeuvre*, then, I propose to use the *Duc* to challenge recurrent, and potentially problematic, assumptions about the stability of the *je* and the belief in the referent in texts attributed to Christine.

Back to the Duke’s story. Following on the heels of the Duke’s interpellation of Christine, the story opens with a young Duke who is interpellated by Love. Hunting, he stumbles upon a Lady he has seen before, but with whom he only now falls in love:

Si sembloie cil qui nage
 Par mer, cerchant mainte terre,
 Pour trouver ce qu’il peut querre
 Pres de soy et point n’y vise
 Tant que un autre l’en advise.
 Tout ainsi m’avint, sanz doubte
 Car n’appercevoie goute
 La beauté... (222-29)

Thus I resembled he who sails the seas, searching in many lands, in order to find what he could in fact find nearby—though he doesn’t notice it until another prompts him to do so. Such a situation befell me, for before, without any doubt, I hadn’t at all noticed this beauty...

⁵⁰ For the question of “sincerity” in Christine, see, for example, E.J. Richards, “Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered Writing.” “Autobiography” in Christine is a hot topic: see, for example, Renate Blumenfeld-Kozinski, “Christine de Pizan et l’autobiographie féminine,” and Kevin Brownlee, “Le projet ‘autobiographique’ de Christine de Pizan.”

As the Duke proceeds along a well-trodden path, only this time to notice something different, so too is Christine deploying a storyline which, in Thelma Fenster's words, stinks "of many another courtly romance," but where the reader is potentially invited to see something new: the possibility, most explicitly broached by Sébille's letter, of courtly love's fundamental misogyny.⁵¹ There is, though, something deeply paradoxical about encoding this resistance to courtly love within the description of the Duke's *coup de foudre*; for Christine both calls upon the reader to behave like the Duke, by noticing something new in familiar territory, while simultaneously undermining the Duke's experience, since what the reader is invited to see is the undesirability or harmfulness of this love. The language of the description of the *coup de foudre* even curiously recalls the prologue. While Christine has "consenti" to the Duke in the prologue, the Duke says, "mon cuer se consenti/a l'amoureuse bleceure" (My heart consented to the amorous wound; 270-71). When the Duke claims that, "A vivre d'autre maniere/Vraye Amour m'apprist en l'eure" (True love taught me right then to live in a completely different way; 292-93), this recalls the about-face the *je* performs in the prologue, where she is forced to abandon the "autre affaire/Ou trop plus me delictoie" (other affair, where I was better enjoying myself). These re-turns to the prologue have the effect of raising the question, "How might we think resistance within the terms of reiteration?," since Christine's resistance to the Duke's desires, performed each time she recalls the *je*'s subjection in the prologue, is fully encoded within the narration of his desire.⁵²

⁵¹ Fenster, "Introduction," 19.

⁵² Butler, *Psychic Power*, 12

As the text describes the Duke's courtship of his Lady, the *énonciation* continues to pierce through the *énoncé*. The Duke having brilliantly performed and impressed his lady at a tournament, the *je* exclaims,

Mais pour ce
Que c'est honte de compter
Son mesmes fait, raconter
N'en vueil plus en ce cas cy
De mon fait, fors tant qu'a si
Bien fait tint la belle nee
...e donna
De ceulx de dedens le pris
En la fin, et je le pris
Par le bon assentement
Des dames... (1084-9, 1092-6)

But because it is shameful to recount one's own feats, I don't want to say more in this instance about my deeds, except that the well-born one (my Lady) thought they were so well performed...and gave the prize in the end for the "home-team," and I took it, with the approbation of the other ladies.

The Duke's not recounting his own feats rings ironically, since we know that Christine recounts them. This description specifically recalls the prologue by repeating the crucial term *assentement*, as Christine obtained the Duke's *assentement* before adopting his pronoun (38). Thus, whereas the text is denouncing calling attention to one's own feats, the narrator, both *qua* Duke and *qua* Christine, is doing precisely that. If the *je* takes the "pris" of "ceulx de dedens," we might say that Christine takes that of "ceulx de dehors."

During the narration of the courtship, Christine not only identifies (however ambivalently) with the Duke's *je-il*, but she also establishes a suggestive relationship with his Lady. The Duke initially asks the Lady to dance, and she "[u]n petit s'en excusa/Mais ne le me refusa" (she hesitated a bit, but didn't refuse it to me; 779-80), recalling how Christine, too, demurs before accepting the Duke's pretensions. This identification becomes more explicit when the Dame later says to the dumbstruck Duke,

“Dont pour nous .ij. me couvient/Parler” (So I must speak for both of us; 2707-8). The authorial *je* therefore sews herself both into the subject of the text and into his love object, in a move seemingly in keeping with how both the Perichoretic model of the soul and Butlerian theories of subjection do not admit of a clearcut opposition of subject to object. Reflexivity makes one always-already both.

As the Duke’s love-story progresses, the authorial *je* also makes her presence felt alongside third-parties to this affair.⁵³ Once the Dame’s husband has called her away, the Duke falls into a bout of depression. His cousin elicits his confession, saying,

Et certes, vray fol seriés
De tenir ou cuer enclose
La douleur qui tient forclose
Vostre joye et vo santé. (1682-84)

And certainly, you would be truly mad to keep bound up within your heart the pain that forecloses the possibilities of your joy and your good health.

As the cousin evokes the inside/outside binary (*enclose/forclose*) in terms of the Duke’s confidence, so too does he challenge this binary, by virtue of becoming yet another intradiegetic stand-in for the narrator; for just as the narrator becomes the Duke’s pronoun or person after receiving his confession, so too does the cousin both receive his confession and then offer his bodily service unto the Duke: “Et moult commence a s’offrir/A moy de *corps*...” (And he starts to offer me his [bodily] service...; 1730-31).⁵⁴ This is indicative of a further complication of narratorial subjectivity, since the narrator has identified as *je*, *tu*, and *il* within the Duke’s story. Her identification with the Duke’s cousin also returns us to questions of complicity, because the cousin takes an active role

⁵³ For a wonderful discussion of the role of third-parties in love affairs in the *Libro de buen amor*, see Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things*, 136-40.

⁵⁴ The cousin will also offer money, which would link him with the Duke, rather than Christine—again, crossing the wires of clearcut identifications.

in the intrigue, concocting the covert plan which allows for the Duke's clandestine encounter with his Lady. Might the authorial *je*, by analogy, be assuming a more active role in the affair than the prologue would imply?

In this climactic scene, the cousin has the Duke dress up as his servant in order to infiltrate the Lady's household unremarked. The Duke says,

Après en l'abit d'un page
Me mist hors cil qui fu sage—
Ce yert le secretaire appris...
Si voyez comment mestier
Est aucunefois au maistre
Qu'il soit varlet, et peut estre
Que souvent ainsi avient
A qui a s'entente avient! (vv. 2893-95, 2906-10)

Afterward, he who was wise put me outside in the garments of a page; it was the skilled secretary. You can therefore see how sometimes it is necessary that the master become the servant, and it is even possible that this often happens thus to he who fulfills his ambitions.

At one level, the Duke's dressing up as servant represents a comic literalization of the motif of lover as servant to his lady. At another, subtler one, we may note that at the same time as the Duke clandestinely infiltrates the Dame's abode, so too does the *énonciation* make its way into the *énoncé*, since the question of impersonating another, especially when it articulates itself in terms of the master/secretary dynamic, recalls the prologue. That this interpenetration of extradiegetic and diegetic occurs in the contexts of the ostensible penetration of the Lady by the Duke raises numerous questions.⁵⁵ If the Duke is impersonating a secretary in the hopes of attaining satisfaction for his desire, was Christine just dressing up as a secretary in the prologue, performing as a servant in order to "a s'entente av[enir]"? And if erotic desire leads to the inversion of the master-servant

⁵⁵ Critics have debated whether or not the Duke and his lady actually have sex; Christine's text is not perfectly clear.

dynamic, since the masterly duke assumes the role of secretary so as to consummate his love, isn't this problematic; for how can Christine both desire not to deal with courtly love, but be obliged to do so by her master, and then depict the pursuit of desire as the forum for troubling this hierarchical opposition? These questions may also point to an overlap between reflexivity and sexuality, because the terms of the prologue, to which the text keeps self-reflexively re-turning, are so similar to those of the Duke's love, on which he is so relentlessly focused.⁵⁶

I would argue that Sébille de Monthault's inserted letter, where she fervently denounces courtly love's misogyny, extends, rather than squashes, this complex interplay between reflexivity and desire. The circumstances of the letter again recall those of the prologue. It is prompted by the Dame's request that Sébille leave everything behind and come serve as her servant and confessor, which echoes the Duke's initial interpellation of Christine: "que vous ordeniés de voz besongnes en tele maniere que soiés preste dedens .viij. jours après pour venir vers moy" (that you organize your affairs in such a manner as to be ready to come to me within eight days' time; IV.169). "Me semble que je mesprendroye a moy taire....," Sébille responds (I feel that I would do wrong, were I to remain silent; V.171). Is she, we might ask, acting unlike Christine, who seems to come to work *with* this narrative of adultery? Or may she be similar to Christine, insofar as Christine never completely silences herself throughout the *Duc*?

The letter itself also suggestively re-turns to the prologue. Sébille chides the clichéd notion that women stand to gain from inspiring their lover's success: "Et a dire, 'Je feray un homme vaillant': certes, je dis que c'est trop grant folie de soy destruire pour

⁵⁶ As Butler writes, "[r]eflection on desire absorbs desire into reflection" (*Psychic Life of Power*, 23).

accroiste un autre” (And to say: ‘I’ll make a man valiant’; surely I say it is a very great folly to destroy oneself to raise another’s status; V.176). Sébille’s words recall the narrator’s predicament, as she too effaces herself before another; yet, since the extradiegetic prologue routinely pierces through the diegesis, they also challenge the notion that such submission goes fully unrecognized. In a similarly ambivalent vein, Christine has Sébille write of male lovers,

disons du costé des amans encore que tous feussent loyaulx, secrez, voir disans—ce qu’ilz ne sont mie, ains scet on assez que communement sont fains, et pour les dames decevoir dient ce que ilz ne pensent ne ne voudroient faire—toutefois, est chose vraye que l’ardeur en tele amour ne dure mie longuement... (V.178)

let’s even assume that amongst lovers all were loyal, discreet, truth-telling—which they absolutely are not all; rather, we all know that many pretend, and in order to deceive ladies say what they don’t think and would rather not do—; in any case, it is true that the passion of such love does not last long...

Christine *qua* author seems to be behaving curiously like the disloyal lover Sébille describes, since, according to the prologue, the narrative represents something that doesn’t particularly interest her, just as the disloyal lover is not really interested in the women he seduces.⁵⁷ Furthermore, as we have seen in detail, Christine isn’t perfectly discreet, as she keeps intruding into the Duke’s story. Therefore, just as the glances to the prologue color with ambivalence the narrative of the Duke’s love, so do they trouble the unequivocal nature of Sébille’s political message. In both instances, the effect of these returns is to challenge the very possibility of renunciation, in a manner which Butler’s thinking may help elucidate. As she writes,

The renunciation of the self as the origin of its own actions must be *performed* repeatedly and can never be finally achieved...The self becomes an incessant

⁵⁷ For discussion of odd similarities between Christine and the *losengier* in the *Epsitre au Dieu d’Amors*, see the absolutely stunning article by Claire Nouvet, “Writing (in) Fear.”

performer of renunciation, whereby the performance as an action, contradicts the postulation of *inaction* that it is meant to signify.⁵⁸

Similarly, the insistence of re-turns to the prologue suggests that for Christine, renunciation is a repeated performance, which, via this very repetition, significantly undoes its own effacement. For by virtue of insistently re-turning to the moment of her initial renunciation of her own interests, she never fully renounces her claim to (her/his/their) *je*.

I am insisting on this challenge to the viability of renunciation in the context of Sébille's letter, because Sébille's message is precisely one of renunciation. Of courtly love, she argues that, "le plus seur est du tout l'eschever et fuir" (the surest solution is to completely avoid and escape it; V.175). For Sébille, then, women have the possibility of escaping from patriarchy, which propagates this fiction of courtly love's desirability. If, however, Sébille's epistle reflexively refers back to the prologue, it may instead be understood as demonstrating the *impossibility* of extricating oneself from courtly power dynamics. Because, that is, this message of renunciation cannot be extricated from its complex relations with the larger *Duc*, then the viability of this lady's (or any lady's) extrication from the Duke or patriarchy may, by analogy, also be undermined. Were this so, the letter would point to an odd complicity not only between reflexivity and sexuality, but also between the prohibition of desire and desire itself, since the prologue pierces through the Duke's story and Sébille's letter in quite similar ways.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 49. Her emphasis.

⁵⁹ For a somewhat similar and quite nuanced reading of this letter, see Adams, "Pour un nice semblant." She will argue that the "letter conveys an authentic didactic message," but not "that which many critics have assumed": "Lovers who believe themselves capable of controlling their desire inevitably fall victim to a force they cannot withstand" (20).

A final example may be helpful in teasing out this complex interplay between the reflexivity of subjection, the renunciation of desire, and desire itself in the *Duc*. For Sébille, certain women say, “Je ay diverse partie qui pou de loyauté et de plaisir me fait; pour ce puis, sans mesprendre, avoir plaisir en aucun autre pour oublier merencolie et passer le temps...” (I have a hard lot [a bad husband] which/who shows me little loyalty and gives me little pleasure; for this reason I can, without doing wrong, take a little pleasure in another, in order to forget my melancholy and pass the time; V.176). Yet, Sébille insists, “se celle qui a tel mari le porte paciemment et sans soy empirier, tant croistra plus le merite de son ame et son honneur en bon los” (if she who has such a husband accepts her situation patiently and without abasing herself, the merits of her soul will grow and her honor praised all the more; V.176). The narrator’s persistent involvement in the story appears to signal her forgetting her own melancholy for a little pleasure “en aucun autre,” as the potentially unfaithful wife proposes to do. Christine’s *je* nonetheless also patiently bears the load of another “sans soy empirier,” as the faithful wife does; for she never completely effaces herself and comes to achieve a remarkably poetic feat in his/her/their text. Contrary to Sébille’s message, then, Christine seems to be performing the impossible, by combining the pleasures of the adulterous woman with the honor of the faithful spouse. The clearcut disavowal of extramarital sexuality does not, then, hold up; instead, the relationship between Sébille’s letter and Christine’s text lends itself to something like Butler’s counterintuitive contention that, “the prohibition becomes an odd form of preservation, a way of eroticizing the law that would abolish eroticism, but which only works by compelling eroticism.”⁶⁰ Sébille’s prohibition, which

⁶⁰ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 103.

seeks to “abolish eroticism,” functions within the text by curiously but persistently re-turning to the prologue. By recalling the prologue, the prohibition therefore preserves Christine’s initial submission to the Duke’s love story, and, it follows, has the ironic effect of “compelling” this narrative of eroticism.

Such a queer reading of Christine’s *Duc* is, as I have acknowledged, hardly par for the course. It is diametrically opposed to the critical commonplaces according to which Christine not only denounces the “incessant vituperation against women” characteristic of the tradition of courtly love and most problematically embodied by Jean de Meun, but also exposes the danger of this same tradition’s “endless *mises en abyme* of literary referentiality,” to borrow from E. Jeffrey Richards’s characterization of Christine’s position.⁶¹ Given the propensity to de-construction or queering that my readings have highlighted, it seems fair to suggest that many readings of the *Duc* may have been guided by a certain conception of Christine’s *je* which lies outside this text. The persuasiveness of my readings, it would follow, may depend not only on their convincingness in terms of the *Duc*, but also on their ability to reconcile the queering of the subject in this text with Christine’s larger *oeuvre*. While this task is by-and-large beyond the bounds of this chapter, it is important to my argument about the *Duc* to gesture toward its feasibility. There are two basic ways of making the argument for a queer Christine—or queer Christines.⁶² The one is to acknowledge that Christine’s relationship to courtly love is not as unequivocally disapproving as criticism often construes it. We do not need to read Christine’s entire *oeuvre* through her denunciation of

⁶¹ Richards, “Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered Writing,” 99.

⁶² The oneness of the *je* across the *oeuvre* should be a question, rather than a presumption. For interesting discussion of this in relation to Machaut, see Helen Swift, “The Poetic ‘I.’” I discuss this question at length in relation to Chrétien and Machaut in Chapter IV.

Jean de Meun's alleged misogyny, and to do so has the effect of side-lining such texts as the *Epistre de Othéa*, the *Dit de la rose*, *la Pastoure*, the *Cent Ballades*, and others, which, like the *Duc*, speak to an engagement with courtly love that is deeply ambivalent and quite subtle. Ballade L, which, as the mid-point to the *Cent Ballades* has pride-of-place in this text, serves as a concise but telling example of the importance of nuancing any notion that Christine was "against" courtly love:

Aucunes gens porroient mesjugier
 Pour ce sur moy que je fais ditz d'amours;
 Et diroient que l'amoureux dongier,
 Je sçay trop bien compter et tous les tours,
 Et que ja si vivement
 N'en parlasse, sanz l'essay proprement.
 Mais, sauve soit la grace des diseurs,
 Je m'en raport a tous sages ditteurs.

Car qui se veult de faire ditz chargier
 Biaulz et plaisans, soient ou longs ou cours,
 Le sentement qui est le plus legier,
 Et qui mieulx plaist a tous de commun cours,
 C'est d'amours, ne autrement
 Ne seront fait ne bien ne doucement,
 Ou, se ce n'est, d'aucunes belles meurs,
 Je m'en raport a tous sages ditteurs.

Qui pensé l'a, s'en vueille deschargier,
 Qu'en verité ailleurs sont mes labours.
 Pour m'excuser ne le dis ne purgier;
 Car amé ont assez de moy meillours,
 Mais d'amours je n'ay tourment
 Joye ne dueil; mais pour esbatement
 En parlent maint qui ont ailleurs leurs cuers,
 Je m'en raport a tous sages ditteurs.⁶³

Some people may misjudge me for this reason that I write *dits* about love; they could say that I know too well the risks and all the tricks of love, and that I would not be able to speak about it so vividly without having tried it myself. But, with all due respect to those who say this, I am relying on/referring to all the wise poets.

⁶³ Christine de Pisan, *Les Cent Ballades*, ed. Roy, Ballade L, p. 51.

For whoever wishes to take on the task of writing beautiful and pleasant lyrics, whether long or short, knows that the softest emotion, which by all accounts is most pleasing to all, is that of love, and there is no other way to compose so well or so sweetly. And if not about love, then from other noble behavior; I am referring to all the wise poets.

Whoever had these thoughts may he rid himself of them; for in truth my efforts lie elsewhere. I do not say this to excuse myself or exonerate myself; for better people than I have known love. But I do not experience the amorous torment, its joys or pains; but for pleasure many speak of it, whose hearts are elsewhere: I am referring to all the wise poets.⁶⁴

In the first stanza of this oft-cited ballade, the *je*, by alluding to “l’amoureux dongier” and its “tours,” suggests that courtly love is a dangerous game, no doubt principally for women.⁶⁵ The speaker claims that she has not “tried it herself” (“sans l’essay proprement”); this act of “trying for herself” is, in fact, transferred from loving to writing, as she risks picking up the pen like the “sage ditteurs” have. The second stanza makes it clear, however, that one cannot simply abandon the *matiere* of love; it explains that “le sentiment...qui mieulx plaist a tous de common cours” dominates all others in the lyric tradition. If Christine succeeds in writing “autrement,” it is not, then, because she doesn’t write about love, but rather because she doesn’t feel love when she writes about it—because, as in the prologue to the *Duc*, “en verité ailleurs sont mes labours.” As Claire Nouvet writes of the *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours*, “the defense of women does not situate itself outside but within the discourse [of love] that it criticizes”; and this ballade subverts the tradition of the “sages ditteurs” not by turning away from writing about love or even

⁶⁴ This translation is adapted from Simon Gaunt’s and Karen Pratt’s translation used to teach this Ballade at King’s College London.

⁶⁵ For an exceptionally thorough article on the *Cent Ballades*, see James C. Laidlaw, “*Les Cent Balades: The Marriage of Content and Form*.” Laidlaw discusses Ballade L on pp. 62-63. For the *Cent ballades d’amant et de dame*, see Cerquiglini-Toulet’s edition; see also, Christine McWebb, “Lyrical Conventions and the Creation of Female Subjectivity in Christine de Pizan’s *Cent Ballades d’amant et de dame*,” and Charity Cannon Willard, “Chrisine de Pizan’s *Cent Ballades d’amant et de dame*: Criticism of Courtly Love.”

calling out its inherent misogyny, but rather by challenging the link between *aimer* and *dire* on which courtly lyrics are predicated.⁶⁶ In other words, Ballade L queries the connection of language—even pleasure—to any referential anchoring in desire, and may therefore be understood as challenging, rather than asserting, the viability of the referent.

Many other ballades similarly problematize the lyric *je*'s relation to desire, rather than simply countering a masculine *je* with a feminine one. For example, six ballades later, Ballade LVI begins,

Mon bel ami, je voy trop bien
De vray, quel que le semblant soit,
Que vostre cuer ne m'aime en rien.
Bien borgnes est qui ne le voit;
Vous le dites quoy qu'il en soit,
Mais c'est tout pour moy faire pestre,
Car l'oeuvre loe le maistre.⁶⁷

My handsome friend, I can see all too well, truly, whatever your outward appearance, that your heart does not love me at all. One would have to be short-sighted not to see it; you say it nonetheless, but it is only to deceive me. For the work praises the master (acts speak louder than words).

One of many ballades from an anonymous female perspective (and seemingly void of autobiographical content, as Christine never discusses entering into a love affair herself), this ballade and others like it tend to be understood as Christine's denunciation of *losengiers*; she exposes how men claim to feel a love that their actions belie, and women should, it follows, not fall for their rhetoric.⁶⁸ Seemingly more subtle than this denunciation of *losengiers*, though, is the identification that the refrain, "l'oeuvre loe le maistre," establishes between the unfaithful lover and the poet *herself*. For, "quel que le

⁶⁶ Nouvet, "Writing (in) Fear," 283.

⁶⁷ Christine, *Cent Ballades*, Ballade LVI, p. 57.

⁶⁸ For discussion of how critics have heavily stressed the autobiographical content of the *Cent Ballades*, and been less interested in the *ballades* when the *je* is gendered male, see Laidlaw, 63.

semblant soit” of the poem’s anti-misogynist message, one would have to be short-sighted—“bien borgnes”—not to see how the poetic achievement, here and elsewhere in the *Cent Ballades*, is to “Christine’s” credit: the *oeuvre* that is the *ballade* praises its author. As in the *Duc*, then, there is an unhappy marriage between poetic achievement and a univocal ethico-political message, since the poet both speaks through the anonymous female *je* and corresponds to the lover who mistreats her, insofar as the refrain directed toward the disloyal lover also describes the poet’s actions. In this stanza, this ballade, and many others, the clearcut denunciation of courtly love’s misogyny is therefore complicated by poetics which problematize the reader’s ability to locate the author in opposition to, or outside of, erotic dynamics.

To insist on the “referential”—sincere, autobiographical, didactic—and prude “Christine” reflects, I would argue, a double gesture of prioritization, whereby the critic first prioritizes certain texts of Christine’s over others, and then reads all texts with a certain conception of Christine in mind, according to which she is unequivocally opposed to courtly love.⁶⁹ The question remains as to whether texts more obviously in dialogue with courtly love/literature can be brought to bear on other texts which critics routinely prioritize in constructing this image of a “sexed” (female) but sex-hating Christine. This question is even more beyond the bounds of this chapter, but I am convinced that a queer Christine lurks even where one might least expect it. The challenge to the possibility of the referent is particularly striking in the *Advision-Christine*; for whereas critics have

⁶⁹ Though she does not discuss Christine, Virginie Greene offers very interesting and nuanced remarks about the creation of an author figure from texts which is then retroactively applied to them in her essay in “What Happened to Medievalists After the Death of the Author.” See esp. 210ff.

long concentrated on the “autobiographical” third book, the “preface” posits that the text’s value lies in its polyvalency⁷⁰:

...souventesfois soubz figure de methaphore, c’est a dire de parole couverte, sont muciees maintes secretes sciences et pures veritez. Et en telle parolle dicte par poisie puet avoir mains entendemens, et lors est la poisie belle et soubtille quant elle puet servir a plusieurs ententes et que on la puet prendre a divers propos.⁷¹

often, under the guise of the figure of metaphor, which is to say covered words, much secret learning and pure truths are hidden. And in such a manner of speaking by poetry there can be many different understandings, and the poetry is beautiful and subtle when it can serve various understandings and be taken as meaning different things.

This notion that polyvalent metaphoricity renders “poisie belle et soubtille,” which challenges both the certainty and the desirability of the referent, can also, I think, be brought to bear on the famous prologue to the *Mutacion de Fortune*, where Christine claims that Fortune has morphed her into a man following the death of her husband. There, the *je* asserts that this metamorphosis is neither “mençonge, ne fable,/A parler selon methafore,/Qui pas ne met verité fore” (a lie nor a story, to speak by metaphor, which doesn’t exclude truth).⁷² While critics often understand the “metaphoricity” of the gender change as resolving the meaning of the metamorphosis (it is metaphorical), I would propose to read metaphoricity as participating in the unresolved investigation of language’s truth value and, in the context of this universal history of Fortune’s role in human affairs, of the relation of language to contingency and arbitrariness.

⁷⁰ This preface was re-discovered in the nineties: see Christine Reno, “The Preface to the *Avison-Christine* in ex-Phillips 128.” For querying recurrent emphasis on autobiography in this text, see Rosalind Brown-Grant, “*L’Advison-Christine*: Autobiographical Narrative or Mirror for the Princes?”

⁷¹ Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de l’advison Cristine*, 3.

⁷² Christine de Pizan, *La Mutation de Fortune*, vol. 1, vv. 1034-37. For a recent summary of critical accounts of the gender metamorphosis and its metaphoricity, see Miranda Griffin, “Transforming Fortune: Reading and Chance in Christine de Pizan’s *Mutacion de Fortune* and *Chemin de long estude*,” esp. p. 64, n18.

There is another less speculative way of beginning to de-construct the image of the “referential” Christine, which is to point to the extant against-the-grain readings of various texts. Roberta Krueger, for example, offers a persuasive de-constructive reading of the seemingly didactic *Livre des Trois Vertus*: for her, “Even as the *Trois Vertus* exhorts women to uphold the values of traditional medieval society, respecting separation of privileges and functions by rank, it promotes methods of social and material improvement that appeal to the rising merchant and bourgeois classes.”⁷³ For Krueger, then, the *Trois Vertus* de-constructs the essentialist view of social status that it explicitly promulgates. Claire Nouvet offers a stunning de-constructive analysis of Christine’s authorial persona, based on close reading of the *Espitre au Dieu d’Amours*: “If Christine de Pizan’s writing is distinctive, it is, I believe, to the extent that it calls us to read ‘fear’ as the signature that underwrites and dissolves any authorial signature, any authoritative voice.”⁷⁴ Christine’s achievement, Nouvet thus posits, is to de-construct masculine claims to authority, not to assert her own “feminine” one. In a rather similar vein, Helen Swift, in her study of male-authored defenses of women in the wake of Christine, has argued that, “[t]he establishment of personal sincerity as a gynocritical or female-author-only prerogative...is limiting to Christine and to Christine scholarship,” since “it is often presumed that she can *only* have been writing sincerely and referentially; the mode of irony and strategies of artifice become the preserve of all male-authored” writing.⁷⁵ For Swift, who deals mostly with the *Cité des Dames*, Christine’s achievement is not that she is the first sincere or autobiographical author in the French tradition, but rather that she

⁷³ Roberta Krueger, “Christine’s Treasure” 102.

⁷⁴ Nouvet, “Writing (in) Fear,” 304.

⁷⁵ Helen Swift, *Gender, Writing and Performance*, 185, 184. Her emphasis.

begins to challenge the relation between gender and the referent, as men later would. Also studying the *Cité des Dames*, Sarah Kay has examined the “paradoxical curvature of space in Christine's City in the light of Irigaray's teasing away at paradoxes of space in Aristotle”; and though careful to note that Christine's prose “has none of the disruptive questioning manner of Irigaray's prose,” Kay stresses how Christine's city destabilizes normative conceptions of place, because “[w]omen are both the place and inside the place, both container and contained.”⁷⁶ Kay's implication, as I understand it, is that Christine is not only constructing something, but also querying the very terrain on which one might construct something, and bringing this question to bear on gender politics. I would add that the *Cité* also rather explicitly encourages the reader to practice deconstructive readings, when Reason claims of the *Decret des femmes*, then attributed to Aristotle,

car par ce que les femmes pevent clerement par espreuve savoir que aucune chose que il touche ne sont mie vrayes, ains pures bourdes, pevent elles conclurre que les autres particularitez dont il traicte sont droites mençonges.⁷⁷

For since women can clearly know by experience that some things he touches upon are not at all true, but pure lies, they can therefore conclude that the other issues he discusses are total lies.

Not to search for contradiction, not to query and unravel Christine's *Cité*—not to deconstruct it—would, then, amount to not taking the method of reading it practices seriously: to reading it as we shouldn't read male-authored texts. It may seem that I am getting further and further away from the *Duc*, but this quotation nicely summarizes my point. An immensely perceptive reader and subtle writer, Christine challenged the *status*

⁷⁶ Sarah Kay, “The Didactic Space: the City in Christine de Pizan, Augustine, and Irigaray,” 457, 465, 457.

⁷⁷ Christine de Pizan, *La Città delle Dame*, I.ix, p. 76.

quo, as we know. Over the last several decades, however, she has been reified as a figure for challenging the *status quo* in one particular way: by asserting the “female” referent.⁷⁸ It may be time to challenge the dominant line of Christinian thinking, to harness her critical spirit to undertake new readings, which instead situate her poetic and ethico-political achievement in the indeterminacy of the subject as she portrays it.

II. *La Fontaine amoureuse*

In reading the *Duc*, I have argued for the importance of reassessing the neatness of the split between, on the one hand, Christine’s poetics, where many of the techniques can be traced back to her French literary predecessors, and, on the other, her ethico-political consciousness of the problematic ways of patriarchy, which has long been held to be her specific contribution to the French courtly tradition. It is important to specify that it is her relationship to French authors that is in question, because Christine has been understood as gleaned from Italian figures, namely Dante, a certain conception of language as both grounded in truth and having concrete ethico-political repercussions: for E. Jeffrey Richards, “she had in mind Dante’s example to prove that literary tradition did not necessarily entail incessant vituperation against women and an endless *mise en abyme* of literary referentiality,” and for Dante and Christine, unlike Jean de Meun, “Words make a difference.”⁷⁹ Many scholars would take issue with Richards’s blanket characterization of the medieval French courtly tradition as purely anti-referential and misogynist; things are,

⁷⁸ I note, for what it’s worth, that the readings I have found the most unusual and innovative do not come from scholars whose primary specialization is Christine de Pizan.

⁷⁹ Richards, “Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered Writing,” 99.

of course, more complex. Richards's notion may nonetheless speak to a critical tendency to downplay the messiness of the engagement of *dits amoureux* with questions of gender and sexuality. If, in the preceding section, I attempted to nuance Christine's denunciation (or renunciation) of courtly rhetoric by focusing on how the *Duc* brazenly interrogates the complexity of the subject, I wish now to turn to how French *dits* were already problematizing the *je*, both dramatizing its resistance to logic and contextualizing its indeterminacy in gender and sexual politics.

Machaut's *Fontaine amoureuse* is a good place to observe how *dits* destabilize the contours of the subject, because, as critics have remarked, the *dit* problematizes the interior/exterior binary in about as many ways as possible. In the *Fontaine*, Guillaume arrives at a Knight's castle, as the Knight, a fictional Jean de Berry, prepares to go "serve as political hostage in England."⁸⁰ The seemingly oneiric *dit* thus plays with its relation to external circumstances, or history. At the castle, Guillaume lays awake in a state of *dorveille*, "[c]om cils qui dort et encor veille" (as he who sleeps but remains awake; 63-64), and amidst this blurring of the frontiers of wakeful reality that persists throughout the text, he overhears a knight groaning unintelligibly and terrifyingly.⁸¹ The next morning, the two are acquainted; they wander into a garden, where they fall asleep together. In a dream, Venus and the Knight's lady appear. The boundaries of this intradiegetic dream are remarkably porous: as has been remarked, in the final stanza of the Dame's *complainte* within the dream, Guillaume and the Knight awaken without it,

⁸⁰ Deborah McGrady, "'Tout son païs m'abandonna,'" 23.

⁸¹ Guillaume de Machaut, *La Fontaine Amoureuse*, ed. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet. Cited in text by verse number.

and while the Dame gives the Knight a ring within the dream, he retains it after waking.⁸² Because the Knight and Guillaume share this dream, the text also challenges the interiority of the activity of dreaming: as Lechat writes, “le rêve...n'est en rien synonyme de retrait dans une intériorité individuelle.”⁸³ The example of the intradiegetic *songe* suggests that the *dit* challenges both the space of interiority and the neat separation of *je* from *il* as part of a larger *mise en scène* of the porousness of the inside-outside binary.

Critics have emphasized the self-consciousness of the *Fontaine*, and, as with the *Duc*, I wish to examine how the entanglement of *énoncé* and *énonciation* relates to questions of subjectivity.⁸⁴ The text loudly calls attention to its play with the relation of poet to patron when, upon meeting Guillaume, the Knight, who recognizes Guillaume as a successful poet, asks him to write “ou lay ou complainte” (1504) about his amorous predicament. Much to the Knight’s surprise, Guillaume responds by giving the Knight precisely what, according to the most literal reading of the *dit*, is the transcription of the fifty-stanza *complainte* that the Knight has spent the previous evening singing and which Guillaume claims to have overheard. The Knight then exclaims,

...Mes cuers trop se merveille
Et esbahist de ceste chose,
Car je la tenoie si close
Que penser ne puis ne savoir
Que homs mortels la puist avoir.
Dites m’amis, dont ce vous vient,
Qu’au vrai savoir le me couvient. (1528-34)

⁸² Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 154-55 for the frontiers of dreams, also Calin, *A Poet at the Fountain*, 146-66, esp. 158-59 for the boundaries of reality.

⁸³ Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 155. He is responding to Calin’s classic book, *A Poet at the Fountain*, 156.

⁸⁴ See McGrady, “Tout son païs”; Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 137-58; Kevin Brownlee, *Poetic Identity*, 188-207; and “The Patron as Lover: Structures of Mediation in Machaut’s *Fonteinne amoureuse*”; and Calin, *A Poet at the Fountain*, 146-66.

I stand in marvel and shocked by this occurrence; for I thought I had so enclosed (the *complainte*) within me that I cannot conceive or know how any mortal man has come into possession of it. Tell me, friend, from whence it came to you, since truly, I must know.

As in the *Duc*, we are confronted with an elusive reworking of the boundary between *je* and *il*, since the *je* does not understand how *il* possesses his private thoughts. Also like in the *Duc*, there are both illogical and reflexive aspects to this confusion, as Guillaume's providing the Knight with his own interiority resonates with this conception of *I* as both cause and effect, subject and object, of itself; for Guillaume must re-turn to the Knight something that, in theory, he has already produced inside himself.

Guillaume ostensibly resolves the Knight's confusion by telling him that he has overheard the *complainte*, but critics have understandably read this bizarre scene as Machaut's not-so-subtle suggestion that he, rather than his patron, has composed the *complainte*. Indeed, like in the *Duc*, the *je* self-consciously draws attention to the intricacy of its poetic achievement, twice mentioning how the *complainte* contains "Cent rimes toutes despareilles" (one hundred rhymes, each different; 1052, 1021). Also like in the *Duc*, the *je* elusively writes his role in the *énonciation* into the *énoncé*. Lamenting his upcoming exile, the *je* exclaims,

Encor y a chose qui m'est plus dure,
Car je m'en vois, et si n'est creature
Qui ma douleur doie a ma dame pure
 Ramentevoir,
Pour ce que nuls ne scet ce que j'endure. (283-87)

Still there is something that is harder for me; for I am departing, and yet there is no creature who shall recall my pain to my pure lady, because no one knows what I am enduring.

While the *je*-Knight requires the intervention of another in order to express himself to his lady, the *je*-Guillaume would already be performing this expressive service by crafting

these lyrics for the Knight. As in the *Duc*, then, the “contestation of signatures” is built into the poetic artifact. The *je* of the *complainte* will go on to specify the nature of the aid he seeks; he wishes that Morpheus impersonate him and visit his lady in her dreams: his lady “verra les maus qu’elle me fait/Se Morpheüs a droit me contrefait...” (will see the pains she makes me feel, if Morpheus accurately impersonates me; 787-88). The porosity of the *je* therefore characterizes both the *énoncé* and the *énonciation*; for if we cannot know to whom the authorial *je* refers, this is because the *complainte* is about how Morpheus’s impersonation problematizes clearcut determinations of the “I.”

Critics have, as we have begun to see, tended to understand this “contestation of signatures” as Machaut’s smart and sly inscribing within the *dit* of his own capacities as poet. It may, though, be helpful to re-turn to Butler, both because relating her *Psychic Life of Power* to Machaut’s *dit* grants a philosophical and psychological *gravitas* to what has been persistently understood as meta-literary play, and because it draws attention to the problematic nature of this depiction of subjectivity in logical and ethico-political terms. Butler writes early on in her text that,

A critical analysis of subjection involves: 1) an account of the way regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility, and place; 2) recognition that the subject produced as continuous, visible, and located is nevertheless haunted by an inassimilable remainder, a melancholia that marks the limits of subjectivation [sic]; 3) an account of the iterability of the subject that shows how agency may well consist in opposing and transforming the social terms by which it is spawned.⁸⁵

The *complainte* evokes the first two elements of this “critical analysis of subjection” almost uncannily. By calling on Morpheus to *contrefaire* his persona, the *je* demands a certain continuity of his person in order to express the continuity of his sentiment; he

⁸⁵ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 29.

seeks a representation of himself that will stand for him by becoming his body and that will assure his “visibility” to his lady, despite distance in “place.” The *complainte* thus overlaps with this “critical analysis of subjection,” because it depicts the continuous, visible and locatable *je* as a *production* that requires the subjection of another, be he poet or god. Consistent with the second element of Butler’s analysis, the *je* of the *complainte* is also characterized by “merancolie,” harrowed as he is at the prospect of leaving his lady. Guillaume equally describes himself as experiencing “aucune merencolie” (some melancholy; 67) just before transcribing the *complainte*, and the *dit* will return to the theme of melancholy when describing various other characters, such as Paris (1879). Certainly, Butler is describing the “melancholia” of “subjectivation,” not the seemingly superficial melancholy Guillaume feels about the prospect of sleeping alone in a scary place or the *je*-Knight’s amorous despair; the thematization of melancholy in and around the *complainte* may, however, stand for, or point to, that associated with subjection. This hypothesis is especially credible, because the *Fontaine amoureuse* insists on how the construction of the subject comports problematically illogical aspects (like in the third element of Butler’s description). At one level, the Knight is asking the bondsman to do something contradictory, as we can gauge from the following passage:

Se vos fins cuers estoit ad ce menez
 —Dont Dieux me gart—
 Que par amours fust a autre donnez,
 J’en seroie si mortelment grevez,
 Que j’en seroie ou mors ou forsenez,
 Ou tempre ou tart. (301-6)

If your noble heart were brought to this—and my God save me from this—that you should give yourself to another in love, I would be so mortally wounded that I would either die or lose my mind, sooner or later.

The irony is that while the *je*-Knight fears that his lady should give her heart to another, this is not far from what the Knight himself is doing, as he must bring “un autre” into the equation in order to express his love. If, that is, the Knight twice repeats that, “en ceste pel morray/Sans rien mesprendre” (I will die in this skin [metaphor for state of mind] without any doubt; 361, 1013), his recourse to Morpheus nonetheless has the effect of challenging the “oneness” of his skin or body, because Morpheus (and/or Guillaume) impersonate him. As the *je* says,

Aussi de fait,
Elle verra les maus qu'elle me fait
Se Morpheüs a droit me contrefait,
Et que je l'aim de loial cuer parfait
Ferme et estable. (786-90)

Also truly, she will see the woes that she causes me, if Morpheus impersonates me well, and that I love her with a loyal and perfect heart, solid and stable.

Ironically, employing Morpheus and Guillaume appears both necessary for the expression of the *je*'s “ferme et estable” love *and* as a challenge to the solidity and stability of the *je*. As in Butler's notion of the paradoxicalness of subjectivity, the *je* becomes a coherent heterosexual “one” only by virtue of modalities that belie its claim to a discreet identity.

In the *Duc*, I focused more on the subjection of bondsman than on the subjectivity of the lord, as well as on the emergence of this subject in the context of sexual politics. Teasing out the relation of sexual politics to the production of Guillaume's *je* is also an extremely fruitful way of looking at the *Fontaine amoureuse*, but, unlike in the *Duc*, this gesture first depends on establishing the pertinence of sexuality, and then the complex interplay between the hetero- and the homo-erotic, to this *dit*. In general terms, this is necessary because there is a tendency in Machaut criticism, both more broadly (as we

shall see in more detail in Ch. IV) and in relation to the *Fontaine*, to downplay the importance of sexuality.⁸⁶ Deborah McGrady, for example, writes of the *Fontaine* that, “Concealed beneath this tale of a subservient poet...is a penetrating account of the fictive Guillaume’s subversive efforts to convert literature into fame, status, and material wealth.”⁸⁷ Valid and insightful, this notion nonetheless evacuates sexuality in a manner seemingly at odds with the text’s terms. For in the lengthy retelling of the Judgment of Paris, Venus claims that wisdom and riches are secondary to love:

Je parlai tout en audience
 Et dis ainsi qu’a ma puissance
 Ne puet nulle rien contrestre...
 Que ne li face, se je vueil,
 Son scens, sa richesse et son vueil
 Tout mettre en ma subjection,
 Sans faire nulle exception... (1789-91, 1797-800)

I spoke before all and said that no thing can contest my power, without my putting, if I wish, his or her wisdom, riches and will in my subjection, without making any exception.

Rather than reading the *Fontaine* as opposing Machaut’s *scens* to his patron’s *richesse*, this *exemplum* would suggest that both may be overpowered by Love’s “subjection.” The persistent sexualization both of the *dit* more generally and of Guillaume’s relation to the Knight supports this notion that sexuality shouldn’t be discarded. In relation to Machaut’s other *dits*, the *Fontaine* includes some rather pornographic moments. Venus twice draws

⁸⁶ To my knowledge, there is not a single article, let alone book, which focuses on Machaut’s relationship to sexuality. Gender has also been largely elided; an exception is Catherine Attwood, “Fortune, Fiction, and Femininity in the *Livre du voir dit* of Guillaume de Machaut.” Oddly enough, I would argue that it is the most famous book about Machaut—Cerquiglini-Toulet’s *Un Engin Si Soutil*—that paves the way for study of the inversion of gender roles and the interest in non-normative procreation, although these threads have not been pursued. See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin Si Soutil*, esp. 125ff. and 151-55 for her concept of “l’écriture androgyne.”

⁸⁷ McGrady, “Tout son païs,” 20.

our attention to erections: at Peleus's and Thetis's marriage, there are the usual gods—Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus—and then Priapus, at whom Venus gawks. She notices,

Jovis Preapus o sa perche
Qui sa robe lieve et reverche
--De ma main ma face couvri,
Quant je le vi, mais j'entrouvri
Mes dois pour la mieus aviser
Et pour mieus celle part viser
Car si volentiers le vëoie
Qu'au vëoir trop me delitoie... (1675-82)

Jove Priapus with his rod, which lifts and moves about his robes. I covered my face with my hand, when I saw him, but I opened my fingers so as to be able better to see the rod and to look its way; for I so happily looked at it, because I took pleasure in seeing it.

This superfluous erection may raise the question: can we see penises elsewhere, if we look through the *dit*'s explicit rhetoric? The descriptions of Guillaume's interactions with his patron do tilt toward the homoerotic. When he first meets the Knight, Guillaume reflects that, "volentiers parlé eüsse/A lui un po longuettement,/Seul a seul, et secretement" (I would have liked to speak to him at some length, one-on-one and discretely; 1208-10). It is somewhat unusual for a man to desire alone time with another man instead of a woman. Upon entering the *verger*, the Knight first refuses "un trop bel arc" (an overly beautiful bow; 1294)—presumably Cupid's—that is offered to him, and then falls asleep on Guillaume's lap: "Et moult doucement s'endormi/Droitement enmi mon giron" (And he very peacefully fell asleep right in the middle of my lap; 1544-45). These lines have been described as "a vivid image of the prince's submission," but we are also in the unusual position of being able to prove their erotic tinge, since, as Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet nicely observes, the image would be recycled in the *Voir Dit*, where it

describes the lovers' first meeting.⁸⁸ Various other instances evoke the possibility that something sexually transgressive is happening in this scene.⁸⁹ Guillaume is aware of a dangerous "Narcissism" in the *verger*: he says of the "fonteinne amoreuse" itself,

De Narcisus fu entaillie
Et si soutieument esmaillie
Que par ma foy! y m'estoit vis
Quant je le vi, qu'il estoit vis. (1309-12)

It was carved with Narcissus's image, and so intricately enameled that, my word, it seemed to me when I saw him that he was alive.

The fountain is a clear allusion to Guillaume de Lorris; we may nonetheless ask ourselves what sort of "love of the same" plays itself out in this scene. When the Knight's lady and Venus then arrive *en songe*, the Lady will tell the story of Zeus and Danae, where, "en pluie d'or est descendus/Li dieus" (the god descended in a golden shower; 2384-85) into the tower where Danae's father imprisons her. In the context of the *Fontaine*, this inter-fenestration recalls how the Knight's words have made their way into Guillaume's chambers through his window. Surely they don't signal the Knight's desire for him?

I am not arguing that the Knight and Guillaume necessarily are, or desire to be, involved, but rather that, like in Butler's theorizing or the *Duc*, the "critical analysis of subjection" implies challenging gender and sexual binaries. In fact, closer analysis of the initial *complainte* suggests that Guillaume's engagement with his patron's desires ought not to be reduced to Guillaume's inscribing himself into the figure of Morpheus. The *complainte* begins,

Douce dame, vueilliez oïr la vois

⁸⁸ McGrady, "Tout son païs," 28; see also Douglas Kelly, "The Genius of the Patron," 77. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, "Introduction," in *La Fontaine amoureuse*, 20.

⁸⁹ The Knight's first words to Guillaume are, "Longuement vous estes tenus/De moy visiter," and Guillaume will begin his "Lay" dedicated to (amorous) Hope in the *Voir Dit* with, "Longuement me sui tenus..."

De ma clamour, qu'en soupirant m'en vois,
 Tristes, dolens, dolereus et destrois,
 Ne dou retour
 Ne say dire ne les ans ne les mois,
 Las! Einsi pers les gracieus convois
 De vos dous yeus qui ont par meintes fois,
 De leur douçour
 Tres doucement adouci ma dolour,
 Joieusement fait joie de mon plour
 Et m'ont rendu scens, maniere et vigour,
 Car de ces trois
 Estois nus, quant vëoie l'atour
 Cointe et joli et vo corps fait a tour
 Qui passe tous en grace et en valour
 En tous endrois. (235-50)

Sweet lady, please hear the voice of my clamor, because, sighing, I am departing, sad, pained, hurt, and distraught—nor can I foresee my return, whether years or months from now. Woe! Thus I am losing the gracious company of your sweet eyes which, many times, have in their sweetness sweetly calmed my pain, joyously made my tears into joy, and provided me with sanity, composure and vigor; for I was without these three, when I first saw your nice and pretty attire and your perfectly formed body that surpasses all others in grace and valor, in every way.

At first glance, the *je*'s sentiment may seem unsurprising for a lyric lover; he is upset at leaving behind the lady he loves so much. Things get more interesting when we read this opening stanza as playing on the odd circumstances of its inclusion within the *dit*. The *complainte* opens with, “veuillez oïr la vois,” and this is exactly what Guillaume is doing: hearing a voice. If the *je* “pers les gracieus convois” of the “dous yeus” of his lady, Guillaume is also unable to see the origin of the voice; he is without their company. The notion that, in the past, the lady's eyes have “joieusement fait joie de mon plour” echoes the ambivalence by which Guillaume has just introduced the *complainte*: “Si commença piteusement/Et je l'escrì joieusement” (He began piteously and I wrote joyously; 233-34). Furthermore, the Knight's contention that his lady has provided him with “scens,

maniere, et vigour” recalls how Guillaume, in composing this piece, may be doing exactly this for the Knight.

The suggestive overlap between the lyric sentiment—the *énoncé*—and its *énonciation* would imply that, beyond participating in the love dynamic *qua* Morpheus’s *il-je*, Guillaume also elusively sews himself into the *je*-speaker’s relation to the *tu*-lady. This sense of his bizarre identification with the *tu* continues throughout the *complainte*. The *je* will refer to the, “Douce dame dont je porte l’empreinte/Dedens mon cuer figuree et empreinte” (sweet lady, whose imprint I bear figured and inprinted in my heart; 1003-4); and the *complainte*, according to critics, bears Guillaume’s hallmark or signature. Is he somehow the lady he is addressing? In another instance, the *je* exclaims,

...il couvient
Que vo biauté, dont toute joie vient,
Et votre bonté, qui toute honneur soustient,
Que mes cuers sert, aime, oubeïst et crient,
Ne m’est presente,
Ne vos gens corps ou riens ne mesavient
Qui tous les jours gais et jolis devient,
Ne voy... (370-77)

It is necessary that your beauty, from which all joy comes, and your goodness, which sustains all honor—your goodness, which my heart serves, loves, obeys and fears—should not be present to me, and that I not see your noble body where nothing is imperfect, which every day is gay and pretty.

At one level, Guillaume, though he seemingly obeys and fears his patron, does not see him; the patron is the invisible object the *je* of the *complainte* describes. Alternately we might argue that Guillaume is invisible, not “present” in the *complainte*, since the Knight’s amorous sentiment seemingly dominates the *je*’s expression; and were Guillaume, like the lady, the “present absence,” the amorous sentiment may, by analogy, oddly enough be directed back onto himself, with Guillaume therefore appearing as both

je and *tu*, subject and object. Of course, it is not unusual for the expression of a *je*'s love for his lady to overlap with his feelings for his lord; yet, I would argue, the ingenuity of the *complainte* is that its extreme reflexivity points to a certain conception of the *je* as never entirely "present" to itself and never irreducible to the gendered and erotically charged opposition of lyric subject to object. Put otherwise, the *complainte*, even the *dit*, is about a Knight-*je* who bemoans how he is "en cage" (402) and "en ostage" (398), both to his lady and then "deça mer," presumably in England. But is Guillaume, who as the *dit* opens finds himself in a "cage-like" chamber, not also "en ostage" to the Knight, constrained as his bondsman and bound to his sentiment? Given that both Guillaume and his patron seem, in different ways, to be "en ostage," it may even be that the amorous suffering of the lyric *je* points to how heteronormativity may serve both as symbol and even as cause of a certain conception of the subjected *je* who is always-already alienated from him/herself.

Such a hypothesis demands that we look at how and why Guillaume is melancholic. As the text opens, Guillaume describes his fear of sleeping alone in an unknown place:

La gisoie en si petit point
 Que, s'aucuns preïst mon pourpoint
 Ou ma sainture ou ma chemise,
 Pour moy n'i fust deffense mise,
 Non, par Dieu, qui mon corps preïst,
 Ja remüer ne m'en veïst.
 Et s'on dit que c'est couardie
 Ou aucune merencolie
 Je n'en donroie pas deus pommes
 Car je vi des plus vaillans hommes
 Qu'on peüst vëoir ne nommer,
 —Fust deça mer, fust dela mer—,
 Que, qui leur donnast de fin ambre
 Reins et Paris, en une chambre

Sans compaignie ne geüssent
Pour necessité qu'il heüssent. (95-110)

There I was lying in such a poor state that, if someone took my doublet, belt, or shirt, I wouldn't even put up any resistance—nay, by God, even if one took my body, one wouldn't see me lift a finger. And if one should say that this is cowardliness or melancholy, I wouldn't give two apples (hoots), since I've seen some of the most valiant men that one can see or name, on this side or the other of the sea, who, if someone gave them fine amber from Reims or Paris, would not sleep in a room without company, however pressing the necessity.

We have been studying how “the narrator Guillaume” complexly lends meaning to his patron’s “inchoate gibberish” (to borrow McGrady’s terminology).⁹⁰ This passage suggests he does something similar toward himself; for while it initially reads as silly and frivolous, this passage nonetheless announces many of the *dit*’s key terms. “Je n’en donroie pas deus pommes” alludes to Venus’s recounting the judgment of Paris, which is also emphasized by the word “Paris.” The superfluous “Fust deça mer, fust dela mer” foreshadows the Knight’s upcoming exile. The question of sleeping alone announces Guillaume’s and the Knight’s shared dream. The possibility of “taking the body of another” (“qui mon corps preïst”) prefigures Morpheus’s role in the *complainte*. The Knight will also fret at length on how being a political hostage might appear as “couardie.” The action of turning gibberish into something meaningful not only describes what the poet “Guillaume” does for his patron, then, but also what he does to himself; and the effect of this is to situate what critics call “Machaut’s” relationship to Guillaume within the *problématique* of subjectivity.⁹¹ Indeed, while critical accounts of the relationship of the author (“Machaut”) to the narrator and the protagonist (“Guillaume”) tend to be very descriptive—Brownlee patiently and usefully identifies when Guillaume

⁹⁰ McGrady, “Ton son païs,” 24.

⁹¹ See Ch. IV for extended discussion of the problematic nature of this commonly accepted opposition between Guillaume and Machaut.

seems to speak or think as “lover,” “clerc,” or “professional court poet,” and when he seems to resemble Machaut’s “global poète figure”—the question of *why* “Machaut” would stage such an inept protagonist has too frequently been elided.⁹² Re-casting the question in terms of subjectivity has the benefit of opening up avenues for thinking through this odd, seemingly unnecessary, narrative choice. In this opening sequence, Guillaume experiences “melancholy” and “absolute fear” (both are Butler’s terms, though they are quite close to Machaut’s), perhaps as a symptom of what Butler, following Hegel, terms an “unhappy conscience”:

It involves splitting the psyche into two parts, a lordship and a bondage internal to a single consciousness, whereby the body is again dissimulated as an alterity, but where this alterity is now interior to the psyche itself.⁹³

The *Fontaine amoureuse* juxtaposes and entangles, as we have seen, the subjection of “poet” to “patron” and that of “lover” to “lady”; it would also seem that the relation of Guillaume to Machaut plays itself out in similar terms. The *Fontaine* thus invites a certain conception of the subject whereby the bondsman, who is given life by his subjection to his lord, also internalizes the eroticized dynamics of subjection, succumbing to the pleasure and “joy of persecuting oneself.”⁹⁴

In the fourth chapter, I will return to discussion of why Machaut might stage such a curiously inept protagonist. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish merely to stress that this seems to have something to do with very sophisticated questions on the nature of the subject. There is, furthermore, no reason to restrict the destabilization of the contours of the subject and the eroticism of self-reflexivity to this one *dit* in particular. I have turned

⁹² Brownlee, *Poetic Identity*, 190.

⁹³ Butler, *Psychic Power*, 42.

⁹⁴ Butler, *Psychic Power*, 75.

to the *Fontaine amoureuse* because it particularly emphatically evokes the complex interrelation between the elusive contours of the *je*, questions of political subjection, and gender and sexuality; yet, because none of these concerns run much risk of being considered only applicable to this *dit*, it does not seem to me necessary to justify the larger feasibility of “queering subjectivity” in Machaut. This also means that I am not arguing that Christine studied the *Fontaine amoureuse* and necessarily incorporated its queering of subjectivity into the *Duc*. I am arguing that Christine’s masterful (or servile, ambivalent...) engagement with the emergence and contours of the politicized, gendered, and erotic subject is characteristic of the tradition of the *dits*; and that we have everything to gain, both in reading texts attributed to Christine and texts attributed to Machaut, from teasing out the intricate relations between the ethico-political, the psychological, and the poetic in the *je* of French *dits*.

III. Le Chevalier de la charrete

Though it refers to itself as a *dit*, Christine’s *Duc* has also been considered to be among the last verse romances in the French tradition. Critics have, for example, claimed that it offers an unequivocally disapproving “woman’s response,” to borrow Roberta Krueger’s phrase, to the male-dominated verse romance tradition.⁹⁵ In the preceding section, I argued that Christine’s relationship to the *dits* goes beyond a simply poetic debt: that we may even leverage the queering of the subject in the *Duc* to open up new readings of how earlier *dits* are similarly concerned with challenging the contours of the

⁹⁵ Krueger, *Women Readers*, 217-46.

je and situating her or his problematic emergence in highly politicized, gendered and eroticized contexts. In this final section, I will make a similar argument in terms of verse romances: that the *Duc*'s queering of subjectivity also hearkens back to this tradition, and this optic stands to open up new readings of the theo-philosophical and ethico-political significance of oft-studied romances.

Chrétien's *Charrete* is the obvious place to turn, both because of the central, even paradigmatic, place it has occupied in modern critical accounts of the genre since Gaston Paris, and because the prologue to the *Duc* has important similarities to, and differences from, the *Charrete*'s.⁹⁶ In what may be the most studied lines in medieval literature, the *Charrete* opens, like the *Duc*, with a scene of interpellation, as Chrétien heeds Marie de Champagne's request:

Puis que ma dame de Chanpaigne
vialt que romans a feire anpraigne,
je l'anprendrai molt volentiers,
come cil qui est suens antiers... (1-4)⁹⁷

Because my Lady of Champagne wants me to undertake writing a romance, I will do so quite happily, as he who is entirely devoted to her.

While Chrétien, unlike Christine, turns "molt volentiers" toward Power, the *Charrete*'s prologue will nonetheless also problematize agency; for enthusiastic as he may be to laud Marie, Chrétien realizes that *despite himself* (maleoit gré mien) he cannot avoid sounding like a flatterer whose language lacks sincerity:

Par foi, je ne sui mie cil
qui vuelle losangier sa dame;
dirai je: 'Tant com une jame
vaut de pelles et de sardines,

⁹⁶ Gaston Paris, "Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde. Lancelot du Lac, II. *Le conte de la Charrette*."

⁹⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot, ou le chevalier de la charrette*, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly. Cited in text by verse.

vaut la contesse de reïnes?
Naïe voir; je n'en dirai rien,
s'est il voirs maleoit gré mien (14-20)

By God, I am not one of those who wishes excessively to praise/flatter his lady.
Will I say, As the pure diamond eclipses pearls and sard, so the countess eclipses
all queens? Not at all—yet (such praise) is true, despite myself.

As with the *Duc* and the *Fontaine*, I would propose that we can read this prologue as evoking very sophisticated questions about the nature of the subject. “Subjection,” Butler writes, “consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our energy,” and Chrétien presents himself as dependent both on Marie and on a language system he recognizes as constraining and emphatically does not choose.⁹⁸ Yet, while Chrétien is ambivalent about his relation to poetic language, he then turns his subjection to language into the source of his agency. For Butler, “Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and this paradoxical simultaneity constitutes the ambivalence of subjection”; and as the prologue concludes, the subject Chrétien comes quite emphatically to put his signature on this feat of language: “Del Chevalier de la Charrete/comance Crestiens son livre” (Of the Knight of the Cart, Chrétien begins his book; 24-25).⁹⁹

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that (aspects of) texts which have traditionally been read as reflecting primarily literary concerns also reflect theological and ethico-political ones relating to subjectivity. This is also, I submit, the case with the prologue’s oft-commented final lines, where Chrétien discusses the role Marie plays in the composition of the romance. His notion that, as it regards power personified by Marie, “mialz oeuvre/ses comandemanz an ceste oeuvre/que sans ne painne

⁹⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 2.

⁹⁹ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 116.

que g'i mete" (her commandments have more effect on this work than the sense/direction [sans] or effort [paine] that I bring to it; 21-23) takes up, for example, the question that guides Butler's thinking on subjectivity: to what extent does eroticized power trump the subject's agency? In discussing these verses alongside Chrétien's ensuing contention that, "matiere et san li done et livre/la contesse" (the countess gives him material and "direction"; 26-27), scholars have (rather endlessly) debated the meaning of two terms: sans, "from the Latin *sensus*... 'understanding,' 'sense,' and 'good sense,'" and san, "from the Frankish *sin (direction)," to quote Bruckner's definition of these terms.¹⁰⁰ The implication of this recourse to etymology is that, once we have specified these terms, we will be in a better position to understand the nature of Chrétien's artistic debt to Marie. Yet, if Chrétien wished to express his debt to Marie clearly, surely he could have found less problematically overlapping terms; and while some scholars have suggested that the prologue may be deliberately ambiguous, I would up the ante, and argue that if we attend to the intriguing resemblance between Marie's and Chrétien's relationship and philosophic questions about subjectivity, the prologue even appears fundamentally contradictory.¹⁰¹ Averroes, whose work would hit France in the thirteenth century, identifies two "modes" for describing the relationship of body to soul, both indebted to his readings of Aristotle: for vegetative and sensitive souls, the mode of the distinction between form and matter, where the soul is the form of the material body; and for the intellectual soul, the metaphor of a ship's pilot, whereby the soul is to the body as the

¹⁰⁰ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*," in *The Romances of Chrétien: A Symposium*, 137.

¹⁰¹ The *locus classicus* for ambiguity in the text is Matilda Bruckner's, "An Interpreter's Dilemma."

pilot is to the ship.¹⁰² Averroes did not bring either metaphor to the Latin West; rather, his contribution is to see them as expressing something fundamentally different, which he then used to distinguish between human and vegetative/sensible souls. The description of Marie's relation to Chrétien's text dramatizes a discrepancy similar to that between these two metaphors; for, fascinatingly, we may understand Chrétien's relationship to Marie in terms of either analogy, but these readings prove opposite. Either through thinking (*panser*) Chrétien gives form to the *matiere* Marie provides, thereby acting as soul to a material body; or alternately, Marie's "san," which Frappier translates as "idée maîtrise" (guiding principle), is as soul that guides the execution (*painne*), which is then performed by Chrétien *qua* body. I am not arguing that Chrétien preempted Averroes, but rather that the seemingly meta-poetic account of Marie's role in his text both lends itself to extremely sophisticated theo-philosophical questions and does so in such a way as to foreground a potential contradiction at the heart of Chrétien's relation to Marie. For this notion that Marie and Chrétien could, in the context of the composition of the romance, be both body and soul to each other reflects the essential contradictoriness of the Perichoretic model of the soul, which demands that we accept, as de Libera writes, "de voir, au moment où on les pose, *sujet* et *objet* se parenthétiser."¹⁰³

It is probable that the prologue evokes sophisticated questions about subjectivity, because the ensuing narrative almost obsessively raises similar issues. At the most basic level, it repeatedly stages scenes of interpellation. In one famous instance, Lancelot is lost in his own thoughts as an anonymous knight attempts to interpellate him:

Et cil de la charrete panse
con cil qui force ne desfance

¹⁰² De Libera, *La Naissance*, 186, 175.

¹⁰³ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 277.

n'a vers Amors qui le justise;
 et ses pansers est de tel guise
 que lui meïsmes en oblie;
 ne set s'il est, ou s'il n'est mie...
 De rien nule ne li sovient
 fors d'une seule, et por celi
 a mis les autres en obli... (711-6, 720-2)

And the Knight of the Cart reflects, as he who has no force against or protection from Love who rules over him; and his reflection is of such a kind that he forgets himself. He knows not from if he is or if he is not; he remembers nothing at all, except one thing: and for her, he has forgotten everything else/all others.

The almost slapstick comedy of this passage, which culminates in Lancelot's foe sending him hurling into the ford, does not bar its treating serious questions. It spells out that if Lancelot *is* because of his love, he also *isn't*; he is without name, location, body, maybe even existence ("s'il n'est mie..."). Instead, as Chrétien may be said to be, he *is* in his intellect (*panser*) and in his subjection. This maps, to some extent, onto the Aristotelian/Boethian notion that man's intellect is his distinguishing feature, but it more intriguingly lines up with the Augustinian privileging of the soul over the body and the Butlerian notion that subjection entails "vacating the body and clinging to [thought, as] what appears to be most embodied."¹⁰⁴ Yet, just as in Christine's text—and, as we shall see, in Chrétien's—we cannot discard the signature of the subject even if it is one of repeated self-effacement, so too does Lancelot's relationship with his body imply not its renunciation, but rather the repeated staging of its own sacrifice or renunciation; the difference is that the former implies that the action can be definitively achieved, whereas the latter suggests that it is never complete. We can tease the complexity of this relation to the body out of another scene of interpellation, where an anonymous *pucelle* yells out to Lancelot as he battles Méléagant,

¹⁰⁴ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 43.

“Lancelot!
Trestorne toi et si esgarde
qui est qui de toi se prant garde!”
Quand Lanceloz s’oï nomer,
ne mist gaires a lui *torner*:
trestorne soi et voit amont
la chose de trestot le mont
que plus desirroït a veoir,
as loges de la tor seoir. (3666-74, my italics)

“Lancelot! Turn around and then look at who has her eyes fixed on you!” When Lancelot heard himself named, he wasted little time in turning around; he turned himself and saw above him the creature in all the world whom he most desired to see, seating in the loges of the tower.

One would be hard pressed to find a passage with emphasizes turning more than this one does; Lancelot will then twist himself so that he can combat Méléagant while looking at the Queen, stabbing in one direction and staring in another. When he finally comes to align Méléagant and the Queen, the sight of Guinevere physically above Méléagant allows him to come out “above” (*au desore de*; 3827) Méléagant in their battle. As knight, Lancelot therefore twists and risks his body in order to prove that his love is whole or, to borrow one of the text’s crucial terms, “antier.” As in the *Fontaine*, though, proving the “wholeness” or “oneness” of love is inseparable from the challenging of bodily integrity. For the love that will straighten things, and him, out also bends him out of shape, and the text repeatedly stresses how injuries leave Lancelot “mie toz antiers” (not at all entire/whole; 3098). At other instances, he will have “n’a...mains ne piez antiers” (neither his hands nor feet whole; 3448) and “mie les doiz antiers/que molt fort s’i estoit blechiez (his fingers not whole, since he had very badly hurt himself; 4708-9). It thus seems that Lancelot’s love or subjection implies not only a (bodily) turn toward Guinevere and away from his “body” as a way of acquiring his “self,” but more

accurately a repeated turning toward her, where this action implies the sacrificing of bodily integrity, uncomfortable torsion, and even bodily penetration.¹⁰⁵

Generations of critics have noted that the term “antier,” to which I just referred, is crucial, because the line, “com cil qui est suens antiers” (as he who is entirely hers; 4, 5656) is repeated to describe both Chrétien’s subjection to Marie and Lancelot’s to Guinevere. Critics have often used this repetition to consider the analogy, “Chrétien: Marie:: Lancelot: Guinevere.” This analogy has stirred much debate, since various critics have, to quote Bruckner, used this analogy “to invent a romance about Chrétien and his patroness based on Chrétien’s own romance about Lancelot and the Queen.”¹⁰⁶ Rather than inventing something unsupported by any evidence or insisting on what this analogy doesn’t necessarily say, I would stress what it does: it re-turns us to, and even performs, the fundamental paradoxicality of subjection. As Jean Rychner has written, “à supposer que la rencontre [the repetition of ‘com cil qui est suens antiers’] ne soit pas fortuite...on aimerait savoir lequel des deux passages rappelle l’autre.”¹⁰⁷ Because we cannot know which comes first, we must view both couples as dependent on the text’s reflexivity, with neither pre-existing their *mise en relation*; as in the Perichoretic and Butlerian models of subjectivity or Christine’s and Machaut’s texts, then, no subject exists prior to reflexivity.¹⁰⁸ The grammatical logic of the sentence, “Chrétien composes the *Charrette*,” cannot hold up, because the subject Chrétien requires the object the *Charrete* for it to

¹⁰⁵ I note in passing that it is very interesting to think about Lancelot as sexually passive in the romance; see both the Immodest Damsel scene, and how Lancelot, rather than Guinevere, bleeds during their love-making.

¹⁰⁶ Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrete*,” 138. See also Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot*,” 141-42 for the status of this debate.

¹⁰⁷ Jean Rychner, “Le prologue du *Chevalier de la charrette*,” 3. See also his follow-up article, “Encore le prologue du *Chevalier de la charrette*.”

¹⁰⁸ See also Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 86, for a similar point.

come into being, at the same time as the object requires the exercise of the agency of the subject; or, put differently, the two come into being in the suspension of the clearcut distinction of subject and object. De Libera, as we have seen, calls this the Perichoretic model of the soul, because the intellect, its knowledge and its love function in the soul through *circuminessio* in the manner of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.¹⁰⁹ The *Charrete* fleetingly allows for the possibility that its reflexivity may be related to the mystery of the Trinity. Begging mercy of Lancelot, the Provocative Knight exclaims,

Mes je vos prie
que vos aiez de moi merci
por ce Deu qui est filz et pere,
et qui de celi fist sa mere
qui estoit sa fille et s'ancele. (2819-23)

But I beg of you that you take mercy on me, in the name of the God who is Father and Son, and who chose as His mother she who was His daughter and His wife.

To the extent that the extradiegetic and the diegetic planes cannot be disentangled, we must read the prologue as *both* son and father of Lancelot's story, cause and effect. And while references to the Trinity like that of the Provocative Knight are surely conventional, no other textual figure describes the relationship of the extradiegetic to the diegetic so cogently. *Una substantia vel essentia-tres personae*: one *Charrete*, in the persons of Chrétien, Marie, Godefroi, Lancelot and Guinevere...¹¹⁰

I shall say more about Godefroi de Leigni as well as what Brownlee calls the "inversion of gender roles" in a moment, which the allusion to Mary may also evoke.¹¹¹

First, it is important to remark that if the relationship of extradiegetic to diegetic

¹⁰⁹ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 264-69.

¹¹⁰ This is Augustine's phrase, quoted and thoroughly glossed in de Libera, *La Naissance*, 214.

¹¹¹ See Kevin Brownlee, "Transformations of the *Charrete*: Godefroi de Leigni Rewrites Chrétien de Troyes," 162ff.

represents a challenge to the inside/outside binary, this is also consistent with Lancelot's story, where the narrative obsessively evokes and confuses this binary. References to it flood, for example, the scene where Lancelot sees his own grave. Leaving behind a *pucelle*, Lancelot wonders what is inside the cemetery's walls: "que par dedanz ces murs avoit..." (what there was inside these walls; 1851). He encounters graves, inscribed on their outsides but empty on their insides, of the most valiant knights from inside and outside Logres: "et de cele terre et d'aillors" (from this land and elsewhere; 1870). Describing the most beautiful grave, the monk says, "biax est defors et dedanz plus" (it is beautiful on the outside, and more so on the inside; 1888); he then explains how he who will inhabit it will eventually allow for the outsiders captive in Gorre to move about as freely as the insiders already do: "et cil del païs vont et viennent/et anz et fors a lor pleisir" (and those from the country [Gorre] come and go, inside and outside as they wish; 1908-9). Discussing the tournament of Noauz, Bruckner remarks how it initially seems to invite the equation of interiority with truth and exteriority with falsehood; the audience, who is outside of Lancelot's love, does not understand how his weakness is a sign of strength, whereas Guinevere is inside to its true meaning. Yet, Bruckner wisely adds, "the situation is far more complex."¹¹² Similarly, over the course of this scene, the interior/exterior "binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense," to borrow from Butler's strategies of subversion in *Gender Trouble*.¹¹³ For here, being inside the cemetery is also being complexly outside of normative temporality, and Lancelot demonstrates that he has the power to allow those

¹¹² Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma," 175.

¹¹³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173. I consider this technique of subversion in the next chapter, in relation to *Partonopeu de Blois*.

who are outside their homeland to move to and fro, in and out, by opening the grave whose inside, though beautiful, is empty, and will remain so until his death. There is no clear sense, then, that being “inside” corresponds to “truth”; rather, the binary is repeatedly in flux. Furthermore, this scene may suggest that not only does subjection complexly enable agency, which always ambivalently re-turns to it, but agency may also function with the paradoxical goal of negating itself, as Lancelot is exercising prowess for the sake of his own death.¹¹⁴ When he exercises agency in the name of his love for Guinevere, is his agency also directed toward its own negation?

In any case, enmeshing the intradiegetic love between Lancelot and Guinevere and the extradiegetic relationship between Chrétien and Marie is consistent with the romance’s play on the inside/outside binary; it also partakes of the narrative’s predilection for repeating similar relational constructs and querying the relation of repetition both to subjectivity and to desire. Bruckner has highlighted the many triangular relationships in the text; she relates the custom of *lores* (yonder; 321) according to which a knight can have his way with a *pucelle* if he captures her from another knight, to the Méléagant-Queen-Lancelot, Lancelot-Immodest Damsel-Proud Son, and Keu-Queen-Méléagant triangles.¹¹⁵ These triangles are potentially queer in the “homosocial” sense identified by Eve Sedgwick and which Roberta Krueger and Simon Gaunt have applied

¹¹⁴ This is, I note in passing, a possibility for which Butler does not allow; she understands agency as emanating from and then as exceeding power without, of course, ever really freeing itself from it. She thus considers that agency might partake of the desire to negate itself, but does not admit that this could be its ultimate purpose, in a move that would resemble the Death Drive. There are many psychoanalytic readings of the *Charrete*: for a particularly interesting Lacanian analysis, see Robert Sturges, “La(ca)ncelot.”

¹¹⁵ Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier*,” 151-52.

to this romance, since men exchange women so as to relate to each other.¹¹⁶ They may also be queer in another way, by virtue of emphasizing the relationship of repetition to sexual identity. The Immodest Damsel episode is a striking example of their dynamic interplay.¹¹⁷ Desperate for lodging, Lancelot agrees to the anonymous Damsel's condition: that he sleep with her in return. Returning from the garden where he awaits the Damsel's getting into bed, he stumbles upon a knight raping her: "uns chevaliers l'ot anversee/si la tenoit antraversee" (A knight had knocked down the Damsel and held her turned over; 1065-66). The Damsel asks Lancelot if he will allow her to be raped: "Fera donc cist sa volenté/de moi, veant tes ialz, a force?" (Will this man have his way with me, by force, before your very eyes?; 1076-77). The text then emphasizes the relationship between force and desire, stressing that, despite seeing the Damsel violated, Lancelot is not aroused, or "talentos" (1085), to sleep with her. This is apparently unexpected because, as we soon learn, the Damsel has orchestrated the scene precisely so as to arouse Lancelot's desire to substitute himself for the rapist, with such substitution both recalling the above-mentioned custom and troubling it, by presenting female agency as compatible with the exchange of women among men. After a crucial hesitation, which recalls and parodies Lancelot's infamous two steps before he jumps on the cart (and where the rapprochement of these instances may, in turn, make the reader hesitate...), Lancelot exercises force over the assailant and his company, whether the culprit wants it or not, "Volsist ou non" (1156). The situation is not, however, resolved, but instead

¹¹⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*; Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 91-103; Krueger, *Women Readers*, 33-67.

¹¹⁷ For another look at the role of agency in this scene, see Norman Klassen, "The Lover's Largesce." For discussion of the role of repetition in the generation of meaning in this scene in relation to other scenes, see Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma." For more general considerations about repetition in romance, see Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 1-2.

“antraversee,” since Lancelot must then sleep with the Damsel. Of Lancelot’s predicament, the narrator reflects,

Don est ce force? Autant se vaut;
por force covient que il s’aut
couchier avoec la dameisele. (1209-11)

So is this force? It might as well be; perforce he must go sleep with the Damsel.

By emphasizing the term *force*, the narrator indicates how Lancelot has not substituted himself for the rapist, but rather for the victim of rape. Therefore, even if Lancelot won’t turn toward the Immodest Damsel in bed—“N’onques ne torne son esgart/ne devers li ne d’autre part” (he didn’t turn his eyes toward her or elsewhere; 1221-22)—he nonetheless adopts the position she has just so theatrically occupied. Butler speaks of how, “perpetual displacement [that] constitutes a fluidity of identities...suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualiation.”¹¹⁸ Such openness here manifests itself in terms of gender and agency, as, quite dramatically, the necessary association of women with passive victims of rape, and men with rapists, comes undone.¹¹⁹ This scene is, then, both performative in the obvious sense, according to which the Damsel orchestrates the charade, but also in a queerer one, as it showcases how meaning, as well as gender and sexual identity, depend on enacting or performing positions inhabited by others. Furthermore, we have a choice as to how to fit this scene, like many others, into the larger romance. It seems torn between what Jakobson deems the “symbolic” or “metaphoric” axis, according to which it would figure something about Lancelot’s

¹¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 188.

¹¹⁹ Karen Taylor discusses the feminization of masculine figures in Chrétien de Troyes; she argues that, “the desexualization of strongly defined masculine and feminine roles is actually anticipated on the textual level within the literature of the Middle Ages” (“Desexualizing the Stereotypes,” 181). I agree with this notion, but remain skeptical of her use of Gauvain as prime example.

relationship with Guinevere (is Guinevere somehow staging her own kidnapping?), and the “syntactic” or “metonymic” one, according to which it represents a step in the narrative progression toward the reunification of these lovers.¹²⁰ The tension is relevant to questions of subjectivity, because it depicts linear progression or narrative temporality as in conflict with a non-narrative, reflexive, circular and elusive depiction of gender, desire, and subjection, which, I believe, lies at the heart of the romance’s “critical analysis” of the subject.

The epilogue, where Godefroi de Leigni claims that he has “parfinee” (finished/perfected; 7104) the *Charrete* “according to Chrétien’s wishes” (pour le boen gré/Crestien; 7106-7)) partakes in this erotic fluidity and even exaggerates its queerness. As scholars have long remarked, Marie is evacuated from the epilogue and Chrétien takes over her role of power; Godefroi thereby assumes Chrétien’s role from the prologue.¹²¹ For Roberta Krueger and Simon Gaunt, this is a sign of the banishment of women from power; the substitution of a man into a role initially occupied by a woman and then his assumption of this role vis-à-vis another man may, however, be read as queer (or even as pointing to what Leo Bersani calls the fraught relationship between queer studies and feminism).¹²² Indeed, many of the queer elements we have analyzed in the *Charrete*’s depiction of subjectivity are at work in this epilogue. It clearly challenges, as David Hult observes, our assumptions as to the oneness of the authorial *je*.¹²³ Furthermore, “the

¹²⁰ See, of course, Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances.”

¹²¹ Brownlee, “Transformations of the *Charrete*,” 172; Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 100-3; Krueger, *Women Readers*, 37.

¹²² Krueger, *Women Readers*, 54-55; Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 102. Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?* 41.

¹²³ David Hult “Author/Narrator/Speaker,” 85-86.

power that initiates the subject fails to remain continuous with the power that is the subject's agency," to quote Butler, since Marie has been evacuated and Chrétien seems to have assumed (internalized?) her role.¹²⁴ It may also challenge the clearcut determinations of the inside/outside binary, since scholars have disagreed as to where Chrétien's part of the text ends.¹²⁵ If we assume, with most scholars, that Godefroi takes over immediately following the Tournament at Nouaz, then his *relève* would be challenging the inside/outside binary in another manner; for at the same time as Lancelot clandestinely exits the tournament, Chrétien would be covertly taking leave of his text. As Lancelot escapes the tournament, "Si s'en ala si en anblee/que nus de tote l'asamblee/qui la fust garde ne s'an prist" (he went away so covertly, that no one in all the crowd who was there noticed it; 6033-35), and his departure prompts the public desperately to search for him:

Au partir del tornoiemant
le quierent et demandent tuit;
n'an trueuvent point, car il s'an fuit,
qu'il n'a cure qu'an le conoisse. (6040-43)

At the conclusion of the tournament, all looked for him and inquired as to his whereabouts; they couldn't find him, since he had left, not desiring that [his identity] be known to them.

As the tournament's public searches for a departing Lancelot, we, as critics, also look for a departing Chrétien. This is particularly interesting, because it would suggest that in its final manifestation in the romance, Chrétien's "signature is an act of self-erasure": as Butler writes of the bondsman, "[h]e can recognize his signature only as what is

¹²⁴ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 12.

¹²⁵ See David Shirt, "Godefroi de Lagny et la composition de la *Charrette*," 29 for an earlier summary of dissenting views—and his own very particular solution.

constantly being erased, as a persistent sign of vanishing.”¹²⁶ This notion that Chrétien’s signature becomes one of “self-erasure” stands diametrically opposed to the common conception of a boastful author who asserts the legibility and visibility of his signature. It also suggests an intriguing difference between the *Duc* and the *Charrete*; for the *Duc* would track the increasing emergence of, or struggle for, the signature, while the *Charrete* may foreground its gradual displacement.

It is all the more probable that Chrétien’s departure from the text may be couched within it because, as various critics have remarked, the next scene includes a rather explicit allusion to the prologue.¹²⁷ Identifying Méléagant’s sister among a crowd, the narrator writes:

Mes une en i ot avoec eles
 (cele estoit suer Meleagant)
 don bien vos dirai ça avant
 mon *pansser et m’antencion*;
 mes n’an vuel feire mancion,
 car n’afiert pas a ma *matire*
 que ci androit an doie dire... (6242-48, my italics)

But there was one among them—it was Méléagant’s sister—about whom I will tell you later my thinking and intention. Here I don’t want to mention it, since it is not in keeping with my material, that at this point I should reveal it...

By including the prologue’s terminology within the text, Godefroi pushes this confusion between extra- and intra-diegetic, as has been amply remarked. Brownlee has also suggested that there is an analogy to be made between Méléagant’s sister, who liberates the imprisoned Lancelot, and Godefroi, who ostensibly frees Chrétien from having to complete the text, although he hasn’t revealed this yet.¹²⁸ Does Godefroi, we may then

¹²⁶ Butler, *Psychic Power*, 40.

¹²⁷ See Brownlee, “Transformations of the *Charrete*,” 170-72; Hult, “Author/Narrator/Speaker,” 88-92.

¹²⁸ Brownlee, “Transformations of the *Charrete*,” 164-65.

ask, identify as a woman, and what would be at stake in this gesture? Certainly the association between Godefroi and Méléagant's sister should not be understood as iron-clad; instead, it is consistent with the queer challenge to any clearcut demarcations between inside and outside (of gender roles, of the subject, etc.), that we hesitate as to the determinateness of this connection. Godefroi could also, for instance, be inscribing himself into Gauvain, as substitution is also at stake when Gauvain offers to replace an absent Lancelot in the final combat: "Et s'il ne vient, si me donez/la bataille—je la ferai" (If he doesn't come, give me the battle—I'll undertake it; 6210-11). In any case, though, we may say that the epilogue has the effect of emphasizing the queer exchange of roles already characteristic of the fabric of this text, since characters adopt the positions of others, and this often across gendered barriers and within eroticized dynamics. And this returns us, again, to the paradoxical nature of subjectivity; for if the epilogue is coherent within the text, then the text is "one" precisely by virtue of undermining its own "wholeness" and "oneness." While Roger Dragonetti and later Hult have argued that this epilogue may be "performative" in the sense of being a fiction *of* the text, I would argue that it is perhaps more helpful to understand it as "performative" in the sense that it negates the possibility of any neat conception of "integrity," textual or otherwise.¹²⁹

Finally, the relationship of the exchange of roles to questions of "oneness" may also be brought to bear on the question that has divided critics for decades: does the *Charrete*—or Chrétien—condemn or support adultery? As has been amply remarked, the

¹²⁹ This argument is often attributed to David Hult, "Author/Narrator/Speaker." Roger Dragonetti had proposed that Godefroi was a textual invention before Hult did, however, in *La Vie de la lettre au moyen âge*, *Le Conte du Graal*, 13-15.

problem of adultery is, to quote Bruckner or Sandra Prior, “displaced” by the text.¹³⁰ By accusing Guinevere of sleeping with Keu, Méléagant deflects attention away from her actual adultery with Lancelot to the factual inaccuracy of his accusation against Keu. This deflection is part and parcel of a series of exchanges of roles operant in this scene; for when he offers to defend Keu, Lancelot is, in a manner, defending himself, as he has just slept with the Queen; and while Keu is not guilty of adultery, he is guilty of something—namely, his arrogance, which prompted the Queen’s capture in the first place. The displacement of characters, literal and figurative, here and throughout the romance, seems, then, to correspond to the displacement of “authorial” or “authoritative” judgment, which would therefore be in keeping with the text’s terms. And should this be the case, the *Charrete* may be read less as avoiding the crime of adultery, than as focusing on the psychological role of “displacement” in subjection, in a move seemingly in keeping with Butler’s notion that, like the melancholic, we all have “indirect and deflected” relationships to “sociality.”¹³¹ Indeed, “displacement” and “substitution” are paradoxically central to the *Charrete*, since, as we have seen, the subject becomes, or acquires meaning, through performances whereby s/he embodies or internalizes the positions and behaviors of others. Likewise, as has been amply remarked, the narrative acquires meaning not in a linear fashion, but via circular displacements; in fact, it can be easy to forget that for the first century of its modern reception, *Lancelot* was widely considered to be Chrétien’s least coherent romance, until Douglas Kelly, Z.P. Zaddy, and later Norris J. Lancy rectified this considerable oversight by highlighting the importance

¹³⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 97-100, esp. 100 for “displacement.” Sandra Prior has more recently taken up this question: “The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name.”

¹³¹ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 182.

of circularity to the romance's plotting.¹³² We might even go so far as to suggest that if "adultery" is a figure for displacement or substitution (here, of Arthur, whether Guinevere is replacing him with Lancelot or Lancelot replacing Guinevere for him), it may be that rather than the narrative avoiding the question of adultery, the romance tells a story of adultery *because* adultery is a figure for the nonlinear and problematic indirection it wishes to foreground in the construct of the gendered and eroticized political subject.

This may all seem a bit speculative, but this is also the point; for reading the romance as a "critical analysis" of the subject opens up suggestive and intriguing questions. And given the romance's extreme and well-documented influence, it should be no stretch to argue that the *Charrete*'s concern with the gendered and eroticized reflexivity of subjectivity is not exclusive to it, but rather a frequent, if not definitional, feature of verse romance. Analysis of subjectivity in the *Charrete* would then suggest that it is far too reductive to claim that Christine was "against" this tradition of courtly romance figured by Chrétien. Being "against" this tradition would be as fruitless, the *Duc* implies, as being "against" subjection. Rather, Christine engages critically with this tradition from within: internalizing, we might say, conventions that are external to, or preexist, her. But this still is an incomplete or potentially misleading explanation; for it is not that she elects to internalize conventions that are exterior to her and therein locates her agency, but that she also seems to glean how these texts always-already depict agency in a similar way. The juxtaposition of Christine and Chrétien is not, moreover, only to the

¹³² See Douglas Kelly, *Sens and Conjointure in the Chevalier de la charrette*; ZP Zaddy, *Chrétien Studies: Problems of Form and Meaning in Erec, Yvain, Cligès, and the Charrete*; and Norris Lacy, *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes*, esp. 88-92.

benefit of Christine studies, where it forces us to re-examine the very problematic notion that Christine was sometimes a French poet, sometimes a (proto-)feminist thinker, and never both. It also opens up new readings of oft-studied verse romances that emphasize how gender and sexual politics very complexly supplement—construct and deconstruct—the logic of the heteronormative *je* in verse romances. The queerness of the subject emerges as a central preoccupation of a genre which has been persistently understood as a crucial step toward the modern, non-queer and normative *je*.¹³³

IV.

This chapter opened with a simple question: does the oft-recognized reliance of verse romances on the third-person pronoun, and *dits* on the first-, betoken opposing, or even fundamentally distinct, conceptions of subjectivity? While this difference initially seems to be the most concrete factor separating the two genres, it misleadingly implies both the necessity and the medievalness of bringing this grammatical opposition to bear on questions of subjectivity; it also very problematically assumes the subject's adherence to the rules and logic of grammar, whereas each text, I have argued, is about the emergence and being of the subject in a manner for which grammar cannot account.¹³⁴

As Christine's *Duc* insistently returns to its prologue, so have I insistently returned to this text, because it exemplifies both the justification for, and the stakes of, this "critical analysis" of subjectivity. Reading the *Duc* as problematizing the relationship

¹³³ Again, see Hanning, *The Individual*.

¹³⁴ It is interesting to speculate that while reading quite a lot into grammar seems more associated with the Middle Ages than with the modern era, in terms of subjectivity we moderns may have more trouble getting away from grammatical logic than our medieval ancestors did.

between rhetoric and poetics, on the one hand, and gender and sexuality, on the other, runs counter to a critical tradition which has, nearly without fail, retained a hermetic separation between Christine's subtle poetics and her unequivocal anti-misogynist politics. I have, instead, proposed to locate her achievement in the convoluted confluence of poetics and politics: to read the *Duc* as a remarkably intricate examination of the relation of rhetorical indeterminacy to the construct of the normative subject. At stake is not only a different reading of this rather understudied *dit*/verse romance, but also a certain conception of Christine as challenging, rather than asserting, the stability of the referent. It is, I am convinced, possible to read texts attributed to her against the overwhelming emphasis on the "didactic," "sincere," and "autobiographical" Christine who was "progressive" in terms of gender but disdainful of sexuality. It is also important to do so, because these notions are "limiting" to Christine and Christinian criticism, and risk very problematically associating women with the literal and the referential, as Swift notes.¹³⁵ To phrase my argument more polemically, it is not that Christine refused the "literary play" of her male predecessors, but that we have refused her this possibility, by being insufficiently attentive to the relationship between rhetorical indeterminacy and ethico-political engagement in courtly literature.

In courtly literature, that is, written by men as well as by this woman; for my goal has not been only to open up new readings of the *Duc*, Christine's *oeuvre*, or her relation to her French literary predecessors, but also of the larger traditions of verse romances and the *dits*. I do not believe that Christine sought a new, distinctly female, counter-narrative to courtly love in the ways criticism tends to maintain. I would,

¹³⁵ Swift, *Gender and Performance*, 185.

however, argue that queering her does stand to open a new counter-narrative about this tradition, which stresses the ethico-political significance, specifically in terms of gender and sexual identity, of questions about the *je* that are often relegated to the domains of the “metaliterary,” the “poetic,” or the “formal.” In terms of Machaut, turning backward from Christine’s *Duc* to the *Fontaine* allows for readings that resist the gesture of minimizing the importance and complexity of his engagement with non-heteronormative sexuality. It also queries the formerly influential notion that Machaut represents a key moment in the history of the move toward the “modern” subject, by countering that the *Fontaine amoureuse* “critically analyzes” the subject; the accent finally falls on the complexity of subjection, rather than on any neat assertion of the *je*’s interiority or agency. Recent Machautian criticism has increasingly left this question of the subject by the way-side, focusing more on his concern with the status of the poet and patronage networks.¹³⁶ Here, I would add that the admirable gesture of localizing Machaut’s *dits* in the specific politics of fourteenth century poetics need not negate the importance of his engagement with larger philosophic and political questions related to the status of the subject. Locating Machaut’s texts in such precise contexts may also, I note in passing, run counter to how many of these hazy, oneiric, bizarre, and elusive *dits* seem so emphatically to resist clearcut determinations of time or place.

In terms of Chrétien, questions of subversiveness have been more satisfactorily addressed than in Machaut. The retrospective trajectory from the *Duc* to the *Charrete* nonetheless has the useful effect of foregrounding how Chrétien’s scrambling of the

¹³⁶ See Ch. IV for more discussion about tendencies in recent Machaut criticism. For a survey of the most recent criticism, see Sarah Kay, “Is Interdisciplinarity the New Theory?” Studies have increasingly tended to branch out into music, and have foregrounded the manuscript.

oppositions of inside to outside and of subject to object is a weighty ethico-political and theo-philosophical move, rather than a playful rhetorical gesture. Furthermore, approaching the *Charrete* from the perspective of the *Duc* allows us to avoid the trap of seeing the romance either as about subjection (the feudal subject, the complicity of romance with the evolving twelfth-century state) or as about subjectivity (the rise of the individual as it was most famously described by Robert Hanning) without attending to the complex and problematic interdependency of the two.¹³⁷ It follows that the once-explosive critical discourse about whether or not the *Charrete* is “subversive” may be sidestepping the question of most interest. Of course “Chrétien” is and is not complicit with Power, just as any subject is. Yet, rather than being subversive because it comes out “for” or “against” courtly love, its hero, adultery, various aspects of feudal politics, or whatever else, the *Charrete* is subversive because it offers a remarkable “critical analysis” of the subject: because, that is, it brings into view the subject’s contradictoriness, ambivalence, and disturbing indeterminacy, where such a gesture is (paradoxically) subversive because it illustrates the impossibility of any pure subversiveness. For Butler, “if one is to oppose the abuses of power (which is not the same thing as opposing power itself), it seems wise to consider in what our vulnerability to that abuse consists.”¹³⁸ This is the question, I have argued, that Christine’s *Duc*, Machaut’s *Fontaine*, and Chrétien’s *Charrete* push us to investigate—or subject us to.

¹³⁷ For concise discussion of “subversiveness” in the *Charrete*, see Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 93. This may seem a “nineties” debate; these questions were once quite pressing. For more recent thinking on subversiveness in High Medieval literature, see Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics*. I note in passing that I have had considerable difficulty with the terms “subjection” and “subjectivity,” because my goal has been precisely to show that each always-already implies the other.

¹³⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 20.

It is worth stressing, in conclusion, that these readings also challenge one of de Libera's key claims about the "archeology of the subject." For him,

L'invention du sujet concerne tout un chacun: aucun *sujet* n'est plus "populaire," et la fiction du "moi" est, beaucoup finissent par l'apprendre, le premier mot de la *folk-psychology*. Pourtant, le principe de la mise en équation du *je* et du *sujet* semble relever de l'histoire d'*en haut*, ou pis encore de l'histoire des idées, concerner la geste des idiolectes techniques ou les métalangages érudits plutôt que l'histoire tout court; il semble parler aux "philosophes" professionnels, aux psychologues ou aux juristes plutôt qu'aux *vrais gens*.¹³⁹

Depending on who one considers to be "vrais gens," our readings have suggested the opposite conclusion: that the subject was always-already a concern of lay-people and the vernacular, and the rigorous technical or "professional" theorization of the subject that de Libera uncovers did not precede, but was contemporary with, an equally rigorous, though somewhat differently oriented (more politicized, eroticized, and gendered) and arguably more accessible, French engagement with the emergence and contours of the *je*. In fact, I submit, it may be productive to understand the commonplace notion that the twelfth century "invented love" and Haidu's contention that "the modern subject was born in the middle ages" as overlapping to such a point that they are merely two forms of expressing the same thing: the emergence of the construct of the gendered, sexualized, politicized and reflexive subject, which was and is at its best when it endeavors to examine critically its own contingency, fragility, contradictoriness, and limitations.

¹³⁹ De Libera, *La Naissance*, 80. His emphasis.

2. **Medieval Metalepsis: Queering the Rhetoric of Fiction in *Partonopeu de Blois* (1182-5?), *Silence* (ca. 1250-1300), and Jean Froissart's *la Prison amoureuse* (1372-73)**¹

The thirteenth-century romance *le Bel Inconnu* abruptly comes to a close when the author, Renaud de Beaujeu, referring to himself in the third-person, implores his reluctant beloved to give him a sign of encouragement:

Quant vos plaira, dira avant
U il se taira ore a tant.
Mais por un biau sanblant mostrer
Vos feroit Guinglain retrover
S'amie, que il a perdue,
Qu'entre ses bras le tenroit nue.
Se de çou li faites delai,
Si ert Guinglains en tel esmai
Que ja mais n'avera s'amie.
D'autre vengeance n'a il mie,
Mais por la soie grant grevance,
Ert sor Guinglain ceste vengeance,
Que ja mais jor n'en parlerai,
Tant que le bel sanblant avrai.² (6253-66, my emphases)

When it should please you, he'll tell more; otherwise, he will stop speaking now. But, given an encouraging look, he would, for you, have Guinglain find his lover, whom he had lost, and he would hold her naked in his arms. If you don't grant him this right away, Guinglain will be in such a plight that he'll never recover his lover. He has no other possibility of revenge, but for his great grievance, he will enact his vengeance upon Guinglain; for I will never again say more of him, until I have received an encouraging look.

Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as “toute intrusion du narrateur ou du narrataire extradiégétique dans l'univers diégétique...ou inversement.”³ As Michèle Perret has remarked, these lines are metaleptic, because the narrator-author claims that he can take

¹ For dating of *Partonopeu*, see *Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. Collet and Joris, 15-22. For *Silence*, see Kinoshita, “Male-Order Brides,” 73n1. For the *Prison Amoureuse*, see Jean Froissart, *La Prison amoureuse*, ed. Fourrier, 28-29.

² Renaud de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. Peret, vv. 6253-66. Hereafter cited in text by verse.

³ Genette, *Figures III*, 244.

vengeance on his character⁴; and since the sole extant manuscript of the romance ends here, he seems to have done just that.⁵ More precisely, these lines seemingly exemplify “exterior metalepsis,” defined as the intervention of a narrator on a higher narratological strata into the story of a character on a lower one.⁶

A closer look at these lines nonetheless reveals a more complex interplay between narrative levels, because the narrator’s behavior curiously recalls his protagonist’s. Guinglain has repeatedly berated himself for wretchedly abandoning the Pucelle aux blanches mains, exclaiming,

Mius deüsse vouloir morir
Que je de ço dont tant desir
Me parti si vilainnement. (3717-19)

I would rather have died than abandon so wretchedly she whom I so desire. If the romance’s final lines do not provide resolution for the story, they would also represent a wretched leave-taking, and the narrator’s behavior would thus echo the protagonist’s fatal error. And if Renaud echoes the *Bel Inconnu*’s insufficient departure, then his fidelity to the protagonist’s story would be paradoxically indistinguishable from his infidelity to it—since by behaving like Guinglain, the narrator is also abandoning him. This in turn amounts to an impossible problematization of the notion of fidelity,

⁴ The terms narrator and author are problematic for me, because the narratological implications map poorly onto common usage by medievalists. For medievalists, the “author” in romance is generally he who refers to himself in the third person, in the prologue and/or epilogue; the narrator is the *jongleur* “je” that dots the text. None of the romances analyzed here admit this distinction; in each, material from the prologues and epilogues recurs in intrusions throughout the text. Narratology, for its part, never discusses the author, but rather the *implicit author*, who is defined by his/her incapacity to speak; he therefore cannot be the “il” of the prologues and epilogues. At most, the “author” of the prologues would be another narrator to distinguish from the *jongleur*, but since the texts I analyze do not make this distinction, neither will I. I therefore generally use the term “narrator” throughout, only occasionally having recourse to “author” because it is uncomfortable for medievalists to read about how a narrator “organizes” a text.

⁵ Perret, “Atemporalités et effect de fiction dans *Le Bel Inconnu*,” 225-27.

⁶ Cohn, “Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme,” 107.

which is also in keeping with the romance's plot, as the Bel Inconnu is torn between the competing claims of two women and cannot be loyal to both. This narratorial intrusion even performs this crucial aspect of the character's predicament; for just as the Bel Inconnu is torn between two affairs, so too are we divided between two competing storylines, that of the narrator and that of the character. And if the narrator's behavior reflects his protagonist's predicament, which, we might then ask, dominates the other, or is really in control? The narrator explicitly addresses these questions of control, by claiming that it is up to his beloved whether or not he shall continue. Yet such questions are, again, pertinent to the diegesis, where an anonymous voice, which only much later is revealed to be the Pucelle aux blanches mains, claims that she has been manipulating Guinglain's actions since his childhood (3212-42, 4974-94). The addition of another potentially all-powerful woman therefore marks both the abrupt end to the romance and its return to the diegetic predicament of a woman pulling the strings behind the stage.

Close reading thus suggests that rather than squarely fitting the pattern of "exterior metalepsis," this metalepsis functions more along the lines of its ancient definition; it effects a tenuous relationship between terms, which often manifests itself as the confusion of cause and effect.⁷ It does not necessarily flip the terms, by stating the effect in the place of the cause; rather, we simply cannot know which comes first: the narrator's extradiegetic predicament or the character's story. As Debra Malina puts it, "the metaleptic cycle forces us to read deconstructively: we must refrain from shutting

⁷ For the ancient definition, see Quintillian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintillian*, vol. 3, 8.6.37-38. See also Genette, *Métalepse* for review of some other ancient definitions of the term.

down meaning, re-containing narrative and its subjects within our usual frames, and instead remain open to unresolvable ambiguities...”⁸

The previous chapter challenged the notion that verse romances’ reliance on the third-person, and the *dits*’ on the first-, betoken radically opposing conceptions of subjectivity. This chapter instead begins with an oft-recognized similarity between the two genres: their “dramatized narrators.”⁹ I shall argue that these dramatized narrators are far more frequently metaleptic than criticism has recognized; metalepsis, in fact, plays such a crucial role in the *rhetoric of fiction* of both genres that it is effectively the rule, not the exception, for narratorial intrusions. Understanding narratorial intrusions metaleptically in turn shakes up the ethical stakes of these fictions, since narratorial judgments, which are so often ethical in nature, become part of subtler, more intriguing and complex performances. Furthermore, by tying *énonciation* to *énoncé*, metalepsis has the effect of imbricating the meta-poetic or rhetorical features of the narration and the love plots of the characters. This chapter will explore the implications of the “metaleptic embrace” of the *énoncé*’s concern with sexuality and the *énonciation*’s self-conscious rhetoric, to return to the terms I used in the introduction.

Each of these steps—from rhetoric, to ethics, to queering—merits a brief introduction. I use Wayne Booth’s term the “rhetoric of fiction” for two reasons: the one because, though dated, Booth’s theorization of narrative is particularly useful in

⁸ Malina, *Breaking the Frame*, 19. I note that this is an astonishing text.

⁹ The term is from Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 151-53. For the “dramatized narrators” in verse romances, I refer the reader to Sophie Marnette’s study, which scientifically proves the relative frequency of authorial interventions: see *Narrateurs et points de vue*, esp. 89-96. For the *dits*, the most influential study to date on “dramatized narrators” would be Kevin Brownlee’s *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut* (esp. 3-23, “Machaut and the Concept of the Poète.” I return to this question in Ch IV. For a more recent study on Late Medieval dramatized narrators, see Didier Lechat: *Dire par fiction*.

discussing metalepsis, since it was the first to take aim at the (modern) dichotomy of showing and telling.¹⁰ In the conclusion to the *Bel Inconnu*, we cannot finally determine whether the narrator is telling us something about his own predicament or showing something about the character's. The opposition of telling to showing—or of diegesis to mimesis, as narratologists often style it—proves inadequate for describing metaleptic intertwinement.¹¹ The expression “rhetoric of fiction” also brings the relationship between Latin rhetoric and vernacular fiction to the fore. In his monumental effort to demonstrate “the historical impact of rhetoric on the composition of romance,” Douglas Kelly argues that romance is defined by *conjointure*, inherited from rhetoric's *iunctura*; and *conjointure*, Kelly holds, signals a belief in order: in the topical unity of the work, as well as the clarity of intention (*intentio* in Latin, *entencion* in Old French) and meaning (*sans*).¹² Romance is, then, the act of making coherent narrative and meaning: “The obscure becomes clear, the disordered and incomplete becomes coherent and whole, as past authority acquires contemporary legitimacy.”¹³ Kelly does explore seemingly unruly aspects of romance, namely *digressiones inutiles*, or digressive games that “play on perfection”; he argues, though, that “[t]hey in no way belie the importance of *parfaire*...”¹⁴ His work implicitly follows Foucault's logic in the “Prose du monde,” insofar as it stresses a pre-modern world conceived of as fundamentally readable: as Kelly writes, “In the Middle Ages, it was assumed that there is always a hidden

¹⁰ See Booth, *Rhetoric*, 3-16, 211-34. Since Booth, others have taken aim at this dichotomy: see Malina, *Breaking the Frame*, 132-43, and Culler, “Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative.”

¹¹ For bibliographic reference to these terms as used by narratologists, see Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 52-53, 20.

¹² Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, 15-31.

¹³ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 114.

¹⁴ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 140.

explanation or rationale for wonders.”¹⁵ This chapter sets out, however, precisely to contradict the assumption that either these texts, or the worlds they stage, are “orderly and comprehensible,” by illustrating how narratorial rhetoric, which initially seems to provide order, on close inspection emphatically does not do so. In order to theorize this rhetorical disorder, I draw on de Man’s concept of reading’s “inability to read itself,” which J. Hillis Miller glosses as follows:

Of the laws of language language cannot speak except in language that disqualifies itself as knowledge in the moment that it posits itself as language. Whenever we think we have pushed beyond the borders of language we find that the region we have reached magically reforms itself as still or already included within the borders of language.¹⁶

De Man and Miller contend that because language is always unstable and indeterminate, it cannot, it follows, understand—read or gloss—itsself in any positive sense. The conclusion to the *Bel Inconnu* illustrates this complex point in narratological terms; for in pushing beyond the borders of the *Bel Inconnu*’s story, the narrator finds himself in a domain “still or already included within [its] borders.” He therefore disqualifies his ability to stand outside the story at the very moment he asserts it; and if this metalepsis muddles the oppositions of resolution to irresolution or fidelity to infidelity, we may then say that it dramatizes not the story’s readability, but rather the impossibility of ever sorting it out.

Miller discusses de Man in the context of his *Ethics of Reading*; Booth concludes the *Rhetoric of Fiction* with recourse to “morality,” before tackling ethics head-on in *The Company We Keep*.¹⁷ As we have seen in different ways in the introduction and the first

¹⁵ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 156; Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, ch 1.

¹⁶ J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading*, 57-58.

¹⁷ Booth, *Rhetoric*, 377-98, and *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*.

chapter, medieval thinkers were also keenly attuned to a privileged relationship between rhetoric and ethics: as Copeland and Sluiter write, rhetoric both “shared [its] general ethical value with the other arts of the trivium” and also, due to its classical “inheritance,” “could be classed both with the ‘arts of discourse’ and under the headings of politics or ethics.”¹⁸ Understanding metalepsis in the contexts of “the rhetoric of fiction” is crucial, because the ethical meanings of texts will appear differently if a narrator cannot be said to exercise privileged authority over the text. That a narrator’s ethical judgments may be unreliable is at one level obvious; numerous fables and fabliaux that include morals with tenuous relationships to the tales testify to a similar mechanism.¹⁹ The frequent fallibility of narratorial ethical judgments nonetheless merits being explicitly stated, because, I believe, critics of verse romances and the *dits* still routinely grant narrators an ethical authority which metaleptic contextualization will challenge—or, to put it more simply, we still take narrators too often at their word. But why, this chapter then asks, do medieval narrators so often make ethical judgments that don’t hold up? I suggest that verse romances and *dits* repeatedly stage not how ethical judgments may succeed, but rather, to quote de Man, “the structural discrepancy between their intellectual simplicity and the complexity of the considerations on which they are predicated.”²⁰ I then attempt to show how, in these texts, the performance of the failure of ethical judgments is itself ethical work, because the texts expose the mechanisms of judgment to critique.

¹⁸ Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 56.

¹⁹ This is a widely accepted notion about the *fabliaux*: for various classic studies, see Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* or Ménard, *Les fabliaux: contes à rire du Moyen Age*. See also Gaunt’s chapter on the fabliaux in *Gender and Genre*.

²⁰ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 207.

Metaleptic involution, in fact, has the effect of exhibiting both *why* and *how* we have such trouble speaking of any transcendent, non-textual “good.”

The inextricability of ethics from textuality brings me to my contention that metalepsis functions queerly. At one level, this terrain has (as I mentioned in the previous chapter) been extensively mined by scholars who have convincingly demonstrated that heterosexual love stories are inseparable from, even dominated by, homosocial dynamics at the levels of both the story and its narration—that is, by homosocial relationships amongst knights and amongst clerks.²¹ This chapter complements this discussion by focusing not on the homo-social dynamics operating at each narratological level, but rather between levels. This made up part of the argument in Ch. I; this chapter will, however, provide a more systematic look at the porosity of narrative borders. Whereas the focus in the previous chapter was on implications for questions of subjectivity, this chapter studies how destabilizing narrative borders specifically affects the legibility of the text, in both rhetoric and ethical terms. There is, we might say, no subject in this chapter, but only the performance of the text. Another way of describing this chapter’s methodology would be to see it as taking us from Judith Butler’s conception of queerness, which we explored in the preceding chapter, to one more emphatically in line with Edelman’s thinking, which will dominate the rest of the thesis. From Butler, I borrow the notion that heteronormative discourse always-already contains the elements of its own deconstruction. As we shall see, metaleptic connections linking story-lines to narratorial intrusions routinely have the effect of deconstructing—contradicting, belying, perturbing—the normative and prescriptive ethical discourse often explicitly

²¹ The classic texts to cite would be Gaunt’s *Gender and Genre*, esp. Ch IV, “The Knight Meets his Match,” and Krueger’s *Women Readers*.

characterizing narratorial intrusions; this in turn suggests that these texts stage a certain conception of normative ethical discourse as inviting its own undoing. Theorizing “subversiveness,” Butler calls for a “repetition of the law which is not its consolidation”; and we will trace how different narratological levels “repeat” each other in elusive ways that, to quote Butler, “resist calculation.”²² If I also include Edelman, it is, at one level, because he more emphatically ties sexuality to rhetoric: for him, “sexuality is constituted through operations as much rhetorical as psychological.”²³ More specifically, he argues that heteronormativity relies on the promise of the future plenitude of meaning as represented by the rhetorical figure of allegory, whereas queers instead embody the perpetual meaninglessness of the *signifiant*: queer sexuality “scorns such belief in a final signifier, reducing *every* signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to jouissance in place of access to sense...”²⁴ Edelman’s ensuing, and daring, move is to call on queers to embrace their “figuration” of the “disfiguration” of both identity and language: “we can...make the choice to accede to our cultural production as figures—*within* the dominant logic of narrative, *within* Symbolic reality—for the dismantling of such a logic...”²⁵ In this chapter, I argue that metalepsis becomes a tool for violating the promise of stable or discernable meaning; it even signals the *embrace*, by each of these texts, of a certain irrepressible and irresolvable meaninglessness which they locate precisely at the messy junction of rhetoric and sexuality.

Studying metalepsis depends on close readings which engage with the messiness of narratorial rhetoric. Embracing rather than avoiding this messiness, this chapter queers

²² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 42, 173.

²³ Edelman, *Homographesis*, xiv.

²⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 37. His emphasis.

²⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, 22. His emphasis.

the “rhetoric of fiction” in three texts: *Partonopeu de Blois*, *le Roman de Silence*, and *la Prison amoureuse*. In *Partonopeu de Blois*, I will move from a survey of the narrator’s polemic rhetoric—namely, his explicit concern with gender politics—to a more patient investigation of how narrative poetics perform and even extend his subversive engagement with non-heteronormative sexuality, before finally turning to the relationship of metalepsis to the very proportions of this romance. In the *Roman de Silence*, penned about a century later, I investigate how the performance given by the romance’s intrusive narrator complements the thematization of gender performativity at the level of the romance’s plot. Studying the metaleptic relationship of one performance to the other opens up new readings of the text’s subversiveness by allowing us to resist the concluding gesture of reintegrating Silence into a stable gender identity. Finally, another century later, I will examine how the *Prison amoureuse* foregrounds the relationship between metalepsis and the homo-erotic in the *dits amoureux*. Yet, rather than understanding the homo-erotic as the *dit*’s ultimate transgression, I argue that the *Prison* introduces gender and sexual transgressions as part of a larger strategy aimed at exposing the ethical implications of reading’s “inability to read itself.” All three texts, I thus contend, not only tell of non-normative manifestations of gender and sexuality identity, but also—and more intriguingly, even subversively—perform their queerness through metalepsis.

I. *Partonopeu de Blois*

Numerous translations across Europe testify to the immense popularity of the late twelfth-century *Partonopeu de Blois*; it was, in Matilda Bruckner's words, "a best seller in the Middle Ages."²⁶ Its popularity may, though, strike modern readers as odd, given how persistently unruly the romance is: whether in generic terms, where it combines elements of *lais*, *chansons de geste*, and lyric poetry; in geographic terms, where it spans nearly the entirety of the known world; or in terms of its length, with the lengthiest manuscript (T) clocking in at some 15,000 lines.²⁷ In the prologue, the narrator claims that it will also seem unruly in ethical terms: "en cest escrit/Avra maint bien et maint mal dit" (In this text, there will be many good and many bad bits), he writes. However, "it is the custom of the wise man that he should weigh each word and extract the meaning from both the wise and the imprudent elements through his cleverness" ("C'est del sage home la costume/Qu'il porgart cascune parole,/Et de la sage et de la fole/Eslise le sens par voisdie").²⁸ This narrator is also himself quite unruly, incessantly intruding; and whether speaking about his own beloved, offering opinions about chastity, or empathizing with female characters, he is nearly always talking about women. This in turn raises the question: Is there something unruly about the narrator's ethical engagement with gender politics?

Quite surprisingly, the narrator incessantly identifies with women, even going so far as to say, "J'aim totes dames comme moi" (I love all women as myself; 5507). The

²⁶ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 109. For the translations across Europe, see also Fourier, *Le Courant réaliste dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Âge*, 315-17, 441-46.

²⁷ See Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 120-26 for discussion of generic unruliness.

²⁸ *Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. Collet and Joris, vv. 129-30, 124-27. Hereafter cited in text by verse number.

character whose relationship with the narrator has attracted the most scholarly interest is Melior, Partonopeu's lover.²⁹ At one point, he says of her,

Tant reconnois son estre en moi
C'or m'est avis que jo le voi
Et que je part a son deshait
Car en merci sui de tel plait. (8583-86)

I so recognize her predicament in myself that it seems to me that I see her now,
and that I partake of her plight; for I too am at the mercy of such a situation.

By claiming that he partakes of Melior's plight, the narrator inverts the gendered equation, like that established in the *Charrete*, of "protagonist (Partonopeu): lady (Melior):: narrator: his lady."³⁰ In his influential rhetorical treatise, which circulated around the time of *Partonopeu*, Matthew of Vendôme writes that, "description of a person ought to be informed chiefly by his office, sex, quality, rank, condition, age and appearance"; he particularly stresses sex, separating his model descriptions into those of men then of women.³¹ Although this is not a description, the narrator, by identifying with a woman, seems to be downplaying the importance of what Matthew calls "external attributes," because the difference of sex is trumped by a similarity of "feeling," one of the other eleven attributes of persons.³²

We do not, moreover, need to wait for the narrator to spell out his identification with Melior to notice that something important links them: their *clergie*, or learning.

Melior says to Partonopeu,

Deus me dona gracie d'aprendre
Et d'escriture bien entendre.
Les .vij. ars tot premierement

²⁹ See, for example, Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 112 and Krueger, "Textuality and Performance in *Partonopeu de Blois*," 59.

³⁰ See Ch. I for discussion of this analogy in the *Charrette*.

³¹ Matthew of Vendôme, "Introductory Treatise on the Art of Poetry," 73, 67-71.

³² Matthew of Vendôme, "Introductory Treatise," 73.

Apris et seuç parfitement... (4579-82)

God by His grace allowed me to learn and to understand writing. I first learned and fully mastered the seven arts (the quadrivium and the trivium).

The narrator is likewise characterized by his learning, as the prologue and many of his intrusions underscore; *clergie*, then, seems to have little to do with “external attributes.” In fact, not only does he seem to query the association of learning with sex, but also its association with what we now call ethnicity. The crucial tournament will, for example, be judged by, “.vij. roi de ceste nostre Aufrique/Qui tuit sevent de rectori[qu]e.../Et son buen clerc et bien letré” (seven African kings, who all know rhetoric, and are good and well-read clerks; 7339-40, 7343). Like sex, then, “race” does not serve as a barrier to identification.³³ The narrator may even tread onto more dangerous ground, by suggesting that religious differences are not absolute either. At this tournament, both teams include Christians alongside Muslims; and whereas Melior is Christian, she is ready to marry a pagan, because, “Chascuns d’[ic]els sa loi lairoit/Por Melior s’ele voloit” (Each of them would abandon his faith for Melior, if she should desire it; 9781-2). This theme of conversion even serves to liken the narrator to these Muslims; for in two of his interventions, he repeats that he would renounce Heaven for the sake of his lady: for example, “Cuite Li claim son paradis/Se dame n’i entre od cler vis” (Let Him have his Heaven, if fair-faced ladies do not enter into it; 7111-12³⁴). The narrator, then, is like Muslim characters, and unlike other Christians, in demonstrating the force of his love by

³³ The most important work to date to deal with the relationship between the West and the East in medieval French literature is Kinoshita’s, *Medieval Boundaries*. Though her work concentrates primarily on Spanish contexts, Maria Rosa Menocal is also a reference for re-thinking the notion of medieval racial and religious intolerance: see, *The Ornament of the World*.

³⁴ I note in passing that these interventions might have prefigured the famous passage, much discussed by critics, in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, where Aucassin claims that he would prefer hell to heaven, if hell is for lovers and Nicolette were there. See *Aucassin et Nicolette*, ed. Walter, §6.

suggesting that it even trumps his desire for Salvation. This connection in turn supports the narrator's contention, in the prologue, that even Muslims might have something to teach us: "nus escriz n'est tant frarins/Nis d[e f]ables as sarasins/Dont on ne puisse exemple traire..." (No writing, not even pagan fables, is so frivolous that we cannot find exemplary models in it; 103-5).

One crucial narratorial identification "gives the measure," to employ the *Charrete*'s famous expression, of the narrator's insistence that desire trumps "external circumstances."³⁵ At least four times in the text, the narrator identifies with Persewis, Melior's sister's servant—more so than he does with any other character.³⁶ Each time, he stresses how Persewis's unrequited love for Partonopeu resembles his own love for his lady:

Et Persewis od els i est
 Qui don ne puet avoir ne prest
 De ço qu'ele aime, ains li vait si
 Qu'ele aime et si n'a point d'ami.
 Si faç jo, caitis, tot adés,
 Mais Deus m'en face aucun relés
 Et doinst veaus une carité
 De baisier et d'estre acolé... (7581-88)

And Persewis is with them (Melior and Urrique), who can have no gift or loan from he whom she loves; rather, it is her fate to be in love but to have no lover. Such is also the case for puny me, right now: may God provide me some assistance, and grant at least the compassionate act of a kiss or being held!

Differences in sex, age, and condition all take a backseat to a deeper similarity uniting this servant girl with the narrator: their unrequited love. These passages are particularly striking because, just as Persewis's love is gratuitous in the sense that she can expect no return value, so too are each of the narrator's identifications with her, and even her entire

³⁵ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot*, v. 5563.

³⁶ See vv. 7581-88; 8443-47; 8981-9004; 3604+6; and arguably, 9742-48.

role in the romance, gratuitous; for none of her actions toward Partonopeu are indispensable to the realization of his love and the narrator seems to gain little from empathizing with her. Yet this very gratuitousness may point to the identification's queerness. In her revised preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes,

the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. One might wonder of what use "opening up possibilities" finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is "impossible," illegible, unrealizable, unreal and illegitimate is likely to pose that question.³⁷

Similarly, the narrator's identifications with Perseus seem to have no "use" other than to explore questions of *possibility*: of unrealizable loves from illegible positions, with no determinable benefit for the romance's storyline or its dramatized narrator beyond challenging what it is possible to perform in romance.

These narrative identifications might suggest that this is a very queer romance; indeed, one consequence of the narrator's numerous identifications with characters other than the protagonist is that they keep us staring at him. As Bruckner writes, "When it comes to descriptions of beauty in the romance, Partonopeu, not Melior, is the primary object of our agreeable contemplation."³⁸ The romance most dramatically stages this inversion of the masculine gaze when Partonopeu wins Melior's hand in a sort of beauty pageant, standing in only a "corte chemise" (short shirt; b10249) before a vast audience. Partonopeu is, in fact, no doubt called Partonopeu because of his dashing looks, in keeping with the medieval association of the name with exceptional male beauty. As

³⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, viii.

³⁸ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 129; for discussion of sexual orientation, see also Penny Simons and Penny Eley, "Male Beauty and Sexual Orientation in *Partonopeu de Blois*."

Matthew writes in his treatise, “In praising women we ought to emphasize beauty but less so in praising men, whence Ovid says: ‘It is becoming to neglect beauty.’”³⁹ However,

Occasional exception can be made when a versifier, to give his work greater clarity, describes the grace of a lad’s appearance as did Statius: in his *Thebaid* he marked Parthenopeus as marked with the pattern of beauty, so that the listener, having heard of his beautiful appearance, can more easily understand that his adversaries suffered with the dying boy...⁴⁰

Unlike in Statius, though, it is unclear how Partonopeu’s body provides this romance with rhetorical or ethical “clarity.” And would it, we may wonder, have been pushing the envelope for a narrator to be fawning over a beautiful man, around the time of Lateran III (1179), the first general council to take up homosexuality?⁴¹

Various critics have, however, warned against exaggerating the progressiveness of the narrator’s views. He seems to hold other views that are less subversive, even reactionary: namely, his contention that all women should accept their suitors, and his repeated thematization of “the binary opposition between *cortois* and *vilain*.”⁴² Close reading suggests, though, that we should not necessarily take eruptions of essentialist jargon at face-value. For example, in his first discussion of a *fiels a vilain*, the narrator presents his position quite dubiously. He says of Eneas’s relationship to his father, Anchises,

Maus fruis ist de male raïs;
Por ço di qu’il n’ert pas ses fis.
France dame soit ennoree
Qui a [frarin] est mariee
Qui si bel maine son engin

³⁹ Matthew of Vendôme, “Introductory Treatise,” 72.

⁴⁰ Matthew of Vendôme, “Introductory Treatise,” 72.

⁴¹ For discussion of homosexuality and Lateran III, see notably Boswell, *Christianity*, esp. 277-78.

⁴² The quote is from Penny Eley, Partonopeu de Blois: *Romance in the Making*, 50. Eley offers the most in-depth study to date of this *vilain/cortois* opposition in the romance, 50-74. For the narrator’s anti-feminism, see J. Chimène Bateman, “Problems of Recognition,” 173-74.

Que ses fils ne seit de put lin! (307-12)

Bad fruit comes from bad stock; for this reason, I say that he wasn't his son. May the noble woman, married to such a wretch, be honored who so well executes her cunning that her son does not come from a crappy lineage!

Because "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree," women should be unfaithful to no-good husbands; this is so far from the liturgical position as to strain credulity. The narrator then offers a genealogy of the kings of France which further undermines this notion that "*maus fruis ist de male raïs*." He begins with Pharamond, who "[a]s siens faisoit si grans honors" (did great honor unto his subjects; 409); yet his son, Clodion (Ludon), "*n'avoit pas de sens plenté/Ne gaires nule altre bonté*" (did not have much good sense, nor hardly any other good quality; 415-16). And after the *maus fruis* that is Ludon, "*Deus sa gent en socoru*" (God saved His people, 431) with Ludon's son, Marovel, who was "*fors rois et justiciers*" (a strong king and ruler; 435). This good king is then followed by another evil one: "*Enprés lui ses fils Childeris/Fu fors rois et poesteïs/Mais molt fu plains de felonie*" (After him his son Childeris was a strong and powerful king, but he was full of evil; 441-43). Finally, the evil Childeris fathers the "*[r]ices et sages et cortois*" (rich, wise, and courtly; 446) Clovis, Partonopeu's uncle.

The perfect alternation between good and bad apples within the romance's most prominent genealogical line prevents us from taking seriously the fundamental superiority of *cortois* blood, as the most *cortois* offspring have nothing better than an even chance of being good. We might, then, wonder if this narrator is "unreliable"—but if he is unreliable here, should we also query those intrusions which seem more progressive? Such a question brings to the fore how subversiveness is not necessarily tied

to the content of the narrator's rhetoric taken *au premier degré*.⁴³ Indeed, theorizing "subversiveness," Butler writes,

It is not simply a matter of situating performances in contexts...of gauging audience response, or of establishing the epistemological ground from which one is entitled to "know" such effects. Rather, subversiveness is the kind of effect that *resists calculation*.⁴⁴

Butler's radical move is to invite us to consider subversiveness less as the parroting of any particular political position than as the resistance to normative mechanisms of signification themselves. As Edelman describes it, the queer has the opportunity to "insist on the unintelligible's unintelligibility," rather than confirming "the legitimacy of the institutions of legitimation, however much what counts as legitimate must undergo change with time."⁴⁵ This gesture, I submit, is liberating for the critic of *Partonopeu*—even of medieval literature more generally—because it frees us from having to judge the queer-feminism of texts by the standards of twenty-first century political rhetoric, instead inviting us to locate subversion in the performance of the resistance to normative figuration. Thus, the narrator's explicit rhetoric raises the question of his ethico-political subversiveness, especially in terms of queer feminism, but his performance is more profoundly subversive—even by twenty-first century standards—because it is performed by metaleptic poetics that continually resist normative figuration.⁴⁶ To illustrate this, I quote at length from the narrator's second intervention, which occurs when King Lohier

⁴³ The term "unreliable narrator" is from Booth, *Rhetoric*; this is significant because he theorizes how we can discuss narratorial unreliability. See *Rhetoric*, 158-59. See my discussion on *La Prison amoureuse*, later in this chapter.

⁴⁴ Butler, "Critically Queer," 29, her emphasis.

⁴⁵ Edelman, *No Future* 106, 105. I note that Edelman makes these comments in the course of criticizing Butler's reading of *Antigone*. I find his criticism of her work to be decidedly unfair.

⁴⁶ I am engaging with Bruckner's statement that, "I do not intend to make this anonymous romancer into a feminist defined by twentieth-century standards..." (*Shaping Romance*, 150).

of France grants Partonopeu a one-on-one combat with the Danish Emperor, Sornegur, on which hangs the fate of their conflict:

Partonopeus drece l'espee
Que Melior li ot donee;
3395 Et quant le voit clere et burnie,
Dont li est menbré de s'amie...
A Sornegur rest bien avis
Que de l'estor li estoit pis,
Et que ses compains s'est molt fains
De quanqu'il se conbati ains.
3415 Ensi set amors ensegnier
Cascun home de son mestier
Cevalier de cevalerie
Et clerc d'amender se clergie.
Vilonie tolt et perece
3420 Cortesie done et largece.
Dame qui n'aime tienç a fole;
Poi pris son fait et se parole.
Mais s'ele est bele u de l'endroit
C'on l'en quiere, si l'otroit.
3425 La moie amie en fin m'ocit,
Tant se desfent et escondit.
Escondire afiert a laron.
Ja s'el me croit ne dira non.
Siens sui liges et ses feels.
3430 Bien se doit metre en mes consels.
Segnor, ne vos anuit, por Deu,
Se j'entrelais Partonopeu
Et paroïl de ço dont plus pens,
Car u soit folie u soit sens,
3435 U as dolor, la est tes dois;
U as amor, cele part vois.
Li dois siolt estre a le dolor
Et li iols tos jors a l'amor.
Partonopeus le fait si bien
3440 Li rois le crient sor tote rien. (3393-6, 3411-40)

Partonopeu raises the sword that Melior had given him; and when he sees it both shiny and burnished, he then recalls his lover...Sornegur had the impression that he was losing the battle, and that his foe was hardly giving it his all when he was fighting before. Thus love knows how to teach each man his trade: the knight, chivalry, and the clerk, to better his *clergie*. Love removes vileness and sloth, and grants courtliness and generosity. I consider that any lady who doesn't love is

mad; I hardly value her behavior and her words. But if she is beautiful and of the sort that her love is besought, she should grant it. My beloved is, finally, killing me, so much does she resist and deny me. To deny belongs to the thief. And if she believes me, she will no longer say no; I am her feudal subject and servant, and she should take into account my advice. My Lords, may it not bother you, by God, if I abandon Partonopeu, and speak about that which occupies my mind; for whether it is folly or good sense, where you feel pain, you place your fingers, and where there is love, I glance. The fingers, in fact, should belong to pain, while the eyes should always be love's. Partonopeu fights so well that the King fears him more than anyone else.

At first glance, this intrusion does not seem metaleptic. As in the *Bel Inconnu*'s epilogue, the narrator seems to abandon Partonopeu to talk about himself: "j'entrelais Partonopeu..." Yet, also like in the concluding lines of the *Bel Inconnu*, he is imitating Partonopeu, insofar as Partonopeu succeeds in combat precisely because he suddenly recalls his own lady. If the narrator is echoing the hero's actions, then his being "without" the story becomes paradoxically indistinguishable from his being "within" it.

The narrator acknowledges that his intervention may seem inappropriate: "Segnor, ne vos anuit, por Deu..." The notion of inappropriate intrusions is also pertinent to the timing of this intervention, since in the immediately following lines, Marés, a *fils a villain*, will break the truce and intrude on Partonopeu's duel: "Or voit et entent cuens Marés/Que n'est pas biens s'il atent mes/Car al roi voit or mal ester..." (now the Count Marés sees and understands that it would not be good if he were to wait any longer, for he sees the King in a poor way; 3441-43). Nearly at the same moment, then, as Marés breaks the truce by which he is supposed to be *without* the conflict by intruding into it, the narrator inappropriately intrudes into the story of his protagonist. Being "without," then, is also being "without" and moving "within," and the narrator's behavior curiously recalls that of both protagonist and antagonist.

This play on the “inside/outside” binary runs deeper. Following Marés’s intrusion, the Danish emperor is mortified; he disguises himself and then penetrates the French lines so as to offer himself up in compensation for the treason: “As François vait pour acerter./Entr’als se met con uns des lor...” (he goes over to the French troops to make sure [that Partonopeu has been kidnapped]; he pretends to be one of theirs; a3508-9). Sornegur thus (again) stages the fluidity of categories of inside and outside, by moving from “ceux de dehors” to “ceux de dedans.” Once the Emperor has infiltrated the French lines, the soldiers ignore him, because of their distress at having lost Partonopeu: “Car comment puet joïr altrui/Qui son cuer a tot plain d’anui?” (for how can one share in another’s joy, when one’s own heart is full of trouble?; 3639-40). Because this is nearly the exact sentiment that the narrator has just expressed—he can’t talk about Partonopeu because he is thinking about his own problems, “paroïl de ço dont plus pens...”—the narrator again seems to be inside the diegetic world via the very sentiment that forces him outside of the task of recounting what happens in that world.

This intrusion, I submit, therefore functions queerly not because of the narrator’s explicit political rhetoric—here, women who don’t love are crazy—but rather because of its confusing metaleptic imbrication with its surroundings. The text deconstructs, or queers, the categories of “within” and “without,” by performing Butler’s call for an “internal subversion...in which the [inside/outside] binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense,” or becomes “unreadable.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

To provide one more example, queer metalepsis is also at work in the narrator's first lengthy intrusion, which occurs at the end of a description of Partonopeu's stay at Chef d'Oire, shortly before he returns to France for the first time:

1855 Puis que li mangiers fu finés
 En le cambre est al lit alés.
 Od Melior a son delit;
 Assés i jue, assés i rit,
 Et n'est merveille s'il a joie,
 1860 Car tant li seit conter la bloie
 Et de deduit et de grant sens
 Et des fais de l'ancien tens
 Que nus ne set tant bien entendre
 Qui ne peüst de lui apendre.
 1865 Douce et soef a le parole,
 C'est une riens qui molt m'afolle;
 Ço ai de m'amie et nient plus,
 Par tant m'i tieng et pens et mus,
 Et Dameldex, qui ne menti,
 1870 Me doinst qu'el m'aint si con j'aim li
 Et qu'a moi pere se francise,
 Car ce n'ert ja que autre eslise.
 Partonopeus a son delit,
 Li parlars de lui molt m'ocit,
 1875 Car il a tos biens de s'amie;
 Jo n'en ai riens qui ne m'ocie.
 Il ne le voit, mais a loisir
 Le sent et en fait son plaisir.
 Je voi la moie et n'en faç rien;
 1880 J'en ai le mal et il le bien.
 Partonopeus i est un an,
 Que travail n'a, ne duel, n'ahan... (1855-82)

After the meal was finished, he went to the bedroom. With Melior he had his fun; he had the occasion to play and laugh plenty there, and it is no marvel if he finds joy; for his blonde beauty so knows how to tell things amusing and wise, even feats of ancient times, that no one is so well-learned that he couldn't learn from her. She speaks to him sweetly and softly—this is something that drives me crazy, and for this reason, I remain pensive and down. And may God, who has never lied, grant that she should love me as much as I love her; and that her nobleness is bestowed on me, as the time will never come where I choose anyone else. Partonopeu has his fun; talking about him is killing me; for he gets all good things from his beloved, while I have nothing that doesn't destroy me. He doesn't see her, but he can feel her and have his pleasure with her at will. I see my lady and

get to do nothing; I get the bad-end and he the good one. Partonopeu is there for a year, without having any trials, pain, or tribulations.

The narrator ostensibly suffers from being without: without any favors from his lady, and without this diegetic universe where sex occurs. Yet his externality to the story is problematized by the fact that “all of the terms used to describe Melior's storytelling in this passage can be found in the prologue,” as Chimène Bateman nicely observes.⁴⁸ Indeed, Melior is a teller “des fais de l’ancien tens,” whereas the narrator calls himself a writer of “estoire d’antif tens” (stories of ancient times; 78); and while, in hearing Melior’s storytelling, “nus ne set tant bien entendre/Qui ne peüst de lui aprendre,” so too does the narrator say of the romance: “nus escriis n’est tant frarins...dont on ne puisse exemple traire...” (no writing is so frivolous that we cannot find good examples in it). Therefore, despite seeming dramatically to oppose his predicament to that of the protagonists, the narrator metaleptically writes himself into it.

This metalepsis quite complexly imbricates sex(uality) and language. For Melior and Partonopeu, stories (metaleptically) prompt sex; yet, it seems, the narrator’s romance isn’t successful in this respect. Melior’s storytelling seems, moreover, emphatically to link her to the narrator, but he then compares her speaking to that of his own lady: “Douce et soef a le parole... ço ai de m’amie et nient plus.” It seems contradictory that Melior’s speaking should recall both the recalcitrant lady and the desperate suitor, whose desires are perfectly opposed. The metalepsis may also go further, with the gratuitous narratorial intrusion functioning as a rhetorical smokescreen, distracting the reader while the protagonists get to have sex—like Flaubert’s infamous carriage reflections in *Madame Bovary*. Indeed, medieval narrators frequently flare up and make their presences

⁴⁸ Bateman, “Problems of Recognition,” 166.

felt during sex scenes, either by conspicuously digressing, as in *Flamenca*, or by fretting about what they do or don't know, or will or won't say, as in the *Charette*, the *Bel Inconnu* or *Silence*.⁴⁹ We might wonder if the imbrication of the narrator and the protagonists' sex itself performs sex, insofar as the narrative levels are here interpenetrating. But can speech simultaneously cause sex, be a shoddy alternative to sex, perform sex, and distract from it? What could this possibly mean—besides something queer, along the lines of: textuality and sexuality are inextricably entangled in a “metaleptic embrace” that we cannot get to the bottom of?

We could continue developing this intrusion's metaleptic character; for example, some thirty lines later, Partonopeu succumbs to his nostalgia for France, therein abandoning Melior. As in the example from the *Bel Inconnu*, then, dividing the reader's attention between the predicaments of narrator and character performs how Partonopeu is also torn between two different places. I hope, though, to have sufficiently demonstrated how metaleptic play queers the charged, normative binary oppositions of exteriority and interiority, while intriguingly but elusively linking the narrator's rhetoric to the characters' sexuality.

In order to underscore how metalepsis affects the very proportions of this romance, I wish to conclude this section on *Partonopeu* by turning to its “continuations.” *Partonopeu* is an extreme example of Zumthor's classic concept of *mouvance*, since no two of the ten extant manuscripts end in the same place.⁵⁰ Scholars separate the

⁴⁹ See *Flamenca*, vv. 6004-16. See the *Bel Inconnu*, vv. 4815ff., or discussion of *Silence* below. For more examples of narratorial eruptions during sex scenes, see Philippe Ménard, *Le rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Âge*, 491-96.

⁵⁰ All versions of the manuscript are consultable on the Electronic edition: <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/partonopeus/>.

manuscripts into two groups: one, solely represented by manuscript A, which seems to be approaching culmination in Partonopeu's marriage, although it is incomplete; and another, to which all other manuscripts belong, and whose sole "complete" version seems to be T.⁵¹ Referring to this second, seemingly more popular tradition, scholars speak of an "authorial" epilogue, that would mark the limits of the "original" romance, which is then followed by a prologue that introduces the "continuations." Bemoaning his own lack of luck in love, the "author" concludes the "original" romance by writing,

Tot ai perdu, mais neporquant
 Tant la redot et tant la crien
 Et tant a son lige me tien
 A son servise sens orguel
 Que s'ele me gignot de l'uel
 Que je die l'ystoire avant
 Faire m'estrova son comant. (10618-24)

I have lost everything; but nonetheless, I so dread her and so fear her, and so subjugate myself to her and to her service, without hubris, that should she just wink at me with her eye, I will continue telling the story. I must obey her every command.

He then explains how, should his lady encourage him, he has a lot more to tell: namely, what came of Anselot, Partonopeu's lost servant; and of the Sultan, Partonopeu's unhappy rival for Melior's hand. Unlike in the *Bel Inconnu*, the narrator's lady apparently encourages him—"Ma joie, ma vie, mes tresors...velt que plus die" (my joy, my life, my treasure, wishes that I continue on; 10657, 10659). He duly returns to Partonopeu's story, re-commencing,

Se Parthonopex a sa pes,
 Guerres et mal li sunt molt pres.
 Il a joie et pais .j. an,
 Poi se prent garde del soldan
 Quil het et tient a enemi

⁵¹ See Collet and Joris, 51-59; see also Penny Simons, "A Romance Revisted," as well as Simons and Eley, "Male Beauty."

Pour Melior qu'il li toli. (10677-81)

If Partonopeu is now at peace, war and misfortune are very much at hand. He has joy and peace for a year, without worrying much about the sultan who hates him and considers him his enemy, because he took Melior from him.

Partonopeu, the narrator tells us, is living a sort of hiatus between events; and because the narrator has just designated a hiatus in the construction of the book, might his hiatus then be performing that of the character?

I would perhaps seem to be over-reading, were reprieve and delay not so incessantly thematized throughout the ensuing "continuation(s)." Immediately after describing the menace that the sultan poses, the narrator writes, "Mais cest conte met en respit/Tant qu'un altre vos aie dit" (But I put this tale on hold, until I've told you another; 10703-4). Not only does the narratorial *mise en répit* of the sultan's story recall how he has just put that of Partonopeu *en respit*, but the intervening, or delaying, story is also flooded with delays. Anselot tells Partonopeu how he has deferred culmination of his love with the Emperor of Rome's daughter: "Terme li mis de jor en jor/Et parler i priveement/Mais onques ne li ting couvent..." (Each and every day I told her that I would give her the opportunity to speak to me privately, but I never kept my word to her; 11274-76). Anselot also defers explanation of key elements of his narrative, such as why he so effusively loves his dog: "Chier l'avoie come ma vie./Assez orés al conte avant/Por coi je parol de lui tant' (I loved him as much as my own life; you'll hear later in the tale plenty about why I speak so much about him; 11162-64). The telling (*énonciation*) of his tale also plays on *différance*, to use the Derridean term; for Anselot puts off explaining to Partonopeu why he was so enraged against *vilains* when Partonopeu first encountered him:

Ansels li conte ou a esté
Et coment a son siecle usé.
Mais del vilain qu'il a maldit
Ont il mis le conte en respit
Duque devant l'empereris.
La iert li contes trestos dis. (11085-90)

Anselot told him where he had been and how he had spent his time. But of the *vilain* he had cursed they delayed the narration until they were before the empress. Then and there, the whole tale would be told.

Delaying the narration until he and Partonopeu reach Melior recalls how the narrator refuses to continue narrating without a specific lady's approbation. The authorial threat to exit the story therefore partakes of the story's motif of *différance*; yet this leaves us clueless as to where the frontiers of the original romance are, since what critics have identified as the line separating the "original romance" from the "continuations" is in fact complexly incorporated into the fabric of the text.

Respit will continue to rear its ugly end in the romance's concluding sections, where the Sultan battles Partonopeu in an attempt to force Melior to marry him: Melior begs Partonopeu that "Par autre[s] enging[s] querons pais/Mais por delai, non por la pais" (By more cunning let us seek a cease-fire—but to buy time, not for everlasting peace; 12013-14). It is, however, the lack of delay in the romance's final lines that seems most remarkable. In manuscript T, after a messenger flatly informs the Sultan that Melior does not love him, he instantly gives up his claims:

Quant li soudans l'a entendu
Sachiés que moult fu esperdu.
Ne vos voil faire lonc sermon:
Ci finerons nostre leçon.
Je ne vos puis mie conter
Les dolors qu'il prist a mener;
Puis s'en ala en son païs. (14559-65)

When the Sultan heard this, know that he was very devastated. I don't want to go on too long; here, we will finish our tale. I cannot tell you the pain that overcame him; then, he left for his native country.

Some twenty lines later, this massive romance is done. Margaris's withdrawal has been qualified as abrupt both by Bruckner and Eley.⁵² Paradoxically, though, this lack of closure has already been written into the romance; for Margaris's refusal to continue when he learns that his lady will not encourage him echoes the narrator's behavior in the preceding "epilogue." Was the narratorial "epilogue" preparing us for this? Does it then legitimate this otherwise hasty conclusion? Is T therefore the most perfect version of the romance? We'll never be able to answer these questions definitively. But this is my point: the notion of "original romance" just does not hold up, along the lines of Butler's contention that, "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but rather, as copy is to copy."⁵³ The continuations are not to *Partonopeu* as copies to original, because originality cannot be disentangled from these copies. We may, then, risk a strange hypothesis: perhaps *Partonopeu*'s particularly variegated transmission may not be purely the result of historical accident, but rather the consequence of the romance's extreme emphasis on the metaleptic challenge to clearcut frontiers. The romance's resistance to the ascription of determinate borders seems, that is, to supplement its ethical stakes, because it suggests that the narrator's challenge to normative modalities of inclusion may be performed by the vast text's indeterminacy. In both rhetorical and ethical terms, then, *Partonopeu* exemplifies medieval romance's propensity to unruliness; and if it hooked medieval audiences, this might well be why.

⁵² Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 155; Eley, *Romance in the Making*, 165-70.

⁵³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

II. Silence

Partonopeu's legacy is, of course, not limited to its continuations. Even though, unlike the twelfth century, the thirteenth was an age "which had already passed laws against homosexual behavior and in which popular hostility toward gay people was becoming a literary commonplace," romance continued to allot a surprisingly prominent role to gender transgressions.⁵⁴ Nowhere is this more obvious than in *the Roman de Silence*, where the protagonist, though born female, is raised as a male, passing both as *jongleur* and *chevalier*. Simon Gaunt aptly observes that *Silence* "appears to engage deliberately with problems that interest modern theorists," namely the "possibility that gender is a construction."⁵⁵ Yet, subversive as gender performativity may seem in the romance, Gaunt nonetheless argues that, "Heldris deliberately problematizes gender and posits a view of sexual difference that is culturally rather than biologically determined, only to conclude that the problem is not a problem."⁵⁶ In a gesture that nearly all critics repeat, Gaunt warns against exaggerating how subversive *Silence* finally is.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The quote is from Boswell, *Christianity*, 329. I also acknowledge in passing Keith Busby's argument that "crossdressing" does not necessarily connote transgressive sexuality in medieval romances. See his "'Plus acesmez qu'une popine.'"

⁵⁵ Gaunt, "The Significance of *Silence*," 202. Note that a version of the argument that follows has also appeared in print, in my "De la filiation à la subversion."

⁵⁶ Gaunt, "The Significance," 209.

⁵⁷ See the quote below, from Robert L.A. Clark, "Queering Gender and Naturalizing Class in the *Roman de Silence*," 51. For several examples of strong articles that examine the queerness of the text, but warn against exaggerating it, see Peggy McCracken, "'The Boy who was a Girl'"; Kinoshita, "Heldris de Cornüalle's *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage," and "Male-Order Brides"; and Elizabeth Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender."

One aspect of the romance, though, has received curiously little attention: its verbose, intrusive narrator.⁵⁸ This is problematic, because the narratorial performance bears on, and stands greatly to alter our perception of, Silence's gender transgressions. At one level, the text explicitly points to the intertwining of tranvestism and *jonglerie* by inserting, amidst the larger narrative of Silence's cross-dressing, a shorter segment where s/he dons another disguise, that of a *jongleur*.⁵⁹ Furthermore, when introducing Silence's birth, the narrator opens the door to a more complex metaleptic interrelation between his narration and her/his tranvestism, saying,

Huimais orrés conte aviver,
 Sans noise faire et estriver,
 De Cador [Silence's father], de s'engendreüre
 Comence chi tels aventure
 C'ainques n'oïstes tele en livre.
 Si com l'estorie le nos livre,
 Qu'en latin escrite lizons,
 En romans si le vos disons./
 Jo ne di pas que n'i ajoigne
 Avoic le voir sovent mençoigne
 Por le conte miols acesmer:
 Mais se jel puis a droit esmer
 N'i metrai rien qui m'uvre enpire.
 Ne del voir nen iert mos a dire
 Car la verté ne doi taisir.
 Avint si par le Deu plaisir
 Que Eufemie [Silence's mother] ot conceü. (1655-71)

Henceforth you will hear a tale recounted, without any noise or fuss: of Cador, of his progeny, begins here such an adventure that you have never before heard the likes told in a book. As the story recounts it, that we read in written Latin, we render it in French for you. I am not saying that I don't often add lies amongst the truth in order to better ornament the tale, but I can truly declare that I will not include anything that lessens the quality of my work. Nor will there be any avoiding of the truth, because I ought not to silence the truth. It came about by God's will that Eufemie conceived a child.

⁵⁸ An important exception is Suzanne Kocher's very smart article, "Narrative Structure of the *Roman de Silence*."

⁵⁹ Heldris de Cornouaille, *Silence*, ed. Sarah Roche-Mahdi, vv. 2907-12. Cited in text by verse.

The allusions to Silence's upcoming story are numerous. The narrator proposes to "give life" (*aviver*) to a "conte"—a tale or a count, and Silence is a count—"sans noise faire." And while various medieval authors, such as Benoît de Sainte-Maure, acknowledge how they intersperse "lies" amongst faithful translations, this trope takes on a special importance here, because Silence's parents insert a very important lie into the true story of their "engendreüre," in order to "por le conte moils acesmer," a deliciously ambiguous line that could mean either "to ornament the story better" or "to dress up the young the count better," as Suzanne Kocher keenly observes.⁶⁰ Silence will, furthermore, repeatedly ask of her/him-self whether this lie worsens her/him—does it "l'uevre enpire?"—and whether s/he should tell the truth about her/his gender: should s/he "taisir la verté"?

The text therefore links its poetics to crossdressing; yet this does not mean that the crossdressing will become more readable. It is not, for instance, clear how the narrator's intrusions map on to the Nature/Nurture debate he repeatedly and obsessively stages. By incorporating a few lies, he seems to echo the behavior of Nurture, who "dishonestly" raises Silence as a man. Yet, as in Alain's *De Planctu*, a text which greatly influences *Silence*, literary composition is also frequently linked to Nature at her forge.⁶¹ In lines that recall the narrator's means of speaking of his own craft, Nature will claim that,

Tant com la materre est plus fine
Covient il plus l'uevre a finer,
Bien commencer et miols finer. (1874-76)

The finer the material, the more one must refine the work: start well, and finish even better.

⁶⁰ Kocher, "Narrative Structure," 355. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, vv. 140-44. See also my Introduction, for this point.

⁶¹ For the influence of Alain on *Silence*, see Howard Bloch, "Silence and Holes: the *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère," esp. 82-88.

Is the narrator creating *qua* Nature or *qua* Nurture, we may wonder, and could he be representing both, even though he repeatedly stages their opposition? It is, furthermore, resolutely unclear what to make, in the contexts of this analogy between narrating and crossdressing, of Nature's contention that it is only one's inside that counts. She says,

Ne poés vos sovent trover
Vil cuer et povre, et riche cors
Kist sarPELLiere par defors?
Li cors n'est mais fors sarPELLiere,
Encor soit de la terre chiere. (1842-46)

Don't you often find a vile and poor heart, and a rich body that is but a sackcloth on the outside? The body is nothing but a sackcloth, even if it is made of fine earth.

If the narrator melds his material, he forms the outside to a preexistent inside, but if the crossdressing Silence is in turn (cross-)dressed by the narrator, how could we possibly decipher the significance of her/his crossdressing? How, in other words, could we distinguish between Silence's (female) *dedens* and (male) *defors*, when the narratorial performance is another *defors*, and *defors*, the story dramatically insists, are prone to misrepresentation?

The queerly metaleptic relationship of the narrator's performance and Silence's story becomes all the more apparent when we turn from the lines introducing Silence's birth to those introducing the larger romance. In a 106-verse screed, the narrator bemoans how *jongleurs* are no longer rewarded as they once were, and he explicitly states that his harangue has nothing to do with the ensuing romance:

Il me prent moult grans maltalens
Qu'a force se honist la gens.
Ainz que jo m'uvre vus commence,
M'estuet un petit que jo tence
Por moi deduire en bien penser,
Car jo me voel tost desivrer,

Que quant venra al conte dire
N'ait en moi rien qui m'uevre enpire...
Ausi valt miols honors de honte.
Dé or revenrai a mon conte
De mon prologhe faire point,
Car moult grans volentés me point
De muevre rime et commencer,
Sans noise faire, et sans tenchier. (75-82, 101-6)

I makes me very angry that people violently shame themselves. Before I begin my work for you, I need to argue/complain a little, in order to please myself with pleasant thoughts; because I want to get it entirely out of my system, so that when it comes time to tell the tale, there shall not be anything that worsens my work... Thus honor is preferable to shame. Now I shall return to my tale, marking the end of the prologue, for I am very desirous to make rhymes and begin, without noise/fuss, without being argumentative.

Again, the final expression relates to silence: “sans noise faire, et sans tenchier.” This seems to indicate that this prologue is not as removed from the ensuing *matiere* as the narrator would have us think. Indeed, the treatment of *jongleurs* will be an intradiegetic problem, notably when Cadore temporarily forbids the exercise of their craft under penalty of death. This prologue is littered with other elements that foreshadow the story: the narrator worries that something inside him might ruin his work (“Que...N'ait *en moi rien* qui m'uevre empire”), which nearly exactly echoes Silence's worry that his/her hidden gender detracts from his/her knightly and clerical prowess. And when the narrator complains that, “a force se honist la gens,” he is also offering a potential reading of the romance's plot, as this is one way of interpreting Silence's behavior.

The prologue therefore functions via a series of fleeting analogies with the ensuing text. It follows, as Kocher deftly observes, that we must “interpret the narrator's commentary in light of the character's example, rather than primarily the other way around.”⁶² But if we are reading “backward,” this is also problematic, insofar as the

⁶² Kocher, “Narrative Structure,” 352.

reliability of the narrative frame depends on a story where the reliability of character presentation is precisely the thing in question. The irony of this confusingly metaleptic prologue is, in other words, that while it tells us how to receive the story in the most material way—give me money, Heldris cries!—it also makes it impossible to read, because we are unable to discern what Heldris is saying about it. Metalepsis confuses our gaze, in a manner similar to how Butler argues that drag confuses the normative gaze.⁶³

Because this rhetorical technique of elusively repeating elements of the character's story describes the narrator's performance even beyond these extended interruptions, it is not necessary to restrict discussion of his performance to them. More concretely, in both of these instances, the narrator has played on the notion of "silence," announcing in an opaque manner the moment when Cadot baptizes Silence

El non de Sainte Paciense,
 Por cho que silensce tolt ance.
 Que Jhesus Cris par sa poissance
 Le nos doinst celer et taisir... (2068-71)

In the name of Holy Patience, because silence alleviates anxiety. That Jesus Christ by His power grant it (Silence's sex) be hidden and silenced...

Both before and after Silence's birth, the narrator obsessively returns to this motif of silence. For example, when Silence escapes with the minstrels, her/his parents succumb to their grief, and their entourage "Por çals de pasmison retraire/Eskivent soi de noise faire" (in order to bring them back from their fainting spell refrains from making noise; 3023-24). While Silence's family suffers such grief at losing him/her, Silence is busy silencing the two *jongleurs* s/he travels with: "on les fait por lui taisir" (they are made to

⁶³ She writes that drag is subversive because it illustrates how, "Gender is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as 'internal' and 'hidden,' nor is it reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play *between* psyche and appearance" ("Critically Queer," 24).

be quiet on account of him/her; 3158). Once Silence returns to Ebain's court, s/he is subject to the queen's advances; the queen tells Silence that they could attempt to keep their affair covert ("par couverture" [3843]), but when she can't convince him/her, she "Fiert soi el nés de puign a ente:/Del sanc se solle et ensanglente./Plore sans noise et sans criër" (hits herself in the nose with her fist in pain, sullying herself and getting blood everywhere; she weeps without noise or yelling; 4077-79). She then forges a letter to the King of France, in which she passes in silence over Silence's alleged crime against her husband: "Cho...dist ceste letreüre/Que il a fait al roi tel honte/Que il ne violt pas metre en conte" (this says the letter: that he shamed the King in a manner so serious that he prefers that it not be recounted in a tale; 4442-44).

The motif of silence recurs dozens of times throughout the romance. Generally, its relationship with the protagonist's naming is opaque; occurring in major and minor moments, and charged with positive and negative connotations, the motif is "proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense," to return again to Butler's words. The confusion of silence does, nonetheless, tell us something about the romance's treatment of the motif: silence becomes deafeningly loud. The motif of Silence is therefore denatured by the performance of the romance, precisely as the protagonist Silence is denatured by crossdressing. And if, with Butler, we understand performativity "not as self-expression or self-presentation, but as the unanticipated resignifiability [sic] of highly invested terms," then the performance of silence is queer; for the term is clearly "highly invested" by the scene of Silence's naming, but also proliferated in "unanticipated" ways throughout the romance in such a manner as to denature it.⁶⁴ This in turn points to how

⁶⁴ Butler, "Critically Queer," 28.

the narrator's performance joins both "polarities," to use Eve Sedgwick's expression, of the term *performative*: "the extroversion of the actor" and "the introversion of the signifier."⁶⁵ Heldris, the extremely extroverted narrator, plays with signifiers in such a manner as to expose via their introversion their inability to carry any sort of stable, determinate meaning.⁶⁶

The narrator/author also enacts subversiveness through the structural organization of the romance. The romance includes not only the two above-mentioned prologues, but also, in a manner, a third: the 1600-line *premerains vers*, representing about a quarter of the romance, which details the courtship of Silence's parents, Cador and Eufemie, in a manner similar to how *Cligès* begins with the story of the protagonist's parents.⁶⁷ This "third prologue," which seems expressive of normative courtly values, since it describes a courtship approved by the King and his court, introduces various motifs that will be taken up by the story of the progeny. For example, Cador complains that in his frenzied, amorous state, he simultaneously feels both hot and cold, reflecting:

S'en moi peüst valoir Nature,
 Ja voir si estrange aventure
 A mon las cors n'en avenist;
 L'uns viers l'autre [hot and cold] ne se tenist.
 Mais jo sui tols desnaturés
 Et si cuic estre enfaiturés. (1027-31)

⁶⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 2.

⁶⁶ A flurry of articles on *Silence* in the eighties explored the text's insistence on "textuality," in a manner indebted to de-construction. See Bloch, "Silence and Holes"; K. Mason Cooper, "*Elle* and *L*"; and the most successful example: Peter Allen, "The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing, and *le Roman de Silence*". Allen writes that, "to remove ambiguity from this text means to tear it, to falsify it, to lose its essence" (110). Gaunt also takes up "de-constructive" play on signifiers in "The Significance of *Silence*."

⁶⁷ The term "premerains vers" comes from Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Fritz, v. 1840. See Chapter IV for discussion of filiation in *Cligès*.

If Nature could assert herself in me, then never would such a strange adventure befall my weary body. Hot and cold could not coexist. But I am completely de-natured and thus believe myself possessed.

Silence will repeatedly be described, and describe her/him-self, as “desnature(e),” and as fighting against his/her Nature. Yet the juxtaposition is uncomfortable; for surely the father’s frenzy here does not cause Silence’s transvestism? And if the father “de-natures” himself in a socially acceptable way, is Silence’s “de-naturalization” therefore also in keeping with courtly codes? This uneasy juxtaposition comes to a head in the lines which describe the parents’ consummation of their love:

Li uns prent l’autre par la destre
Et escalfent si del tenir
Qu’il se ne pueënt abstenir
Ne mecent les boces ensamble.
Sans dire font, si com moi sanble,
De fine amor moult bone enseigne,
Car li baisiers bien lor enseigne...
Car n’est pas baisier de conpere,
De mere a fil, de fil a pere:
Ainz est baisiers de tel savor
Que bien savore fine amor.
Et se vus verté m’en querés
Ja par moi sage n’en serés
Se dunques baisierent sovent... (1090-6, 1099-105)

The one takes the other by the right side and they are so excited by holding each other that they cannot abstain from bringing their mouths together. Without speaking, it seems to me, they demonstrate the sign of true love; for the kiss teaches them well. For it is not a familial kiss, like that of a mother to her son, or the son to his father; instead, it is a kiss with the savor that true love savors. And if you seek the truth from me as to whether they kissed a lot, you will not be any wiser.

The narrator immediately insists again on the silence of their kiss: “anchois...qu’il onques un mot sonasscent/Peüst on une liue aler” (before they said anything else, you could have made it a league away; 1109-11, punctuation modified). But this eroticization of silence—“sans dire font”—seems incompatible with the fact that Silence will be

characterized by abstinence: “C’onques ne fu tels abstinence/Com poés oïr de Silence” (for you will never hear of an abstinence like Silence’s; 2659-60). We are, then, left to wonder what the juxtaposition of “silent” lovemaking and Silence’s story teaches (“ensegne”) us, and specifically what it tells us about this relationship “de mere a fil, de fil a pere.” It seems to offer nothing very definitive; the narrator is correct to note that, “Et se vus verté m’en querés/Ja par moi sage n’en serés.” The juxtaposition nonetheless invites us to read Silence’s story as the queering of that of her/his parents, insofar as it repeats the same terminology, but in a manner ostensibly not intended by heteronormative codes. To use medieval rhetorical terminology, the *natural* (chronological, normative) order of filiation seems imbued with something of *artificial* order, defined by rhetorical treatises as the re-ordering in the name of obtaining maximal rhetorical effect.⁶⁸ The rhetorical effect of metalepsis is to problematize the causal relationship between father and “son”; for we do not go “naturally” from description of one to the other, and what Zrinka Stahuljak has called the “linguistic alliance” at the heart of genealogy manifests itself with all the indeterminacy characteristic of the romance’s depiction of language, gender, and sexuality.⁶⁹

The awkward echoes linking the Queen’s unwanted advances on Silence to the story of Silence’s parents’ courtship offer the fullest expression of the queer metaleptic effect of the romance’s structure. In the above-cited passage, the narrator has inserted a bizarre precision: “n’est pas baisier de compere/De mere a fil, de fil a pere/Ainz est

⁶⁸ See Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, trans. Gallo, excerpts reprinted in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar* 594-606, esp. 598-99.

⁶⁹ Stahuljak’s thesis is that, “filiation between fathers and sons does not begin in the so-called natural relationship of blood, but rather in the act of linguistic alliance” (*Bloodless Genealogies*, 2).

baisiers de tel savor/Que bien savore fine amor.” Yet what reader would have imagined that it was a “familial” kiss? The precision seems purely gratuitous, until we arrive at the Queen’s attempted seduction of Silence, where s/he fails to recognize the erotic nature of the Queen’s kiss:

Joste la face, sos sa guinple,
Li dona cil [Silence] .i. baisier simple,
Car il n’entent pas, al voir dire,
Con fait baisier ele desire.
Et la dame, qui nen a cure
D’estre baisie en tel mesure,
Li done .v. baisiers traitis,
Bien amorols et bien faitis... (3765-71)

Beside her face, under her wimple, Silence gave her a simple kiss—because, to tell the truth, s/he doesn’t understand what kind of kiss she wants. And the lady, who does not desire to be kissed in such a manner, gives him five well-executed kisses, very amorous and very lovely.

The description of the parents’ love, legitimated by the feudal court, therefore contains a covert reference to this transgressive—homosexual—sex act. The romance thus portrays the Queen’s advances on Silence as the “unanticipated resignification” of the “invested” and normative terms of the love of Silence’s parents. Other similarities linking the Queen to the parents support this idea. For example, Silence’s mother Eufemie, whose name is but one letter from the Queen’s, constantly observes an object that she cannot have and feels that her heart is spinning out of control: “Fel cuers, tres donc que vos creï/Honors ne biens ne me tehi./Veult me tu avoir parhonie?” (treacherous heart, since I believed you, no honor or good has befallen me; do you want to have thoroughly shamed me?; 846-7, 851). These feelings are also perfectly applicable to Queen Eufeme’s predicament, as the narrator repeatedly insists that she does, in fact, love Silence:

Car onques Tristans por Izelt,
Ne dame Izeuls por dant Tristan

N'ot tele angoisse ne ahan
Com eult Eufeme la roïne
Por le valet ki ert meschine...' (3700-4)

For never Tristan for Iseult, nor Lady Iseult for Sir Trisan, had such anxiety or experienced such tribulation as Eufeme did on account of the lad who was a maiden.

The hypothesis that the Queen queers—in the sense of repeating in an “unanticipated,” seemingly unwanted manner—heteronormative codes, is all the more credible given that the scene itself plays on this strategy. Seeing her advances rebuffed by Silence, the Queen convinces herself that he must be gay: “Herites est, gel sai de fi” (he’s gay, I’m sure of it; 3947). Yet, it is not Silence who seeks gay sex, but the Queen, albeit unknowingly; the scene, then, could be said to queer the queer, insofar as it showcases an unintentional signification already operating within the Queen’s language. The Queen’s misdirected accusation of homosexuality therefore invites us to link homosexuality, as the romance presents it, with what Edelman calls “the violent undoing of [intentional, stable] meaning”; and this is significant not because of its depiction of homosexuality *per se*, but rather because the relationship of the story of the father to that of the “son” functions similarly, which would suggest that the larger romance embraces this queer challenge to normative signification.⁷⁰

The metaleptic narrator, therefore, establishes a queer connection to his *matiere*, before capitalizing on the queerness of his poetics through play on signifiers and on the relationship of Silence’s story to that of her/his parents. Two objections may still be leveled against my claim that the performance of the romance is queer: the one, could the

⁷⁰ Edelman, *No Future*, 132.

romancer possibly have intended this? And the other, what to make of the conclusion, where Silence is integrated into the feudal order as a woman, while the Queen is ousted?

I will respond to these objections in order. We have already begun to see how the romance is toying with conceptions of intentionality; and while, in the Introduction and in Chapter IV, I discuss the larger relationship between intentionality, authorship, and deconstruction, it is worth noting here just how insistently this particular romance returns to the motif that intentions backfire. For example, the two *jongleurs* with whom Silence travels come to regret their hospitality toward him/her. One says,

Tel caiel norist l'om adîés
Ki li cort a la janbe apriés.
Tel fait meïsmes le vergant
Dont on le bat. (3255-58)

It's like the dog that one feeds, who runs at one's leg afterward; one makes oneself the stick with which one is then beaten.

Silence returns, almost word for word, to this theme, when regretting her/his success at capturing Merlin: s/he exclaims: "Jo ai fait al fuer de serjan/Ki quiert meïsmes le verjant/Dont on le destraint et castie..." (I behaved in the manner of a servant, who himself goes looking for the stick with which he will be forced and chastised; 6442-45). But despite worrying that her/his intentions will backfire, Silence makes out quite well in the final scene. Instead, it is the Queen whose intentions are not realized:

Or est la roïne as las prise
Dont el volt Silence lachier.
Si vait: tels cuide porcachier
Honte et damage avoec altrui
Ki soi meïsme quiert anui... (6658-62)

So the Queen is ensnared in the very trap with which she wished to ensnare Silence. This is how things go: one thinks one is bringing shame and wrong on another, who is rather only creating difficulties for oneself.

Because the narrator repeatedly thematizes how intentions backfire, we cannot admit the intentions of the author as a valid criteria for understanding *this* work; and if other romances also challenge intentionality, *Silence* does so particularly loudly. In fact, given the metaleptic intertwinement between the story and its narration, it would be more tenable to argue that the motif of uncontrollability signals the narrator's acknowledgement that this may well be the case in his performance of the romance; or, he paradoxically intends for the romance to be read *beyond* his intentions.

Because the last two cited passages come from the romance's conclusion, they bring me to my final point: that this conclusion does not contradict, but rather exaggerates, the romance's queerness. This is a weighty claim because, as R. Clark observes, nearly all critical accounts of the text "tend to repeat in a different register the text's own closing gesture"; and if the text's conclusion can be shown not to mean what it seems to mean, then the critical gesture of blunting the subversiveness of *Silence* would also unravel.⁷¹ Critics may have granted so much credence to this conclusion because it initially seems to adhere so perfectly to what medieval rhetoric holds that a conclusion should do. "In romance, the dénouement occurs when, through adventure, the marvel yields its truth," writes Kelly; and *Silence* seems to yield her "female" truth.⁷² He then remarks how, "The hero, male or female, effects the integration of the marvel into a social or moral economy," and *Silence* is integrated into the court by marrying Ebain.⁷³ Finally, good knights seek "to correc[t]...offensive custom[s]," which is precisely what

⁷¹ Clark, "Naturalizing Gender," 51.

⁷² Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 189.

⁷³ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 194.

happens when Ebain reverses the decree according to which women cannot inherit wealth.⁷⁴

This “rhetorical” perfection is, of course, also political, and it also conforms to Edelman’s descriptions of the anti-queer mechanisms of normative society. The violent ousting and murder of the queen would signify how “normative” society both associates sexual deviants with violence—and then ironically exercises violence *onto* the sexually deviant. On the other hand, by virtue of her marriage, Silence is brought into the normative, futuristic project of dynastic succession. Furthermore, his/her exposure of her/his own gender—really, genitals—brings him/her into “legibility,” with such final emphasis on “legibility” serving as acknowledgement of “the legitimacy of the institutions of legitimation.”⁷⁵

Close reading, however, showcases how there is something persistently “off” in this concluding sequence, which counteracts its capacity to provide stable rhetorical and ethico-political resolution. When, for example, Silence sets out to capture Merlin, s/he is aided by an anonymous old man, who uses the image of a bud grafted onto a sterile stock to explain why Silence should cheer up:

Amis, lasscier le dementer.
Jo ai veü jadis enter
Sovent sor sur estoc dolce ente,
Par tel engien et tele entente
Que li estos et li surece
Escrut trestolt en haltece. (5915-20)

Friend, let be this worrying. I have often before seen successful grafting performed onto an infertile stock via a nice graft, done so cleverly and carefully that the stock and the addition then grew together quite tall.

⁷⁴ Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 246.

⁷⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, eg. 49.

There is simply no reason why the old man should resort to an image of unnatural propagation to tell Silence to cheer up. It is also odd that the language used to describe Ebain's marriage to Silence should recall that previously used to describe his disastrous marriage to Eufeme. "Il n'est si preciose gemme/Ne tels tresors com bone feme" (there is no gem or treasure as precious as a good lady; 6633-34), Ebain says of Silence, whereas he has said of Eufeme: "Il n'a el mont si chier avoir" (there is not in this world any such rich artifact; 182), and the narrator has remarked, "El mont n'avoit plus biele gemme" (in the world there was not such a beautiful gem; 166). Finally, the closing lines slyly suggest that this conclusion is not what it pretends to be:

Maistre Heldris dist chi endroit
 C'on doit plus bone feme amer
 Que haïr malvaïse u blasmer.
 Si mosterroie bien raison:
 Car feme a menor oquoison,
 Por que ele ait le liu ne l'aise,
 De l'estre bone que malvaïse,
 S'ele oeuvre bien contre nature.
 Bien mosterroie par droiture
 C'on en doit faire gregnor plait
 Que de celi qui le mal fait. (6684-94)

Master Heldris says here and now that we should love/respect a good woman more than we hate or blame the bad one. And I will explain my reasoning: for a woman has less reason, provided she have the time and desire, to be good than bad; (by being good), she is going against nature. I can correctly show that we should in all fairness make a bigger fuss about a good woman than a bad one.

Heldris claims that women are, on the whole, naturally bad; by being a virtuous woman, Silence is therefore combating her feminine nature. Heldris's description follows the logic of Matthew of Vendôme's description of Marcia: "The excellence of the kernel is at strife with the shell, the diseased exterior with the inner grace" and "This daring woman

casts aside inborn evil. She is a woman in name, not fact.”⁷⁶ But this is a *huge* irony; for Silence, who was a man in name and shell only, concludes the romance as woman in name or shell only, since she is acting against her female nature. Therefore, rather than resolving the gender transgression according to which interior and exterior do not match up, Heldris retains and even further muddles their problematic interrelation. He again makes his subversive hand felt within the romance, and his judgments serve to problematize legibility—political and poetical, ethical and rhetorical. Standing opposed to the future-glancing promise of the stability of the sign or to the meeting of *signifiant* (body/outside) and *signifié* (gender identity/inside) is the eruption of Heldris’s queer jouissance, which refuses any entrance “into legibility.”⁷⁷

III. *La Prison amoureuse*

One hundred years after *Silence*, the heyday of verse romances had passed. Another increasingly valorized genre was experimenting with dramatized narrators: the *dits*. Metaleptic images, where art becomes life, incessantly recur: for example, Pygmalion, made famous by Jean de Meun, was both explicitly and implicitly evoked, such as in the portraits that take on lives of their own in the *Voir Dit* or the *Joli Buisson de Jonece*.⁷⁸ These intradiegetic metalepses point to the notion’s larger place in the genre’s “rhetoric of fiction,” where, to apply Jean Ricardou’s terms for the *nouveau roman*, the *narration*

⁷⁶ Matthew of Vendôme, “Introductory Treatise,” 70.

⁷⁷ Edelman, *No Future*, 105.

⁷⁸ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Lecoy; Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre du Voir Dit*, ed. Imbs; and Jean Froissart, *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*, ed. Fourier.

d'une aventure is entangled with the *aventure de la narration*.⁷⁹ The *Voir Dit*, the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli Buisson* all stage loves that are as poetic as they are mimetic. In Machaut's or Froissart's *dits*, life cannot be said to cause literature; the two are metaleptically interrelated, confusing notions of cause and effect.⁸⁰

But do these metalepses have anything to do with sexual politics? Froissart's *Prison amoureuse* implies that they do, by establishing a relationship between metaleptic poetics and non-heterosexuality. In this collection of "lettres, epîtres [sic], escriptions, traitiés amoureux (treatises on love), balades, virelais, complaintes et toutes manieres de devises" (and all kinds of pieces; XII.170), the relationship between the protagonist and his lady takes a back-seat to that between the protagonist and his "tres grant ami" (very great friend; 2131). As Claire Nouvet writes, "le texte qui prétend enclore une relation amoureuse [hétérosexuelle] n'enveloppe guère qu'une relation poétique [homosociale]." ⁸¹ Women, then, are removed from the fore—which may initially seem misogynistic, along the lines of Malina's notion that "crossing the boundary into hypodiegesis [frequently] entails a loss of subjectivity," as women are not directly accessible to readers.⁸²

If, though, we attend to how women are not simply excluded from the *dit*, but rather complexly incorporated into the same-sex relationship amongst men, this relationship appears to have homoerotic, rather than only homosocial, dimensions. Both men adopt women's names: the patron, Rose, "pour l'amour" (for the love; 693) of his

⁷⁹ Cohn, "Metalepsis," 108.

⁸⁰ See also Jean Froissart, *l'Espinette amoureuse*, ed. Fourrier.

⁸¹ Jean Froissart, *La Prison amoureuse*, ed. Fourrier. Cited in text by verse number or, for the prose letters, by letter number and page. Claire Nouvet, "Pour une économie de la dé-limitation," 344, my brackets.

⁸² Malina, *Breaking the Frame*, 97. For the homosocial, see notably Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*.

lady, and the narrator, Flower: “Je me nomme et nommerai Flos” (I call myself, and will continue to call myself, Flower; 888).⁸³ The potential queerness of adopting female pseudonyms is complemented by an important terminological overlap between how these men describe erotic loves and their relationship with each other: Flos, for example, characterizes Pynoteüs’s and Neptisphele’s heterosexual love as “D’une amour et d’une unité/Sans mestrie et sans signourie...” (of one great love and unity, without mastery or domination; 1377-78), whereas shortly before he has announced his intention to be Rose’s “compagnon loyal,” “d’un acord et d’une unite” (loyal companion, of one accord and one unity; 819, 821). Certainly, erotic and feudal terminology greatly overlapped throughout the Middle Ages; yet this neither means that such overlap is not queer, nor that specific texts cannot exaggerate its implications.⁸⁴ In fact, in the *Prison*, the activities by which the lover typically interacts with his lady—seeing her and touching her—are re-directed toward the correspondence between men. Flos gawks at Rose’s seal, “Car li regars et la veüe/De toute joie est pourveüe;/Pluiseurs fois m’i suis ravis” (for looking at it and seeing it provides all sorts of joy, many times I’ve been overcome by it; 989-91), and he repeatedly describes himself touching these letters: for example, “les ouvri je sans

⁸³Perhaps Flos’s name recalls Baudri’s Florus, the most famous voice to speak up in defense of gay love in the Middle Ages, according to Boswell. Boswell, *Christianity*, 244-47.

⁸⁴The overlap between feudal and amorous vocabulary is so thoroughly recognized that it does not necessarily merit citations; it seems that the Marxist critics of Troubadours were the first to mine the common-ground between the feudal and the sexual, seeing the sexual as a metaphor used to evoke feudal concerns: see, for example, Kohler, “Observations sociologiques et historiques sur la poésie des troubadours.” When one doesn’t attempt to look “through” sexuality, but at it, something more complex happens: an example of this would be Jean-Charles Huchet’s *L’Amour discourtois: la ‘fin’amors’ chez les premiers troubadours*. For discussion of a text which insistently investigates the overlap between the feudal and the erotic, see Ch. IV’s analysis of the first part of *Cligès*.

anui/Et les desploia a mes dois...” (I opened them without difficulty and unfolded them with my fingers; 3432-33).⁸⁵

The two men even write lyrics about each other. This is most obvious in Flos’s *lai*, the subject of which is how, “s’un compagnon veïsse/A cui mon estat deïsse,/Moult me peuïst conforter” (if I saw a companion to whom I could tell my plight, that would greatly comfort me; 3544-46). In the *lai*, the *je* expresses no desire to end his suffering with women; he only wishes to indulge in the pleasure of sharing it with another man:

Par ensi faire on s’esgaie
Et n’est mauls qu’on ne delaie,
Car le tamps on passe et paie
Par tamaint esbatement. (3579-82)

So doing, we enjoy ourselves; there is no pain that we don’t defer, for we pass and spend our time in many an enjoyment.

Because this *lai* introduces the possibility of men writing lyrics about each other, we may also look back to earlier lyrics that, though ostensibly addressed to women, instead pertain more to the relationship established between the two men. Flos, for example, writes in his second *ballade*,

Mais, tant qu’a moi, j’aroie assés plus chier,
S’il aloit par souhedier,
Brief estre oïs que longement languir... (2066-68)

But, as for me, I would rather prefer, were I able to choose, to be heard soon rather than to languish for a long while.

Yet, when composing the *ballade*, he is suffering not because his lady is slow to respond to him, but because Rose is: “Depuis passerent mois et jour/Que je n’oï nulle nouvelle...De Rose mon compagnon grant” (since then many a month and day have

⁸⁵ I make a similar observation about the *Voir Dit* in Ch IV.

passed during which I heard no news from my great companion Rose; 2021-22, 2024). Is the amorous ballade, we might then ask, actually about Rose?

Even before Rose initiates his correspondence with Flos, something seems to be “off” about Flos’s sexuality. His lady sings in her *virelay* that “toute merancolie/Li affiert bien a porter” (he wears all melancholy well; 433-34); she even suspects that he derives too much pleasure from melancholy: “Chils y prent joie et deport,/Tout deduit et tout confort” (he gets joy and pleasure, all his fun and comfort, from it; 438-39). Flos himself recognizes a paradoxical relationship to melancholy, saying, “Se merancolie pooit/Reconforter un coer d’amant,/Elle me reconforteroit” (if melancholy could comfort a lover’s heart, it would comfort me; 765-67). This melancholy is only alleviated when he finds solace in another man:

Merancolieus et pensieus,
Contre terre clinans mes ieus,
Je n’euïsse ja si tost pris
Confort qui vaille ne de pris,
S’Amours euïst dit, ‘Je t’oubli.’
Mais il m’envoia un oubli
Ou puis me sui moult deportés
Et solaciés... (657-64)

Melancholy and pensive, my eyes fixed on the ground, I would not have so soon felt any comfort worth its salt, if Love had told me, “I relinquish/forget you.” But Love sent me a pastime [Rose] where, since, I have found much pleasure and solace.

Perhaps Flos’s melancholy corroborates Butler’s notion of “the melancholic formation of gender,” whereby “masculinity will be haunted by the [same-sex] love that it cannot grieve.”⁸⁶ Flos certainly experiences extreme melancholy in his heterosexual identity and only finds fulfillment in “recreation” (II.62, VI.105) with another man.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 133, 138. See Ch. I for discussion of this idea in relation to the *Fontaine amoureuse*.

The *Prison* therefore suggests that when the story of courtly love becomes intertwined with, and even takes a back-seat to, that of its narration, this may betoken something non-heteronormative.⁸⁷ And because it was a common feature of many *dits*, notably those of Machaut, to imbricate what Nouvet calls the “rapport lyrique,” which instantiates the heterosexual lover, and the “rapport professionnel,” generally (but not always) homosocial, we may understand Froissart’s *dit* as “le point extrême d’une certaine ‘tradition’ poétique”: an *extreme* point which exposes the overlap between the entanglement of *narration* and *amour*, on the one hand, and same-sex eroticism, on the other.⁸⁸ Froissart’s text simply goes a bit further in the direction in which the *dits* were already headed, just as Rose initially goes a little further than Flos expects: “Rose m’escript, la merci soie/Plus avant que penser n’osoie” (Rose’s writing, by his mercy, went further than I would have dared expect/think; 924-25).

It would nonetheless be problematic to reduce the *dit* to an allegory of the homo-erotics of the genre, because the *dit* functions precisely by problematizing allegoresis. Inserted into the larger *dit* are two smaller ones: one where Flos recounts the myth of Pynoteüs, and another where Rose recounts his dream-vision. Rose will implore Flos to gloss the hidden meaning of these pieces: “je vous pri que vous voelliés sus mon songe mettre aucune exposition nouvelle, ensi que la matere le requiert...” (I beg you to please provide a new explanation of my dream, as the material requires; VIII.149). Yet, rather than clearly relating to the inserted pieces, Flos’s glosses instead seem rather arbitrary. To give a minor example, he initially considers that, when Prudence (*Avis*) defects from

⁸⁷ The *Voir Dit* is the important exception, since Toute-Belle is a female patron/lover. See Findley, “Deadly Words,” esp. p. 13 for a similar point. See Ch I for discussion of melancholy in relation to the *Fontaine amoureuse*.

⁸⁸ Nouvet, “Pour une économie,” 342.

the narrator's army in Rose's dream, this symbolizes the lover's inability to speak when in the presence of his lady, although it is hardly clear why Prudence's defection necessarily represents this specific manifestation of the lover's trepidation. More globally, the very fact that Flos offers various "expositions" proves that they are fallible, insofar as none is definitive: "je m'avisai que ceste aultre exposition j'esciroie et le vous envoierois, ensi que j'ai fait, a fin que vous aiiés avis sus l'un et l'autre pourpos, et le plus agreable retenés pour vous ou tous deus" (I reflected that I would write this other explanation and would send it to you, as I have, so that you can consider both ideas, and retain for yourself that which you find most agreeable, or both; IX.154). As Nouvet observes, "Proposer quatre gloses là où une seule est nécessaire, c'est avouer l'échec de la reconstruction: l'excès de justification dénonce le manque fondamental de justification."⁸⁹ This queer strategy, by which excess exposes underlying instability, is beautifully figured in the *coffres* that Flos lays about; for while, as Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet correctly observes, these chests serve a "practical purpose: to avoid dispersion and loss," their very excess throughout the *dit*—I count at least five different ones, to say nothing of the sacks, cloths, etc. that Flos also uses—suggests that, rather than limiting dispersion, they instead function to ensure it.⁹⁰

If Flos offers "unreliable" readings, their very unreliability may nonetheless serve an ethical purpose. As Miller writes, "the ethical moment, for de Man, occurs toward the end of [the] intricate sequence" of language's functioning, "as primary evidence of the text's inability to read itself"; and these glosses, which occur toward the endpoint of the

⁸⁹ Nouvet, "Pour une économie," 345.

⁹⁰ Cerquiglini-Toulet, "Fullness and Emptiness," 226.

Prison, certainly exemplify the *dit*'s "inability to read itself."⁹¹ More specifically, they stage how, "[i]t is a necessity to be in error or at the least confused...when I attempt to make language referential, and I *must* attempt to make it referential"; for Flos is precisely charged with making the inserted *dits* referential in the double sense of referring to Rose's story and to a world of ethics that theoretically transcends textuality.⁹² His glosses, then, are finally "'true' [only] in the special sense of being true to an implacable law of language, that is, the law of the failure to read, not truth or correspondence to some transcendent and universal Truth with a capital T."⁹³ The text's play on gender and sexual identity and their relation to poetics, therefore, appears as part of a more subtle queering, or critical exposure, of the normative mechanisms of ethical judgments and of the determinacy of meaning more generally.

This text's "inability to read itself" is, furthermore, grounded in a particular strategy central to the rhetoric of nearly all of Froissart's (and Machaut's) *dits*: the narrator's "inability to read himself." As Booth long ago observed, if a narrator is "discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed"⁹⁴; but despite the high stakes of narratorial unreliability, most critical accounts of Froissart's *dits* do surprisingly little to develop this possibility.⁹⁵ Such

⁹¹ Miller, *Ethics*, 45.

⁹² Miller, *Ethics*, 49-50. His emphasis.

⁹³ Miller, *Ethics*, 53. I am particularly taking issue with de Looze's argument that, "though intellectuals still paid lip service to what Judson Boyce Allen has called an 'ethical poetic,' they in fact wanted to avoid the hard ethical problems posed by the question of literature's relationship to the real world" ("From Text to Text and from Tale to Tale," 109-10). For a recent take on Froissart, the *dits*, and ethics, see Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment*.

⁹⁴ Booth, *Rhetoric*, 158.

⁹⁵ Kibler, for example, only mentions in passing that the narrator in each of Froissart's major courtly *dits* is "generally making a fool of himself," without exploring how this might alter the effect of the *dit*. Kibler, "*Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*: Froissart's Mid-Life Crisis," 64. For unreliability, not only of the narrator but also of the author, see Ch IV.

reluctance may stem from the common misconception that unreliability is not scientific or demonstrable.⁹⁶ Yet, according to Booth, there are two ways to demonstrate it: either the narrator does not conform to norms established by the text, which can be illustrated through close textual analysis; or the text to which s/he does conform asks the reader to accept norms that we cannot, which implies looking beyond the text. In the *Prison*, the narrator repeatedly showcases an inability to understand the significance of his language *within* the text, and thus does not conform to its norms. For example, before his interpellation by Rose, he discusses how a lover should attend as many *festes* as possible, so that his beloved will hear chatter about him:

Homs qui aime ou qui voelt amer
 Que son nom face reclaimer
 En lieux et en pays divers.
 Aultrement il use au revers,
 Car riens n'est deseure le nom
 De loenge et de bon renom.
 Non que par voie je le di
 De vantise, ains m'en escondi:
 Je ne le di fors par exemple,
 Ensi qu'offrande est mise au temple. (599-608)

If a man loves or desires to love, he should let his name resound loudly in many places and lands; otherwise, he is behaving unproductively, since nothing is above the name worthy of praise and well-reputed. Not that I say this by way of bragging, I must protest; rather, I just give this as an example, like an offering which is left at a temple.

This passage does not, however, function as an arbitrary offering left at some mythical temple. Instead, it announces both the importance of reputation, as Flos's *renom* is the reason Rose elects to correspond with him, as well as many discussions on the

⁹⁶ For somewhat different discussions of possible *raisons d'être* for the Machaldian protagonist, see Ch. I and especially, Ch. IV, in relation to the *Voir Dit*.

importance of the *nom*, or naming, such as the following, where Flos frets about choosing a pseudonym:

Car quel devise ne sçai prendre.
A prendre le nom d'un *oisel*,
D'une *beste* ou d'un arbissel,
Ce n'est point cose *qui se taille*.
Je me truis or en *grant bataille*
Pour une devise aviser... (859-64, my emphasis)

I don't know what emblem to take. To take the name of a bird or an animal or a shrub, that isn't a strong move. I find myself here in a great strife trying to come up with an emblem.

This second passage also assumes a significance that the narrator gives no indication of seeing. For tedious or infantile as his reflections might seem, they in fact announce some of the text's key terms: here, those of Rose's later *complainte*, where the king of *bestes* is saved by the greatest *oisel* after having lost a *grant bataille*. Furthermore, the idiomatic expression, "cose qui se taille," which can be rendered as "something really solid," represents the first use of the verb *tailler* in the text, with this verb later dominating the three nearly identical formulations that describe "the sculpture of the statue...the writing of the lay by the poet, [and] the prince's writing of his own lament," as Cerquiglini-Toulet observes.⁹⁷ Because there is no indication that the narrator sees any intradiegetic significance to his language, he is technically "unreliable," since the text invites us to see things he does not. He may even be contrasted with the figure of the "fiable messagier," who, though he has attracted little interest from scholars, is the second most present character in the *Prison*—and who, by virtue of the role he plays in this *dit* and others,

⁹⁷ Cerquiglini-Toulet, "Fullness and Emptiness," 235.

may suggest that the concept of (narratorial) *reliability* (fiabilité, modern French *fidélité*) hearkens back to medieval literature.⁹⁸

But if the text allegorizes nothing but the insufficiency of allegoresis, and if we can't trust the narrator, what is left for us to do? De Man's and Miller's concept of "reading's inability to read itself" should not be confused as a call *not* to read; instead, it "imposes on the reader the 'impossible' task of reading unreability": of articulating *how* the text does not "read itself," and what is at stake, both in rhetorical and ethical terms, in such "unreadability."⁹⁹ I propose, then, to read through the several inserted pieces in the *dit*, highlighting their metaleptic involution and the ethico-political ramifications of this rhetorical gesture.

In the first inserted *dit*, Pynoteüs's lover Neptisphelé is devoured by a lion; he then constructs a statue that models her original form, into which Apollo breathes life. As has been widely observed, Pynoteüs's artistry closely echoes the creation of the myth itself; the statue is a "mixture" of different materials, whereas the story, which Flos falsely attributes to Ovid, in fact represents the "mixture" of the myths of Pyramus, Orpheus, and Pygmalion.¹⁰⁰ The metaleptic overlap between the *inventio* of the story and that of the statue is wonderfully dramatized when a re-created Neptisphelé encounters her father: Pynoteüs

Ne onques meruelles n'en eut
Qu'il ne le tenist pour sa fille
(Et a pere ossi le tint cille)
Et si amic et sa serour.
Chi n'a mençongne ne erreur,

⁹⁸ Evelyn Vitz is, I think, incorrect when she asserts that, "I assume the medieval narrator to be reliable; the 'unreliable' narrator is, I think, well in the future" (*Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology*, 216).

⁹⁹ Miller, *Ethics*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ See de Looze, "From Text to Text," 95-96, and Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 281-93.

Car pour otel je le vous livre
 Qu'Ovides le met en son livre,
 Qui fu sages et grans assés,
 Et croi qu'il n'euïst ja passés
 Tels recors ne mis en memore
 Se vraie ne tenist l'ystore... (1985-95)

did not at all marvel that he believed her to be his daughter (and she his father, too), and her friends and sister believed it too. Here there is no lie or error; for I am delivering it to you right as Ovid puts it in his book—Ovid who was wise and very grand, and I do believe that he wouldn't have committed such a story to posterity if he didn't believe the story to be true.

This is metaleptic, because the text invites us to see an interrelation between a daughter who is not authentic but is taken as such, and a story that is not authentic either, though perhaps able to pass. The act of narration therefore performs the metaleptic transformation it describes; or, metalepsis performs metalepsis. But this synchronicity does not promise an “entrance into legibility,” or that language harnesses its own power in the name of determinacy or stability.¹⁰¹ Rather, within the myth, Pynoteüs offers a telling example of not grasping the signification of one's language, when he recounts to Apollo the story of the god's son Phaeton,

qui tant fu gens tousiaus,
 Qui, sans solers et sans housiaus,
 Emprist a gouverner ton kar,
 Et les chevaus a mener, kar
 Esprouver volt se c'ert tes fis. (1768-72)

who was such a strapping lad that, without shoes or leggings, he took it upon himself to steer your chariot and to direct the horses; for he wanted to test if he were your child.

Phaeton's questioning of Apollo's paternity recalls the *mise en cause* of both the resurrected Neptisphele's “true” paternity and that of the myth itself; the “orison” therefore repeats a crucial question from the surrounding narrative. Yet, because

¹⁰¹ Edelman, *No Future*, 105.

Phaeton's questioning of Apollo's paternity leads to his shame, it is hardly clear why Pynoteüs should wish to tell a story about things spinning out of control. Does this forebode something backfiring in his re-created Neptisphelé—or even in the larger myth? Just as Phaeton is unable to foresee the consequences of his language, so too does Pynoteüs evidence an inability to read the implications of his own “orison.”

Later in the text, Rose's lady requests a gloss of the *exemplum* of Phaeton; I will return to it when discussing the *dit*'s conclusion. First, I wish to develop how the tactic of playing on key terms “in unanticipated ways” that “resist calculation” not only characterizes the means by which Phaeton's episode interacts with the narrative of the myth, but also the means by which the larger myth relates to the surrounding *dit*. Critics generally understand the myth as Flos's and/or Froissart's dramatization of the power of art (metaleptically) to create life, along the lines of Machaut's ostensible depiction of what the poet can offer the patron in the *Fontaine amoureuse*.¹⁰² Indeed, there are important—and queer—similarities between Pynoteüs's story and Flos's, notably insofar as “the crafted object replaces the ‘real’ woman,” as de Looze remarks.¹⁰³ Yet Pynoteüs's desire also significantly contrasts with that of Flos, and therefore cannot simply allegorize it. Whereas Pynoteüs cannot forget Neptisphelé—“Or ne puis je estouper l'oreille/Que la belle mette en oubli” (now I cannot block out my ears so that I forget the beauty; 1673-74)—Flos describes his interactions with Rose as an “oubli” sent to him by Amors (662). Pynoteüs is therefore driven to metalepsis by a heterosexual desire that Flos does not seem to share, but rather to flee. This crucial difference is particularly evident

¹⁰² See, Lechat, *Dire par fiction*, 276-77 for the relation of this text to the *Fontaine amoureuse*; 281ff for “l'art de la contrefaçon.”

¹⁰³ De Looze, “From Text to Text,” 101.

when Pynoteüs worries that, should he not recreate his lover, his epithet would read as follows:

Chils poëtes, qui tant fu sages
Et qui cognoissoit les usages
Des herbes et des medecines,
Des bois, des pieres, des racines,
Et qui savoit, sans lui marir,
Autrui consellier et garir,
Ne s'est sceüs garir lui mismes,
Ains baise les bors des abismes. (1658-65)

This poet, who was so wise and who knew the potential uses of herbs, medicines, wood, stones, roots, and who knew, without hurting them, how to counsel others and heal them, wasn't able to heal himself, and thus he teeters on the edge of destruction.

The irony is that Flos may be described in precisely these terms; he has no success with his own lady, and while he can “autrui consellier et garir,” he cannot “se garir lui mismes.” Pynoteüs's myth therefore repeats key concepts from the larger *dit*, namely the power of language to create (illusions of) life; yet the connection between these stories remains problematic, “resist[ing] hermeneutic determination.”¹⁰⁴ Ironically, the very staging of the poet's power simultaneously showcases the limits of his power to make something either he or the reader is capable of recognizing or ascribing with significance. Paradoxically, we can't recognize the perfectly recognizable Neptisphelé's significance for the larger *dit*.

Twice in the text, Rose blames (“encoup[e]” [VII.113, VIII.149]) Flos's story of Pynoteüs for prompting his dream-vision; and the connections between this later dream-vision and Pynoteüs's story furnish another telling illustration of how the text queers its own terms. For Anthime Fourier, “il existe...un parallélisme étroit entre le ‘dittié’

¹⁰⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 135.

mythologique de Flos-Froissart et le songe allégorique de son correspondant.”¹⁰⁵ Yet Fourier’s contention, which has since been echoed by other critics,¹⁰⁶ relies on minimal evidence: both Flos’s and Rose’s narratives “aboutissent à une analyse du comportement amoureux par un examen de ses rouages,” and, “de même que...Flos avait...emboîté la mythologie grâce à l’*orison de Pynoteüs*...de même Rose emboîte dans le songe une *complainte de moralité*.”¹⁰⁷ It is insufficient evidence for the “parallelism” of these narratives that they are both glossed as being about love; what narratives couldn’t be, especially given that the glosses can be arbitrary? The second contention merits further scrutiny, because the “orison” and the “complainte” do occupy structurally similar positions in each metadiegetic segment, coming toward the end and prompting the resolution of each. Yet the dream’s “complainte” is remarkable for how it takes the terms of Flos’s *dit* and re-ascribes their signification in unexpected ways. Whereas in Flos’s *dit*, the lion is the great culprit, devouring Neptisphelé and then denounced and devoured by the animal court, in Rose’s “complainte,” “[f]iguré sus le bestiaire” (figured as bestiary; 3157), the lover compares himself to a lion presiding over the court:

Et li lyons si s’asagist:
 De sa nature
 Ne congnissoit, quant on le mist
 En le prison ou il gemist...
 Oés bestes qui sui vos rois:
 Pour deffendre et garder les trois
 Vertus, ensi qu’ensengne drois,
 M’a mis Fortune
 Arriere de moult d’esbanois... (3012-5, 3042-6)

And the lion thus takes stock of his situation: they didn’t know much of his nature, when they put him in the prison where he languishes. Listen, animals, to I

¹⁰⁵ Fourier, *Le Courant*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ See for example Keith Busby, “Froissart’s Poetic Prison,” 93.

¹⁰⁷ Fourier, *Le Courant*, 20.

who am your king: in order to defend and preserve the three virtues, as fairness instructs us to, Fortune deprived me of many pleasures.

Not only, in fact, is the signification of the lion and his court flipped, but the very means by which this lion will be rescued also curiously recall Pynoteüs's story. While in the *complainte*, the lion is saved by an eagle who is "Jettans feu et flamme a tous les" (shooting fire and flames in every direction; 3359), in Pynoteüs's "orison" fire is also falling from the sky: when Phaeton loses control of the chariot, "tel calour rendi li kars/Que li pays y fu tous ars..." (such a heat came from the chariot that the country was completely burned; 1872-73). But why does the "good" become "bad," and *vice versa*, from one inserted piece to the next? The text offers no explanation; instead, the "resignifiability of highly invested terms" functions queerly and metaleptically, because it is irreducible to any clear causal or conceptual relation between the two instances.

Finally, the *Prison*'s queer poetics are not limited to the inserted pieces, since the same mechanisms by which terms elusively recur describe the poetics of the larger *dit*. In an oft-commented scene, Flos is attacked by a group of women, including his lady, who wish to know what is inside the bag he wears:

La fui je boutés et saciés
Et detirés et embraciés
Par jambes, par corps et par bras
Sans noient espargnier mes draps. (1133-36)

I was hit, pulled at, tugged on and seized, by legs, body, and arms, without my clothing being spared at all.

Critics have offered various readings of the scene's significance: from de Looze's notion that it symbolizes the poet's castration, to Deborah McGrady's "appreciation of the light-

hearted tone and erotic suggestiveness of the romp.”¹⁰⁸ The difficulty of reading the scene is even figured within it, when Flos, having agreed to let the ladies copy Rose’s ballade and virelay if they can detach them from his letters, asks, “La quele en sçet mieulz la maniere/De prendre sans grever la lettre?” (who knows how best the manner to separate them without damaging the letter?; 1172-73). As critics, it is difficult to *gloser la lettre sans grever la lettre*, because the terms of this scene will recur in curious ways later in the text. Flos will refer to his task of organizing the exchanged letters and lyrics into a *livret* as follows:

Or en y a de pluseurs tires,
Et de rompues et d’entires,
Dont c’est grant painne au rajouster.
Mes quoi qu’il me doie couster,
S’Amours m’i aye et avance,
J’en isterai bien sans *grevance*. (3772-77)

There are many kinds (of writings), both torn and entire, which it is very hard to bring back together. But whatever it should cost me, if Love helps and supports me, I’ll make it through without much trouble.

The hackneyed disorder of the text, then, is prefigured by the ladies’ tearing Flos’s clothing: but why would Flos’s clothing embody the brokenness of the larger text? The metalepsis is functioning performatively here, since the critic cannot sew back together these two images each representing that which is torn apart. Furthermore, when the ladies make copies of the inserted lyrics, it also announces how Rose’s lady will later make a copy of their correspondence: as Rose writes to Flos, “elle le mes acorda dou rendre, mes que la copie l’en demorast; et je li respondi que elle en fesist a sa volenté” (she agreed to give them back to me, as long as she could keep a copy, and I told her to do as she

¹⁰⁸ See de Looze, “From Text to Text,” 93-94. The citation is from Brooke Heidenreich Findley’s characterization of Deborah McGrady’s argument, “Deadly Words, Captive Imaginations,” 9. See McGrady, *Controlling Readers*, 180-82 for her reading of this scene.

pleased; XI.148). This later scene is a copy of the earlier scene of making copies. Yet this doesn't add up: Flos never told Rose about his earlier adventure, and are we to understand that this frivolous "romp" somehow causes the later scene, which is crucial to the composition of the book, insofar as it prompts Rose's lady's request that Flos compile it? The uneasy juxtaposition between the earlier scene and the later one brings to the fore the ironic question: what is being copied amongst these scenes of copying?

The *dit* concludes shortly following Flos's Letter XII, which furnishes a wonderful example of how it performs subversively and queerly by "embrac[ing]" the "resist[ance] to hermeneutic determination." The letter is a response to Rose's lady's demand that Flos gloss the Phaeton episode: as Rose writes,

il li samble que li exposition de mon songe ne fet nulle mention de Phebus, de Pheton, ne de la grant poëtrie qui dedens est contenue. Si dist ensi que une comparison, de vous fete et figuree sus ceste matere, seroit bien seant, et est de necessité, che dist elle, que elle y soit. (XI.168)

it seems to her that the explanation of my dream makes no mention of Phoebus, of Phaeton, nor of the great poetry contained in that episode. So she says that a comparison, executed by you and based on this material, would therefore be quite fitting, and it is very necessary, so she says, that it be made.

This notion that Flos's gloss is "de necessité" corresponds to de Man's contention that it is necessary to attempt to make language referential. In his response, Flos excuses himself for having neglected to gloss Phaeton's episode:

Et de che que je le passai si legierement, se m'en aiiés, et je vous en pri, pour escusé, car il ne me puet pas de toutes coses souvenir, quant on a le corage espars en pluseurs pensees et a che jour j'avoie grant dolour ou chief, qui m'estoit prise de trip villier, de quoi, pour le travel, je m'en delaiai. (XII.172)

And that I passed over it so quickly, please, I beg of you, excuse me, because I can hardly remember everything, when I have my thoughts in so many different places; and that day, I had a really bad headache, which results from sleeping poorly, on account of which, for the stress, I delayed explanation.

Froissart probably didn't just "have a headache" one day; instead, the text is granting the privileged, concluding position to Phaeton. Something seems to link Phaeton to the larger *dit*, a notion that is all the more probable given that they are both cloaked in the same garment: Phaeton is dressed "d'un abit de kamoukas" (in a satin-like silk garment; 1814), the *livret* is "[e]nvelopé de kamoukas" (enclosed in satin-like silk; 2222). In this citation, we also begin to sense metaleptic intertwinement between Flos and Phaeton: Phaeton attempts to control horses "qui s'epardirent" (who are breaking away; 1874), while Flos declines to gloss the story because he had "le corage espars." Both also suffer from extreme *travel*: "De painne et de travel tous sue" (from pain and effort he sweats much; 1838), Flos has said of Phaeton. In fact, Flos's final gloss comes to *perform* Phaeton's story, which is to say that it performs uncontrollability. Flos describes how Phaeton

y ataille .iiii. chevaus, dont le premier je figure a Jonece, le secont a Lie Pensee, le tierch a Wiseuse, le quart a Fole Emprise, et chils est li limonniers sus le quel il monte, aprestés et encoragiés de conduire et de mener le kar par tout. (XII.173)

harnesses four horses. The first, according to me, figures Youth, the second Happy-Thought, the third Futility, the fourth Imprudent-Task, and this one is the shaft horse he gets on, ready and feeling encouraged to drive and guide the chariot everywhere.

These personifications are rather arbitrary; nothing in Phaeton's story would suggest that the horses must be named Youth, Happy-Thought, Futility, and Imprudent-Task. The gloss fails to work referentially, unable to offer clear exposition of how Phaeton's story relates either to Rose's predicament or to an ethical message. Instead, it functions performatively and metaleptically; for there is a sense that Flos, though ostensibly desirous to provide stable meaning, instead guarantees disorder, in a manner akin to how Phaeton cannot control Apollo's chariot. The horses

si l'emportent et demainnent a leur agree et l'esprendent et enflamment si en cel estat qu'il pert la voie de Raison, ensi que li amans fort enamourés, epris et enflamés des brandons amoureux, pert souvent maniere, avis et contenance, et oublie au ferir et au cachier les chevaux de l'escorgie d'Atemprance, mes chemine tous jours avant, sans rieule et sans mesure, car li cheval le mestrient, mes il ne les puet mestrier... (XII.174)

thus overcome him and lead him about at their pleasure and seize and overtake him such that he loses the guidance of Reason—like the lover, much in love, overcome, burning with amorous branding, often loses composure, prudence, and stable countenance, forgetting to strike and pursue the horses with the Whip of Moderation, but rather always heading ahead without rule or measure, without control; for the horses dominate him and he cannot dominate them...

The beauty of these lines is that Flos “pert la voie de raison.” Caught up, as the very long sentences suggest, in his own enthusiasm, he “perd...maniere, avis et contenance”; for nothing suggests that this gloss which asserts the importance of “the whip of Moderation” demonstrates any. Instead, the language “chemine tous jours avant, sans rieule et sans mesure.” When Flos attempts to fix meaning, he does no better than Phaeton: “il ne les puet mestrier.” This irony is crucial and queer: the gloss works precisely because it doesn’t work. Or, it only works metaleptically, with the *énonciation* performing the *énoncé*’s disorder. The only order of the text, then, is that of disorder. And the brilliance of the *Prison amoureuse* is that, rather than being stated as such, such uncontrollability is performed by queer poetics, which both expose the text’s “inability to read itself” and challenge our ability to “read it” by making it conform to any standard of normative or determinate rhetorical or ethical signification.

IV.

Early on in the *Prison*, Flos decides to write a virelay for his lady that will be,

Si entendable et si commun
Qu’elle pora bien percevoir

Se c'est a faute ou s'est a voir
Que merancolie me touche. (530-33)

So comprehensible and self-evident that she will be able easily to tell if it is true or not that melancholy is taking hold of me.

But how “entendable” and “commun” is Froissart’s *dit*, or metalepsis more generally, in any of the texts we have looked at in this chapter? For Sylvia Huot, “vernacular literature has always allowed for a certain element of audience interaction with the text.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, patiently articulating the metaleptic overlap between narrative levels and its subsequent “unreadability” seems to be asking quite a lot of the audience. This raises two questions: the one, why should we be invested in putting in the work if we will not reap any tangible benefits—if, in fact, rather than positive knowledge, we only arrive at the deconstruction of this possibility? And the other, is it reasonable to argue that a medieval audience would have been attuned to the extremely complex metalepses that I present in this chapter?

I will only sketch a cursory response to the first question here, because the final chapter examines it in more detail. Some twenty-five years ago, Booth proposed to understand literature as “the company we keep”: to consider texts as *friends* who ideally offer us something “too valuable to be reduced to either the *utile* or the *dulce*.”¹¹⁰ Booth then reasons that the modern—and distinctly unmedieval—lack of interest in, and theorizing of, *amicitia* serves as a crucial impediment to our understanding of literary texts as friends. I would suggest that the texts studied in this chapter admit the sense of subjective interactions between *narrataire* and *narrateur* that Booth theorizes, while also

¹⁰⁹ Huot, “The Daisy and the Laurel,” 242-43.

¹¹⁰ Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 174-79.

making another crucial move: to invite us to conceive of our friendship with these texts not in platonic, but rather in erotic, terms. To take the example of Froissart's *dit*, it only works if the reader enters into a loving relationship with it, along the lines of the text's conception of *amor*: Flos says of his lady, "Une heure en pais et l'autre en doubte/C'est bien drois que je le redoubte" (One moment in peace the other in doubt: it is quite justified if I fear her; 29-30). The desire to explore metalepsis seems to me, that is, necessarily to implicate what Edelman describes as the unstoppable and obsessional drives of sexuality, since we are drawn to the narrator (as he is drawn to his characters, and as characters are drawn to each other), even if this is without any promise of stability or meaningfulness in the end. Glossing Rose's dream, Flos writes, "Par la quele guerre et bataille j'entens la vie amoureuse de vous et de vostre dame, les prieres, les responses, les refus et les escondis" (by which war and battle I mean the love-story between you and your lady, the demands, the responses, the refusals and dismissals; IX). Each text that we have analyzed in this chapter conceives of love as an uphill and uncertain battle to which the characters, and by extension, the narrator, are committed. It is a similar commitment brought by us, *au second degré*, to the narrator's interactions with his text which would drive our interest in metalepsis, even if it finally amounts to the "refus" and "escondis" of clearcut meaning or positive knowledge—even, that is, if we don't come out on top. Perhaps, then, it is the artificial divorce between rhetoric and sexuality as it may be construed by the modern critic that blunts the transgressive pleasure of, and attraction to, metalepsis; and Chapter IV, looking at Chrétien and Machaut, will extensively query this divorce, arguing that "meta-poetic" elements of medieval narratives are frequently related

to emanations of transgressive sexuality, which might explain much of their seductive appeal to readers.

This brings me to the second possible objection; for if one accepts that metalepsis partakes of “the rhetoric of fiction” of verse romances and the *dits*, and that this has ethical repercussions that we can justifiably call queer/subversive, would medieval audiences have picked up on this, and does this matter?

Of course it matters. An ethical engagement is only meaningful if recognized, felt, and registered, as so many medieval prologues stress: for Calogrenant, in *Yvain*, “parole oïe est perdue/S’ele n’est de cuer entendue” (words heard are lost if the heart doesn’t grasp them; 151-52). Late in the *Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth poses a pertinent ethical question: “What do we say of a work which is ‘bracing’ [an ethical warning] to a very few, perhaps only one, but harmful to many?”¹¹¹ I cannot prove that large swaths of medieval audiences would have felt the queerness of metalepsis except tautologically, by illustrating how metalepsis repeatedly functions queerly in many verse romances and *dits*. But, I think, this should be enough; for if close inspection of narratorial interventions across a wide array of texts—a wider one than we have analyzed in this chapter, since the other chapters will also explore instances of metalepsis—routinely showcases metalepsis *à l’oeuvre*, it seems unfeasible that this is an accidental feature of the “rhetoric of fiction” in either genre. Perhaps, that is, Froissart had a headache that day, Heldris really did just want to turn a quick buck, or *Partonopeu*’s author absolutely despised *vilains*. Maybe Renaud de Beaujeu thought his ultimatum would work with his lady. Yet, if these intrusions all seem to have richly suggestive relations to the texts in which they occur, to

¹¹¹ Booth, *Rhetoric*, 386.

argue that metalepsis is fortuitous seems to me the equivalent of arguing that lightning keeps miraculously striking in the same place.

The question remains as to *why* metalepsis may often escape notice by modern critics—to why we may be less on the look-out for it than a medieval public. Both the preceding chapter and the next one offer ways of helping to explain why a modern audience might have particular difficulty sniffing out metalepsis. In the preceding chapter, I highlighted the limitations of modern, “postromantic” (for de Man) conceptions of subjectivity when applied to these texts. No doubt our overwhelming epistemological association of the narratorial *je* with the “introspective” subject inclines us to understand his/her intrusions as expressive; and were the notion of the “introspective” subject less prominent, then there would be less to distract an audience from seeing the narratorial *je* as part of the textual performance—as *there* because of the text, rather than the other way around.¹¹² Similarly, in the following chapter, we will look at the relationship of lyrics to these narratives; and if the medieval lyric *je* is by all accounts a performative creation—that is, not necessarily implicated in the love story he recounts, but constructing this fiction as part of a literary performance—there is little reason to think that the narratorial *je* would be defined by a “real” interiority or sincerity of beliefs. Modern criticism may, in other words, have long succeeded in “de-individuating” the medieval lyric *je*, without having succeeded to the same extent with the narrative one.

In any case, studying metalepsis pushes us to understand the narratorial/authorial *je* first and foremost as textual performance. In the poststructuralist world, this might be something we think we already know and do. In this chapter, however, I have attempted

¹¹² For querying modern assumptions about the narratorial *je*, see also Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*.

to demonstrate that we can push much further in exploring the “performativity” of narratorial rhetoric—and that doing so helps draw out the rhetorico-poetic and ethico-poetical indeterminacy at the heart of verse romances and *dits*.

3. **Queering Lyric Insertion in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose* (1208-10), Jakemés's *Roman du Châtelain de Couci et de la Dame de Fayel* (1285-1300?), and Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère* (1290-1328)**¹

Roughly two decades ago, scholars began to argue that the prologue to Chrétien's *Charrete* is perhaps deliberately ambiguous.² A very similar ambiguity characterizes the prologue to Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*, frequently referred to as *Guillaume de Dole* so as to avoid confusion with Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's text:

Cil qui mist cest conte en romans,
ou il a fet noter biaux chans
por ramenbrance des chançons,
veut que ses pris et ses renons
5 voist en Raincien en Champaigne
et que li biaux Miles l'apregne
de Nantuel, uns des preus del regne;
car aussi com l'en met la graine
es dras pour avoir los et pris,
10 einsi a il chans et sons mis
en cestui *Romans de la Rose*,
qui est une novele chose
et s'est des autres si divers
et brodez, par lieus, de biaux vers
15 que vilains nel porroit savoir.
Ce sachiez de fi et de voir,
bien a cist les autres passez.
Ja nuls n'iert de l'oïr lassez,
car, s'en vieult, l'en i chante et lit,
20 et s'est fez par si grant delit
que tuit cil s'en esjoïront

¹ For the dating of each text, I have adopted the dates given by the editors of the modern editions from which I cite. The question of dating has been most controversial in terms of Renart's text, where scholars have debated whether or not it pre-dates Guillaume de Lorris's *Rose*. This question has no bearing on my argument, but I would add that it is a seductive but unverifiable hypothesis that Renart's challenge to the viability of the logic of anteriority also prompted him to render the sequence of the two *Roses* deliberately ambiguous. For a brief summary of the possible dates of the romance, see Jean Dufournet's introduction, in Jean Renart, *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, 11-13. Parts of this chapter were presented in February, 2015 at the Medieval French Seminar at the University of Cambridge.

² See Bruckner, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*," 137.

qui chanter et lire l'orront,
 qu'il lor sora noviaus toz jors.
 Il conte d'armes et d'amors
 25 et chante d'ambedeus ensamble,
 s'est avis a chascun et samble
 que cil qui a fet le romans
 qu'il trovast toz les moz des chans,
 si afierent a ceuls del conte.
 30 Si commencē ici son conte.³

He who has made this tale into a romance (or, who put it into the vernacular), where he has included the music of beautiful songs so that the lyrics may be remembered, wishes that his glory and reputation make it to Reims in Champagne, and that the handsome Miles of Nanteuil learns it, one of the most worthy of the kingdom; for just as one puts red dye on clothing so that it may merit more praise and value, so too has he put songs and music in this *Romance of the Rose*, which is a new work, and is thus much different from any other, and embroidered, at instances, with such beautiful lyrics that no knave could know them. Know this by faith and in truth: no one will grow tired of hearing this (work), since, if one wishes, one can sing and read here, and it is made with such great mirth that all will enjoy it who will hear it sung and read it; it will always seem new (fresh) to all. It tells of arms and love and sings of both together, and it is even the impression of all that he who made the romance composed the words of the songs, so well fitted are they to the tale. Here he begins his tale.

For Ardis Butterfield, Renart here chooses to “promot[e] his poetic method and medium rather than the story to follow.”⁴ This apparent predilection has, as Ben Ramm observes, “given rise to a critical tradition dealing largely with this hybrid form, often at the expense of investigating nuances of the romance’s thematic content...”⁵

Yet, as with the *Charrete*, close reading demonstrates that this prologue is in fact subtly imbricated in the ensuing *conte*; and while various critics have observed some connections between the prologue and the ensuing tale, I wish both to develop

³ See n1 for the bibliographic information for the text. Hereafter cited in text by verse number.

⁴ Ardis Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France*, 19.

⁵ Ben Ramm, “A Rose by Any Other Name?” 402.

them and to examine their implications for the meta-poetic content. The “red dye” will reappear four times in the story: in the introductory sequence, “Une dame s’est avanciee/vestue d’une cote en graine” (A Lady stepped forward, wearing a red coat; 511-12).⁶ The importance of the color red to the romance would, moreover, be impossible to overstate, since “[d]e la rose de Liënor, rien d’autre n’est dit que sa couleur,” as Michel Zink writes.⁷ The embroidery metaphor announces the sequence in which Liënors and her mother embroider while singing *chansons de toile*, as various critics have observed.⁸ More specifically, the adjective “brodez” (embroidered) will reappear twice to describe one of Liënors’s most curious creations: the embroidery she tricks the Seneschal into wearing, which is blotted red by his blood (4293, 4826). And just as this romance “a...les autres passez,” so too does Liënors surpass all others within it, with Nicole saying of her, “Aussi passe, ce m’est avis/de beauté bele Liënors/totes les autres” (So the beautiful Liënors surpasses, it seems to me, in beauty all other women; 1417-20). We may even describe Liënors as a *novele chose*; for Conrad only falls in love with her through *noveles* (reports), and her susceptibility to *noveles* is particularly apparent when Conrad refers to the Seneschal’s lie as the “novele/de sa perte et de son damage...” (the news of her loss [of virginity] and maiming; 3606-7). Liënors’s actions in the concluding sequence serve, furthermore, to make her “new once again” (“nouviaus toz jors”), since she reinstates her virginity by refuting the Seneschal’s accusations. The expression “conte d’armes et d’amors” also repeatedly punctuates the romance:

⁶ For the recurrences of “grain,” see Caroline Jewers, “Fabric and Fabrication,” 916.

⁷ Michel Zink, *Roman rouge et roman rose*, 70.

⁸ Caroline Jewers, “Fabric and Fabrication,” 911 n7; and Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 85-87; Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “Les citations lyriques dans le *Roman de la Rose*.”

Jougllet, for example, says to Guillaume, “Ne contez pas vostre lignage/mes parlez d’armes et d’amors” (Don’t recount your lineage, but speak about arms and love; 1644-45). Finally, Conrad explicitly evokes the fitting of songs to his own circumstances within the narrative when he says of one by the Vidame de Chartres, “a droiture/fu ciz vers fet por moi sanz doute” (certainly, this verse written for me, beyond any doubt; 4141-42).⁹

Not only, then, does the prologue boast that the romance fits songs to new narrative contexts, but the prologue itself is fitted to the ensuing romance by virtue of its many connections to it. Aristotle defines opposites as statements which “affirm and deny the same thing of the same thing.”¹⁰ Renart’s prologue seems to invite opposite readings, because it both implies the priority of lyric insertion over the romance’s content and deconstructs this overly neat opposition. These seemingly opposing readings nonetheless strangely converge, insofar as both foreground the motif of displacement. The prologue first tells of the physical displacement of the romance’s reputation to Reims. It then relies on metaphors, figures of linguistic displacement, to describe the displacement of lyrics into the romance. And taken as a whole, the prologue functions both to displace emphasis away from the ensuing *conte* and as the displacement of the romance’s very terms.

By emphasizing displacements, the prologue functions rhetorically, in the sense that de Man gives to rhetoric.¹¹ For de Man, “All rhetorical structures, whether

⁹ See Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 33.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, 27. For her excellent introduction to Aristotelian theories of contradiction, see Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 12-16.

¹¹ See the introduction for extended discussion of de Manian rhetoricity.

we call them metaphor, metonymy...or whatever, are based on substitutive reversals.”¹² But de Man does not restrict his conception of rhetoric to tropes, because, for him, the trope “is not a derived, marginal or aberrant form of language but the linguistic paradigm par excellence.”¹³ Language, he argues, always functions rhetorically, by constructing a smokescreen of displacements that masks an inability to carry stable or univocal meaning. Rhetoric, as we saw in the introduction, figures this inability to assert meaning that stays still or where it should: as he writes, “Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration.”¹⁴

Renart’s prologue is rhetorical because it dramatizes linguistic aberrance, the displacement of meaning. In so doing, it also showcases what de Man calls the “sizable stakes” of rhetoricity; for the prologue upsets the binary oppositions of inside and outside and before and after which it initially seems to affirm.¹⁵ Like in the *Charrete*’s prologue, we cannot identify how “inside” or “outside” to the ensuing romance we are, or which, the *conte* or the prologue, comes semantically “before” the other. Meaning instead lies in recognizing our inability to disentangle such neat oppositions. In fact, this is not entirely dissimilar to what the prologue says about lyric insertion, when it asserts that we will struggle to disentangle the

¹² De Man, *Allegories*, 113.

¹³ De Man, *Allegories*, 105.

¹⁴ De Man, *Allegories*, 10. In a more medieval register, de Manian rhetoric runs the risk of being considered “sophistical,” in the sense of “having ‘no care at all for facts,’” to quote Sarah Kay’s reading of John of Salisbury (*Courtly Contradictions*, 19). De Man’s concept of rhetoricity stands in opposition to John’s notion that, “if it is to fecundate the soul to bear the fruits of philosophy, logic must conceive from an external source,” because de Man precisely denies the existence of an “external source” (in *Courtly Contradictions*, 17). Unlike John, however, de Man makes no claim to being logical—*au contraire*.

¹⁵ De Man, *Allegories*, 15.

original songs from their new contexts; indeed, we do have trouble disentangling metapoetic rhetoric from the terms of *conte*.

In this chapter, I will argue that the practice of lyric insertion is rhetorical in this de Manian sense: that lyric insertion deconstructs the binary oppositions on which it initially seems to rely, such as those between lyric and narrative, orality and literacy, synchronicity and diachronicity, inside and outside, before and after, to name just several of the most prominent oppositions that this thirteenth- and fourteenth-century phenomenon has evoked for critics.¹⁶ Understanding lyric insertion as rhetorical reflects my hesitation toward the striking binarism underpinning critical accounts of the phenomenon.¹⁷ Certainly, some critics have recognized that lyric insertion can have the effect of challenging the steadfastness of certain binary oppositions.¹⁸ I nonetheless find that the breadth and force of lyric insertion's challenge to normative conceptions of order can be carried further. I should also distinguish my notion of the rhetoricity of lyric insertion from Maureen Boulton's argument that "the lyric insertion device extended the contemporary rhetorical repertoire in a manner wholly compatible with the principles of traditional

¹⁶ Indeed, whether one turns to Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet's opposition of *collage* to *montage*, Huot's contrast between song and book and the concomitant opposition of orality to literacy, or Taylor's distinction, picked up by Boulton, between code and message, the binarism is remarkable. See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin Si Soutil*, 24-32; Huot, *From Song to Book*; Boulton, *The Song in the Story*; Jane H.M. Taylor, "The Lyric Insertion: Towards a Functional Model."

¹⁷ To the possible objection that some of these schemas are beginning to feel dated, I would respond that they are still the models routinely discussed when studying lyric insertion. See, for example, Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, 155-60.

¹⁸ Kay and Armstrong, for example, write that, "lyric insertion is not only extremely diverse but also intimately bound up with formal instability, the interrogation of genre, and the problematization of binary distinctions such as lyric/narrative, song/speech, and oral/written" (Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, 155).

rhetoric.”¹⁹ While Boulton conceives of rhetoric in terms of decorum, and thus as consolidating social and even semantic order, I instead see rhetoric as fermenting disorder, the figure for a dangerous minefield of paradoxes—as, for example, it may be said to function in Alain de Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*.²⁰

In Alain’s text (as we saw in the introduction), rhetoric seems to have both linguistic and sexual implications, which brings me to the second component of my argument: that lyric insertion’s rhetoricity becomes queer, because these texts take the deviant rhetoricity they emphasize in the lyrics and place it at the heart of the depictions of sexuality in the narratives. Indeed, I shall demonstrate that it is not coincidental that the romance that boasts the invention of lyric insertion is also, as Ramm demonstrates, extremely queer; for the challenge to binary thinking characteristic of lyric insertion’s rhetoricity contributes to a subversive indictment of normative sexuality’s binarism, thereby raising the ethico-political stakes of what would otherwise seem a purely metaliterary matter. I will suggest that the association between lyric insertion and queerness is, in fact, so strong that we cannot know which comes first. We cannot, that is, know whether lyric insertion motivates the larger queerness of the surrounding narratives or whether this queerness inspired the technique of lyric insertion. We can, however, observe that such questions imply recourse to the very logic of anteriority that both de Manian rhetoricity and queer theory aim to challenge.

This chapter queers the rhetoric of lyric insertion in three texts: Renart’s *Rose*,

¹⁹ Boulton, *Song in the Story*, 13.

²⁰ See the Introduction for discussion of rhetoric in Alain. I also note that there is nothing particularly unusual about Boulton’s conception of rhetoric; rather, it is in line with Kelly’s foundational *The Art of Medieval Romance*.

Jakemés's *Roman du Châtelain de Coucy*, and Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère*. While the importance of Renart's romance to the history of lyric insertion is clear, the choice of the other texts requires some explanation. I have chosen them for three principal reasons. First, because each has been tagged as a "transitional" text in a historical narrative of lyric insertion that moves from Renart through to Machaut, and this transitional quality renders them particularly useful in questioning the binaries critics have used to describe the phenomenon.²¹ Second, as we shall see, their common obsession with one *trouvère* lends itself particularly well to queer readings; the *Châtelain* and the *Panthère* are very complementary in this regard. Third, I will argue not only that these texts challenge the criteria of difference between lyrics and narrative, but also that their juxtaposition serves to challenge the criteria routinely employed to oppose verse romances and the *dits*; for this reason, it is helpful to study two (probably) roughly contemporaneous texts.

As it regards each text, I will follow a similar itinerary. I first argue that rather than merely citing the lyrics, each narrative actively engages with them.²² To describe how the narratives engage with the lyrics' rhetoricity, I read the process of lyric insertion, rather than the lyrics themselves, alongside Roger Dragonetti's classic study of *trouvère* lyrics.²³ I turn to Dragonetti because, like de Man, he

²¹ Boulton, Butterfield, and Huot—the three to give broad, over-arching surveys of the history of lyric insertion—each tag both the *Châtelain* and the *Panthère* as transitional.

²² For the concept of turning, I am principally drawing, as we shall see, on Derrida's description of de-construction as turning texts in the sense in which they are already turning. Judith Peraino also draws heavily on this term in her *Giving Voice to Love*; see especially 33-36.

²³ Roger Dragonetti, *La Technique poétique*. I am principally emphasizing Dragonetti, rather than the other structuralists—Zumthor and Guette—for two reasons: the one, because Dragonetti is uniquely focused on *trouvère*, rather than troubadour, lyrics; the other, because in his career, he took a *turn* to the sort of eminently suspicious investigations of narrative like those practiced in

situates both the subject and the object of literature within language itself; both he and de Man refuse the possibility of extra-linguistic or referential meaning. Initially, my aim is to show how the tropological tendencies of the lyrics, which Dragonetti identifies, may be said to be exaggerated, not quashed, by the act of lyric insertion; I thus attempt to demonstrate how de Man's notion of the rhetoricity of narrative texts complements Dragonetti's conception of the lyrics' self-reflexivity in each of these texts. I then explore how this rhetoricity, associated with the technique of lyric insertion, bleeds into the surrounding narratives, challenging any notion that they purport mimetically to represent referents or can be said to rely on a purely diachronic temporality. Finally, I argue that when this rhetoricity bleeds into the love-stories at the heart of each narrative, this amounts to a challenge to heteronormativity's reliance on stable referentiality and to the very possibility of the *signifiant*. In the conclusion, I will discuss how queering lyric insertion challenges not only the recurrent critical narratives of lyric insertion, but even our very impulse to narrativize it.

I. *Guillaume de Dole*

In Renart's *Rose*, the second song that Conrad sings of his love is the first stanza of a famous song by the Châtelain de Couci:

Li noviaus tens et mais [et violete]
 et roissignox me semont de chanter;
 et mes fins cuers me fet d'une amorete
 un doz present que ge n'os refuser.

this chapter. For Zumthor, see of course, *Essai de poétique médiévale*; for Guette, *D'une poésie formelle en France au Moyen Âge*.

Or m'en doint Dex en tel honor monter,
cele ou j'ai mis mon cuer et mon penser
q'entre mes bras la tenisse nuete
ainz q'alasse outremer. (923-30)

The new season (spring) and May and violets
and the nightingale inspire me to sing;
and my steadfast heart gives me a love-story
as a sweet present that I dare not refuse.
May God now let me so rise in honor
that she in whom I've placed my heart and thoughts
I should hold, naked, in my arms
before I go abroad (to the Crusades).²⁴

Conrad's singing represents a series of displacements. The song reflects an *amor de lonh* born during various literal ones: as Conrad returns from helping the Count of Guerre in his struggle against the Duke of Bavaria, he takes Jouglet aside, they "issent fors del chemin amdui" (go off the path together; 650) and Jouglet then tells Conrad of the fantastically beautiful Guillaume and Liénors. The next morning, Conrad dispatches Nicole to Guillaume's village, only thereafter breaking into song. This is one of many songs where Conrad sings his love; he seems, in Boulton's words, "in love with love," which he expresses by transposing, or displacing, himself onto the lyric *je*.²⁵ Already, then, this love (metaleptically) disrupts notions of before and after, because, like in Foucauldian thought, the romance presents sexuality as primarily a discursive construction, not a physical impulse.²⁶ The language that purports to represent Conrad's love functions performatively, inspiring and sustaining it.

²⁴ I will discuss this same song in the *Roman du Châtelain de Couci*. For Butterfield, "the quotation of Gui de Couci's songs developed into a topos in its own right within the *romans à chansons* composed during the course of the thirteenth century" (*Poetry and Music*, 36).

²⁵ Boulton, *From Song to Story*, 28.

²⁶ I am referring to Vol. I of the *Histoire de la sexualité, La volonté de savoir*.

Similarly, I submit, the romance is not merely reproducing the lyrics, but also actively participating in their *enjeux*—even though Conrad’s choice of song initially seems quite bizarre. The final two verses seem especially removed from his predicament, since he is not leaving for the Crusades. Furthermore, the remainder of the original song, which the sole extant *Rose* manuscript does not include, evokes a love-affair with a treacherous woman, called “Fausse Amie” (False Lover), and “Fausse Amours” (False Love); and while Liénors’s chastity will later be called in question, there is no reason to suspect anything yet. As critics have remarked, the citation therefore establishes an ironic distance between Conrad’s *il* and the lyric *je*.²⁷ Yet, within the Châtelain’s song, distance and displacement are also at stake: namely, the distance of the *je* from his lady. Indeed, just as the lyric *je* is being forced *outramer*, so too does the excision of this stanza, and its tenuous relation with Conrad’s circumstances, perform a play on distance. The excision challenges, that is, the proximity of the lyric *je* to its desired object: the proximity of the *je* to itself and to its original form and contexts. Possession of one’s pronoun is also at issue in the Châtelain’s original song, both as it regards the *je*’s relationship to his lady and to *losengiers*: for example, he says of his heart that, “Tant con fui mienz, ne me fist se bien non,/Mes or sui suenz, si m’ocit sanz raison” (as long as it was mine, it [my heart] did me nothing but good, but now that I am hers, it destroys me without reason).²⁸ In its new contexts, the poem goes from being *mienz*, or the property of the *je*-singer, to *suenz*, or that of Conrad; lyric insertion may therefore be performing the

²⁷ Boulton, *From Song to Story*, 4, 35.

²⁸ Citations from the Châtelain’s songs come from, *Chansons attribuées au Chastelain de Couci*, ed. Lerond, song V, vv. 21-22. Cited hereafter in text by song and line numbers.

act of dispossession that the lyrics describe. My suggestion, then, is that lyric insertion does not violate the terms of the *chant* by dragging it into narrative surroundings antithetical to the lyrics, but rather extends them, by developing similar thematics, namely the notion of displacement. If, for Dragonetti, “Pour qu’une chanson soit digne du modèle imaginé, il importe que le trouvère soit...engagé en elle,” then the romance, by emphasizing crucial elements of the song, also showcases its engagement with it.²⁹

Despite their paucity of words, the *rondets* support this notion of a counterintuitive continuity between the lyrics and their narrative surroundings. I cite the second chain of *rondets*, sung as Conrad presides over courtly festivities:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | |
| C’est tot la gieus, enmi les prez, | It’s over there, in the middle of the fields, |
| vos ne sentez mie les maus d’amer! | You don’t feel the pangs of love! |
| Dames i vont por caroler, | Ladies go there to dance— |
| remirez voz braz! | Watch your arms! |
| Vos ne sentez mie les maus d’amer | You don’t feel the pangs of love |
| si com ge faz! | As I do. |
| 2. | |
| C’est la ins desoz l’olive, | It’s over there under the olive tree |
| Robins enmaine s’amie. | That Robin brings his lover. |
| La fontaine i sort serie | The water sweetly flows from the |
| desouz l’olivete. | Fountain under the olive tree. |
| E non Deu! Robins enmaine | In God’s name! Robin brings |
| bele Mariete. | The beautiful Mariette. |
| 3. | |
| Main se levoit Aaliz, | Alice gets up early, |
| J’ai non Enmelot. | My name is Amelot. |
| Biau se para et vesti | She attired herself and dressed up well |
| soz la roche Guion. | Under the Guyon rock. |
| Cui lairai ge mes amors, | To whom will I leave my love, |

²⁹ Dragonetti, *La technique*, 553.

amie, s'a vos non?

But to you, my love?

4.

Main se leva la bien fete Aeliz,	The well-made Alice gets up early,
par ci passe li bruns, li biaux Robins.	By here passes the brunette, the handsome Robin.
Biau se para et plus biau se vesti.	She attires herself prettily and dresses up better.
Marchiez la foille et ge qieudrai la flor.	Tread on the leaves, I'll pluck the flower;
Par ci passe Robins li amorous,	by here the amorous Robin passes,
encor en est li herbages plus douz. ³⁰	And the grass is all the softer.

Each of these *rondets*, as Butterfield remarks, “present[s] a combination of solo and communal performance.”³¹ Within each song, then, “[t]he emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the present...are all questions, rather than presumptions,” to quote Eve Sedgwick’s description of queer performativity.³² In fact, while critics routinely focus on the tension between Conrad’s specific desire for Lienors and the discursive, non-individual nature of his love; and while many have understood lyric insertion as dramatizing the tension between narrative elements, generally told in the third-person and the past, and the eruption of a *je*, who speaks in the present or future; these tensions are both already manifest even within these small songs themselves.³³

Within, but also among them, since *rondets* rarely appear alone. Here, the substitution of various singers performing the songs echoes the substitution of various first-names within each song, as well as the exchange of verbal fragments amongst them; “mains se levoit Aaliz,” from the third *rondet*, becomes, for example, “Mains se leva la bien fete Aeliz” in the fourth. Rather than presenting as hermetically closed, the *rondets* therefore participate in an economy based on substitutions. I am using the term

³⁰ Vv. 514-27, 532-37, 542-47.

³¹ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 51.

³² Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 4.

³³ For the question of the distinction between first- and third-person pronouns, see Ch. I.

economy in a figurative as well as a literal sense; for the above-cited chain of songs comes over the course of our introduction to the feudal economy over which Conrad presides. Describing this economy, the narrator says,

L'empereres voloit mout miex
que li vilain et li bourgeois
gaaignassent de lor avoires
qu'il lor tolist por tresor fere;
car, quant il en avoit afere
il savoit bien que tot ert soen. (593-98)

The Emperor would have much preferred that the peasants and the bourgeois profit from their wealth than to take it for his own treasure; for he knew that whenever he was in need, everything would be at his disposal.

Conrad's court relies on an economy of gifting, in which clothing, jewelry, money, even people, are constantly circulating.³⁴ The romance, then, invites us to make a double equation of sorts, about the notion of economies of substitution: they characterize these lyrics *within* and *among* themselves; and, since they also characterize the economy into which these lyrics are integrated, the romance is moving economies of substitutions from a "lyric" to a "narrative" setting in a manner thoroughly in keeping with the emphasis on displacement characteristic of both lyric and narrative worlds.

This sense of the lyrics' turning takes another crucial turn in the only *chant* attributed to Conrad:

Quant de la foelle espoissent li vergier,
que l'erbe est vert et la rose espanie,

³⁴ The feudal economy depicted in the romance has been much-discussed. See, for example, Zink, *Roman rouge et roman rose*, 21-25; and for an excellent, meticulous materialist take, Nancy Jones, "The Uses of Embroidery in the Romances of Jean Renart: Gender, History, Textuality." Jewers discusses the relation between lyric exchange and the exchange and materiality of clothing in "Fabric and Fabrication."

et au matin oi le chant commencer
dou roissignol qui par le bois s'escrie,
lors ne me sai vers Amors consellier
car onques n'oi d'autre richece envie,
for que d'amors
ne riens [fors li] ne m'en puet fere aïe.

Ja fine amors ne sera sanz torment,
que losengier en ont corrouz et ire.
Ne ge ne puis servir a son talent,
qu'ele me voelle a son servise eslire.
Je soufferrai les faus diz de la gent
qui n'ont pooir, sanz plus, fors de mesdire
de bone amor,
ne riens fors li ne me puet geter d'ire. (3180-95)

When the orchards thicken with leaves,
and the grass is green and the roses blooming,
and in the morning I hear the song begin
of the nightingale who cries out through the woods—
then I don't know how to advise myself in relation to Love;
for I never desired any other riches,
except from love,
and nothing/no one but her can help me with this.

Never will true love be without torment,
since the slanderers are full of anger and ire by it.
And I cannot serve her in a manner pleasing to her,
that she may choose to allow me to be in her service.
I will tolerate the false words of the people
who cannot do anything more than slander
true love,
and nothing but her can move me from my ire.

The song opens with the traditional *ouverture printanière*, where the *je* hears sounds external to it (with the nightingale being the famed symbol of the poet)³⁵; and once he hears these songs, he can profess his submission to the authority of Song and/or Love, tautologies for each other according to Dragonetti's and Zumthor's systems. Both

³⁵ For the most recent study of the significance of nightingales, see Sarah Kay, *Parrots and Nightingales*.

within the lyric and within the narrative, then, Conrad turns toward Song and Love because he has “over-heard” them elsewhere. The *ouverture printanière* also raises the question of how the *je* does or does not fit into his surroundings; the question of the harmony between the *je* and the outside world, therefore, is not only the crucial question raised by lyric insertion—where critics have studied the degree of harmony between the lyrics and their narrative surroundings—but also the very question that introduces nearly all *chants*.

The content of the second stanza initially seems unremarkable; the dreaded but familiar *losengier* appears.³⁶ The love must struggle, and here not quite succeed, at working back to the stability of a refrain; from the “ne riens fors li ne m’en puet faire aïe” of the first stanza, the song is only able to get back to, “Ne riens fors li ne me puet geter d’ire” in the second. At the same time, then, as the *losengier* turns language against the singer (“Je soufferrai les faus diz de la gent”), form is also forcing the poem to turn, to find different words and rhymes so that the rhythmic (and perhaps melodic) scheme, and by extension the love itself, may persevere.³⁷ Here, then, the formal turning seems strangely correlated to the figure of the *losengier*; and indeed, while Dragonetti (and Zumthor and Guiette) emphasize how the lyric Lady does not represent an actual lady, but rather the aspirations of the song itself, it is equally logical that the lyrics create the figure of the *losengier*, who, like the Dame, is an “objet poétique,” but one who represents not the aspiration, but rather the dread, of the lyrics: in a word, what they

³⁶ See the Introduction, for some discussion of this figure.

³⁷ Because the *Guillaume de Dole* manuscript contains no music and the lyric is not reproduced elsewhere, it is not known to contain music.

don't want to become.³⁸ Indeed, in its narrative contexts, the song functions performatively; for once the Seneschal overhears this song, then he begins creating trouble for Conrad. The song about the *losengier* thus calls forth the creation of his figure in the text; the lyrics breed falsity. The *turn* in the narrative, then, reflects both a formal and semantic turn *within* this lyric, and a turn *from* this lyric into the narrative, in such a manner as to foreground the tropological action of turning.

I should be clear as to the stakes of my argument. I am not suggesting that Renart's text is, to use Sylvia Huot's term, a "lyrical narrative" one, if one understands this term as homogenizing lyrics and narratives in the manner of Guillaume de Lorris's *Rose*, as Butterfield does.³⁹ Rather, I am arguing that the opposition between the two is set up, and then deconstructed, along the lines of one of Derrida's descriptions of de-construction, which we looked at in the introduction: in "Psychè: invention de l'autre," he speculates that perhaps de-construction functions "[en] tournant ces règles dans le respect de ces règles memes afin de laisser l'autre venir ou s'annoncer dans l'ouverture de cette déhiscence."⁴⁰ The romance functions by turning the lyrics in the sense that they were already turning: by re-turning the rhetoricity or tropological nature always-already at their heart. The lyrics do not then "become" narrative couplets (or *vice versa*), but the criteria by which we oppose lyrics to narrative, beyond obvious differences in musicality and in metric and rhyme schemes, increasingly appear as unsteady, in turn challenging our interest in investing the opposition between lyricism and narrativity

³⁸ Dragonetti, *Technique*, 560. For discussion of the structural necessity of *mésdisants* in troubadour lyric, see Jean-Charles Huchet, *L'Amour discourtois*, 39-40. See also Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, 104-7. For excellent discussion of *mésdisants* in the *Châtelain de Coucy*, see Krueger, *Women Readers*, 213-16.

³⁹ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 220.

⁴⁰ Derrida, "Psychè," 59.

with such weight. Recourse to the pervasive critical lexicon helps demonstrate just how tenuous the opposition between lyrics and narratives becomes in Renart's *Rose*. Critics routinely oppose lyrics (or songs) to narratives in terms of the opposition between orality and literacy, with the former being associated with hearing and the latter with seeing. Many have argued that Renart privileges hearing songs over their status as visual documents.⁴¹ Yet, since Conrad falls in love with Liénors through *oïr-dire*, without seeing her; and since much of the romance turns on the invisible but "overheard" (*oui*)—Liénors's rose being the prime example of this—it follows that privileging hearing over seeing is a move embedded in the narrative segment of the text; or, put differently, the privileging of the "oral" is "literate" in this romance, and the "literate," "oral."⁴²

This complex interplay between seeing and hearing is especially evident when Conrad first hears about Liénors. After Jouglet has told Conrad of the brother and sister,

Cil [Jouglet] s'aperçoit mout bien que cele
li plesoit ja par oïr dire,
et au samblant que il remire
li est avis qu'il [Conrad] aime ja. (805-8)

Jouglet noticed indeed that she (Liénors) was pleasing to him upon hearing about her, and judging from Conrad's expression as he sees it, it seems to him that Conrad is already in love.

⁴¹ Huot, for example, writes, "In Renart's *Rose*, songs maintain a decidedly oral character; he in turn takes on the persona of narrator-compiler, arranger and committing to writing a series of lyric performances" (*From Song to Book*, 107). She then contrasts this to Jakemés's use of songs as (visual) documents. For the importance of sound over sense in Renart's citations, see also Kay, *Parrots and Nightingales*, 91-105, esp. 94-98.

⁴² I will touch on the question of music in my conclusion; note, though, that music being oral, what I say about orality pertains to music. Music does not survive in any of the texts under discussion. For Renart's *Rose*, it may well have once existed. For the other two texts, it probably never did, because, as Butterfield remarks, no manuscript of a narrative text contains music for *grands chants*. See Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 29.

Here, Jouglet sees Conrad hearing; the text emphasizes that Conrad hasn't seen Lïenors by displacing the act of seeing from Conrad onto Jouglet. This act of displacement is in keeping with an emphasis on rhetorical displacements throughout this crucial scene, the examination of which will bring us to the queerness of the romance's rhetoricity. Not only, that is, does the conversation between Jouglet and Conrad take place during physical displacements (as we have seen), but these literal deviations also correspond to the round-about manner by which Jouglet introduces Lïenors. He first describes an anonymous brother and sister, about whom he has only heard in a second-hand manner: "uns bachelers, qui de la vint/ou cē ot esté, me conta..." (a bachelor who was coming from where this happened, told me this; 659-60). Only thereafter does he introduce Lïenors and then Guillaume: "g'en sai une/et que ge n'ai doné nesune/beauté que ceste n'ait..." (I know of a lady, and I haven't ascribed any beauty to the other [anonymous Lady] that this woman doesn't possess"; 744-46).

Once Jouglet has piqued Conrad's interest, Conrad decides to send for

Guillaume: he says,

820 "Sempres covient savoir qu'ira
querre son frere le matin,
a cui ge me doig et destin
por servir de cuer et de cors."
En riant li dit Jouglez lors,
qui ert sages et apensez:
825 "Del cors, voir, avra il assez,
qu'il n'est mie si covoitous;
et Lïenors as blons chevouls
avra le cuer, se m'en creez."
Fet il en riant: "Gars provez,
830 com ez ore de mal apens!
Or cuides tu, voir, que ge pens
mains au frere q'a la seror?
En mon roiaume n'en m'onor
n'afferoit pas q'el fust m'amie.

835 Mes por ce qu'el n'i porroit mie
avenir, i voel ge penser." (819-36)

"Soon we will need to find who will go looking for the brother in the morning, to whom I pledge my service in heart and body."

"Of your body, truly, he'll have plenty, since he isn't too desirous of it at all, and the blond Lïenors will have the heart, trust me."

Laughing, he said, "You trickster, you have some no-good thoughts there! Do you really believe that I think less about the brother than the sister? In my kingdom, nor for my honor, it would not be fitting that she should be my lover. But because she cannot come to this, I'd like to think/dream about it."

In this remarkable passage, Conrad resists Jouglet's insinuation that he is only interested in the sister, adding that, in any case, it is precisely the distance of this fantasy from reality that makes the fantasy permissible. Yet, if the fantasy is predicated on a series of rhetorical displacements and reversals, then it would be in keeping with the rhetorical modalities that inspire Conrad's love to give this passage another twist. The passage provides all the terms we need to make another chiasmic reversal; it even initiates this movement, since the notion that Guillaume will have the "body" and Lïenors the "heart" seems potentially backward, insofar as Conrad will eventually sexually possess Lïenors, not Guillaume. If Conrad gets her body, does Guillaume have his heart? It is tempting to recall Jaufré Ruidel's ambiguous lines, "Que tout can lo faire.m desditz/Aug autrejar a la seror..." (whatever the brother refuses me, I will have granted by the sister).⁴³ In any case, when Conrad explicitly compares brother and sister, and then relates fantasy to impossibility, we can quite fluidly read another impossibility into this passage: that of Conrad's same-sex desire for Guillaume, with such reading being in keeping both with the literal terms of this passage and the

⁴³ Jaufré Ruidel, "Bels m'es l'estius e'l temps floriz," vv. 43-44, in *Les chansons de Jaufrei Rudel*, ed. Jeanroy.

rhetorical reversals which underlie it. I am not flatly asserting that Conrad desires sex with Guillaume; rather, with Ramm and against Zink, I am asserting that this suggestion is not a violation, but rather the logical continuation, of the rhetorical modalities by which the text introduces Conrad's love.⁴⁴ It is adding one more twist to a love constructed by linguistic turns, which brings us to an association between the tropology or rhetoricity characteristic of lyric insertion and queer sexuality.

Because of the importance of this point, I will provide a second example.

Conrad stumbles upon Guillaume as he dreams of his future tournament success, and,

L'emperere, qui mout l'amot
le resgarde, s'aperçoit bien
qu'il entendoit a autre rien,
ce li est vis, qu'il ne disoit.
Si fesoit il, car il pensoit
au tornoi tot vaintre et outrer... (1732-36)

The Emperor, who loved him very much, looks at him, and notices that he is concentrating on something else—it seems to him—than what he is saying. And he was; for he was thinking about how to conquer and make a splash at the tournament.

Guillaume, like tropological language itself, is thinking about something other than what he expresses. Yet the brilliance of this passage is that the romance repeatedly describes Conrad, not Guillaume, as “thinking about something else,” because he uses Guillaume to get to his sister; the very act of “thinking about something else” is therefore displaced from Conrad unto Guillaume, or is “somewhere other” than where it should be. To add another tropological turn to this language is, it follows, in keeping

⁴⁴ See Zink, *Roman rouge*, 112. I am generally quite sympathetic to Ramm's argument, and he reads this passage similarly; yet Ramm understands this passage as hiding Conrad's gayness, while I instead see this obliqueness as precisely the site of his sexuality (though Ramm does use the term “queer,” rather than “gay”). See Ramm, “A Rose by Any Other Name?”, 409-12.

with the text's movement; or, the possibility that the text means something other than what it says is one that the text itself invites. Exactly as we saw that lyric insertion is the act of mobilizing an active engagement by exaggeratedly turning the already turning lyrics, so too are we logically called upon to twist the larger narrative, and this series of turnings would suggest that the process emblemized by lyric insertion becomes related to the instability of heteronormativity.

Not only is the "love" at the heart of the romance characterized by potentially queer rhetoricity rather than straightness, but the ensuing narrative progression isn't any straighter. For Zink, the romance's plot "est fait tout entier de substitutions et de déplacements."⁴⁵ Indeed, although characters are constantly scrambling and rushing to execute their immediate goals, these actions are always predicated on the lack of immediate or unmediated bringing together of Conrad and Liénors. For example, when sending Nicole to fetch Guillaume, Conrad says to him,

Sez tu, fet il, que dit li briés?
Que je li mant et si li pri,
lués qu'il avra cest brief oï
qu'il monte et viegne a moi lués droit... (886-89)

Do you know what the letter says? That I order and beg that right after he has heard this letter, he should mount (his horse) and come straightaway to me.

The irony underwriting this moment, and countless others, is that the immediacy with which Conrad orders Guillaume to court relies on extreme mediation: here, that represented by the use of the messenger and also by the larger project of using Guillaume to get to his sister. Bruckner has drawn attention to the complexity of the

⁴⁵ Zink, *Roman rouge*, 62.

expression *droit chemin* in the *Charrete*.⁴⁶ Similarly, in Renart's *Rose*, there is neither a *droite voie* in spatial terms nor a *lués droit* in temporal ones, because the romance's movement is tropological: based on substitutions, displacements, reversals. As in Derridean *différance*, moments in the plot generate meaning by glancing backward and forward toward each other, rather than by proceeding in a linear fashion.⁴⁷ The juxtaposition of Guillaume's departure for court with Liénors's provides a strong example of this temporality of *différance*. As Guillaume first takes leave of his family, the narrator observes,

Or sachiez que, quant il monterent,
il i ot ploré maintes lermes.
.iii. somiers a robes et armes
orent, et granz chevax de pris.
Mout a belement congié pris
a sa seror et a sa mere:
“A Deu, biau filz! –A Deu, biau frere!
A Deu, tuit,” quant il s’en tornerent.
Or sachiez que tuit en plorerent
li remegnans por eles deus.
Or s’en vont, or les consaut Deus! (1274-84)

Now know that, when they were on their horses, there were many tears spilled there. They had three chests full of robes and arms, and large, valuable horses. Guillaume very courteously took leave of his sister and mother—“Adieu, handsome son!”; “Adieu, handsome brother!”; “Adieu all”—when they turned to go. Know that all who remained cried on account of the two women; they are leaving, may God watch out for them!

The narrator's description of Liénors's departure about 3,000 lines later is remarkably similar:

Au matinet, quant ele mut
i ot mout besié et ploré:
“Bele fille, a saint Honoré

⁴⁶ Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire,” 152-53.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, “La Différance.” I discuss the temporality of *différance* in my “Queering temporality and the gender binary in *Flamenca*.”

conmant ton cors, quel part qu'il aille.
 --Bele mere, Dex vos i vaille,
 ou ge ai tote ma fiance!"
 Nus ne fust a la dessevrance,
 quant la pucele dut monter,
 s'il deüst lermes emprunter,
 qu'il ne covenist que plorast.
 Ainçois qu'ele s'en par alast,
 par fu trop la dolor commune. (4074-85)

In the morning, when she set off, there was much kissing and crying. "Beautiful daughter, may Saint Honoré watch over your body, wherever it may go."
 "Beautiful mother, may God, in whom I have entire confidence, watch out for you." Nobody was present at this leave-taking, when the maiden got on her horse, who didn't feel the need to cry—even if he had to borrow money against his tears! Before she was gone away everyone was in pain.

In both moments, the leave-taker looks backward and forward: glancing back at family, and turning toward the necessity of appearing at court. And at another level, this action of looking backward and forward is performed by the *mise en relation* of these two moments, which glance reciprocally at each other. Not only are both leave-takings described at similar length and with a common emphasis on tears, but they also seem semantically dependent on each other; for whereas it is logical that, when a shamed Liénors heads to court, there would be an expression of sadness, the excessive tears accompanying Guillaume's departure are hardly in keeping with the absolute joy with which his family receives the news that the Emperor desires to meet him. The co-dependence of these moments on each other, which no doubt partakes in the larger co-dependence of brother and sister, therefore invites us to see the progression of the romance not as directly linear, but rather as tropological in the sense that these displacements are also displacements of each other.

The narrative begins with displacements, then recounts displacements—and culminates in more rhetorical displacements. The seneschal describes his fateful visit to

Guillaume's mother as the displacement of a displacement: he is *en route* to Besançon, but stops by their *plessié* because, "si en fusse a cort blasmez/se ge fusse par ci passez,/et si ne tornasse çaienz" (I would be blamed at court if I came through this area without turning in this way; 3317-19). The Seneschal's literal displacement, and his ensuing displacement of truth, prompts Liēnors's literal displacement to court, and then her more figurative assumption of the role of rhetorician (4768-73). Once Liēnors expresses her desire to plead her cause, Conrad grants her request, because it serves as a welcome *distraction* from having to confess to his barons his failure to find a suitable bride: "Il ne queroit fors ochoison/que li parlemenz remainsist" (he was only looking for a pretext for delaying the discussions; 4704-45). This scene also displaces both Jouglet and Guillaume; Guillaume is absent from the proceedings, and Jouglet will never again appear in the romance, as has been remarked.⁴⁸ And, of course, Liēnors's argumentative strategy is one of displacement. She re-turns the Seneschal's allegation against him, and, as Helen Solterer has brilliantly shown, this implies a deflection of questions of virginity and rape from a female onto a male: as Solterer writes, "It is the seneschal who is stripped bare for all to see; it is a gendered rose of another order that is made visible."⁴⁹ Given this foregrounding of displacements, we may in turn attempt to understand the larger scene as itself constituting another displacement. If, that is, the defloration of the Seneschal is the displacement of that of Liēnors, then it is fitting to continue this displacing movement, and perhaps the entire scene functions as the displacement of the defloration of Guillaume, a possibility made all the more probable by the fact that these displacements already cross gendered lines.

⁴⁸ Laurence de Looze, "The Gender of Fiction," 604.

⁴⁹ Helen Solterer, "At the Bottom of Mirage, a Woman's Body," 228.

In any case, should there be any doubt as to the appropriateness of “de-constructive” readings of the romance, Lïenors’s argumentative strategy perfectly exemplifies the definition of deconstruction already rehearsed: by momentarily admitting to sex with the Seneschal, she exaggerates his allegations past the point which he had intended, in order to bring about their destruction or de-construction. Yet she exposes more than the literal fact that she has never met the Seneschal: as Solterer observes, the Seneschal’s allegations and Lïenors’s defense combine to “set [Lïenors’s birthmark, her rose] in motion as a linguistic sign free of any referent,” since “Their rose is a construction in language that claims a vital connection to the flesh but in fact possesses none.”⁵⁰ Therefore, Lïenors not only disproves the Seneschal’s claim, but also ironically disproves her own claim to Conrad’s love at the same moment as she reinstates it; for her refutation hinges on rejecting the necessary truth value of *oïr-dire*, while *oïr-dire* underlies her entire claim to Conrad’s love in the first place. For Edelman, “Gay male sexuality...textualizes male sexuality across the board...condemning its signifiers to the prospect of a ceaseless interrogation by forcing the recognition, first and foremost, that they are always *only* signifiers.”⁵¹ Lïenors’s argumentative strategy also “textualizes” sexuality across the board, thereby forcing the recognition that her *amor de lonh* with Conrad is, to apply the term that the text repeatedly uses to describe the Seneschal’s misdeeds, *un gros noient*, divorced from any necessary correlation with referential truth.⁵²

Rather spectacularly, the romance seems aware that this final scene is “trapped

⁵⁰ Solterer, “At the Bottom of Mirage,” 223.

⁵¹ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 206, his emphasis.

⁵² It is tempting to read this as another reference to troubadour poetry: here, to Guilhem IX’s “dreyt nient.” See Ch. IV for some *neents* in *Cligés*.

in [a] destabilizing force field of...irony,” to borrow Edelman’s expression.⁵³ Details are repeatedly out-of-place. Lïenors’s host’s explanation of what all the fuss in town is about plays, for instance, on the terms of Lïenors’s own predicament: “La borjoise li vet moustrant/ce qu’ele set *par oïr dire*” (the bourgeois lady explained to her what she knew through rumor; 4253-4). More importantly, the text figures the perversity of displacement by associating all three major male protagonists—Guillaume, Conrad, and the author himself—with the transgressive figure of the Seneschal. When Guillaume returns to court, he approaches his sister, newly crowned as Empress, with deference:

Mout l’a com sa dame honoree;
 et si voel que vos sachiez bien
 c’onques a li de nule rien,
 fors de parole, n’atoucha... (5270-3)

He very much honored her like his sovereign; and I want you to know that he didn’t touch her at all, only through his words.

Yet this is precisely what the Seneschal did—or didn’t—do: he only touched Lïenors through words! Why, we might ask, should the romance wish to associate Guillaume’s deferential behavior with the Seneschal’s crime? It also confusingly links Conrad’s sex with Lïenors to the Seneschal. The barons ask Lïenors for clemency for the Seneschal:

Li uns li a sanz delaïer
 por aus touz dite la parole,
 que, s’il i muert ou l’en l’affole,
 ele i avra mout poi conquis;
 et s’avra a toz jors aquis
 lors cuers, s’ele fet lor proiere.
 Mout estoit en bele meniere
 vestue, acesmee et trecie,
 que ne l’avoit pas si blecie
 la nuit, Deu merci, l’emperere... (5553-62)

⁵³ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 230.

One, without delay, spoke for all of them, saying that if he [the Seneschal] died or was maimed, she will have gained little; yet she would conquer their hearts for evermore if she acceded to their request. She was very well dressed, done-up—including her hair—since, thank God, the Emperor hadn't overly hurt her the previous night!

Because Liënors wasn't mutilated by Conrad (just as she wasn't mutilated by the Seneschal), there is, apparently, no reason for anyone to mutilate the Seneschal. Yet, we may wonder, what does the romance have to gain ("el i avra mout poi conquis") from juxtaposing the softness of the Emperor's touch with the pardoning of the Seneschal? It is also quite odd that the author couches his signature in descriptions of the Seneschal, as Dragonetti first remarked.⁵⁴ Of the Seneschal's forced displacement, Renart writes, "S'il puet eschaper a cest tor/dont savra il mout de Renart" (if he can get away from this turn of fate, he will be quite the crafty one; 5420-21) and while the Seneschal is forced to leave for the Crusades, so too does the author turn to religion as the romance concludes: "Et cil se veut reposer ore,/qui le jor perdi son sornon/qu'il entra en religion" (and he wishes to rest now, who gave up his name when he entered into religious orders; 5653-55).

The text further dramatizes the Seneschal's strange ability to destabilize even after the successful refutation of his allegations by Liënors, when it recounts his departure for the East. The Seneschal,

Toz croisiez i fu amenez,
plorant, devant l'empereriz
rendre les grez et les merciz
de la bonté qu'el li ot fete.
Si vos di que tex s'en deshete

⁵⁴ Roger Dragonetti, *Le mirage des sources*, 166-67.

qui pensa poi a son movoir.
Puis voudrent le congié avoir
Li baron de l'empereriz...
Puis departi la cours ainsi
et ralerent en lor païs
ou chascuns ot assez a fere.
Mout est li siecles de mal aire
que tote joie fine en doel.
Ja ne queïssent mes lor voel
departir, mes il le covint. (5617-24, 5628-34)

Ready for the Crusades was brought, crying, before the Empress, to express his gratitude and thanks for the service (here, commutation) she had rendered him. And I will tell you that some were saddened who were hardly considering going abroad; the barons then wished to have the empress' blessing. Then the court broke up and everyone went back to their land where all had plenty to do. This is a terrible world where all joy ends in pain. They no longer wished to depart, but it was then necessary.

We get little explanation as to why the barons follow the Seneschal; the terse “tex s'en deshete” implies that they empathize with his plight. When coupled with the allusions linking the Seneschal to the male protagonists and to the author himself, the pure gratuity of this moment would suggest that the barons' departure with the Seneschal figures how he continues to be a force of disturbance even after his threat has ostensibly been neutralized. Indeed, the dark moral, “tote joie fine en doel,” which is the only moral provided in the romance, certainly does not imply that things will work out for the protagonists. It is possible, of course, to read this moral as “displaced” or “ironic”; it is, in fact, quite literally displaced, describing as it does displacements. But it also suggests that when displacement is itself the moral, the beginning, middle and end of this love, and the content and the form of the romance, there is something both resolutely painful and hauntingly compulsory about this: “Ja ne queïssent mes lor voel/departir mes il le covint.” It is precisely as if displacement itself were being overturned in the romance. The displacements, that is, which the prologue introduces and

which lyric insertion figures and performs, are being relentlessly over-turned—in the sense of excessively turned—by the romance, and this in turn amounts to overturning—in the sense of subverting—normative meaning, in both poetic and ethico-political terms.

II. *Le Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel*

Referring to *Guillaume de Dole*, Butterfield offers a counter-intuitive, but intriguing, hypothesis; she suggests that whereas there is but one extant copy of Renart's *Rose* as opposed to some 250 of Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's *Rose*, Renart's formal legacy was, in fact, more pronounced; for throughout the thirteenth century, romances would continue to insert lyrics into narrative in such a manner as to draw attention to the formal heterogeneity separating lyrics from narratives, as Renart does, rather than homogenizing lyrics and narratives, as Guillaume and Jean do.⁵⁵ I wish to fast-forward to the other end of the century, in order to both corroborate and supplement Butterfield's hypothesis; I will suggest that Renart's *Rose*'s deconstruction of the opposition between lyricism and narrativity would also know a considerable legacy, and that this move would continue to have weighty ethico-political implications, specifically in terms of gender and sexuality. It is in the spirit of challenging received narratives about the evolution of lyric insertion that I turn to a text that is routinely considered by critics to use lyrics quite differently than the *Rose* does:

⁵⁵ She writes, "it is Renart's work, rather than Guillaume's, which sets the pattern for the great majority of love narratives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in which formed distinctions between lyric and narrative are both consistently maintained and ceaselessly examined" (*Poetry and Music*, 220).

Jakemés's *Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel*.⁵⁶ Unlike the *Rose*, this text, in which Jakemés invents a back-story for five songs attributed to the Châtelain, cites only one composer, while foregrounding the composition, rather than the performance, of the songs. Yet, just how different Jakemés's use of lyric insertion is from Renart's, and how he distinguishes lyrics from narratives within the romance, will be "questions," not "presumptions" (to return to Sedgwick's terminology), guiding analysis of the *Châtelain*.⁵⁷

We may begin by observing that Jakemés rather evidently uses lyric insertion to challenge the binary opposition of "before" and "after," because, as Silvère Menegaldo observes, "les chansons, antérieures chronologiquement, sont à l'origine d'un récit qui explique l'origine des chansons, postérieures logiquement."⁵⁸ But it is not only in such a superficial manner that lyric insertion challenges binaries. I cite the first and fourth stanzas of the second song where the Châtelain sings his love:

La douce vois dou lossignot sauvage
 Qu'oi nuit et jour quoinciier et tentir,
 Me radoucist le coer et rassouage.
 Or ai talent que canch pour resbaudir.
 Bien doi canter, puis qu'il vient a plaisir
 Celi qui j'ai fait de coer liet hommage.
 Si doi avoir grant joie en mon corage,
 S'elle me voet a son oes retenir.

Je le doi bien siervir a hiretage
 Et sour toutes et amer et cremir
 Qu'adiés m'est vis que je voie s'ymage,

⁵⁶ The following sentence will mention some of the ways that critics have opposed the two: for their opposition, see Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 64-67; Huot, *From Song to Book*, 107 and 122-23. See Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 41, for her hesitation about distinguishing "performance and writing."

⁵⁷ Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 4.

⁵⁸ Silvère Menegaldo, "*Le Roman du Castelain de Couci et de la Dame de Fayel*: la biographie d'un poète?" 138.

Si ne m'en puis soëler dou veïr,
 Qu'el mont ne puis si bielle riens coisir.
 Lues que le vi, si laissai en hostage
 Mon coer, qui puis y a fait lonc estage,
 Ne jamais jour ne l'en quier departir. (816-23, 840-47)⁵⁹

The sweet sound of the wild nightingale,
 Which I hear resound and ring out night and day,
 Soothes and calms my heart;
 I desire to sing to proclaim my joy.
 I must sing, since it pleases
 She to whom I have pledged my loyal homage.
 Thus I ought to have great joy in my heart,
 If she should decide to retain me in her service.

I ought to serve her for perpetuity,
 And love and fear her above all;
 For now it seems to me that I see her image,
 And I cannot get enough of seeing it!
 Because in all the world, I could not find something so beauteous;
 Since I first saw her, my heart has been captive
 And has since spent much time thus—
 And never do I desire to separate it from her.

For Dragonetti, “dans le poème courtois, le travail d’invention requiert une soumission totale”; the poet submits to “une tradition de style” figured by his submission to his Lady and to Love.⁶⁰ Here, we may also read the insertion of the song in terms of another act of submission: that of Jakemés to the Châtelain’s song. For the song itself seems to function in the romance as the “douce vois dou lossignot” that Jakemés cannot stop hearing. Jakemés includes this song as an act of homage to it: “Bien doi canter, puisqu’il vient a plaisir/Celi qui j’ai fait de coer liet homage.” The song itself is being retained for use in the narrative, “a son oes.” Jakemés obsessively reproduces the song’s image: “adiés m’est vis que je vois s’ymage/Si ne m’en puis soëler dou veïr.” He

⁵⁹ Jakemés, *Le Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel*, ed. Gauillier-Bougassas; cited in text by verse number.

⁶⁰ Dragonetti, *La technique*, 539.

seems to desire not to stray from these songs: “Ne jamais jour ne l’en quier departir.”

The final verses of the song proclaim, “Mais j’ai de ce moult cruel avantage/Qu’il m’en estuet sour mon gré obeïr” (But I have from this a very cruel advantage, that I must obey despite my will; 854-55); and most modern critics would agree that the unique *avantage* of Jakemés’s romance lies in how it remains glued to, or obeys, the Châtelain’s songs.

As in the *Rose*, then, the act of inserting lyrics into the romance does not necessarily contradict a structuralist reading of them, but may in fact encourage it. Close reading, that is, suggests that Jakemés’s lyric insertion has the effect of opening up the possibility that the song becomes its own object, its own *tu*. In the context of the romance, the song may become “la mise en forme symbolique d’une fiction poétique,” to borrow from Dragonetti’s characterization of the lyrics themselves.⁶¹

But surely, in Jakemés’s romance, the song refers to the Dame de Fayel? Isn’t this the obvious effect of Jakemés’s use of lyric insertion? De Man describes “rhetoric” as fostering “two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view,” which “puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding.”⁶² Such paradoxical rhetoricity is also the effect of Jakemés’s lyric insertion; for the narrative invites two incompatible readings of these lyrics: the one, which focuses on their insertion into a mimetic narrative, which, Dragonetti insists, constitutes a violation of their essential rhetoricity; and the other, a drastically different understanding, which

⁶¹ Dragonetti, *La technique*, 559.

⁶² De Man, *Allegories*, 131.

exaggerates their tropology or rhetoricity.⁶³ Jakemés therefore uses lyric insertion to implicate both rhetoricity and referentiality, and it would be too hasty to assert that lyric insertion simply provides referents for the referent-less or self-referential lyrics.

A second example of this subtle rhetoricity is in order. The Châtelain dreams of his lady,

Et en ramembrance de li
Fist il ce cant et dist ensi
C'on a recordé moult souvent:
A vous, amant, ains qu'a nule autre gent
Est bien raisons que ma dolour complaingne,
Car il m'estuet partir outreement
Et desevrer de ma douce compaingne... (7343-49)

And in remembrance of her, he composed and declaimed this song, that has since been recalled very often:

To you, lovers, more so than to any others,
It is fitting that I complain of my pain;
For I must go abroad,
And separate from my sweet companion...

Here, the Châtelain's *ramembrance* of the Dame de Fayel corresponds to Jakemés's act of *recorder* the song. The act of lyric insertion therefore implies the substitution of the song for the lady as the thing remembered; and because remembering is also thematized within the song, the song can be said to become the object of its own remembering. This remembering is, moreover, predicated on distancing, since it is the departure of the *je* from the lady which occasions his remembering within the song: "Car il m'esteut partir outreement." Similarly, it is the forcible displacement of the song into its narrative

⁶³ Note that this would counteract Dragonetti's implication that to narrativize medieval lyric is a modern impulse. In other words, while I am *not* arguing that the narratives narrativize the lyrics, this is essentially what critics have long argued, without necessarily stating it as such.

contexts that allows for the action of remembering it here. As in the *Rose*, then, lyric insertion may be said to extend the song's own thematization of displacement as part of its remembering of the song's terms.

Solterer has very usefully drawn attention to the term *recorder* in the romance, and this verb has important implications for understanding the relation of lyrics to the narrative in the romance.⁶⁴ According to the prologue, *recorder* prompts Jakemés's entire endeavor: "On doit tous jours bien recorder/Des boins le bien" (we should always recall the good deeds of the good; 55-56). Throughout the narrative, the protagonists recall each other—for example, "En son coer prent a recorder/Le douc maintien et le parler/De sa dame" (in his heart he comes to recall the sweet countenance and speech of his lady; 309-11)—and the Châtelain also inspires others to recall his prowess to his lady:

En brief tamps va teil los acquerre
C'on em parloit en mainte tierre,
Et a Faiiel meïsmement
Recordoient son hardement...(337-40)

Rapidly he would achieve such renown that people spoke about him in many lands; and especially in Fayel they recounted his bravery.

When the lovers come together, they also "recall" together: "La menerent vie d'amant,/Et recorderent leur grietés...Et recordent les grans hascies/Qu'il ont souffiertes..." (there they lived the life of lovers, recalling their griefs; and they recalled the great trials they had suffered; 6078-79, 6081-82). *Recorder*, then, both drives the romance's narrative and characterizes its relationship to the lyrics, as well as the lyrics themselves. Therefore, if *recorder* initially seems to reflect, and even to assert, the

⁶⁴ Helen Solterer, "Dismembering, Remembering the Châtelain de Couci," 107-10.

distance of the narrative from the songs, since the narrative remembers the distant songs, it comes to have the opposite effect, because the narrative, the lyrics, and the act of lyric insertion all similarly foreground remembering.

Solterer contrasts *recorders* with dismembering, deftly observing the recurrent tension “between union and rupture, *recorder* and dismemberment” in the plot.⁶⁵ In terms of lyric insertion, I would suggest that remembering and dismembering function as “nondisjunctive oppositions”—to borrow Kristeva’s concept which Bruckner has applied to romance poetics—because the extreme remembering of the terms of the lyrics becomes paradoxically indistinguishable from the dismemberment of them.⁶⁶ To illustrate this complex notion, I cite Jakemés’s introduction to the first stanza of the Châtelain’s song, “Au nouviel tans que mais et vïolette,” which we also looked at in the *Rose*:

Le coer ot deduisant et liet,
Adont fist ce cant envoisiet
D’amoureuse pensee entaite:
 Au nouviel tans que mais et vïolette
 Et lossignos me semont de canter,
 Et li dous coers me siert d’une amourette,
 Si douc present ne doit nus refuser.
 Or me laist Dieus a tel honnour monter
 Que celle k’aim entre mes bras nuette
 Tiengne une fois ains que voise outre mer! (7001-10)

His heart was light-spirited and gay; then and there, he made this pleasing song, full of amorous thoughts:

 In the new season when May and violets
 And the nightingale encourages me to sing,
 And my sweet heart provides me a love-affair,
 Such a sweet present no one should refuse.
 Now may God let me rise in such honor
 That she whom I love I may hold naked in my arms
 Once, before I head abroad.

⁶⁵ Solterer, “Dismembering, Remembering,” 110.

⁶⁶ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 2, 227 n4.

This is one of few songs that the romance does not cite in its entirety. As Huot remarks, “If the entire song was sung, the audience might have noted the seeming inappropriateness of this material to the Châtelain’s situation and wonder whether he was destined to live out the entire role there prescribed.”⁶⁷ Given his integral knowledge of the Châtelain’s other songs, Jakemés was no doubt aware that the invective against Fausse Amie that follows in the original would be inappropriate to his narrative; he therefore voluntarily dismembers the song, performing via lyric insertion the very action—dismemberment—for which his narrative will become known. Yet, as Huot suggests, the remainder of the song is not irrelevant to the Châtelain’s story. The song concludes by denouncing *losengiers*: “Maiz en cel point que dui avoir mon don,/Lor fu l’amour descouverte et moustree,/Ja n’aient il pardon!” (But in this state where I should have reaped my rewards, then my love was discovered and exposed: may they not be forgiven; V.46-48); and in the romance, the Dame de Vermandois and the Sire de Fayel hardly benefit from the Châtelain’s pardon! There is, then, a sense of metaleptic intertwinement, since the narrative does not explain the song’s circumstances here, but rather the song those of the narrative. The excluded content suggests, moreover, that the narrative *il* cannot yet be transposed onto, and is therefore not fully in possession of, the lyric *je*. Yet, we recall from the *Rose*, this is not a violation of the terms of the song, but rather what it describes, as the *je* loses possession of himself first to his lady and then to the *losengiers*: “Tant com fui mienz, ne me fist se bien non;/Mes or sui suenz, si m’ocit sans raison...” Turning the lyric in the sense that

⁶⁷ Huot, *From Song to Book*, 112.

it is already turning therefore ironically amounts to violating the integrity of the lyric, because Jakemés's dismemberment of the lyrics re-stores the lyric's original emphasis on dismembering. Paradoxically, the romance performs its extreme remembering of the lyric's terms by dismembering the lyric, associating dis- with re-membering like the Châtelain does when he dis-members himself so that he may be re-membered by his Lady.

I will return to the gory final episode momentarily. First I wish to suggest that not only is the dismemberment of the lyrics potentially in keeping with their terms, but their exclusion might also be. Twice, the narrative alludes to songs which, it implies, should be included, but are not. Here is the second instance:

En ce pensant, Amours l'avoie
Que par lui soit fais noviaus cans
Ens ou despit des maisdisans.
Amours, qui li aida a faire,
L'ensengna. Ains qu'a son repaire,
Venist, l'ot toute parfurnie,
Ensi com vous l'avés oïe. (4944-50)⁶⁸

In the throes of these thoughts, Love pushed him to make a new song about shaming slanderers. Love, who helped him do this, instructed him. Before he had come home, he had completed it, just as you have heard.

But we haven't heard anything! It is especially odd that both extant manuscripts exclude these songs, because, between these two gaps, Jakemés explicitly asserts his

⁶⁸ For another interpretation of these absent songs, see Gaullier-Bougassas's (excellent) introduction to the romance; she considers that these citations would be unnecessary, because the audience would remember that the Châtelain routinely denounces *losengiers*. Following this logic, though, one wonders why Jakemés would bother to insert any songs. Gaullier-Bougassas, "Introduction," 40-41.

control over which *rondets* he includes.⁶⁹ After citing *rondets* sung by the Dame de Vermandois and the Dame de Fayel, he says,

Si recommença a canter
Une autre damë, haut et cler,
Une autre cançon, de coer gai.
Dire ne compter ne vous sai
Les cançons quë on y canta. (3865-69)

Then another lady began to sing, loudly and clearly, another song, with a gay heart; I cannot tell you nor recount the songs that were sung there.

Given Jakemés's previous attention to which songs he quotes, it seems possible that the exclusion of the Châtelain's songs is not a mistake; rather, their absence may serve a poetic purpose. Immediately following the above-cited gap, the text says of the Châtelain:

Quant a son manoir est venus,
Ses coers ne pense sus ne jus
Fors qu'a sa dame puist parler,
Mais il l'en estuet consirer
Juskes a tant ke poins venra
C'aucunne occoison trouvera. (4951-6)

When he came to his estate, his heart is not thinking about this or that, but only about how he should next be able to speak to his lady; but he must be without her, until such time as he could come up with some pretext.

The act of doing without (*consirer*) that the Châtelain experiences corresponds to that of renouncing the actual citation. It is all the more tempting to read metaleptic intertwinement into this absence given how the Châtelain immediately thereafter decides to exact revenge on the Dame de Vermandois:

Tant a pensé qu'il s'avisa
Que de s'amour le prierait

⁶⁹ See Gaullier-Bougassas, "Introduction," 40-41, for more discussion of the two extant manuscripts of the text.

Et mout y feroit le destroit:
Ententivement et sans faindre
Yra souvent a li complaindre
Et tant de parolles dira,
S'il poet, quë elle le crera. (4966-71)

He reflected so much that he planned that he would beg her for her love, and pretend he was suffering; carefully and “sincerely” he will go to tell her about his amorous pains, and will say so much, if he can, that she will come to believe him.

While the Châtelain prepares to speak empty words to the Dame de Vermandois, the romance has just offered up an empty citation; the Châtelain prepares his lure, and maybe the romance just performed one?⁷⁰ Strangely enough, though, this hypothesis of a poetic function to these lyric non-citations nonetheless remains compatible with a structuralist conception of lyrics, since, for Dragonetti, the lyric world is characterized by its play on notions of absence and presence; Dragonetti emphasizes the absence of the referent for the lady or intrigue, and the presence of this song in the very space constituted by this absence. Paradoxically, then, the narrative may be continuing the rhetorical work of the lyrics not despite, but because of, the absence of lyrics which would serve as referent for the citation.

This is a seductive hypothesis—in fact, it echoes the trajectory Dragonetti would take in his career, moving from interest in lyric rhetoricity to narrative *renarderie*—but it is finally unverifiable. By turning to “Jakemés’s” own poetry, we can, however, demonstrate how challenging the integrity of the lyrics undeniably serves a poetic purpose in the romance. As the romance concludes, it attributes to the

⁷⁰ This is a very Dragonettian way of reading “authorship”: see Dragonetti, *Le Mirage des sources*. Virginie Greene offers thoughtful discussion of Dragonetti’s notions of authorship in *The Medieval Author*, 217.

Châtelain lyrics which could not possibly be his own, drawing as they do on forms (a *virelai* and a *salut d'amour*) posterior to his period of activity; critics therefore attribute them to Jakemés himself.⁷¹ In the refrain and second stanza of the *virelai*, the Châtelain sings from his death-bed:

Sans faindre voel obeïr
A ma dame, en qui veïr
 Puis sens et valour.
Sa biauté en surveïr
Ne me poet asouveïr,
 Tant ai plus dolour.

Grietés que mes cuers endure
Tout pour amoureuse ardeur,
 Ne feroit doloïr,
Moi qui ayme outre mesure
La tres bielle a desmesure,
 S'elle euïst voloir
D'aidier son ami; suiwir
Le voel, se pour moi suiwir
 Et par ma clamour
Peusse sans avoir l'aïr
De li et bien parveïr
 Pardon de savour.
Sans faindre, etc. (7563-68, 7582-93)

Without pretending, I desire to obey
my lady, in whom I can see
 sense and dignity.
Contemplating her beauty
cannot quell my desire;
 instead, it gives me all the more pain.

Grief that my heart endures
because of love's flame,
 wouldn't pain me—
me who loves beyond reason,

⁷¹ The *virelai* without question represents "lyric insertion," although it only appears in one of the two manuscripts of the romance (Manuscript B, Bnf nouv. Acq. Fr. 7514): see Gaullier-Bougassas, "Introduction," 83, 547 n91. The manuscripts do not set off the *salut d'amours* as lyric insertion, though I have been arguing that it is precisely the frontiers of the lyric that are in question. See Gaullier-Bougassas, 561 n85.

she who is immeasurably beautiful—
if she desired
to help her friend; follow her
I wish to, if by my persistence
and by my cries
I may, without prompting anger
from her, come truly to obtain
a savory pardon.
Without pretending, etc.

Immediately following the *virelai*, the narrative describes how the Châtelain, “Ceste cançon fist a grant painne/Car mout li ert joie lointaine...” (composed this song with great effort, because he was far from being in a state of joy; 7608-9). If Jakemés here composes, rather than recycles, this song, he would presumably be exercising more *painne* than usual; his *painne*, then, may perform that which the Châtelain experiences (or *vice versa*). This notion of Jakemés subtly asserting his own presence is all the more probable given that we can once again read the lyrics as speaking to the terms of their own insertion into the romance. The question of “faindre,” for example, is evoked by the attribution of lyrics to the Châtelain that he could not possibly have written, and the “biauté en sourveïr” describes Jakemés’s obsession with contemplating the Châtelain’s lyrics. By writing a *virelai*, Jakemés is literally loving the Châtelain’s lyrics “oultre mesure” and “a desmesure,” because the *virelai* represents a new measure; and the repetition of the desire to “suiwir” resonates with how this new form is posterior to the Châtelain’s *grands chants*.

Right after singing the *virelai*, the Châtelain orders his secretary to embalm his heart:

C’est que, tantost que mors sera,
Qu’il l’oeuvre et em prange le coer,
Et ce ne laist il a nul fuer

Qu'il ne l'apareille et atourne. (7619-22)

It (the request) is that right after he is dead, he should open the body and remove the heart; he should not for any reason neglect to prepare and arrange it (for embalming).

The transfer of authorship from the Châtelain to Jakemés within the lyrics corresponds to the narrative's motifs of excision and displacement; for if the Châtelain prepares to die in the narrative, the secretary has already taken over in terms of the lyrics. Jakemés has opened the body of the lyrics, and he dresses them up as he sees fit (*apareiller* and *atourner*). In this passage, to which I will return, Jakemés therefore emphatically demonstrates his narrative's active engagement with the lyrics' terms, since the formal and authorial displacement within the lyrics corresponds to the physical dismemberment of the Châtelain in such a manner as to foreground, once again, the tropological actions of substitution and displacement.

In the romance, furthermore, Jakemés is not only complexly engaged in the lyrics, but also alongside his characters; turning to his relationship with the characters will bring us to how this rhetoricity, associated with lyric insertion, bleeds into the surrounding narrative. As the text opens, Jakemés says of the Châtelain's love for the Dame de Fayel,

Mais chius se deut loer d'Amour
Qui l'asena a le meillour,
Le plus noble et le plus senee
Qui fust en toute la contree. (85-88)

But he should praise Love who brought him to focus on the best, the noblest and the wisest in the entire country.

Because Jakemés asserts, in the prologue and the epilogue, that he is writing for his own

lady, critics have recognized that Jakemés's actions parallel those of his Châtelain.⁷² But Jakemés does not only parallel his Châtelain; for the Châtelain is also his object, since Jakemés has also chosen in the Châtelain he whom he considers "le plus noble et le plus senee/qui fust en toute la contree."

Not content to stand vis-à-vis the Châtelain in a relationship of *je to je* or *je to tu*, Jakemés also inscribes himself into various *ils* and *elles*.⁷³ The text relentlessly insists on parallels between the author and certain secondary characters, saying, for example, of Isabelle, the Dame de Fayel's servant:

...moult se pense en quelle guise
Au castellain parler pora,
Et tant que de çou s'avisa
Qu'en ses tables elle escriroit
Çou que le castellain donroit,
Car loisir n'averait dou dire. (2823-28)

She much wondered in what way she could speak to the Châtelain; and this until she realized that she could write on wax tablets that she would then give to the Châtelain, because she didn't have the opportunity to speak to him.

Isabelle uses non-lyric writing to arrange for the lovers to come together. Isabelle and Gobiert, the Châtelain's secretary, may even seem to occupy for the lovers a function analogous to that of Jakemés vis-à-vis the lyrics; for the servants are necessary to the realization of the love, like Jakemés's narrative is to the reproduction of the lyrics, but both servants and narrative violate the aristocratic terms on which the Châtelain's love and lyrics are predicated.⁷⁴

⁷² See Krueger, *Women Readers*, 183-216 and Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, 101.

⁷³ See the analysis of the *Duc* in Ch. I for a similar point.

⁷⁴ The notion of realism goes back to Fourier, *Le Courant réaliste*, and as it regards Jean Renart, also to Rita Lejeune, *L'Oeuvre de Jean Renart: contribution à l'étude du genre romanesque au Moyen Âge*. As this reference suggests, the question of realism has been particularly hotly

This is not, though, a tenable conclusion, because it neglects the relentless play characteristic of the romance's depiction of status. The Châtelain, for example, disguises himself as a merchant, dressing below his station: "Son viaire tainst et canga/Et si bien se deffigura/Hors de son communal atour/C'on nel piercuÿst a nul jour" (he darkened and altered his face and so thoroughly transformed himself from his usual appearance that no one could ever recognize him at all; 6587-70) and this makes the Dame de Fayel smile: "La dame en soi prist a sousrire" (the lady began to smile to herself; 6722). The Châtelain also repeatedly pretends to be in love with Isabelle in order to hide his true love, saying to the Dame de Vermandois,

Se pour mon deduit aciever,
Sui bien d'aucunne camberiere
Ce n'est mie cose si ciere
De quoi on doie faire conte. (5086-89)

If in order to have my fun, I am in good with a chambermaid, it is not something so important that one should make anything of it.

He then has Isabelle and Gobiert don disguises to fool the Dame de Vermandois into thinking that she has been discovered *en flagrant délit* by other aristocrats. Various critics have argued that the presence of lower-class characters in the romance is "realistic" or "narrative," because these characters clash with the hermetically closed aristocratic world of the lyrics.⁷⁵ I would counter that because the romance's depiction of status emphasizes disguise and illusion, it has the effect of challenging the certainty

debated in terms of Renart's text—with Dragonetti opposed to the notion and Zink also resisting over-stating it: Dragonetti, *Le Mirage*, 167, 193; Zink, *Le roman rouge*, 10-20. Anglophone scholars have been a bit less wary: see, for example, Norris Lacy, "*Aimer par oïr dire*," 786; Jewers, "Fabric and Fabrication," 914-17; De Looze, "The Gender of Fiction," 596. Boulton holds that lyric insertion has everything to do with register and thus with class: see her introduction in, *From Song to Book*.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Anthony Allen, "La mélancolie du biographe," 34.

of the referent, rather than asserting it, and is thus in keeping with the lyrics' rhetoricity.

The lovers, as we have begun to see, interact through ruses; they must relate tropologically to each other, since their interactions take place via substitutes and displacements. And, I submit, these intradiegetic *tours* bring into focus one of the larger text's ruses, which it falls to the critic to articulate: Jakemés insistently describes the jealousy that the dame de Vermandois and the Sire de Fayel experience in nearly identical terms to those he uses for the protagonists' love.⁷⁶ Like the Châtelain, the Dame de Vermandois is so love-struck that she cannot eat—"Ensi pensoit et repensoit/Si que petit but et menga" (She was so preoccupied by thinking and thinking more that she hardly ate or drank; 3801-2)—while the text has earlier said of the Châtelain, "Mais li cevaliers a pensé/Toudis, qu'il ne but ne manga" (But the Knight was so continuously preoccupied by his thoughts that he neither ate nor drank; 236-37). Like the Châtelain, the Dame de Vermandois must enlist proxies to accomplish her mission: "Lors s'avise qu'elle querra/Une espie qui gaitera/Le castellain..." (She reflected that she would seek out a spy who would follow the Châtelain; 3939-41). Like the Châtelain and his own proxies, this "spy" repeatedly disguises himself: "ses abbis souvent cangoit/Par quoi on ne s'en piercevoit" (he frequently changed his clothing, so he couldn't be recognized; 3971-72). When the Dame de Vermandois confesses his wife's infidelity to him, the Sire de Fayel takes over this quasi-amorous behavior. Having enlisted the help of his servant, he seeks out, "Aucun privé lieu, chi entour/U nous peussions iestre le jour,/Si que nuls ne nous puist veïr" (a private place, around here, where we can be during the day but where no one will see us; 4337-39), whereas

⁷⁶ I make a similar argument in terms of *Flamenca* in my, "Queering the Gender Binary and Temporality in *Flamenca*."

the Dame de Fayel has enlisted her servant's help in order to find, "Aucun privé lieu, biel et gent,/U ne nous sacent nulle gent" (a beautiful and fitting place—where no one will know that we are; 2195-96). The text makes manifest a certain accord in discord between the protagonists and antagonists, when husband and wife together learn that the Châtelain intends to leave for the Crusades:

Quant li sires ces mos oÿ
De la nouvelle s'esjoÿ.
La dame aussi en fu joians,
Qui de çou estoit desirans.
D'iestre liet a l'oïr s'acordent
Mais lors pensees se descordent,
Car la dame tent a l'aler
Et li sires al demourer. (6975-82)

When the Sire heard these words, he was thrilled at the news. The Dame was also joyous, who wished for this. Insofar as they were both happy, they were in agreement, but their thoughts diverged; for the Lady wanted to go (to the Crusades), the Sire to remain at home.

The similarities between the behavior of protagonists and antagonists raise the question: to what extent does their behavior "discord," and to what extent does it finally "accord"? Perhaps the incessant insistence on the physical closeness of the protagonists and antagonists—for example, the texts says of the Chatelain and the Sire, "Si priés passa que destourner/Ne se pot de le encontrar" (the Sire got so close to the Châtelain that he couldn't avoid running into him; 6607-8)—figures their proximity in a more profound sense.

There are important consequences to the romance's insistence on this proximity between protagonists and antagonists. In poetic terms, it may invite a certain conception of the structure and temporality of the romance as nonlinear, even lyric,

according to Jean Rychner's description of how lyric temporality may overcome that of the narrative in *chansons de geste*: he writes,

Mais si la narration, de laisse à laisse, n'avance qu'imperceptiblement, si son progrès ne consiste plus qu'en de légères variantes du même acte, comme dans les laisses similaires, alors cette halte dans la narration permet au lyrisme de s'épanouir... Libérées de leur tâche narrative, les laisses concourent tout entières à la puissance du chant.⁷⁷

While Wahij Azzam considers the first part of Jakemés's romance to take place in a lyric register and the second part in a narrative one, I would caution against taking its linearity for granted, because the movement of the entire romance consists in such repeated "variations of the same actions," as the protagonists fool the antagonists, who then behave almost identically toward them.⁷⁸ There are also weighty ethico-political consequences to this *tour*. For Butler,

The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but rather as copy is to copy.⁷⁹

In the romance, the proximity of jealousy to courtly love focuses our attention on the constructed nature of the latter, since its actions do not fundamentally differ from those against which it nominally stands diametrically opposed. Instead, the ruses characteristic of the interactions between the lovers and antagonists unleash, to quote Edelman, a "force field" of "irony," which "subverts the possibility of any stable,

⁷⁷ Jean Rychner, *La Chanson de geste: essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs*, 93. Also cited in Wahij Azzam, "La lyrique à l'épreuve des récits," 281.

⁷⁸ Azzam, "La lyrique," 281.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43. We also looked at this quote in relation to the continuations of *Partonopeu* in Ch II.

uncompromised ground on which [normative love] might stand.”⁸⁰

But could we not just say that intentions determine the text’s depiction of ethics, since the protagonists act out of love, the antagonists, jealousy?⁸¹ The final sequence poses an obstacle to this notion, because the Châtelain cannot be judged by his intentions. Dying, he receives absolution from the Cardinal, because he has partaken in the Crusades, regardless of his lack of desire to serve God: “Amis, n’ayés pavour/Car vous trespassés el labour/Et el sierviche Jhesucrist” (Friend, fear not, for you are passing on in the labor and service of our Lord Jesus Christ; 7842-44).

This infamous final sequence, on which critics have feasted, foregrounds and capitalizes on the perversity of the romance’s rhetoric. Things are particularly gruesome when the Dame de Fayel gets such physical pleasure out of chowing on the Châtelain’s heart:

La dame mout cel més loa
Et il sambla bien c’onques mes
Ne manga plus saverageus més... (8045-47)

The lady had much praise for this dish; it seemed to her that she had never before eaten so savory a dish.

In the most adept readings of this sequence, Solterer, Gaunt, and Anthony Allen have all argued that the excision and ingestion of the heart performs a rhetorical operation, since the physicality of the heart becomes invested by symbolic meaning: as Gaunt writes, “the heart the lady eats, though originally a mere organ from her lover’s body, has been

⁸⁰ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 230, 21. The medieval text that most obviously unleashes this forcefield, I should add, is Bérout’s *Tristan*, where the good lovers have to behave quite badly for their affair to continue.

⁸¹ A very interesting take on the importance of intentionality in medieval literature—and related to the previous note—is Tony Hunt’s, “Abelardian Ethics and Bérout’s *Tristan*.” The criticism that the article has inspired would also point to the limitations of applying Abelard to medieval literature with too heavy a hand.

transformed into a fabricated and symbolic object.”⁸² The literal displacement of the heart therefore corresponds to a displacement from the literal to the “symbolic” realm; or, more precisely, the text carries the sign from its metaphoric function in lyric discourse to a more literal understanding—and then shows the sign in the process of reacquiring symbolic capital, in a play of displacement or show of rhetoricity explicitly tagged as perverse.

But the romance does not only narrate this gruesome story; it also performs it, in a manner. In his reading of Otto Preminger’s 1944 film *Laura*, Edelman observes that, the film “can only shore up its integrity through [an] act of structural violation and it can only call forth its image of the literal in a sequence that the film positions ambiguously, and suggests may be counter-realistic.”⁸³ Similarly, Jakemés’s romance “only shores up its integrity through ambiguous structural violations.” In fact, the most obvious point about the eaten-heart episode is almost never made: given that there is no record of the eaten-heart material being associated with the Châtelain de Couci before Jakemés, it seems that Jakemés is ingesting into his narrative the very story of ingesting the heart of another.⁸⁴ The romance therefore metaleptically performs the transmutation of the heart it describes, but this problematically implies that the heart is not really the Châtelain’s, thus challenging the referential validity of the turn to the literal, or presenting it in such a manner as to function “ambiguously” in a sequence that a

⁸² Gaunt, *Love and Death*, 100.

⁸³ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 228.

⁸⁴ For a recent comprehensive survey of the eaten-heart material, see J.-J. Vinvenisi, “Figure de l’imaginaire et figure du discours.” The most basic information, as Gaullier-Bougassas notes, is that this motif is found in three *vidas* and two *razos* of Guilhem de Cabestanh, although there is no reason to assume that Jakemés had any direct knowledge of the Occitan language texts. In Old French, there is a reference to it in Thomas’s *Tristan* (Iseult refers to the “lai de Guirun”) and in the “lai d’Ignauré.” See Gaullier-Bougassas, “Introduction,” 63-69.

medieval public may have understood as “counter-realistic.”

It would seem impossible to prove that this scene presents as “counter-realistic,” did the lyrics not support this hypothesis. As we have remarked, the lyrics perform structural violations, because, once the Châtelain lies on his deathbed, Jakemés takes over writing them, doing so in forms that differ from the *grand chant*, hitherto the only form cited in the text with the exception of the two *rondets* that Jakemés does not attribute to the Châtelain. According to Francine Mora, the *virelai* “devrait à cette époque apparaître comme la manifestation d’une audacieuse modernité”; it would be impossible not to hear that this *virelai* greatly differs from the *grands chants*.⁸⁵ Lyric insertion thus contributes to our increasing sense that there is something off, if not perverse, about the scene’s poetics.

Finally, like in many of the other texts examined in this dissertation, close reading of the narrator’s final words suggests that he wishes to go out by striking a discordant, even perverse, note. In the epilogue, Jakemés first denounces men who indiscriminately seduce women:

Mais tels dist qu’il est vrais amis
Qui son coer moult lonc en a mis,
Car li coer sont diviers souvent.
Une maniere y a de gent,
S’il voient dame u damoiselle,
Tantost lor lance une estincele
Telle qu’il sont en une esroure...
Cheaus tient Amours a anemis
Qui en çou faire se sont mis,
Et s’il goent, c’est sans savour
Savourer des dous biens d’amour. (8196-202, 8214-17)

But such a man says he is a true lover, who in his heart is far from being one; for often hearts are cruel. There is a certain type of man, who if he sees a lady

⁸⁵ Francine Mora, “La mise en scène de la mort du poète dans *le Roman du Châtelain de Coucy*,” 39.

or a maiden, receives a spark which induces them into error... These men are enemies of Love; and if they behave in such a way, if they play, it is without knowing how to savor Love's sweet rewards.

The irony of this passage is that Jakemés is “en une esroure”; he is “moult lonc” from proposing a reasonable moral for his *conte*, because no man indiscriminately seduces women in the romance—with the possible exception of the Châtelain's seducing the Dame de Vermandois. The play on *savour* emphasizes this passage's dubiousness; for, as we saw, the Dame de Fayel savors the Châtelain's heart, and Jakemés is therefore playing (“il goe”) with the notion of *savoring* at the same time as he denounces those who are only playing in love.⁸⁶ He then concludes the romance with an odd image: the tormented lover, he says,

...sueffrent menu et souvent
Maint diviers assaut aigrement,
L'un de Tristour, l'autre d'Aaise.
Dont li fevres qu'en la fournaise
U il sen fu souffle et alumme
Pour le fier battre sour l'englumme,
Quant il a soufflé longement
Tant que li fus art aigrement,
Dont regiete aighe par dessus,
Et si n'estaint mie li fus.
Tout ensemment a en Amour
L'une heure froid, l'autre calour... (8228-39)

suffers violently, and often and incessantly, many perilous assaults, the one of Sadness and the next of Ease. This is like the blacksmith who, in his oven, lights and breathes life into his fire, in order then to hit the iron against the anvil. When he has blown for a long time and the fire burns violently, then he puts water over the fire; yet he does not put the fire out. Just so, in Love, one feels cold at one moment, hot at another.

Why, we might wonder, is being unable to put out a fire like being alternately hot and

⁸⁶ See Krueger, *Women Readers*, 200-1, 215, for discussion of “savoring.”

cold? For Krueger, when water is poured on fire, the fire momentarily seems cold; it seems clear, though, that to figure hot and cold as equally pressing torments for the lover, Jakemés could have selected a more appropriate image.⁸⁷ Yet he does not arbitrarily chose this one; rather, the gratuitous reference to the hammer and the anvil represents a perversion of the metaphor, famous from Alain de Lille and Jean de Meun, that brings together potentially perverse rhetoric (and grammar) and sexuality.⁸⁸ Jakemés thus concludes his romance with a displaced moral—men shouldn’t indiscriminately seduce women—and a rhetorically and sexually displaced comparison, where the anvil and the iron do not stand for the man and the woman procreating naturally, but only for the lover himself. He thereby drives home, or hits us over the head with, the perversity of the romance’s rhetoric; and because we can trace this tropological emphasis on displacements, dismemberment and substitutions back to lyric insertion, I would argue that the romance invites us to “insert” lyric insertion into a larger rhetoricity which is perverse and queer.

III. Le dit de la panthère

Like the *Rose*, the *Châtelain* therefore offers both a rhetorical and an ethical challenge to what Leo Bersani has, in other contexts, called the problematic privileging of “difference” over “sameness.”⁸⁹ Both texts, that is, invite us to reconsider—or deconstruct—the criteria of difference used to distinguish, and to distance, lyrics and

⁸⁷ Krueger, *Women Readers*, 214.

⁸⁸ See for example, Daniel Poirion, “Alain de Lille et Jean de Meun.”

⁸⁹ Bersani writes, for example, of the “cult of difference” and its relation to heteronormativity, arguing that the queer has the opportunity to instead privilege sameness over difference (*Rectum* 34).

narrative from each other. They also challenge any modern impulse to dissociate formal or poetical characteristics from ethico-political ones, by allowing us to relate the seemingly formal procedure of lyric insertion and the ethico-political *mise en cause* of heteronormative criteria of “sameness and difference.” Furthermore, one effect of studying these two romances together has been to query the criteria by which critics oppose them; and if the stakes of this gesture are not overly high, insofar as no one is that invested in opposing Renart to Jakemés *per se*, it nonetheless runs counter to the narrative of the progression from “song to book” onto which critics have mapped the technique of lyric insertion in these romances.⁹⁰ The stakes of re-writing the narrative of lyric insertion will be all the more apparent in this final section, which uses Nicole de Margival’s *Dit de la panthère*, a text probably contemporaneous to the *Châtelain*, to challenge the recurrent notion that romances and the *dits* use lyric insertion in fundamentally different ways.⁹¹ This *mise en cause*, which participates in the dissertation’s larger challenge to the viability of the criteria used to distinguish romances from *dits*, thus attempts to leverage the de-construction of the opposition of lyricism to narrativity within each text to perform a similar gesture amongst texts which employ lyric insertion. Because, furthermore, Nicole’s *dit* represents an unusually stark depiction of the rhetoricity and queer potential of lyric insertion, studying it will have the more general effect of corroborating the relation of anti-normative, queer sexuality to lyric insertion.

⁹⁰ The quote is from the title of Huot’s book, *From Song to Book*.

⁹¹ Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet perhaps most dramatically opposes the two, associating thirteenth-century romance with what she calls “collage,” or using lyrics as ornamentation, and later *dits* with “montage,” where the lyrics are anterior to, and drive, the narrative, rather than the other way around. See Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin*, 23-42.

Like Jakemés's romance, Nicole's *dit*, which recounts a dream-vision where the *je* encounters a stunning panther whom he is too timid to approach, focuses on one poetic figure: in Nicole's case, Adam de la Halle. Nicole's "culte obsessionnel pour le poète arrageois," to borrow Anne Berthelot's phrase, suggests that Adam, rather than his anonymous lady, may represent the primary object of his affection.⁹² Indeed, as in the *Châtelain*, we can read the inserted *chants* as coming to pertain to the author's relationship to the original composer. Nicole twice includes entire songs by Adam. Here are the first two stanzas of his, "Grant deduit a et savoureuse vie":

Grant deduit a et savoureuse vie
 En bone Amor honorer et servir:
 Qui la maintient si qu'il doit, sans boisdie,
 Qu'Amours rent plus c'on ne puist deservir.
 Pour ce le serf, miex faire ne porroie;
 Et se ja merci n'avoie
 Quant tant avrai deservi,
 Si me plaist il ma vie user ainsi.

Car je la fais pour la miex ensaignie
 C'on puist du cuer penser ne d'ieux veïr;
 De tant appert a tous sa seignorie
 Qu'il est tous liez qui la puet conjoïr.
 Hé! las! je ne m'os mettre en la voie,
 Car poy parans i seroie,
 Si n'ai qui la soit por mi,
 S'Amors n'i est, et Pitié que je pri. (1589-1604⁹³)

There is great enjoyment and a rich life
 In honoring and serving good Love,
 For he who treats her as he should, without trickery,
 As Love gives back more than one would ever deserve.
 For this I serve her: I could do no better;
 And if I know no mercy,
 When I will have served her thus,
 Still I prefer to live my life in this way.

⁹² Anne Berthelot, "Nicole de Margival lecteur d'Adam de la Halle," 6.

⁹³ Nicole de Margival, *Le Dit de la panthère*, ed. Ribémont. Cited in text by verse.

For I do it for the best learned,
That one can conceive of in one's heart or see with one's eyes;
To all, her superiority is obvious,
And he who can celebrate her is happy.
Alas! I dare not put myself in her path,
For I would hardly be visible,
And nobody would be there for me,
Should Love not be there, and Pity whom I invoke.

While ostensibly characterizing the narrator's sentiments for his lady, the song also comes to evoke the terms of its own insertion into the *dit*.⁹⁴ By relentlessly appealing to Adam's songs, Nicole experiences "grand deduit" in honoring and serving Adam's authority, which he considers second-to-none: "Pour ce le serf, miex faire ne pouroie." In the contexts of Nicole's *dit*, Adam appears as "la mieus enseignie/C'om puist de cuer ne d'iex veïr," and the narrator's excessive reliance on Adam presumes that he considers his authority obvious: "tant aper a touz sa seignourie." The narrator expresses joy in evoking Adam's songs: "Il est tous liez qui la puet conjoïr." The other song cited in its entirety, "Merci, Amour, de la douce doulour," lends itself to similar readings. The song claims that a *je* has found, "la plus belle et toute la meillour/Q'en puist ou mond ne amer ne servir" (the most beautiful and the best that one could in this world either love or serve; 2558-59) even adding that, "Car n'est pas pareil de nous" (for we are not equals; 2588), with Nicole evidently considering Adam the best poet, and seemingly far above him. This song concludes when the *je* says of the *doulz maulz savourouz* (sweet savory pains of love),

Com plus sens, plus sui jouiouz,
Ne je ne vuïel point guerir,
Car mon espoir vault d'autrui le joïr. (2598-600)

⁹⁴ I call the "character," "narrator," and "author" Nicole, as the text does. For the limits of this distinction as it regards this text, see below.

The more I feel it, the more I am joyous,
And I do not wish to heal,
Since my mere hope is as good as the enjoyment/pleasure of another.

In the contexts of the *dit*, Nicole's *espoir* literally *vault d'autrui le joir*, since it is Adam's poetic joy that defines the terms of Nicole's amorous hopes. Lyric insertion, therefore, may be understood as having the effect of displacing the referent from the lady onto the song itself; and, as in the *Châtelain*, this exaggerates the tropology that structuralist critics have located at the heart of the lyrics, because the song becomes its own object, its own *tu*. In fact, because Nicole delves less into a mimetic narrative than Jakemés, he may better expose the anti-referential potential of lyric insertion. For, by blurring any notion of a "real" lady while idolizing Adam's poetical figure, Nicole's *dit* suggests not only that the lady is "not real," but also, as Jean-Charles Huchet has argued in his readings of troubadour lyrics, that the figure of the lady is a rhetorical *smokescreen* for the problem of focusing on (the language of) other men or on the seductiveness of language itself.⁹⁵

Before developing the queerness of Nicole's relationship to Adam's lyrics, I wish to insist on how the text foregrounds the interpenetration of lyric sentiment (the *énoncé*) with the circumstances of the insertion of the lyrics within the *dit* (the *énonciation*). The larger *dit* includes three smaller, inserted ones. In the second and the third inserted *dits*, Venus and Amours literally give to the narrator the expression of his own sentiments: the narrator says of Venus's *dit*, "Dedens ce dit moult bien escript/Avoir la deesse descript/De mon cuer toute la matiere..." (In this well-written *dit*, the goddess had very well described all the substance of my heart; 1147-49). Within

⁹⁵ Huchet, *L'Amour discourtois*, 19-26.

these inserted *dits*, the peculiar circumstances of their enunciation also repeatedly pierce through the lyric sentiment: Venus's *dit* begins,

Dame, cilz qui amors fine
Destraint por vous, vous estrinne
De son cuer sans ja mouvoir. (1151-53)

Lady, he who true love torments for you, embraces you with an unwavering heart
(a heart that does not move).

Here, an otherwise banal sentiment comes alive through play on the verb "mouvoir"; for not only does the narrator place his heart in his lady "sans ja mouvoir," but he becomes the lyric *je* without moving at all, since Venus hands the *dit* to the bedridden narrator. Likewise, when the *je* of the *dit* claims,

Sans faire plus longue atente,
Vous doins mon cuer, bele et gente;
Ne veilliez por mal tenir
Se par escript le presente, (1175-78)

Without any more delay, I offer you my heart, beautiful and noble one; please do not consider it wrong if I present it in writing,

the circumstances of the *énonciation* perform the lover's claim, insofar as Venus has already given the narrator "by writing" his own heart. Because of this emphatic metaleptic intertwinement of *énoncé* and *énonciation* in these inserted *dits*, it then seems appropriate to read Adam's songs as also speaking to the circumstances of their own insertion.

This interpenetration of *énoncé* and *énonciation* points to the narrative's active engagement with the lyrics, similar to what we have seen in the *Rose* and the *Châtelain*. In fact, while criticism has always understood the relationship between Nicole and Adam as a sort of *amor de lonh* whereby, in investing Adam's songs with such authority, Nicole considers them untouchable, the intertwinement of lyrics and

narrative is far subtler.⁹⁶ In the narrator's third citation, he cites the second stanza of Adam's song, "Li jolis maus que je sens ne doit mie":

Folz est qui trop en son cuidier se fie.
On voit aucun seur le point d'enrichir
Emprendre tant dont il aprez mendie;
Tout che me fait de li proier cremir,
Car miex me vault user toute ma vie
En mon joli souvenir
Que par trop taillant desir
Perdre tout a une fie. (1099-106)

He is imprudent who puts too much faith in his own beliefs;
we often see one who is on the point of becoming rich,
who takes on so much that afterward is forced to beg.
All this makes me afraid to confess my love to her;
for it is better to spend my whole life as is,
happily contemplating her image,
than, because of my overly sharp desire,
to lose everything at once.

Nicole's narrator understands this stanza as Adam's instruction to lovers not to express their love; yet it is not at all clear that this is the message of Adam's original song, where the *je* later comes to address his beloved, begging her to "moi metre en volenté de jehir/Mon cuer" (give me the will to reveal/confess my heart; II.26-27).⁹⁷ Adam's song, then, is predicated on a paradox, because it self-consciously addresses the lady about the very impossibility the *je* experiences in addressing the Lady; it is saying what it

⁹⁶ For Butterfield, for example, "Adam's chansons, unlike the Chatelain's, are held up as *exempla* not merely of sentiment, but of the authoritative expression of sentiment in poetry," and "Nicole creates a paradigm of authorship on behalf of Adam but hesitates from applying it directly to himself" (*Poetry and Music*, 261, 263). For Boulton, "the narrator's attitude toward Adam's songs is that of disciple to master" (*The Song in the Story*, 187). See also Solterer, *The Master and Minerva*, 61-78, for a study of the narrator's relation to his "master."

⁹⁷ Adam de la Halle, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Badel. All citations are given by number of song and verse in the text. Note, as is crucial for the upcoming argument, that Badel's edition closely follows Trouvère Chansonier W (BNF fr 25566); see his "Introduction."

apparently cannot say. Nicole here exacerbates this irony by excerpting this stanza in such a manner as to make it say what it doesn't mean to say; in fact, the opening verse, "Faus est qui trop en son cuidier se fie," applies both to Nicole's incorrect *cuidier* of what this lyric means, and even to his larger over-reliance on Adam throughout the *dit*. Nicole showcases a similarly intricate engagement with the terms of Adam's songs in his second citation, when he cites the fourth stanza of Adam's "D'amourous cuer voel canter":

Ançois voit on refuser
 Celui qui trop prie
 Que celui desamonter
 Que trop s'umilie.
 Pour ce sueffre sans renier
 En espoir d'avoir merci,
 Et bien veil qu'il soit ainsi;
 Car a seignorie
 A on mainte foyz failli
 Par trop haster. (1085-94)

We are more likely to see refused
 someone who begs/demands too much
 than someone fail (literally: fall)
 for being overly humble.
 For this reason, I suffer without renouncing,
 in the hope of benefiting from her mercy;
 and I do desire that it is so,
 since, to attain a position of superiority,
 one has many times failed,
 by acting too quickly.

Again, Nicole ironically performs the sentiment of this stanza; for he is overly relying on Adam—he is "celui qui trop prie" Adam—and this is, perhaps, why he fails in his love with his lady. Yet this irony is nonetheless in keeping with the terms of the lyric; for not only does the original lyric repeatedly return to the notion that it risks being "turned" in unwanted ways—denouncing, for example, "Male gent

haïe/Qui a tort m'en volés si/Destourner" (evil, despicable people, you who wrongly want to impede me; I.18-20)—but it also speaks despite its protestations that it is not speaking, as the *je* admits in the sixth strophe, "Ma canchon voel presenter/Ma dame envoisie" (I wish to present my song to my gay lady; I.51-52). My suggestion, then, is that the question of what the lover does or does not express to his lady, which is the subject both of the original song and of the debate within the *dit*, is performed by what Nicole's *dit* shows and hides when quoting from Adam's original songs.

Should one hesitate as to the pertinence of the non-quoted elements of the songs, Venus's first allegation so intriguingly resonates with Adam's original song that it suggests that Nicole may well have had it in mind. She says to Nicole,

Ja qui sera loiaus drus,
 Comment c'on le puist destraindre,
 N'iert de servir recreüs;
 Ains ert tous jors en li graindre
 Foys dusque au morir.
 N'il ne l'osera gehir.
 Et s'il avient qu'il li die
 Et sa dame l'escondie,
 Cuer ara meillour
 D'endurer miex la douleur,
 Et miex li plaira la vie. (1517-27)

He who is a truly loyal lover,
 however he may be tormented,
 will not be loath to serve his lady.
 Instead, in him every day there will be all the more
 Loyalty unto death;
 and he will not dare confess his love.
 But if it so happens that he should tell her,
 and his Lady refuses him,
 he will have all the more courage
 better to endure the pain,
 and life will please him more.

Venus's choice of citations seems odd, because the stanza's logic is so unapparent; it

hardly explains why confessing gives the lover courage to endure his pain.⁹⁸ Yet what Venus does not cite—what she “n’ose gehir”—is relevant to the larger *dit*. Adam’s song opens,

Pour coi se plaint d’Amours nus?
Mais Amours se deüst plaindre,
Car ele rent assés plus
C’on ne puist par sens ataindre
Ne par bel servir. (XI.1-5)

Why should anyone complain about Love?
Love should, in fact, be the one complaining;
for she gives more than one can attain
through wisdom or through devoted service.

This lofty sentiment is quite literally true in the contexts of the *dit*, because Venus and Love give the timid lover far more than he seems to deserve. Adam’s *je* then complains in the fifth stanza that, “Et le langue m’est loïe/Aussi que se faerie/Me venist entour” (And my tongue is tied, as if a fairy had appeared around me; XI.51-53). Again, this is literally what happens in the *dit*, since a *féerique* Venus appears before the lover, whom she finds tongue-tied. Adam’s song concludes:

Canchon, fai toi de maisnie
A me dame tant c’oïe
Soies par douchour!
S’on t’en cache, fai un tour,
Si rentre a l’autre partie. (XI.56-60)

Song, infiltrate the household
Of my lady so that you heard
May be in sweetness!
If you are chased away, think up some ruse,
and find another way in.

⁹⁸ Berthelot offers a rather twisted argument on what she considers to be the logic of Venus’s citation in, “Nicole de Margival lecteur,” 10-11.

Because of the pertinence of the song to the *dit*, the *dit* seems to invite us to *faire un tour*, to *rentre a l'autre partie* of the song. It then performs *onto* the lyric the very play of revealing and concealing that is the theme of both the lyric and of the narrative when considered independently.

There is another way to demonstrate that the narrator's citation functions by playing with what we do and do not see; for the *dit* literally dismembers and remembers one of Adam's *chants* for us, to return to the terms used in discussion of the *Châtelain*. As Berthelot has remarked, Nicole cites the fourth stanza of Adam's song, "Qui a droit veut Amours servir" to justify his pusillanimity; and in her second and third citations, Venus cites the initial three stanzas to denounce the lover's timidity.⁹⁹ The fact that the *dit* itself reconstructs one of Adam's *chants* suggests that we may proceed similarly. We can even go further, by recognizing that Nicole's citations of Adam also call for a larger reconstruction of another order; for in the contexts of the debate, the citations justify opposing positions, like in a *jeu-parti*. Adam's own *jeux-partis* often treat similar subjects: his first, ninth, tenth, and fourteenth *jeux-partis* all deal with whether or not tormented lovers should go for it.¹⁰⁰ The *jeux-partis* also repeatedly discuss (however ironically) Adam's authority in love in terms of *clergie*, as Nicole and Venus do.¹⁰¹ This complex relationship between Nicole's citation of Adam's *chants* and Adam's own *jeux-partis* brings to the fore a series of ironies; for although he seemingly goes to great lengths to confine Adam to one lyric genre, Nicole

⁹⁹ She nevertheless understands Nicole to be operating a "découpage arbitraire" of Adam's songs. "Nicole de Margival lecteur," 10.

¹⁰⁰ Numbers of the *jeux-partis* refer to Badel's edition.

¹⁰¹ For example, in Adam's tenth *jeu-parti*, his anonymous interlocutor says, "Adan, tous tans parlés vous en clergois/Et clerc et lai sont en amour onni..." (Adam, you keep speaking as a clerk, while clerk and laymen are one and the same when it comes to love; X.29-30).

in fact pushes him into another; and although he seems to over-cite Adam in a servile manner, Nicole potentially under-cites him by not alluding to the *jeux-partis*. He is, then, complexly negotiating distance vis-à-vis his master. We can nonetheless affirm that, rather than violating the terms of the lyrics, Nicole turns them in a sense that they invite, since the move from Adam's *chants* to his *jeux-partis* is precisely that of the famous manuscript BnF fr 25566, commonly referred to as Trouvère Chansonnier W!¹⁰²

This play of distance vis-à-vis Adam's *oeuvre* takes another turn in the final segment of Nicole's *dit*. After waking up from his dream, Nicole inserts, alongside two more citations from Adam's songs, six works which he claims as his own. Yet Nicole's "originality" is rather paradoxical: I cite the first stanza of his fifth *chançon*:

J'ay esté chantans, jolis
 Et gays, mais venue est l'eure
 Dont j'oÿ dire jadis:
 Tels rit main qui au soir pleure.
 Si n'a en moy jeu ne ris,
 Car je ne puis ester oÿs
 De cele qui a m'amor,
 Por qui je sui sans sejour
 En pensee nuit et jor. (2384-92)

I was singing, happy
 and gay—but then came the hour
 about which I have previously heard said:
 He who laughs in the morning will be crying by night.
 In me there is therefore neither mirth nor laughter;
 for I cannot be heard
 by she who has my love,
 about whom I am, without interruption,
 thinking day and night.

¹⁰² The manuscript is available on Gallica:
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6001348v/f8.image.r=25566>. And, as noted, Badel's edition attempts largely to follow its progression.

This song continues for four more stanzas, which each repeat the refrain of the final two verses; this first stanza has also included one of the most common medieval refrains, “Tels rit main qui au soir pleure.” In fact, every song that Nicole claims to author is a *chanson à refrain*, and the existence of a refrain seems to be the principal feature distinguishing Nicole’s *chançons* from Adam’s *chants*. Here, that is, the above-cited song contains five stanzas, and nothing seems to justify Nicole’s preference for the term *chançon* over *chant*, which he uses to describe Adam’s songs, except for its use of a refrain, as E. Hoepffner first remarked.¹⁰³ The irony, though, is that refrains serve precisely to challenge notions of originality; as Butterfield brilliantly observes, “such anonymous, inclusive forms of speech and melody do not easily admit a notion of original, authorial creation.”¹⁰⁴ Nicole’s originality, then, is his recourse to that which challenges originality; and by relying on refrains, Nicole finds his own voice by drawing on the very type of language that, for Butterfield, “break[s] down barriers...between mine and yours, ours and theirs, hers and his.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Nicole’s implication that *chansons à refrains* mark a progression away from Adam’s lyrics is, again, misleading; for Adam authored many *rondeaux* with *refrains*, and Butterfield praises his “wide and novel use of refrains.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, the move from *chants* to *jeux-partis* to *rondeaux* is precisely that of Chansonnier W, giving one the distinctly odd impression that the *Panthère* is shadowing this manuscript.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ernest Hoepffner, “Les poésies lyriques du *Dit de la Panthère* de Nicole de Margival,” 223.

¹⁰⁴ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 244.

¹⁰⁵ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 243.

¹⁰⁶ Ardis Butterfield, “*Aucassin et Nicolette* and Mixed Forms in Medieval French,” 85.

¹⁰⁷ See manuscript, and Badel’s edition.

Indeed, the final songs Nicole attributes to himself are two *rondeaux*, and they provide a striking illustration both of Nicole's play of distance vis-à-vis Adam and its relation to the rhetoricity of the lyrics. His first *rondeau* begins:

Soiez liez et menez joie,
Amis, car Amours me proie
D'alegier vostre douleur.
S'en lais convenir Amour.
Fins cuers, a qui je m'otroie
Soiez liez et menez joie... (2516-21)

Be happy and express your joy,
Lover (masc.), for Love begs me
to soften your pains.
Let Love do her work,
Sweetheart, to whom I give myself;
be happy and express your joy.

Because this *rondeau* is written from a woman's perspective, Nicole is making use of the ventriloquism characteristic of his earlier dream-vision; he even associates this ventriloquism with Love: "Amours me proie." Yet Nicole is not only putting words in his lady's mouth, since, as Butterfield has observed, the *rondeau* "has the same distinctive formal structure as Adam's *rondeau*, 'Je muir, je muir d'amourete.'"¹⁰⁸ Beyond signaling Nicole's awareness of Adam's *rondeaux*, the "contrafacture" also implies that the lyric is performing ventriloquism at two levels, since Adam first provides Nicole with the "formal structure," and Nicole continues this movement by providing words to his lady.¹⁰⁹ And because the *rondeau* is not only written by Nicole but also addressed to him, would it be too much to suggest that the lyric is not only inspired by Adam, but also somehow for him?

¹⁰⁸ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 284.

¹⁰⁹ For discussion of "contrafacture," see Sarah Kay, *Parrots and Nightingales*, 11.

The ensuing *rondeau*, written as a response to this one, drives home this lyric challenge to the stability of the referent:

J'ai eü commandement
D'estre liez, si le serai
En chant de loial cuer gay.

S'on me demande comment
Ne pour quoy, je respondrai:
J'ai eü commandement
D'estre liez, si le serai
En chant de loial cuer gay.

Et tout ce m'est bel et gay
Que cele ou mon cuer mis ay
Commande, et por ce dirai:
J'ay eü commandement
D'estre liez, si le serai,
En chant de loial cuer gay. (2530-43)

I have received the order
To be happy, and thus I will be,
In this song of a loyal and gay heart.

If one asks me how,
Or why, I'll respond:
I have received the order
To be happy, and thus I will be,
In this song of a loyal and gay heart.

And all this is beautiful and happy for me,
That she in whom I have placed my heart,
Orders me, and for this I shall say:
I have received the order
To be happy, and thus I will be,
In this song of a loyal and gay heart.

Yet, we know, Nicole has received no such *commandement*; the *dit* expressly refers to this sequence as pure fantasy. Thus, as in structuralist conceptions of the lyric, referential truth is not an appropriate way to evaluate this song; in the *dit*, this song even seems to exist precisely in opposition to actual events. This does not, though,

mean that the *commandement* is void of authority; for by virtue of being repeated, the command comes to possess its own authority. The command, that is, functions via its insistent repetition as the command itself, because the formal imperative (or command) to repeat *becomes* the content of the command. The lyric becomes its own rhetorical object, and this about as concisely as possible.

Because, as we have observed, referential truth and narrativite progression are anything but solid notions in Nicole's text, turning from lyric insertion to how rhetoricity bleeds into the surrounding texts is simpler than it was in either the *Rose* or the *Châtelain*. It is nonetheless worth noting that the text emphasizes the instability of the referent, by dragging Nicole's bed, the literal support of the *récit-cadre*, within the dream-vision itself. While the *dit* opens with the narrator falling asleep, the bed will reappear throughout the dream: rescued by Love, the narrator "tantost demande le lit/Car moult malades me sentoît..." (Then asked for a bed, because I was feeling very ill; 802-3). Throughout his ensuing debates with Venus and Love, he remains bedridden: Venus and Love, "Après ce vindrent, menant joie/Dedens la chambre ou me gisoie/En mon lit..." (afterward came, enjoying themselves, into the room where I lay in my bed; 1003-5). It is not unusual for an oneiric *dit* to open with a *je* in bed; it is, though, unusual for the lover to remain bedridden within the dream for nearly the entirety of its duration. Nicole's text therefore seems particularly insistent on confusing the distinction of within and without, and because the bed's materiality becomes entangled in the immateriality of the dream-vision, the material support of the text loses its ability to anchor the text in a "real," non-allegorical setting.

It is, though, the magnificent panther that best showcases the larger *dit*'s

engagement with indeterminacy. According to the *dit*, which here follows bestiary tradition, the panther assimilates the colors of all other animals into itself, except the dragon:

Qu'il n'i avoit beste nis une,
Tant fust estrange ne commune,
Qu'elle n'eüst de lor coulour
Tant recevoit elle du lour
Sans faire a elles nul damage. (99-103)

For there was no animal but one, however distant or local, whose color [the panther] didn't incorporate into itself; so much did it receive from others without damaging them at all.

Eliza Zingesser has observed how the panther-sign functions like Nicole's text, which incorporates into its fabric a wide variety of different sources.¹¹⁰ We can also liken the panther-sign to Adam's role in the *dit*, because the text emphasizes both the sweetness of its words, as figured by its *douce haleine* (sweet breath; 493), and its *renomme* (reputation; 477). I am insisting on the porosity of the panther's contours, and its association both with Nicole's larger text and with Adam's role in the *dit*, in order to stress the paradoxical nature of its determination; for the panther is so unusual or unique precisely it is indeterminate. For Edelman, "The gay male body...must be *marked and indeterminate at once*; consequently, it is imagined to be marked as indeterminate with the result that indeterminacy effectively ceases to *be* indeterminate and becomes, instead, the gay male body's determinate mark."¹¹¹ Similarly, the determinacy of the panther-sign is its indeterminacy; it is, to borrow de Man's felicitous phrase, "the metaphor of a metaphor," because it is a metaphor that

¹¹⁰ Eliza Zingesser, "The Vernacular Panther," 307.

¹¹¹ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 237. His emphasis.

explicitly evokes substitution and displacement.¹¹²

There is a particularly important consequence to the panther's "meta-metaphoricity": it colors the entire dream-vision with irony. Throughout it, the narrator seeks the *senefiance* behind the panther's appearance and behavior. Love provides him with the "droite interpretation" (correct/straight interpretation; 203) of, among other things, the place "Ou celle que ton cuer honneure/Comme en son propre lieu demeure" (where she, whom your heart honors, resides, as in her proper place; 629-30). Yet, try as he might, it would be impossible for Love to explain "tout apertement," to borrow the text's phrase, the panther's "proper place," because, by virtue of being a metaphor, even the metaphor of a metaphor, the panther is defined as always-already figural, and thus not in its, or in any, proper place. The notion, then, that "[t]out droit parmi le voir irai" (I am cutting straight to the truth; 741) which punctuates the explanations, is heavily underwritten by irony; for the panther's truth is only tropological, and therefore necessarily not straight.

There is, though, another larger irony behind this irony. While the narrator refuses to approach his lady, Nicole makes it clear, in both the prologue and the epilogue, that he will allow the *dit* to circulate, so that his Lady may eventually come into contact with it. Referring to himself in the third person, he writes in the prologue, "Por ce, par pluseurs li envoie/Qu'il veult qu'en aucun lieu le voie/Cele por qui fu commencie/Et moiennee et parfornie" (For this reason he sends it to many, because he wishes that she for whom this work was begun, continued, and completed, should come to see it somewhere; 23-26). In the epilogue, he asserts that he was waiting for the *dit* to

¹¹² De Man, *Allegories*, 37.

be complete, before allowing it to circulate (2629-37). Contrary, then, to what the *je*-narrator says both within and without the dream, the author of the prologue and epilogue does desire the *dit*'s circulation.¹¹³ Within the dream, the God of Love says, "Je fais bien des couars hardis/Et les hardis acouardis" (I make cowards courageous, and the courageous cowardly; 355-56); yet it is Nicole's *dit* taken in its entirety, rather than Love's intervention, that makes of a cowardly hero a brazen text. According to de Man, "Curiously enough, it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means."¹¹⁴ Within the dream—as in various songs of Adam's—Nicole's narrator says he will not express himself; yet somehow, this becomes the very content of the expression of the *dit*. Nicole's *dit*, then, derives its truth value from language's inability to mean what it says, which it figures in many different ways. And because the *dit* both emphasizes language's rhetoricity as it derives from lyric insertion and emphatically brings this rhetoricity to bear on conceptions of sexuality, it is, I think, justifiable to call it queer. The *Dit de la panthère* not only deconstructs heteronormative rhetoric by depicting it as more rhetorical than heterosexual, but it also relentlessly eroticizes language's very indeterminacy.

IV.

We have traced a similar itinerary through Renart's *Rose*, Jakemés's *Châtelain*, and

¹¹³ This does not mean that I accept this distinction; I am using it here as a short-hand for saying that the *je* says he will not speak to his lady—and then apparently does, by sending the *dit* to her. We can show that this is not something specific to narrative (and thus does not demand the narrator/author distinction) by recalling that "speaking but not speaking" is a lyric property, no doubt here inherited from Adam.

¹¹⁴ De Man, *Allegories*, 211.

Nicole's *Panthère*. In each text, I have argued that the act of lyric insertion exaggerates the rhetoricity already at work within the lyrics. I then attempted to show how such rhetoricity, which the act of lyric insertion emphasizes rather than quashes, bleeds into the surrounding texts, in turn cautioning us against taking for granted either the pretensions to diachronic temporality or to mimetic referentiality of any of the narratives. Finally, these texts locate this rhetoricity at the heart of conceptions of sexuality; and because the confusing conflation, or metaleptic embrace, of rhetoricity and sexuality may be understood as the signature move of (certain conceptions of) queerness, these texts become queer in the sense according to which theorists like Butler and Edelman use the term.

Like the other chapters, then, this chapter has both attempted to demonstrate, and been guided by, my conviction that the poetics of verse romances and the *dits* challenge conceptions of order, both in poetic and political (or, to use their medieval analogues, rhetorical and ethical) terms. These texts shake things up, which is why I have attempted to shake things up in terms of critical understanding of lyric insertion. In conclusion, I want to look briefly at the consequences of my argument for certain binary oppositions, before turning to what it might mean to study lyric insertion radically differently.¹¹⁵

The binary opposition of lyrics to narrative, I have argued, has unfair consequences for both. When the distance between lyrics and narratives is taken for

¹¹⁵ I note in passing that my argument may be interestingly juxtaposed to Kay's sense of contradiction in *Courtly Contradictions*. In the introduction, she argues that critics have refused to look contradiction in the eye, doing all they can to efface its danger. Yet, I would suggest, as it regards lyric insertion, critics have done precisely the opposite: exaggerating contradiction. This nonetheless also serves as a means of looking away from a fundamentally challenging problem.

granted, it limits the senses in which the lyric can turn, even fogging our conception of the lyrics as rhetorical in ways that, by inviting active engagement, can be consequential both for the narratives and for our understanding of the world.¹¹⁶ I find that the consequences to the narratives of this binary opposition are perhaps even more worrisome: the narratives are belittled into attempts mimetically to represent referents and come to be associated with purely diachronic temporality. Both (logocentric) moves push these narratives away from tropology or rhetoricity, which instead rely on non-linear temporality and queer the possibility of the referent. Indeed, it is odd that rather than understanding lyric insertion as moving narratives toward lyricism, criticism has persistently seen the gesture as always-already distancing narratives from lyrics. Not only is this counterintuitive (if lyrics and narrative are brought together, maybe this is the point...), but, I think, it also betokens a distinctly nonmedieval conception of narrativity, reflective of our modern association of narrative with diachronicity and mimesis.¹¹⁷ Yet, even the most cursory glance at any rhetorical treatise showcases the preference for “artificial” over “natural” temporality, thus challenging the reign of diachronicity, and it hardly seems that either romances or the *dits* principally locate their truth value in mimetic referentiality or *vraisemblance*...¹¹⁸

Challenging this lyric/narrative binary invites us to challenge others. That of music to literature, which I have insufficiently explored. No one, I think, would deny the importance of the recent revival of critical interest in music; we may nonetheless

¹¹⁶ For the relationship of poetry and knowledge, see Armstrong and Kay, *Poetry and Knowledge*.

¹¹⁷ See the “epilogue” to the thesis.

¹¹⁸ Note that it is quite interesting to read Kelly’s monumental treatise on rhetoric as persistently challenging our impetus to overlay modern conceptions of narrativity onto medieval “narratives.” See Ch II for brief discussion of natural and artificial time.

wish to remain prudent about how our conceptions of music may be clouded by what de Man calls romantic “phonocentrism.”¹¹⁹ It is worrisome that some scholars seem to equate musical analysis with the attempt to locate the “original” means of gaining access to the “presence” of songs, when both songs and texts function by displacing notions of presence and originality—worrisome, that is, that musical analysis and the study of performance can become confused.¹²⁰ To level this charge against Butterfield and Judith Peraino—who, more than any others, have nuanced our understanding of the relationship of music to vernacular literature—would, however, be unfair. Peraino nonetheless decries how “proponents,” including Dragonetti, “of [a] literal, word-oriented view see melodies as supplemental rather than integral to the expression of the song.”¹²¹ I would suggest that we may embrace such supplementarity as paradoxically integral to these songs. Works like Renart’s *Rose* are entirely supplementary, in the Derridean sense of showcasing that which is foreign to the referent, but inevitably clouds our ability to approach it in its self-sufficient presence.¹²² I therefore expect that more musically-oriented readings than my own would supplement my analyses of the supplementarity (or de Manian rhetoricity, since the two notions are cousins)

¹¹⁹ De Man, *Allegories*, 31.

¹²⁰ There is, for example, something that gives me pause in Butterfield’s notion that, “the desire to retrieve an aural image of the sound of early music powerfully motivates us to decipher medieval notation, even if we recognise that our resulting image is inescapably modern” (*Poetry and Music*, 25). Certainly, but can we “retrieve” without considering that a medieval public would have equated music with “presence”? Or Huot, who writes of Guillaume de Lorris’s *Rose*, “Because the narrator is identified with the protagonist...the dream experience acquires an immediacy close to that of lyric performance” (*From Song to Book*, 87). Is song necessarily “immediate”? Huot also writes, “the lyrico-narrative text is a hybrid entity, a conflation of normative discourse, normally written and read aloud, and lyric discourse, normally sung. In short, lyricism, the direct oral expression of sentiment, is redefined so as to allow for a written lyric discourse...” (*From Song to Book*, 83).

¹²¹ Peraino, *Giving Voice to Love*, 27.

¹²² The classic development of the *supplément* is in the *Grammatologie*, 197-226.

characteristic of each text. These “supplements” would be as essential as any other reading of the text: essential, that is, paradoxically because they question the possibility of essentialism. Embracing the rhetoricity of music nonetheless depends on establishing the importance of rhetoricity; and de-construction provides the tools to do so, while queer theory opens up fruitful paths for understanding its ethico-political ramifications—for letting it “come out” into undeniably consequential terrain. As we saw in the preceding chapter in relation to *Silence*, Eve Sedgwick observes in her landmark essay how, “the stretch between the two theatrical and deconstructive meanings of ‘performative’ seems to span the polarities of, at either extreme, the extroversion of the actor, and the introversion of the signifier.”¹²³ The “extroversion” of theatrical or musical performances is not incompatible with the deconstructive introversion of the signifier; rather, this “introversion” fosters a conception of rhetoricity whose challenge to notions of presence can then be brought to bear on the “extroversion” of performances.

Other oppositions, finally, begin to tumble: those at which this thesis takes aim. In rhetorical terms, those between romances and the *dits* and between High and Late medieval literature; in ethical terms, those between man and woman and hetero- and homo-sexual; and at another level, that between metaliterary poetic (rhetorical) and political (ethical) relevance. Because I focus on these binaries elsewhere, I will not elaborate on them here. Instead, I wish to conclude by querying our very impulse to narrativize lyric insertion. In an age where many ascribe to Foucault their impetus always to historicize, it may be useful to recall de Man’s reluctance:

In literary studies, structures of meaning are frequently described in historical

¹²³ Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 3.

rather than in semiological or rhetorical terms. This is, in itself, a somewhat surprising occurrence, since the historical nature of literary discourse is by no means an *a priori* established fact, whereas all literature necessarily consists of linguistic and semantic elements.¹²⁴

My intention is not to rehearse the subtleties of de Man's argument, which I will touch on in the thesis' conclusion. Rather, it is to suggest that the very desire to narrativize lyric insertion may be misleading, a violation of the terms of the lyrics and of the rhetoricity of lyric insertion, because it has the effect of ascribing to a (largely) linear narrative the very elements which are structurally opposed to diachronic temporality and even to mimetic representation. Strangely enough, it seems that while many critics of lyric insertion barely hide their preference for the lyrics over the narrative, the gesture of fitting lyric insertion into a quasi-linear narrative that goes from Jean Renart's included songs to Machaut's books presupposes critical accounts written according to diachronic narrative terms (which, I repeat, do not correspond to the rhetoricity of these narratives).

But how, we might then ask, could we privilege rhetoricity over diachronic historicity when studying lyric insertion? Judith Peraino describes the trajectory of her book, which moves from the troubadours through to Machaut, as "a spiral staircase, constantly turning round, though moving to new locations."¹²⁵ I have argued that each of the narratives we have analyzed is structured tropologically. And, I submit, it is only if we continually strive to understand this as the determining structure and temporality of lyric insertion that we can free ourselves from the presupposition of diachronic

¹²⁴ De Man, *Allegories*, 79. Carla Freccero also has useful things to say about problematic interpretations of Foucault's call to historicize: see *Queer/Early/Modern*, 31-52.

¹²⁵ Peraino, *Giving Voice to Love*, 32. Butterfield also hesitates with certain binaries, arguing that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century texts trouble the oppositions of "public and private, vocal and aural, physical and abstract concepts of communication" (*Poetry and Music*, 17).

historicity that inevitably suffocates the lyrics because it violates their terms, and that also minimizes both the poetic and political stakes of lyric insertion and of the narrative texts which explore this striking and subversive phenomenon. The genius, that is, of Renart's prologue, is not that it says what it means and thus began the history of lyric insertion; instead, it is that we can't peg down what it means, and thus began the turns of lyric insertion. It is time to hear the ambiguity, irony and rhetoricity behind the line which concludes Renart's prologue: "Si commencē ici son conte."

4. Screwing (with) Chrétien de Troyes and Guillaume de Machaut: de Manian Irony and Queer Spectropoetics in the *Jugement dou roy de Behaingne* (before 1342) and the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre* (1349-50), *Erec et Enide* (ca. 1170), *Cligès* (1176), and the *Voir Dit* (1363-5)¹

“The pace and import” of the concluding lines of *Yvain* “have severely tested modern critics’ sense of a satisfying conclusion,” write Howell Chickering and Fredric Cheyette.²

Laudine is constrained to forgive Yvain, and then Yvain

Mout en est a boin chief venus,
Qu’il est amés et chiers tenus
De sa dame et ele de luy.
Ne lui souvient de nul anuy,
Que par la joie les oublie
Qu’il a de sa tres chiere amie.³

has come to a very good end, since he is loved and held dear by his lady, and she by him. He remembers no strife, because the joy that he derives from his very dear lady makes him forget it.

Chickering and Cheyette argue that modern critical responses to this passage are just that: overly modern. Drawing on impeccable historical research, they consider that this passage would be satisfactory to a contemporary audience, because it is in keeping with attested twelfth-century practices of dispute resolution.

¹ For the dating of each of these texts, which has little bearing on my argument, I am referring to the critical editions used for each text. There has been some more recent discussion of the dating of *Erec* in James R. Simpson, *Troubling Arthurian Histories*, 20. Helen Swift uses the term “spectropoetics” in her, *Gender, Writing and Performance*, 35. While her discussion of “spectropoetics” derives from Derrida, she doesn’t acknowledge that the term “spectropoétique” is his: see *Spectres de Marx*, 81.

² Howell Chickering and Frederic Cheyette, “Love, Anger and Peace,” 75.

³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le chevalier au lion ou le roman d’Yvain*, ed. Hult, vv. 6793-98. Cited in text by line numbers.

No doubt it is, but the text also subverts this sense of resolution by inviting suspicious readings; for while Yvain “par la joie...oublie,” we as critics are (ironically) called upon to remember the numerous instances of forgetting, dotting the text, that problematically relate to this sequence.⁴ These lines are first prefigured in Calogrenant’s narrative. After he provokes the storm, there is a brief moment of calm before Esclados puts him to shame, of which he says, “Que joie, s’onques le connui/Fait tost oublier grant anui” (For joy, if one has ever known it, makes one quickly forget great strife; 455-56). Given that shame is on the horizon for Calogrenant, this repetition can’t bode well for Yvain. Throughout the romance, forgetting also has negative connotations for the protagonist. It is the sin he is accused of: “Yvain, mout fus or oublians,/Qu’il ne te puet resouvenir/Que tu deüsses revenir” (Yvain, you were then very forgetful, since you weren’t able to remember that you had to return; 2746-47). Forgetting then describes the effect this sin has on him, since he loses his memory as he declines into a bestial state—“Pour che mais ne li souvenoit/De nule riens qu’il eüst faite” (From this moment onward he didn’t remember anything he’d done; 2822-23)—and reacquires it on his way back to civilization: “Si fu garis et respasés/Et rot son sens et son memoire” (he was healed and restored, and had his mind and memory again; 3018-19).

This passage thus presents the reader with a choice: either to act like Yvain, forgetting forgetting so as to re-member his couple, or to remember forgetting, and in so doing, to dismember the neat sense of resolution.⁵ This latter gesture describes the

⁴ I make a similar argument in the final pages of my, “The Beast that Therefore Chrétien is.” Peggy McCracken discusses forgetting in the *Conte du graal* in her, “Forgetting to Conclude,” in Stahuljak *et al.*, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 139-62.

⁵ For a recent study on dismemberment on *Cligès*, see Matilda Bruckner, “Of Cannibalism and *Cligès*.” See also Ch. III’s discussion of dismemberment in the *Châtelain de Couci* and Solterer’s “Dismembering, Remembering the Châtelain de Couci.”

methodology of this chapter, where I offer new readings of various romances of Chrétien's and *dits* of Machaut's, which emphasize how different texts dismember themselves more than criticism has traditionally allowed. I shall contend that Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Behaingne* establishes a link between poetic indeterminacy and erotic despair on which its sequel, the *Jugement du roy de Navarre*, then capitalizes. With *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, I offer new metaleptic readings of the prologues and of the concluding sequences, emphasizing parallels between the *énoncé* and the *énonciation* which point to the ethical, rather than the purely rhetorical, stakes of Chrétien's oft-touted irony. I proceed to trace irony's relation to transgressive emanations of sexuality throughout these romances, before considering the ramifications of this imbrication for our understanding of each text's subversiveness. Finally, as it regards the *Voir Dit*, I argue that Machaut is not contrasting the failures and insufficiencies of the lover with the success of the poet/author, but rather simultaneously creating ("membering") and dismembering the possibility of the stable erotic relationship and of the authoritative author or text.

If, as the example from *Yvain* suggests, illustrating dismemberment relies on close textual analysis, it also has broader theoretical justification which both informs this chapter and which it in turn advocates. Each chapter in this dissertation pairs verse romances and *dits* together, challenging the criteria by which critics distinguish them and wagering that their juxtaposition will open up new readings which foreground the attraction, characteristic of texts of both genres, to rhetorical and ethico-political indeterminacy. It may seem that studying Chrétien and Machaut together is merely a metonymic reformulation of studying verse romances and the *dits* together; and the

similarity between the genres, on which this chapter is based, is their allowance of this metonymy, insofar as both genres have fostered larger-than-life author-figures and *oeuvres* that have greatly influenced literary history. It is, however, contradictory to argue that each genre is both obsessed with indeterminacy and characterized by fostering author-figures and *oeuvres*, when the latter notions seem to imply some sort of determinacy.⁶ In this chapter, I attempt to leverage this contradiction to resist the conceptions of *auctoritas* generally ascribed by critics to Machaut or to Chrétien. I explore how texts attributed to them may better lend themselves to a queer—anti-patriarchal, explicitly erotically charged and relentlessly unstable—challenge to *auctoritas*. This chapter is, then, both the fruit of studying verse romances and the *dits* together and a test for the indeterminate, even antinormative, drives that this dissertation locates at the heart of each genre.

The remainder of this introduction will sketch the theoretical strokes that I have found most useful when thinking about ways to dis-member rhetorical and ethical *auctoritas*, while it will necessarily fall to the readings of the texts to justify the usefulness of these frameworks. At the most basic level, there is something both intuitive and counter-intuitive about considering Chrétien and Machaut together in terms of authorship: intuitive because the authors of the two most canonical medieval French *oeuvres* have not been studied together since 1919⁷; and counter-intuitive, because their authorship seems to manifest itself so differently, as Chrétien is cloaked in biographical anonymity, while Machaut, critics maintain, is a key figure in the history of the

⁶ See also considerations about the “anti-genre” nature of these genres in the “Introduction” and the “anti-narrative” sense of the narrative I am tracing in the “Epilogue.”

⁷ See Ernest Hoepffner, “Crestien de Troies und Guillaume de Machaut.” He briefly considers the relationship between the lion in *Yvain* and Machaut’s *Dit dou lyon*.

construction of the modern, autobiographical author of a unified *oeuvre*.⁸ The hesitation to consider the two together may reflect Foucault's notion that the "author-function" is a historical construction.⁹ Late medievalists, interested in patronage networks and manuscript studies, have extensively historicized the birth of Machaut *qua* author, implying, in a notion to which high medievalists are unlikely to voice objection, that fourteenth-century conceptions of authorship were beyond twelfth-century epistemological horizons. Yet, it is unclear to what extent high medievalists do without this "author-function" in practice, and whether late medievalists have sufficiently paired their study of the material conditions and rhetorical depictions of authorship with an investigation of the theoretical limitations of the concept.¹⁰ The problematic persistence of the "author-function" is perhaps more tangible if, with Foucault, we tease it out of the notion of the *oeuvre*. "Le mot 'oeuvre,'" he writes, "et l'unité qu'il désigne, sont probablement aussi problématiques que l'individualité de l'auteur."¹¹ To institute the *oeuvre* as arbiter of truth is, Foucault argues, merely to slide one monolithic authority, misleadingly considered as trans-historical and/or as a material reality rather than a series of complex discursive operations, into the place of another. With very few exceptions,

⁸ The earliest in-depth scholarly accounts of Machaut all take up this question of "authorship": see Calin, *A Poet at the Fountain*; Brownlee, *Poetic Identity*; and Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin si subtil*, esp. 105-66, 211-22. Since, notions of Machaut's "authorship" and "oeuvre" have been ubiquitous; to give but one example, McGrady and Jennifer Bain have recently introduced the *Companion to Guillaume de Machaut* by reflecting on Machaut's "success in uniting author and corpus in an unprecedented manner" (6).

⁹ Virginie Greene offers a good account of how medievalists have responded to modern theoretical questions about the "author," especially to Foucault's call to historicize, in her essay, "What Happened to Medievalists after the Death of the Author," 206-9.

¹⁰ Virginie Greene's volume is the exception for its engagement with modern reflection on the limitations of the concept of the author. John Moreau's recent book is a particularly compelling instance of looking to domains of medieval thought other than rhetoric to problematize the author-figure: see *Eschatological Subjects*.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur," 8-9.

critics have retained this notion of the *oeuvre* when discussing Chrétien, without any substantial evidence that one man authored each text attributed to him.¹² We may then wonder how this recurrent but dubious assumption affects critical conceptions of each text's larger engagement with authority, whether rhetorical, ethical or otherwise. As it regards Machaut studies, the situation is arguably more complex. Late medievalists have made the construction of the *oeuvre* into Machaut's crowning achievement, without necessarily supplementing this with what Foucault calls a "théorie de l'oeuvre," that is, with emphasis on the discursivity—which, in Foucauldian thought, is always problematic, calling for suspicion and resistance—inherent in the notion.¹³ It is also possible that various (brilliant) studies over the last several decades which sought to supplement rhetorical analysis of texts by turning to the "rhetoric of the manuscript" may have encountered such success that critics stand to gain from recalling the potential limitations of conceiving of the *oeuvre* as a material construct.¹⁴ Foucauldian thought is,

¹² The remarkable exception is Sarah Kay's, "Who was Chrétien de Troyes?" For Kay, who mentions Foucault in passing (3), "Crestien" is possibly a "pseudonym" or what she dubs an "anonym": "a renunciation of all identity other than the spiritual and ethical aspirations of the Christian" (30). Kay's article was followed up by *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*. This text, in fact, is inspired by Kay's article and Greene's volume on authorship. See Stahuljak et. al., *Thinking Through Chrétien*, 3-4. Bridging the high/late medieval divide, Alexandre Leupin brilliantly observes that, in the *Rose*, "the text's unity or duality is ultimately referred to a conception of authorship that is not medieval, one in which the ultimate deciding criterion is the author's or the authors' intentionality" ("The *Roman de la Rose* as a Mobius Strip," 62).

¹³ Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur," 8, for the quote. The notion of problematizing discursivity is particularly prominent in *l'Histoire de la Sexualité*, vol. 1. Helen Swift's recent chapter on the "Poetic I" in the *Companion to Guillaume de Machaut* does take up the question of the unity of Machaut's *oeuvre*; she warns that, "our sense of coherence [of the I] may risk anachronism" (18). In theorizing concepts of narratorial and authorial presence that are not attached to anachronistic conceptions of subjectivity, Swift draws heavily on A.C. Spearing's *Textual Subjectivity*. For problematization of the notions of the author and the *oeuvre* in a philological sense, see Stephen Nichols, "The Medieval Author: An Idea Whose Time Hadn't Come?"

¹⁴ I think it fair to argue that there has been quite a trajectory from how Sylvia Huot read Machaut manuscripts as saying something about "books," to how Deborah McGrady uses them to think about readership, to their overwhelming presence in, say, *A Companion to Guillaume de Machaut*.

in this respect, helpful, because it both queries assumptions about the materiality of the material and urgently reminds us of the ethico-political complexity of discursive operations which establish normative parameters—or, put more simply, which control readings. Recourse to Foucault also suggests that recent Machaldian criticism, which has been characterized by its “interdisciplinarity” and its lack of overt engagement with “theory,” may stand to benefit from re-injecting it, both because so-called “literary” questions are not necessarily resolved (whatever that would mean!) and because theory can open up avenues for asking questions that have not been satisfactorily addressed, such as Machaut’s relationship to sexuality.¹⁵

Momentarily remaining with Foucault will help us begin rethinking *auctoritas* in Chrétien and Machaut. In his famed Collège de France lecture, Foucault theorizes that, “la marque de l’écrivain n’est plus que la singularité de son absence.”¹⁶ He explores how a constitutive forgetting may replace the traditional concept of the author in select works of Marx and Freud. These men are “instaurateurs de discursivité,” he hypothesizes, because their texts contain a radical emptiness to which we are incessantly drawn: “on revient à un certain vide que l’oubli a esquivé ou masqué, qu’il a recouvert d’une fausse ou d’une mauvaise plénitude et le retour doit redécouvrir cette lacune et ce manque.”¹⁷

These lines nicely describe the conclusion of *Yvain*. “Chrétien,” according to this

¹⁵ Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur,” 8, for the concept of the “théorie de l’oeuvre.” For a wide-ranging account of recent Machaut criticism and its relative lack of interest in “theory,” see Sarah Kay, “Is Interdisciplinarity the New Theory?” The most striking exception, I find, is Judith Peraino’s *Giving Voice to Love*, which draws heavily on Butlerian theory in discussing Machaut’s songs. There may have also been a more recent kick-back against de-construction; Swift attributes to Kay and Elizabeth Eva Leach a notion that “there is a poststructuralist temptation to equate any perception of disorder with indeterminacy and deconstructive play,” and argues that one should resist it when studying Machaut’s “I” (Swift, “The Poetic ‘I,’” 22, see n22).

¹⁶ Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur,” 7.

¹⁷ Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur,” 21.

conception, may be an *instaurateur*, not because he exercises totalizing authority, but because he doesn't: because his text is constituted by a forgetting that we re-member so as to dismember the text.

Given that Foucault considered his remarks to be, "rien de plus qu'un plan de travail, un repérage de chantier," it is understandable if he doesn't think through the most radical implications of conceiving of authorship as absence.¹⁸ Without citing Foucault, Derrida picks up this train of thought in the *Spectres de Marx*. He focuses on how ghosts confuse notions of presence and absence, past and present. These phenomena also present us with confusing, disparate injunctions which constitute the bulk of our heritage: "Si la lisibilité d'un legs était donnée, naturelle, transparente, univoque, si elle n'appelait et ne défiait en même temps l'interprétation, on n'aurait jamais à en hériter."¹⁹ Referring to *Hamlet*, Derrida compares the injunctions of the ghost to the literary *chef d'oeuvre*: "Un chef-d'œuvre toujours se meut, par définition, à la manière d'un fantôme."²⁰ He also speaks of what he calls the *Chose Shakespeare* in similar terms: this Thing can "autoriser chacune de [se]s traductions, les rendre possibles et intelligibles sans jamais s'y réduire."²¹ Helen Swift turns to Derridean spectropoetics when thinking about medieval intertextuality for two reasons: "first, the way Derrida subjectivizes the relationship between text and spectral antecedent, and, secondly, the specifically troubling nature of this relationship."²² Like Swift, I turn to "spectropoetics" in the hope of rendering more intimate and troubling our relation to the *Choses Chrétien et Machaut*, though I do so

¹⁸ Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur," 29.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 40.

²⁰ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 42.

²¹ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 47.

²² Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance*, 36.

precisely so as to problematize the ascription of subjectivity, even presence, to these figures. For, as Carolyn Dinshaw writes, “learning to live with” ghosts implies

learning to live in a world in which no opposition between death and life can hold. And with the reconstruction of that foundational opposition, related foundations crumble: the oppositions between inside and outside, presence and absence, materiality and ideality, reality and fiction, true and false, present and past, subject and object...²³

Conceiving of texts and authors as ghosts provides a framework which allows them to challenge normative conceptions of order—whether in temporal, logical, or ontological terms—without undermining their subversiveness by underlying it with assumptions of once-present *auctoritas*.

This may sound abstract, but considering Chrétien and Machaut as ghosts has concrete consequences, namely because it encourages us to re-evaluate their use of irony.

D.H. Green once defined irony in romance as

...a statement or presentation of an action or situation, in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the initiated intentionally diverges from, and is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated.²⁴

Paul de Man defines irony quite differently:

Irony is unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness. Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just as social language dissimulates the inherent violence of the actual relationships between human beings. Once this mask is shown to be a mask, the authentic being underneath appears necessarily on the verge of madness.²⁵

²³ Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*, 136.

²⁴ D.H. Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance*, 9. Simon Gaunt quite usefully revisits, revises and develops Green’s conception of irony in *The Troubadours and Irony*, 5-38.

²⁵ De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 215-16.

De Man's conception of irony is supplementary to more classic definitions such as Green's. It complements Green's notion, since both conceive of irony as tropological language *par excellence*; irony foregrounds the contrast between one meaning and another, whereas other tropes, both hold, emphasize similarities.²⁶ Yet supplementary also in the sense whereby the second definition negates the first, because, for Green, irony culminates in knowledge, whereas for de Man, it never serves the purposes of positive knowledge: "at the very moment that irony is thought of as knowledge able to order and to cure the world, the source of its invention immediately runs dry."²⁷ Figuring a radical, deathly negativity, de Manian irony is "a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness," even "a consciousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from inside of madness itself."²⁸ Irony is the trope by which we may gauge the arbitrary and the lame, but it does not offer a way out; instead, it figures how there is no way out, no access to "sense," and this makes it endlessly disturbing. Because de Manian irony insists on radical indeterminacy where traditional conceptions of irony situate positive knowledge, we may understand it as a sort of *mise en abyme* of spectropoetics, which imagines disorder where the critic may be most tempted to establish illusions of stable *auctoritas*.

Analyzing de Manian irony in works attributed to Chrétien and Machaut will, then, counter the notion that irony betokens the presence of an "implied author"

²⁶ Green, *Irony*, 6-7; de Man, *Blindness*, 209-11.

²⁷ De Man, *Blindness*, 218. Gaunt's position on the relationship of irony to knowledge is intriguing; he considers that, "there is always a moment of doubt during which everyone, except the ironist, belongs to the uninitiated audience" (*Troubadours and Irony*, 22). For de Man, this includes the ironist and there is no escaping this moment.

²⁸ De Man, *Blindness*, 216.

guaranteeing “meaning” in any positive sense.²⁹ It provides a theoretical framework for taking another route, in which nothing is certain and there is no resolution—as appears to be the case in the conclusion of *Yvain*. In these lines, furthermore, irony specifically challenges heteronormativity, by threatening the institution of marriage. Like the “repetitive propulsiveness of sexuality,” which, for Butler and Edelman, queers embody, repetition fosters a sense of irony—*qua* unresolvable uncertainty—which punctures this marriage’s promise of lasting and meaningful stability.³⁰ For Edelman, de Manian irony generally has a privileged relationship to queer sexuality: “Irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself.”³¹ Edelman theorizes that heteronormative culture relies on allegory, the promise that figuration will eventually add up to positive meaning, or that things have “consequence,” to borrow his terminology.³² The queer assumes the opposite position: “denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of meaning,” s/he “affirms a constant, eruptive jouissance,” that “scorns such a belief in a final signifier, reducing *every* signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to jouissance in place of access to sense...”³³ Queers therefore embody the irony that heteronormativity wishes to abject, and are threatening because their ironic gaze exposes identity and sexuality as “intolerable” but inescapable “madness.” Edelman’s notion

²⁹ For discussion of the “implied author,” see Booth, *Rhetoric*, 71-76, 211-21, and *passim*, and Ch. II, n4.

³⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 62, also cited in Edelman, *No Future*, 22.

³¹ Edelman, *No Future*, 24. As it regards medieval texts, Gaunt briefly touches on the privileged relationship of irony and sexuality: *Troubadours and Irony*, 22.

³² Edelman, *No Future*, 35.

³³ Edelman, *No Future*, 35, 74, 37.

works nicely not only with *Yvain*'s conclusion, but also, this chapter will attempt to demonstrate, with many verse romances and *dits*, which depict transgressive sexuality as a privileged locus of irony—and where irony may even perform subversive sexual behavior.

The title of this chapter, “Screwing Chrétien de Troyes and Guillaume de Machaut,” figures the three broad theoretical moves it makes. I argue that we have everything to gain from screwing, in the sense of striving to dismiss, the “implicit author” *qua* authority grounding the texts and the larger *oeuvres*: screw Chrétien, screw Machaut. I contend that this is because the ascription of *auctoritas* to these men obfuscates how these texts hauntingly and disturbingly use irony to “screw with” normative conceptions of stability: they’re screwing with us and with (the possibility of) meaning. Finally, I question the extent to which “screwing with” is purely metaphoric, by holding that their ghastly irony “comes out” as a particular concern with queer sexuality.

I. The *Jugements*

“Or est bien a rebours” (now everything is backward; 177) says an anonymous lady to the knight she encounters in the *Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*, in a remark that also applies to the larger *dit*.³⁴ This *dit* describes a debate, opposing a Knight with an unfaithful Lady to a Lady with a deceased lover; they argue about whose situation is worse, in such a manner as to render (rhetorical) success indistinguishable from (amorous) failure. Other binaries crumble as the text advances. The Lady, for example,

³⁴ Guillaume de Machaut, *The Judgment of the King of Bohemia (Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne)*, ed. Palmer, v. 177. Cited by verse.

claims that her life is worse, since she (figuratively) lives as dead because her lover is (actually) dead, with the Knight countering that his life more closely resembles death, ironically enough because his beloved is (actually) not dead.³⁵ In another ironic moment, the allegorical personification of Reason considers that the Lady will necessarily overcome her grief, because,

Amour vient de charnel affection,
E si desir et sa condition
Sont tuit enclin a delectation... (1709-11)

Love comes from carnal attraction, and its desires and condition are (necessarily) inclined toward delectation.

Yet Reason is hardly well-placed to argue that love is above all corporeal, since as an allegory, she is more “âme” than “corps.” The *jeu-parti* also culminates in irony, when the King of Bohemia,

Et deprie chascun qu’il se conforte,
Car se le cuer longuement tel mal porte,
Il en porroit mors estre, et elle morte...
Et recorder
Voit on souvent qu’on doit tout oublier
Ce qu’on voit bien qu’on ne puet amender... (1973-75; 1980-82)

Encourages each to find comfort; for if the heart bears such pain for long, he could die, and so could she. And often we hear repeated that one should forget everything that one realizes one cannot improve.

After ruling in favor of the Knight, the King immediately negates the very question he has judged, because if no one has anything to gain from remembering grief, then neither party has any claim and the *dit* has necessarily gone nowhere. *Oublier* is as double-edged as in *Yvain*.

³⁵ See, for example, vv. 242-43, 1173-74.

The oneiric *Behaingne* could, then, seemingly lend itself either to Green's or to de Man's conception of irony; either we are in an upside-down world that we can sort out (Green) or that we cannot (de Man). The persistent metaleptic entanglement of narrative levels points to the latter. It can be difficult to keep these levels straight, as, for example, when Loyalty says,

Car se la dame,
Que je repren moult durement et blame—
Et c'est bien drois, car elle acuet grant blame
De muance faire en la haute game—
Premierement
N'eüst osté son cuer de cest amant,
Qui tous estoit en son commandement,
Amours, Amours, je parlasse autrement...
Et si m'acort
Dou tout en tout de Raison a l'acort,
(Car elle fait bon et loial raport):
Que cils a droit, et ceste dame a tort. (1828-35; 1844-47)

For if the lady, whom I reproach severely and blame—and it's only fair, since she brings great blame onto herself in being unfaithful in the highest degree—had not initially removed her heart from her lover, who was entirely devoted to her every command, Love, Love, I would be speaking differently. And so I concur entirely with Reason's thinking, since she has provided a good and reliable account, that he is right and this lady is wrong.

Over the course of this passage, it becomes increasingly unclear whom Loyalty is judging. When she states, “cils a droit, et ceste dame a tort,” she could be referring either to the Knight's unfaithful Lady or to the anonymous Lady with whom he is debating. She is, in fact, slipping between women just as she denounces women who go from one man to another!

The narrator's role in the *dit* represents the most compelling instance of metaleptic indeterminacy. As the *dit* opens, Guillaume listens to birds in a *verger*:

Lors me laissay tout belement chëoir

Et me coiti si bien, a mon pouvoir,
 Sous les arbes, qu'il [the nightingale] ne me pot vëoir,
 Pour escouter
 Le très dous son de son joli chanter.
 Si me plut tant en oïr deliter
 Son dous chanter, que jamais raconter
 Ne le porroie. (33-40)

There, I let myself comfortably recline and I tucked myself as comfortably as possible under the trees, so that the nightingale couldn't see me, in order to hear the very sweet sound of his pretty song. And there I so delighted in hearing his sweet song, that I could never express my pleasure.

Clichéd as it may seem, this passage takes on special resonance in the *dit*, because the narrator will “listen” to something he enjoys: the debate between the characters, which begins immediately following these lines.³⁶ McGrady and Jennifer Bain speak of “the role of the timid observer assigned to the poetic I” in this *dit*; yet, I would suggest, these lines may signal the narrator’s self-conscious transformation of the birds’ cries into (debate) poetry, similar to the *Fontaine amoureuse*, where, critics have maintained, the narrator transforms the Duke’s bestial groans into polished lyrics.³⁷

Querying the narrator’s passivity is important, because it opens up the possibility that he is complexly participating in the terms of the debate: not despite, but because of, the fact that he is hiding in the bushes throughout most of it.³⁸ The Lady says of her

³⁶ These lines have been understood as “placing” the *dit* in a lyric setting: see, for example, Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 117.

³⁷ McGrady and Bain, *A Companion*, 3; see also De Looze, *Pseudo-Autobiography*, 71-72, for the narrator’s passivity. Palmer also compares the narratorial predicament in the *Behaingne* to the *Fontaine amoureuse*, although without drawing the inference I do: see “The Metafictional in Machaut,” 29. My suspicion is that there has been a relative lack of interest in problematizing the narrative structure in the *Behaingne* because the *Navarre*’s seems more interesting. Brownlee’s chapter represents, to my knowledge, the last work to concentrate solely on the *Behaingne*: see *Poetic Identity*, 158-70. See Ch. I for my discussion of the narrator in the *Fontaine amoureuse*.

³⁸ Critics have focused on various self-consciously meta-reflexive instances (which have nothing to do with the narrator-in-the-bushes): when the knight twice refers to his speech’s being written (1592-96 and 1780-84) and when the text alludes to a *clerc* telling the King the story of Troy.

deceased lover that, “De tous les biens pooit mes cuers joïr/Par li veoïr seulement et oïr” (my heart was enthralled with all possible good just by seeing and hearing him; 154-55), and the narrator does precisely this in relation to his characters: he only sees and hears them. The Lady adds, “volentiers li alasse retraire/Comment de cuer l’amoie ... Mais la paour d’escondire ce faire/Me deffendoit” (I would have happily told him how I loved him from the bottom of my heart, but fear of rejection prevented me from doing this; 453-56), and the narrator’s fear also renders him timid: he will later confess, “Je regarday/Le plus fueillu dou brueil; si m’i boutay,/Car de vous faire anui moult me doubtay...” (I saw the leafiest part of the bush: there I inserted myself, because I very much feared bothering you; 1280-82). For Loyalty, who is here referring to the Knight’s predicament,

N’il n’est raisons,
Pour ce, s’il est vrais, loiaus et preudons,
Qu’il soit de ceuls qui batent les buissons
Dont li autre prennent les oisillons. (1824-27³⁹)

And is it not logical, however, if he is true, loyal, and noble, that he should be one of those who “beat the bushes while someone else gets the little birds” (a hunting metaphor; someone else profits from the fruits of one’s labor).

The narrator, who describes himself as listening to “oisillons” (birdies; 1275) as the *dit* begins, is literally in these bushes, suggesting that his predicament may relate to this question of infidelity which dominates the debate. Indeed, the Knight bemoans his situation because, “Eins voy autrui/Qui joie en a” (I see another, who has joy; 1132-33), and this also describes the narrative projection, which is unusual for a Machaldian *dit*, of

See, for example, Brownlee, *Poetic Identity* 165-70; Swift, “the Poetic ‘I,’” 25-26; Palmer, “The Metafictional in Machaut,” 30.

³⁹ This proverb also occurs in the *Voir Dit*, vv. 7530-31, and Froissart’s *Prison amoureuse*.

the love-story *onto* others. If the Knight complains that his Lady, “Mon guerredon ailleurs donne et depart/Ne je n’en puis avoir ne part ne hart” (shares and disperses about my reward, and I can’t have a part or piece; 1577-78), the entire story is also *departi* from the *je* onto another *il* and *elle*. Rather than serving as a formal characteristic unrelated to the *dit*’s content, the narrative structure may, then, complexly participate in the terms of the debate. Of Froissart’s *Chroniques*, Stahuljak has written that the “achievement...does not lie merely in providing a neutral translation of the war, but rather in problematizing the very possibility of neutral authorship.”⁴⁰ Similarly, the *Behaingne*’s achievement, I believe, lies in problematizing the notion of the uninvolved, objective narrator.

This is dazzling, but also dizzying; for it suggests that the *dit* functions ironically by virtue of serving as a meditation on questions of absence and fidelity without providing a vantage point securely beyond these *enjeux*. By shattering narrative borders, the *Behaingne* is a “reflection on madness from within madness itself.”⁴¹ We must, though, be careful not to re-erect these very borders by emphasizing the text’s self-conscious involution and overlooking its content; for the *dit*’s deviousness derives not from the notion that the *énonciation* trumps the *énoncé*, but rather from their entanglement.⁴² If, that is, the poetics foster a sense of indeterminacy, this troubling unease also characterizes the amorous predicaments of the two debaters. The Knight will, for example, say,

Et se pensée
Par souvenir est en moy engendrée,
Quelle est elle? Elle est desconfortée,
Triste, mourne, lasse et desesperée. (1048-51)

⁴⁰ Stahuljak, “Neutrality Affects: Froissart and the Practice of Historiographic Authorship,” *The Medieval Author*, 152.

⁴¹ De Man, *Blindness*, 216.

⁴² See above, note 15.

And if thought is engendered by memory in me, of what sort is it? It is discomfoting, sad, woeful, trying and hopeless.

Similarly, if this *dit* inspires *pensées*, they are *desconfortées*, even *tristes* and *desesperées*, insofar as there seems to be no hope that the *dit* will add up to resolution or meaning. As the Lady says,

Car sans faillir
Teindre, trambler, muer, et tressaillir,
Pleindre, plourer, souspirer et gemir,
Et en paour de desespoir fremir
Me couvendra;
N'a mon las cuer jamais bien ne vendra,
N'a nul confort n'a joie ateindra. (188-94)

For without end, I am obliged to suffer, tremble, move about and shake, complain, cry, sigh and gasp, and fret in fear of hopelessness, nor will any good come to my exhausted heart and it will not attain any comfort or joy.

The *Behaingne* is about amorous predicaments which have “*No Future*,” to borrow Edelman’s title. It then locates notions of “trembling,” “meaninglessness,” “frustration,” “irresolution” not only in its ironic poetics, but also in the erotic predicaments it describes. For Edelman, “the narrative that raises meaningless as a possibility... necessarily bestows a particular meaning on such meaningless itself,” and my contention is that the *dit* locates meaninglessness in impossible amorous dynamics.⁴³ This gesture is particularly significant, because the *dit* would then be effecting an alternative—even transgressive or queer—retort to the oft-commented lyric equivalency between loving, writing and singing. For if, as Alexandre Leupin writes, “the whole strategy of courtly love is to deny the absence of a sexual rapport...by maintaining that it could happen in an

⁴³ Edelman, *No Future*, 120.

infinitely remote future,” the *Behaingne* presents a more hopeless picture, responding that, “Nennil! Il ne puet avenir,” to quote its sequel, the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre*.⁴⁴

This later *dit*, penned by Machaut some 20 years later, was once understood as a “didactic” reversal of the earlier one.⁴⁵ In the *Navarre*, the character of Guillaume, *qua* author of the *Behaingne*, is put on trial by an angry Dame Bonneürté, who represents the Lady whose lover has died; and the King of Navarre offers an opposite, even corrective, judgment, ruling in favor of Bonneürté and her allegorical *suite*. Critics have recently understood the *Navarre* as extending, rather than upending, the *Behaingne*.⁴⁶

Narratological analysis supports this notion of continuity between the two *dits*, since, as in the *Behaingne*, elements of the narrative frame both fluctuate and bear an elusive and ironic relation to the debate. From one *dit* to the next, the witness becomes the accused (in a move which undermines any pretense that the King of Bohemia was responsible for the earlier judgment); yet Guillaume is also strangely likened to the Lady in the earlier *dit*, since, while the previous debate opened with the Knight’s interpellation of the Lady, the drama of the *Navarre* begins with Bonneürté’s interpellation of Guillaume (554-56). It seems contradictory that Guillaume, who will be defending the Knight’s cause, should occupy the narrative position of the Lady in the *Behaingne*. The relation of the narrative

⁴⁴ Leupin, *Möbius Strip*,” 66-67. For discussion of the structural necessity of a ‘futur indéterminé’ in troubadour lyrics, see also Jean-Charles Huchet, *L’Étreinte des mots: Flamenca, entre poésie et roman*, 164. Guillaume de Machaut, *The Judgment of the King of Navarre*, ed. Palmer, v. 1541.

⁴⁵ Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin Si Soutil*, 61.

⁴⁶ For Sarah Kay, it dramatizes the “failure of integration of the individual with a higher unity,” which is already at issue in the *Behaigne*, whereas John Moreau considers the *Navarre* as “both a continuation and a symbolic rewriting” of the earlier *dit* because it capitalizes on the *Behaigne*’s *mise en cause* of certainty and finality. Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 99; Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 109.

frame to the terms of the debate may be more profoundly ironic.⁴⁷ The *Navarre* rules that death is worse than infidelity, with Reason characterizing infidelity as follows:

Car il cuidera s'amour toute
Avoir acquis toute sa vie,
Sans jamais faire departie.
Mais il ira bien autrement... (992-95)

For he (the Knight) will believe that he has acquired her entire love for his entire life, without ever having to share it. But things will go quite differently.

Interestingly, these lines also apply to the relation of the earlier *dit* to the later one, since a decision that seems final ("acquis toute sa vie") is reversed, and "il ira bien autrement" in the *Navarre*. This is paradoxical, because the *Navarre* would both be relegating infidelity to a secondary position (it is less bad than death) *and* performing it in relation to the earlier *dit*. According to Guillaume's allegorical opponents, it is less awful than death, because in death there is no possibility of the situation correcting itself. Yet, we might understand the *Navarre* as resuscitating the *Behaingne*, insofar as it re-opens a debate that had seemed definitively closed, thus inviting us to challenge criteria of finality even as it ostensibly promotes them. And to challenge criteria of success: as the *Navarre* concludes, Guillaume exclaims,

Je, Guillaumes dessus nommez,
Qui de Machau sui seurnommez,
Pour mieus congnoistre mon meffait,
Ay ce livret rimé et fait. (4199-202)

I, Guillaume, named above, whose surname is de Machaut, in order to acknowledge my misdeed, have rhymed and composed this little book.

⁴⁷ Kay notes a different aspect of the oddity of the narrative structure: "The character who embodies happiness, Dame Bonneürté," she writes, "is in the bizarre position of condemning Machaut for failing to record how *unhappy* women can be" (*The Place of Thought*, 113).

Guillaume's notion of "making one's wrong known" suggestively recalls the terms of the earlier debate, where the protagonists strive to dramatize their suffering in such a manner as to render success indistinguishable from failure. If Guillaume is performing the *dits'* conception of a "queer art of failure" (to borrow Judith Halberstam's coinage), might his failure to convince then represent his success?⁴⁸

Beyond deepening the ironies of the *Behaingne*, the *Navarre* also raises the ante by exaggerating the relationship between despair and poetic indeterminacy. It opens with an exceedingly rare and gruesomely realistic depiction of the Plague; we are then left to piece together the Plague's connection to the oneiric universe which follows.⁴⁹ At one level, the link is thematic, since both the plague and the *jeu-parti* emphasize "death and judgment," as John Moreau observes.⁵⁰ Moreau then cautions against the critical tendency to exaggerate the "sharp dichotomy" separating the gravity of the Plague from the frivolousness of the ensuing debate.⁵¹ For him, the description of the Plague, reminiscent of the Chronicles, is more ironized and the *jeu-parti* more serious than critics have recognized, and their juxtaposition has the quite serious effect of emphasizing man's inability to understand or articulate divine, absolute judgment.⁵² This insightful argument for bringing these two segments together has, I think, the surprising effect of also inviting the critic to pry them apart with new energy; for if Moreau's contribution is

⁴⁸ The difference is that the lovers are, apparently, not responsible for their situations, whereas Guillaume would be; the similarity is that all seek to make their "plight" known. The reference is to Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

⁴⁹ For the unusual nature of the description of the Plague, see Zink, "The Time of the Plague and the Order of Writing."

⁵⁰ Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 116-17.

⁵¹ Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 104.

⁵² Moreau discusses how the description of the Plague seems heavily indebted to the Chronicles, and he argues for Machaut's "ironic awareness" of the Chronicle's "limitations" (*Eschatological Subjects*, 114).

to query the lack of previous engagement with the tonal indeterminacy of each segment—upsetting the facile notion that one is silly, the other serious—the gesture of placing indeterminacy front-and-center can then be re-injected into emphasizing the indeterminacy of the interrelation between the Plague and the oneiric debate. To return to the *dit*'s terms, the Plague, “nous en mist hors de doubance” (removed us from doubt; 186), instructing us that human affairs were not pleasing to God; and while Bonneürté also brings Guillaume “hors de doubance,” the comparison of the one to the other may nonetheless have the effect of fostering “doubance.” And it is not just any sort of “doubance”; the Plague emphasizes, even performs, a particularly harrowing conception of indeterminacy. It,

Fist la mort issir de sa cage,
 Pleinne de forsen et de rage,
 Sans frein, sans bride, sans loien,
 Sans foy, sans amour, sans moien,
 Si trés fiere et si orgueilleuse,
 Si gloute et si familleuse
 Que ne se pooit säouler
 Pour riens que peüst engouler. (355-62)

Had death escape her cage, full of folly and rage: without snaffle, bridle, or reins;
 without faith, love, or moderation; so very proud and arrogant, so voracious and
 so hungry that she couldn't satisfy herself with anything that she may consume.

Chaotic, uncontrollable, and disturbing forces drive the Plague; and if the relationship between the Plague and the ensuing *dit* is also uncertain, the *dit*'s poetics may somehow be performing the Plague's horrible indeterminacy. Indeed, the closer we examine the relationship of the Plague to the ensuing debate, the more intensely problematic it appears. For example, Guillaume, in keeping with attested fourteenth-century sources, first blames the Plague on the Jews who poisoned the wells: God “Cest traison plus

celer/Ne volt, eins la fist reveler” (didn’t want to hide this treason any longer; rather, He revealed it; 231-32).⁵³ The *dit* will expose Guillaume’s *trahison* of women; yet, there seems to be something dangerous, even treacherous, about Guillaume’s elusive identification with the dreaded Jews. Or with the Heretics: God punishes the world, “Pour itant que leur batterie/Et leurs chans estoit herisie” (for this reason: that their drumming and songs were heresy; 255-56). The *Behaingne*, according to the *Navarre*, was a sort of heretical song, meriting punishment; therefore, Guillaume, this courtly buffoon, appears curiously like these notorious sinners. My suggestion, then, is that not only do the Plague and the ensuing debate both foreground uncertainty, but the relationship of the one to the other also performs it in such a manner as to emphasize indeterminacy’s relation to chaos, subversion, and violence.

This notion of coupling literal and hermeneutic violence also characterizes the many *exempla* employed in the *Navarre*. Describing these *exempla* as a whole, Sarah Kay observes that, “thematically, the surplus elements are the death of the woman (instead of, or as well as, that of the man); the infidelity of the man (instead of, or as well as, that of the woman); and madness,” to which I would add their recurrent attraction to violence, as it frequently causes death and is caused by infidelity and madness.⁵⁴ Critics have argued that these *exempla* “seem quite irrelevant” and “are but tenuously connected to the initial object of the debate.”⁵⁵ Rather than supporting the arguments of the characters who employ them, the *exempla* have instead been understood as demonstrating

⁵³ Moreau discusses this flash of antisemitism in *Eschatological Subjects*, 113. See also René Girard, “Guillaume de Machaut et les juifs,” in *Le Bouc émissaire*, 7-21, for discussion of this passage.

⁵⁴ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 118.

⁵⁵ Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 103, 133.

something unrelated to the debate's explicit terms: for Kay, they illustrate both the necessity and impossibility of grounding universal knowledge "in the particular and the singular," while for Moreau, they show that the "expectation of final certainty [is] misguided."⁵⁶ Very compelling, such readings, by understanding the *exempla* as *exempla* of something else, may run the risk of looking through their content, rather than at it. I would suggest that emphasizing violence allows us to account for both the content of the *exempla* and its tenuous relationship with the debate at hand. In the first *exemplum*, Bonneürté tells of the stork who seeks vengeance upon his unfaithful mate; this apparently illustrates how, unlike the lady, the Knight has the opportunity to seek revenge. When Guillaume then wonders if this means that it would be acceptable for the Knight to kill his unfaithful Lady, Attemprance jumps in, saying,

Nennil! Voir, ce seroit folie.
 Ne ma dame ne maintient mie
 Qu'il la face tuer ne tue;
 Mais elle tient qu'il s'esvertue
 Encontre les temptations
 Des fausses cogitations
 Qui porroient en lui venir. (1819-25)

Not at all! Truly! This would be folly, and my lady is not at all maintaining that he should have her killed or kill her; rather, she is arguing that he should resist against the temptations stemming from false thoughts that could come to him.

Nothing in Bonneürté's tale suggests that the male stork should resist the temptation of "fausses cogitations." Instead, it rather sounds like this gloss, in its arbitrariness, serves as the very "fausse cogitation" that it denounces—which suggests that the gloss performs a violence onto the *exempla* that reflects and performs the violence the *exempla* describes. Shortly thereafter, Pais tells the story of Dido, where,

⁵⁶ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 122, and Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 107.

...on puet vëoir clerement
Que grieté, peinne, ne tourment
Ne se porroient comparer
Ad ce que celle comparer
Volt pour le grief de son amy. (2137-41)

We can clearly see that no grief, pain, nor torment could compare to that which she experienced on account of her lover.

For Kay, if this *exemplum* is “supposed to confirm the greater intensity of grief of a woman whose lover has died...it does nothing of the kind.”⁵⁷ The content of the *exemplum* nonetheless becomes paradoxically pertinent in its impertinence, since the self-harm Pais inflicts on her own argument reflects the suicide which the *exemplum* stages. Franchise’s examples of Theseus and Jason, which also ostensibly illustrate the power of female love, are equally detrimental to the lady’s cause, because they dramatize the horror of infidelity; and because they function as inappropriate choices for sustaining the Lady’s claim, the betrayals within the *exempla* are performed by the betrayals of the *exempla* in the form of dubious glosses.

No better than those of his allegorical opponents, Guillaume’s *exempla* also foreground literal violence and couple it with hermeneutic violence.⁵⁸ He speaks at length of a lady who gives her lover a ring which he promises never to remove; her husband notices that the ring has gone missing and asks his wife to see it, prompting the Knight to amputate his own finger so as return the ring without removing it. Loyalty will remark that the Knight’s gesture is quite unnecessary:

Car il y avoit .iii. ou .iiii.
Voies qui deüssent souffire,
Et il prist de toutes la pire. (2996-98)

⁵⁷ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 118.

⁵⁸ For discussion of Guillaume’s *exempla* see also Palmer, “The Metafictional Machaut,” 36, and Louis Picherit, “Les exemples dans *le Jugement dou roy de Navarre*,” 115-16.

There are three or four options that would have been plenty satisfactory and he chose the very worst one of all.

Loyalty's remark not only applies to the Knight's decision to amputate his own finger, but also to Guillaume's choice of this *exemplum*, since it is not an obvious choice for illustrating the value and beauty of "true love." Rather than serving a didactic function, the *exemplum* couples the questionable and gratuitous violence within it with the questionable and unnecessary choice of it. These metalepses suggest that the *Navarre* is not necessarily straying as far from the violent despair of the *exempla* as is generally held. It might not be straying as far from the terms of the earlier debate either. For if the *Navarre* seems to drift away from the *jeu-parti* at the heart of the *Behaingne*, this move may also perform crucial aspects of it, by emphasizing themes of depature, meaninglessness, uncertainty, and indeterminacy, all of which characterize the amorous situations of the protagonists in the *Behaingne*.

The specific trajectory of the semantic "drifting" in the *Navarre* merits closer attention. The *Navarre* moves from the questions of sexuality central to the *Behaingne* to focus on the problematic relationship of gender to sexuality.⁵⁹ When the allegorical personae begin framing the Lady's dispute with the Knight in terms of the opposition of male to female lovers, Guillaume initially protests that gender is irrelevant—"Ne fait riens a nostre matiere" (it has nothing to do with our question; 2825)—because infidelity plagues both men and women, "autant es fames comme es hommes" (as much to women as men; 2829). But he then gets pulled down into debating gender, saying,

Il est certain—et je l'affirme—

⁵⁹ For discussion of the turn to focus on gender in the *Navarre*, see, for example, Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects*, 134.

Qu'en cuer de femme n'a riens ferme,
Rien seür, rien d'estableté,
Fors toute variableté... (3019-22)

It is certain, and I affirm it, that in a woman's heart there is nothing solid, nothing consistent, nothing of stability, only perpetual variability.

This move from sexuality to gender, especially given that it comes in the context of gratuitous physical and rhetorical violence, corroborates Butler's notion of the problematic linking of conceptions of gender and sexuality in the Western tradition.⁶⁰ For Kay, the *Behaingne* and the *Navarre* both dramatize "the association between gender, citation, performance and melancholy which Judith Butler has enabled us to see as defining of heterosexuality," since "both parties constitute their identity as 'male' or 'female' by repeatedly reenacting their loss of their loved one before the judge."⁶¹ I would add that not only do these *dits* offer a behind-the-scenes look at the inter-related and fraught construction of gender and sexuality, but the *Navarre* also explores transgressions against normative conceptions of them. Charité recounts the story of a female graft becoming a male tree, ostensibly so as to illustrate why a lover might accept that his lady should marry someone else:

Li jardiniers puet dire: 'Sire,
Pour verité, vous en puis dire,
Ce m'est avis, bonne nouvelle.
Ne demandez plus que fait elle,
Mais demandez me bien qu'il fait,
Car vostre ente .i. aubre parfait... (2459-64)⁶²

⁶⁰ See Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

⁶¹ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 116.

⁶² This quote may seem incomplete, but "parfait" is functioning as a verb rather than an adjective here, as the ensuing lines immediately move on to a new clause.

The gardener may say, “Sire, truly, it seems to me that I can tell you a good piece of news. Don’t ask me any longer how *she* (the graft, female in French) is doing, but how *he* is, since your stock becomes a tree (masculine).”

This intradiegetic sex-change opens the door to the possibility of other gender transgressions in the text, and I would emphasize how Guillaume’s above-cited (misogynist) description of feminine inconstancy also points to a certain conception of the narrator and his text as coded feminine, since, as we have seen, nothing is “sure” or “stable” either in Guillaume’s words or this *Jugement*. Machaut’s *oeuvre* may even, according to these same terms, be described as feminine. When Bonneüirté accuses Guillaume of having slandered women in his past, he responds,

Trop mieus savez que vous ne dites:
J’ay bien de besongnes escriptes
Devers moy, de pluseurs manieres,
De moult de diverses matieres,
Dont l’une l’autre ne ressamble. (883-87)

You know much more than you are saying. I have plenty of written work in my name, in different styles and about many different materials, with one work not resembling the next.

For Huot, these lines reflect Machaut’s barely hidden pride in constructing his *oeuvre*.⁶³ It is odd, though, that these lines are persistently understood as reflecting Machaut’s desire to present his works as “a coherent composite picture,” when they explicitly assert the opposite: the lack of stability or unity characteristic of the burgeoning *oeuvre*.⁶⁴ In fact, the description of the *oeuvre* nicely describes the debate in the *Navarre*, which draws on “diverses matieres” that hardly resemble each other or add up to a “coherent whole.” But could Machaut’s *oeuvre* be as frivolous and gratuitous, as rhetorically and

⁶³ Huot, *From Song to Book*, 248.

⁶⁴ Huot, *From Song to Book*, 248. For a more recent reading of these lines, see Moreau, who describes this scene as “comic self-promotion” (*Eschatological Subjects*, 123).

ethically violent and meaningless, as the debate staged in the *Navarre*? The *Navarre* seems to link hyperbolically feminine inconstancy, the *je*, the poetics of the larger *dit*, and those of the greater Machaldian *oeuvre*; and this move implies that the ascription of stable *auctoritas* to the *dit* or to the *oeuvre* would reflect a masculine, patriarchal impulse, which the *dit* and the *oeuvre* resist.⁶⁵ Put otherwise, Daniel Poirion has famously written of Christine de Pizan, “Voilà... notre premier auteur, et cet auteur est une femme.”⁶⁶ Our readings of the *Jugements* offer an interesting retort; for whereas Christine, according to both herself and to her modern critics, may become an author by becoming a man, Machaut seems to become an “ironic (anti-)author” by becoming a stereotypical woman, who is characterized by her involvement in a hopeless erotic scenario.⁶⁷

If this is veering toward abstraction, the *dit* spells out for us this (haunting) link between gender confusion, hopeless depictions of sexuality, poetics, and the action of haunting itself in its pendant, the “Lai dou Plour,” which follows the *Navarre* in four manuscripts.⁶⁸ As the *Navarre* concludes, the King orders Guillaume to write a “lay” (4182), “une chanson/De .iii. vers et a un refrain” (a song with three verses and a refrain [a *rondeau*]; 4184-85) and “une balade” (4189) for Bonneürté. The *dit*’s final two lines, “Pour la paier vueil sans delay/Commencier .i. amoreus lay” (In order to repay her, I wish without delay to begin an amorous *lai*; 4211-12) imply that what follows is the first

⁶⁵ Doubtance will, for instance, say to Guillaume, “Moult avec estrange regart/Et s’avez diverse parole,” when criticizing his misogyny (3010-11).

⁶⁶ Poirion, *Le Moyen Age II*, 206. See Ch I for discussion of Christine’s authorship.

⁶⁷ The reference is to Christine de Pizan’s “Prologue” to the *Mutacion de Fortune*. See Ch. I, which challenges the notion that Christine simply becomes a “male author.”

⁶⁸ The most original discussion of the “Lai du Plour” is Huot’s, in *From Song to Book*, 266-68. The final lines of the “lai” have received a good deal of attention; see Laurence de Looze, *Pseudo-Autobiography in the Fourteenth Century*, 76.

element of his *amende*, and the ensuing *lai* is both written from a female perspective and concerned with her deceased lover.⁶⁹ Guillaume is thus not only *like* a woman involved in a hopeless erotic scenario; he actually assumes the persona of one. Consistent with the metalepses we have explored in the *Behaingne* and the *Navarre*, this (bizarre) narrative predicament then pierces through the lady's voice. The "lai" repeatedly tells us not to forget—it opens with the refrain, "Qui bien aime a tart oublie" (s/he who loves well is slow to forget; 1), shortly thereafter adding, "Envis puet s'amour oublier" (With difficulty can s/he forget her/his love; 26)—which encourages the reader *not* to forget that Guillaume is composing the *lai* behind-the-scenes. The effect, that is, of the insistent call to re-member is to make Guillaume's presence haunt the lady's voice—which is fitting, given that she describes haunting:

Et vis a vis
 Te voy, ce m'est vis,
 Dous amis,
 Et toudis
 De toy me souvient.
 Mes esperis
 Et mes paradis
 Estient mis
 Et assis
 En toy; s'apartient
 Que soit fenis
 Mes cuers et peris... (180-91)

And face-to-face I see you, it seems to me, dear lover, and always I remember you. And my spirit and salvation were put and placed in you; thus it is fitting that my heart stops and perishes.

The brilliance of these lines, and of this *lai*, is that the narrative predicament performs the sentiment. Guillaume's specter haunts the lady's voice at the very moment when she

⁶⁹ Machaut, "Le Lay de Plour," in *The Judgment of the King of Navarre* 190-212, vv. 129-30.

describes the haunting image of her lover; for Guillaume “sees her,” “remembers her,” and places his thoughts, even his hopes of salvation (vis-à-vis Bonneürté), in her. I see this metalepsis as concisely figuring the link, more subtle in the preceding *dits*, of authorship both with gender transgressions and with hopeless, futureless conceptions of sexuality. For Guillaume is not adopting just any persona; rather, the conception of authorship underlying the *dits* seems to lend itself to figuration as feminine, hopeless, haunted and haunting. And this seems to me an important counter-argument to a critical tradition that has persistently associated Machaut’s authorship with presence, authority, self-consciousness, and a “straight” history teleologically leading up to the modern author and the modern *oeuvre*.

II. *Erec et Enide*

I chose to begin this chapter with the *Jugements* because, both separately and together, they dramatize the stakes of the distinction between a conception of irony that fosters positive knowledge and one that virulently refutes the possibility. The *Jugements*, I have also argued, are so powerful and disturbing—so haunting—because they tie these indeterminate poetics to violently meaningless conceptions of gender and sexuality.

The obvious limitation, though, of beginning with Machaut’s *Jugements* is that they are relatively non-canonical, and queering them thus cannot force as radical a reassessment as in texts where criticism has reified the author-figure and the *oeuvre*. For this reason, I turn now to an infamous passage that introduces not only a celebrated text but also an *oeuvre* and even a genre: the prologue to *Erec et Enide*, which I cite in its entirety.

Li vilains dit en son respit
 Que tel chose a l'en en despit
 Qui mout vaut mieuz que l'en ne cuide.
 Por ce fait bien qui son estuide
 5 A torne a sens, quel que il l'ait;
 Car qui son estude entrelait,
 Tost i puet tel chose taisir
 Qui mout venroit puis a plesir.
 Por ce dit Crestiens de Troies
 10 Que raisons est que totes voies
 Doit chascuns penser et entendre
 A bien dire et a bien aprendre,
 Et trait [d']un conte d'aventure
 Une mout bele conjuncture
 15 Par qu'em puet prover et savoir
 Que cil ne fait mie savoir
 Qui sa science n'abandone
 Tant con Dex la grace l'en done.
 D'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,
 20 Que devant rois et devant contes
 Depecier et corrompre suelent
 Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent.
 Des or comencera l'estoire
 Que toz jors mais iert en memoire
 25 Tant con durra crestientez.
 De ce s'est Crestiens ventez.⁷⁰

The peasant says in his proverb that one disdains that thing which is worth much more than one might think; for this reason, he does well who gives his learning/pursuit meaning, whatever this meaning may be. For he who neglects his learning may easily keep silent something that could produce much pleasure. For this reason Chrétien de Troyes says that it is right that each person continually ponder how, and strive, to speak well and learn/teach well. Thus he draws a very beautiful composition from an adventure story, by which one can prove and know that he is not acting wisely who doesn't diffuse his learning as long as God gives him the grace to be able to do so. Of Erec, the son of Lac, is the tale, that, in front of kings and courts, used to be dismembered and corrupted by those who try to live by telling tales. Right now I will begin the story that will remain in memory as long as Christianity lasts: of this Chrétien boasts.

⁷⁰ Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Fritz, vv. 1-26. Cited in text by verse.

This passage has elicited much discussion, namely (as with the *Charrette*) as to the sense of various rhetorical terms, such as “bien aprendre,” “conte d’aventure,” and of course, “conjointure.”⁷¹ Critical debate generally assumes that in this passage, “Chrétien” is speaking about his literary ambitions *qua* author, rather than ironically engaging with the upcoming tale *qua* narrator; yet, I submit, this passage “mout vaut mieuz que l’en ne cuide” when we flush out its enigmatic relations to the ensuing narrative.⁷²

John Plummer and Tony Hunt point us in this direction, with Hunt remarking “that the dialectic of the work (*teisir/dire, celer/aprendre*) can be derived from the prologue.”⁷³ Enide will later say of her outburst to Erec,

Ainz taisirs a home ne nut,
Mais parlers nuit mainte foïe.
Ceste chose ai bien essaïe
Et esprove[e] en mainte guise. (4624-27)

Never before has silence been harmful to man, but speaking has many times proven harmful; I have tried and certainly proven this in many ways.

The prologue, then, not only announces this dialectic between *parler* and *taisir*, but it also jars with its ensuing portrayal, since Enide’s *éloge du taisir* runs directly counter to

⁷¹ For a relatively recent, critical bibliography for this prologue, see Tony Hunt, “Chrétien’s Prologues Reconsidered,” 154 n6.

⁷² To give some examples, Donald Maddox argues that, “Above all, the prologue enables us to begin to situate the narrative within the cultural context to which it is addressed and to understand the text as the designated locus of a cultural transaction within the courtly public” (*Structure and Sacring*, 15). For Edward Buckbee, “The Prologue verses...illustrate the very principle of *conjointure*...” (Buckbee, “*Erec et Enide*,” 54). For Simpson, this Prologue “taps into a vast range of relations—literary, cultural, and historical—looked at from the perspective of a late twelfth-century courtly milieu” (Simpson, *Troubling Arthurian Histories*, 18). Sun Hee Kim Gertz does argue that, “By foreshadowing important themes and motifs of the narrative it prefaces, the Prologue also ironically meets the standard expectation of a prologue to introduce the themes of the work that follows”; however, she hardly discusses how and what the Prologue foreshadows (“Rhetoric and the Prologue to Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*,” 7).

⁷³ Hunt, “Chrétien’s Prologues Reconsidered,” 155 and John Plummer, “*Bien dire and Bien aprendre* in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*.”

the *vilain*'s proverb as Chrétien understands it (4-8).⁷⁴ The effect of this repetition is to make us hesitate and ask which action, telling or remaining silent, is preferable—just as Enide repeatedly does within the story—while also raising the question of whether the prologue is *telling* us (*dire*) or not (*taisir*) how to read the ensuing romance.

Taisir represents the loudest repetition linking the prologue to the ensuing tale, but there are many others. The verb *atourner* floods the romance; I count some 34 occurrences, including in many of the romance's most pivotal moments. When we initially encounter Enide, she is "atornee si povrement" (dressed so poorly; 513) until, "La roïne s'est entremise/De l'atorner" (the queen takes it upon herself to dress her up; 2074-75). The verb also dominates the scene where Erec and Enide set out *en aventure*—Enide "Bien et bel s'est atornee (nicely and beautifully dressed up; 2609) and Erec "Por armer s'atorne" (prepares to arm himself; 2638), before complaining that Enide, "Trop a mis a li atorne" (has spent too long getting ready; 2665)—before recurring some eleven times over the course of the *Joie de la Cort* episode and the Coronation sequence.⁷⁵ The connection between Chrétien's dressing up his learning and these intratextual *atornements* is not clear, however, and we may wonder if the relationship between *atorner* in the prologue and the *histoire* is itself *atorné a sens*.

According to the prologue, one should "atorne a sens" learning because it is irresponsible to *entrelaissier* it. *Entrelaissier* is also a verb crucial to the ensuing tale, as

⁷⁴ As E. Jane Burns brilliantly observes, the prologue's rhyme also recurs when Erec and Enide have "make-up" sex: "Li un[s] encontre l'autre tance/Coment il li puisse mieuz *plaisir*:/Dou soreplus me doi bien *taisir*" (The one rivals the other in attempting to please the other the most; I should not mention the rest; 5246-48). See *Bodytalk*, 193-94.

⁷⁵ In the *Joie de la Cort* episode, see, for example, vv. 5663, 5667, 5674, 5675; in the Coronation sequence see vv. 6447, 6448, 6449, 6540, 6571, 6697, 6912. Note that in almost all of these occurrences it is the rhyme word.

Enide, confessing the cause of her woes to Erec, will exclaim, “Que granz damages est de vos/Que vos armes *entrelessiez*...” (that it is a great pity for you that you abandon your arms; 2542-43). Chrétien thus elects not to *entrelaissier* a story about *entrelaissier*, thereby inviting a certain conception of the prologue as opening ethical questions, rather than signalling the *a posteriori* resolution of rhetorical ones.⁷⁶ *Conjuncture* may function equally provocatively; for if, as M. Ruch writes, it represents “la réunion de deux termes antithétiques, donc de ce que nous appelons une ‘alliance de termes,’” it would then function less as a description of Chrétien’s poetics than as an introduction to the romance’s *problématiques*, whether in terms of maintaining the “alliance” between Erec and Enide or between love and chivalry.⁷⁷ And if one understands *iunctura*, with Horace, as the “appropriate linking or joining of different elements,” and thus as the art of fluid transitions, it is unclear how Erec’s abrupt departure with Enide could qualify as a “belle conjuncture.”⁷⁸ Instead, it represents a jarring departure, even an “anti-conjuncture,” which launches a “conte d’aventure,” rather than necessarily signalling the artistic transformation of such tales into something nobler. Continuing its *éloge* of Chrétien’s art, the prologue bemoans how *conteurs* may “depecier” and “corrompre” the material. These terms are also pertinent to the ensuing tale: Enide, for example,

Bien sot par parole enyvrer
Bricon, quant ele i mist s’entente.

⁷⁶ E.J. Burns also reads the “Prologue” as raising questions, though about the female ability to perturb male literary creations. See Burns, *Bodytalk*, 161-64.

⁷⁷ M. Ruch, “Horace et les fondements de la ‘iunctura,’” 255. Also discussed in Kelly, “The Source and Meaning of ‘Conjointure’ in Chrétien’s *Erec*,” 194. Burns notes something similar: for her, “if we think of *conjointure* in the sense of coupling, joining, bringing together in amorous liaison or linking in marriage, we see how the romance has metaphorically transferred the act of coupling with a woman, with her enigmatic *chose*, into the realm of literary creation that is his alone” (*Bodytalk*, 162). For her, the romance is asserting a “masculine” *conjuncture* that would exclude Enide.

⁷⁸ The quote is from Kelly, “The Source and Meaning,” 184.

Mieuz est assez qu'ele li mente
Que ses sires fust depeciez. (3414-17)

Knew well how to use language to mislead fools, when she resolved to do so. It is rather better that she lie to him (Count Galoain) than that her lord be cut into pieces.

If other poets *depecient* the *matiere*, Chrétien also tells a story where *depecier* is at stake. And if others corrupt the true tale, Enide also corrupts the truth here. Finally, the prologue concludes with Chrétien's infamous boast, but it is problematic to take the boast at face-value when the romance repeatedly warns against bragging. To give but two examples, Erec will say, "Tex vaut petit, qui mout se loe" (he is worth little, who praises himself much; 4432) or "[t]ex cuide avoir/Le jeu joé, qui puis le pert" (he thinks he has won the game, who then loses it; 5916-17). Ironically, Chrétien brags about composing a story which dramatizes the dangers of bragging.

By playing on the terms of the romance, the prologue to *Erec et Enide*, like that of the *Charrete*, has, I submit, the effect not of asserting but of querying the possibility of a stable perspective squarely beyond the story. This gesture is particularly significant in the case of *Erec et Enide*, because if, as Zara Zaddy writes, over the course of the romance, "Erec shows that he has...realized, as a king should, that duty must take precedence over private inclinations," we may in turn wonder to what extent rhetorical "duty" takes precedence over private inclination for "Crestiens."⁷⁹ For if Erec's sin is the alleged involution of his obsession with Enide, which prevents him from focusing on his public duties, then it is all the more consequential—and problematic—if this prologue glances inward at the protagonists, rather than outside of the couple's dynamics to the larger

⁷⁹ Z.P. Zaddy, "The Structure of Chrétien's *Erec*," 616.

rhetorical and ethical responsibilities of the romancer. Might the prologue be somehow mirroring Erec's *recreantise*?

The prologue, I have suggested, is elusively emmeshed in the literal terms of the text. By virtue of functioning ironically, it is also consistent with the role irony has in generating meaning throughout the narrative. The scene where the lovers stumble on Count Galoain offers a wonderful, and provocative, example. Seduced, like Erec, by Enide's beauty, the Count declares to Enide his intentions to take Erec's place as her husband. After some initial resistance, Enide, fearful that the Count will harm Erec, pretends to acquiesce to the Count's request, although "El pense cuer que ne dit boche" (her heart thinks something other than what her mouth says; 3380).⁸⁰ A concise definition of tropological language, this formula is interesting because Enide's language is, in fact, twice tropological; for not only does she mislead the Count, but she also does so in a manner which suggestively recalls her larger predicament. When she tells the Count that she has never, "de riens fausé/Vers mon seignor, nes enpensé,/Felonie ne trahison," (in any way been disloyal to my lord, nor even considered wrong-doing or treachery; 3335-37), this recalls the larger question of whether or not she has betrayed Erec. Her notion that she is resisting the Count so as to test him—"Ne vos ai rien dit par orguil,/Mais por savoir et esprover/Se...vos m'amessiez de bon cuer" (I didn't say anything to you out of vanity, but in order to know and test if you loved me truly; 3364-67)—echoes how Erec tests her; he will later say, "Bien vos ai dou tot essaïe..." (I have tested you in every way; 4915). When she tells the Count, "Se vous ensi l'oceïez/Trop grant mesprison ferïez,/Et je en seroie blasmee" (If you killed him in this way, you would do a great wrong, and I

⁸⁰ Sally Mussetter sees this scene as exemplifying "the rhetorics of deliberation," in "The Education of Chrétien's Enide," 156.

would be blamed; 3371-73), she also taps into the question of blame, echoing her fear that others have blamed her for Erec's *recreantise*—"il m'en metent le blasme sus" (they place the blame on me; 2556)—as well as her conviction that, because of her "mortel parole entochie...Je seule en doi estre blasmee" (mortal poisoned word, only I should be blamed; 4641, 4645).⁸¹ By evoking the terms of Erec's and Enide's relationship, the entire scene is "look[ing] back over its shoulder," to borrow from James Simpson's description of the romance's poetics; or, it "ne repose/De regarder de l'autre part," (doesn't cease to look elsewhere; 3280-81), as the narrator says of the Count who, though in conversation with Erec, cannot stop staring at Enide.⁸² And this has the effect of raising uncomfortable questions for the couple. When the Count remarks to Enide that, "Quant vos alez a tel vitance/Grant duel en ai et grant pesance" (When you travel about in such a scandalous way, I feel great pain and great distress; 3313-14), the romance obliquely introduces the question of the acceptability of Enide's treatment by her husband, similar to how Méléagant and Keu obliquely introduce the question of adultery in the *Charrette* (3313-14).⁸³ When the Count reflects,

Bien est voirs que fame s'orguille

⁸¹ Kinoshita has observed just how weighty this question of blame is for Enide. See Kinoshita, *Thinking Through Chrétien*, 124. For Kinoshita, this scene showcases how, "*Erec et Enide* not only vindicates conjugal love versus adultery but demonstrates the complete compatibility between aristocratic interest and ecclesiastical stipulations for mutual consent and indissolubility" (129). Donald and Sarah Maddox understand this scene as demonstrating the "devastating effects on chivalric solidarity" that can be "occasioned by feminine beauty" ("The First Arthurian Romance," 110).

⁸² For Simpson, "the unfolding thrust of *Chrétien's* narrative is perhaps most troublingly answered by recurring looks back over the shoulder in which the glimmers and hauntings of particular allusions in a given scene are 'outed' in a subsequent one" (*Troubling Arthurian Histories*, 48).

⁸³ For discussion of adultery and indirection in the *Charrette*, see Ch. I. I find this parallel between the *Charrete* and *Erec* particularly helpful, because there is a recurrent assumption that subverting gender politics is "modern," not medieval. I think it is useful to bear in mind that Erec's treatment of Enide is exactly as open to question as Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere in the *Charrete*.

Quant on plus la prie et losenge;
Mais qui la honist et laidenge,
Cil la trueve meillor sovent, (3346-49)

It is true that women become prouder the more they are begged and flattered, but he who shames and insults one, often finds her better (disposed);

we may read these lines as representing more than the Count's frustrated recourse to misogyny, raising as they do a disturbing question: does Enide behave better only by virtue of being treated worse, and what would this mean for the romance's depiction of female heroism?⁸⁴ Escaping from Galoain, Erec is spotted and challenged by Guivret, of whom the narrator says, "il estoit de cors mout petiz/Mais de grant cuer estoit hardiz" (he was very small of body, but bold of heart; 3675-76).⁸⁵ Given that Enide has just bravely used cunning rather than physical force to save Erec, this description may recall her actions. It would then raise subversive questions, since if women, despite inferior physical force, can be just as bold, why should Enide accept Erec's treatment of her?

In a manner similar to the concluding lines of *Yvain*, we have a choice when reading this scene: either to understand it, as scholars always have, according to Green's conception of irony, whereby Enide's irony would come to neutralize the threat posed by

⁸⁴The question of "female heroism" in the romance has arguably been the most important and controversial issue for critics of the romance. Grace Armstrong and Penny Sullivan "emphasize Enide as an emergent heroine, one who learns language and succeeds through eloquence during the course of the poem," as Kurtis Haas notes ("Erec's Ascent, 134). See Grace Armstrong, "Women of Power: Chrétien de Troyes's Female Clerks," and "Enide and Solomon's Wife: Figures of Romance Sapientia"; and Penny Sullivan, "The Education of the Heroine in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*." Since then, scholars have increasingly argued that this is either an anti-feminist romance or one whose feminism is dubious. See Lynn Tarte Ramey, "Representations of Women in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*," and Burns, *Bodytalk*. The most recent contribution to the dialogue has been Kinoshita's notion that the romance associates interiority with femininity, which invites us to re-think the history of romance as that of the increasing valorization of the male individual; see *Thinking through Chrétien*, 111-38.

⁸⁵ For the question of equality among knights, see Mussetter, "The Education of Chrétien's Enide," 154-55.

the Count; or to read the explicitly *second degré* scene as then pointing to something else: namely, to a *remise en cause* of the ethics of Erec's treatment of Enide.⁸⁶ According to this latter reading, by saving Erec Enide paradoxically condemns him; for though rescuing him from being "depeciez" or "desmembrez" by the Count, the scene mobilizes irony in such a manner as to raise questions that further dismember the stability of the marriage.⁸⁷

Yet, one may object, it is hardly news that Chrétien's romances resist reductive meaning, since we already know, largely thanks to feminist critics, that Chrétien's romances raise questions, rather than closing them.⁸⁸ My response, informed by the preceding rhetorical analysis, is two-fold. At one level, not everyone seems to have gotten the memo, and the relationship of rhetoric—here, irony—to subversive politics has been almost entirely elided.⁸⁹ Raising subversive questions is also often considered undeliberate or unprovable, while my argument is that it is consistent with the romance's terms.⁹⁰ It is only fitting to read a *second-degré* scene in a *second-degré* manner, and the

⁸⁶ While I certainly prefer the latter option, I find the most persuasive reading in favor of the former to be Eugene Vance's chapter, which concentrates on this scene, in *From Topic to Tale*, 28-40. Burns reads this scene as evidencing Enide's ability to unsettle when she speaks, though she contends that this disruption is contained by the narrative: *Bodytalk* 175-79. For Kinoshita, this scene illustrates how Enide's will has been warped into wanting to be with the husband she is supposed to be with: *Thinking Through Chrétien*, 128-29.

⁸⁷ For Ramey, "She causes his transgression, and yet she must also be his salvation..." ("Representations of Women," 381) I am adding one more dimension; she has him prove his knighthood and deconstructs it.

⁸⁸ For a summary of some of the issues raised by feminist critics, see the Introduction.

⁸⁹ It is, for example, surprising, that in his exhaustive *The Art of Romance*, Kelly does not once consider that rhetorical techniques may not signal total adherence to feudal hierarchies and ambitions. See *The Art of Romance*, esp. 63-5. Kelly refers the reader *à juste titre* to Norris Lacy, *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes*.

⁹⁰ For a good critical review of critical accounts of Lancelot's propensity to subversion, see Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 92; see also Bruckner's classic "An Interpreter's Dilemma."

romance invites what McGrady elsewhere calls “inventive” readings, or what I would call de-constructive ones.⁹¹

There is another move that critics have been largely reticent to make: to map the ironical poetics onto the dominant themes of the *histoire*, in such a manner as to foreground the metaleptic and erotic ties between *énoncé* and *énonciation*. In this romance as in others, critics have noted how various secondary characters introduce hermeneutic questions into the diegetic universe.⁹² When, for example, Gauvain, Guinevere, and Keu wonder with whom Erec is arriving at Court, they introduce within the *histoire* the notion of subjective, limited vision (1090-134).⁹³ Rather than limiting self-conscious meta-poetic reflection to secondary characters, we can, I think, also locate it at the heart of *Erec et Enide*’s love plot. For there is something *seductive* about the romance’s poetics; “Quant plus l’esgarde, plus li plait” (the more he looks at her, the more she pleases him; 1483) is as much a description of our experience of reading the romance, and specifically of its use of ironic detail, as it is of Erec’s initial relationship to Enide.⁹⁴ This disturbing sense that the reader’s predicament eerily echoes Erec’s relationship to Enide continues after problems erupt in the marriage.⁹⁵ Indeed, Erec is *like* the text itself, insofar as the text does not explicitly alert us to everything it sees. The

⁹¹ McGrady, *Controlling Readers*, 9.

⁹² This has perhaps been more studied in the case of the *Charrette*. For discussion of intradiegetic hermeneutic questions, see notably Bruckner’s chapter on the *Charrette* in *Shaping Romance*, 60-108.

⁹³ See Buckbee, “*Erec et Enide*,” 59, for comments on perspective.

⁹⁴ As Leupin writes of the *Rose*, “our desires implicate us in our work.” Leupin, “Mobius Strip,” 73.

⁹⁵ Michel-André Bossy makes an observation of this sort, writing, “the narrator becomes aligned with Enide, the wandering and anxious outsider, while the author’s position as plot contriver becomes analogous to that of Erec driving ahead without revealing his specific intentions” (“The Elaboration of Female Narrative Functions in *Erec et Enide*,” 29).

statement “Erec le vit et semblant fist/Qu’encor garde ne s’en preïst” (Erec saw him and pretended that he had not yet noticed him; 2957-58) also applies to the romance’s use of suggestive detail and ironic repetition, which generally is included without being expressly signaled. When the text raises uncomfortable or dangerous questions, we have the same choice that Enide does: either to raise the alarm or to remain silent.⁹⁶ This ironic romance tests us, just as Erec tests Enide; and, it follows, we prove our love for “Chrétien” not by obeying him silently, but by speaking up and talking back. If the *Behaingne* and the *Navarre* present “love as suffering,” in *Erec et Enide* it appears first as excessive desire and then as matrimonial conflict.⁹⁷ In fact, while not typically (or ever) held up as queer, *Erec et Enide* is unusual in that the problem explicitly emanates from antisocial expressions of sexuality, which are then addressed, by Erec and Enide, in such a manner as to foreground tensions at the heart of the institution of marriage. Contrary to the lyric equivalency of writing, singing and love, *Erec* may then be staging the equivalency between writing and involuted, antisocial sexuality, or staging not an equivalency between writing and harmonious marriage, but rather between romance poetics and a contentious threat to the stability of this normative institution.

There is, though, a possible objection to be leveled: what if the concluding sequence straightens things out, as critics have always maintained? I would respond that, at a general level, a complicit ending does not necessarily undo a subversive narrative, and that more specifically, the concluding sequences to *Erec et Enide* are far messier than

⁹⁶ As Jeanne Nightingale observes, “Her conflict between silence and speech...can be seen as a fictive analog of the poet’s own stated obligation to break silence and share his wisdom for our greater benefit...” (“Erec in the Mirror,” 135). See also Burns for commentary on the relation between “the romance author and his female protagonist” (*Bodytalk*, 161).

⁹⁷ “Love as suffering” is Sarah Kay’s formulation (*The Place of Thought*, 119).

has hitherto been acknowledged. Critics have long recognized that the *Joie de la Cort* episode functions ironically, since, like the Joie which is anything but joyous, the couple upon whom the protagonists stumble “représente le reflet inversé et sinistre”—or, to use the term we have been using, *ironic*—of Erec and Enide.⁹⁸ And if numerous elusive echoes to earlier moments in the text do not stand in any sort of stable relationship to the protagonists’ predicament—and thus if the relationship between Mabonagrain and his lady, on the one hand, and Erec and Enide, on the other, is fundamentally unstable—then the scene would necessarily be ill-equipped to confer any stability on Erec’s and Enide’s relationship.⁹⁹ More concretely, Mabonagrain’s notion that, “Ainsi me cuida retenir/Ma damoisele a lonc sejour” (thus my lady thought she would retain me for a long while; 6082-83), certainly does not reflect Erec’s and Enide’s predicament, since Enide never imprisons Erec; and what, we may ask, is stable or stabilizing about likening the forceful Erec to Mabonagrain’s lady?¹⁰⁰ When Erec first sees this lady, the narrator exclaims, “C’onques Lavine de La[u]rente...N’ot mie de beauté le quart” (that never Lavinia of Lavinium had a quarter of her beauty; 5883-85). While this observation is consistent with the notion that Dido and Lavinia represent competing models of love within the romance—with Dido standing for uncontrollable passion and Lavinia for a stable, forward-looking love (sexuality with a future)—shouldn’t Mabonagrain’s lady then be

⁹⁸ The quote is from Liliane Dulac, “Peut-on comprendre les relations entre Érec et Énide?” 46.

⁹⁹ For Donald and Sarah Sturm Maddox, “Critical consensus...holds that it [the *Joie de la Cort* episode] is by no means a superfluous prolongation of the fiction, and that its meaning lies in comparison of the secluded couple’s mode of existence with the earlier experience of Erec and Enide” (“The First Arthurian Romance,” 113).

¹⁰⁰ As Penny Sullivan observes, “Erec has never abdicated his sovereignty as Maboagrain [sic] had done, and his love is a constructive influence in his life, not a source of pointless destruction” (“The Education of the Heroine,” 329).

compared to Dido, rather than surpassing Lavinia?¹⁰¹ After Erec has defeated Mabonagrain, Enide approaches his distressed lady: “Seule i cuida Enide aler/Que nului n’i cuida mener” (Enide wished to venture out alone, and thought that she would bring no one with her; 6199-200). Enide’s solitary venture echoes Erec’s repeated insistence that he and his wife travel without companions.¹⁰² But it is unclear why Enide’s behavior to this lady should recall Erec’s forceful treatment of her. Enide then recognizes this lady as her cousin—“Si li sembla que l’ot veüe/Autre foÿe et conneüe” (it seemed to her that she had previously seen and known this lady; 6231-32)—and the cousin’s joy at encountering Enide negates her distress at losing despotic control over her lover: “...de son duel mais ne li chaut,/De liece li cuers li faut” (she no longer worries about her pain; her heart is overcome with joy; 6247-48). This excessive joy is odd, since encountering Enide changes nothing about the dissolution of her amorous predicament. Similarly, the larger scene functions via a “poetics of recognition,” since the reader recognizes elements from earlier in the romance in a manner similar to the way Enide and her cousin recognize each other (we may, in fact, recognize that Enide had another cousin earlier in the romance, who disappeared).¹⁰³ Yet our “joy” in recognizing elements may, like Enide’s cousin’s joy, be merely distracting, serving to mask the perpetual irresolution of the various couples’ predicaments.

¹⁰¹ For the relationship of this romance to the *Aeneid*, see Witting, “The Aeneas-Dido Allusion in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*” and Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, 157-96. See also Bossy, “The Elaboration of Female Narrative Functions,” 25-26.

¹⁰² For example, “Mais il dist que nul n’en menroit/Ne compaignie n’i queroit...” (But he said that he would bring no one, and desired no company; 1447-48).

¹⁰³ See vv. 1351-1418 for the first cousin of Enide’s. For discussion of Enide’s family relations, and Erec’s relative lack thereof, see Joan Brumlik, “Chrétien’s Enide: Wife, Mistress, and Metaphor.”

The sense that inappropriate details trouble the possibility of resolution also haunts the ensuing coronation sequence. Since Donald Maddox, it has become commonplace to read this passage as showcasing model kingship.¹⁰⁴ Were this the case, it is unclear why the scene would open with such a demeaning depiction of Arthur. Before Erec returns to Court, Arthur is alone and anxious: “Onques mais en nule saison/Ne fu trovez li rois si seus,/Et s’en estoit mout angoisseus” (Never before, in any season, was the King found to be so alone, and he was very distressed about this; 6412-14). Arthur then informs Erec of his father’s death, and Erec’s reactions contrast strikingly with his sovereign’s behavior:

Erec en pesa plus assez
 Qu’il n’en mostra semblant as gens;
 Mais duelx de roi n’est mie genz,
 N’a roi n’avient qu’il face duel. (6516-19)

It was considerably more disturbing to Erec than what he let others see, but a King’s mourning is not noble, and it is not fitting that a king demonstrate pain.

If Erec cannot express his distress at his father’s death, then surely Arthur shouldn’t be whining about feeling lonely and bored. Again, the devil is in the details, and these details subvert the sense of resolution that the scene ostensibly espouses. In fact, as critics, we already know this; for, although the narrator famously claims that he has already told us “[q]uex achoisons le [Erec] fist movoir” (what reasons made Erec set out; 6471), critics have long recognized that Erec’s motivations are never spelled out, and thus that close reading contradicts explicit and overly neat statements of resolution.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Maddox, *Structure and Sacring*. Also taken up by Haas, “Erec’s Ascent,” 131.

¹⁰⁵ Hardly a small question. For Dulac, relying heavily on the work of René Ménéage, there are at least “une douzaine” of interpretations of this moment (“Peut-on comprendre,” 37). Norris Lacy also compiles various responses and speculates on this scene, in “Narrative, Point of View, and the Problem of Erec’s Motivation,” 355.

The narrator's final words furnish the most persuasive, and perverse, indication of the ironic nature of the romance's conclusion. As he ties up the romance, the narrator decides to describe the banquet Arthur throws for the newly crowned Emperor and Empress, exclaiming,

Dont vuil je grant folie enprendre
Qui a[u] descrire vuil entendre;
Mais, puis qu'a faire le m'estuet,
Or aviegne qu'avenir puet,
Ne laisserai que je ne die
Selonc mon sens une partie. (6699-704)

Now I, who will attempt to describe (this scene), am undertaking great folly; but since I must do it, come what shall, I will not refrain from saying a bit about it insofar as I can.

This superfluous narratorial intrusion strongly recalls Enide's alleged error; for not only has she routinely qualified her outburst to Erec as her "folie" (for example, 2583), but the narrator's decision to speak out, regardless of the consequences, also echoes Enide's recurring internal debates.¹⁰⁶ Strange echoes of Enide's "folie" then pierce through the narrator's final words:

Mençonge sembleroit trop granz
Se je disoie que .v^c.
Tables fussent mises a tire
En un palais; je nou quier dire...
De mes divers sont tuit servi;
Neporquant, *se je ne les vi*,
Bien en seüsse raison rendre.
Mais il m'estuet a el entendre
Que a raconter la mangier.
Assez orent et sans dangier,
A grant joie et a grant planté
Servi furent a volanté...

¹⁰⁶ As Mussetter notes, Enide "immediately curses" her outburst to Erec "as 'folie' and 'foressenaige.'" And from this point on, Chrétien never again calls her wise" ("The Education of Chrétien's Enide," 150).

Li rois departi s'assamblee
 Des rois et des dus et des contes,
 Dont assez estoit grans li contes...
 Mout lor a doné largement...
 Por ce qu'il ert de grant franchise
 Et por Erec qu'il ama tant.
 Li contes fine ci a tant. (6917-20; 6931-38; 6945; 6948-50, my emphasis)

It would seem to be too great a lie, were I to say that 500 tables were placed head-to-head in a palace, and I do not wish to say it. All are served various dishes; nonetheless, if I didn't see them, I am still capable of providing an account. But I must put my energy into doing something other than recounting the banquet. All had plenty and were without lack, and they were served with great joy and great copiousness to their fullest desires. The King released the assembly of kings, dukes, and counts, of whom there is much to recount. He gave to them generously, because he was of great nobility and on account of Erec, whom he so loved. The tale ends here.

This pseudo-epilogue functions similarly to the prologue to *Yvain*, since, rather than discussing the romance as if he were outside it (*qua* author), the narrator remains glued to this intradiegetic last supper. We might say of these lines what Hunt says of the narrator's protestation that we already know why Erec set off: "The romance ends...with an egregious example of narratorial *teisir* in place of the process of revelation so lauded in the prologue."¹⁰⁷ This choice may imply that the reader can *either* focus on the coronation sequence (as the narrator does) or on the larger effect of the romance—and doing one might imply ignoring the other.¹⁰⁸ The narrator's language is particularly devious when he claims that, "il m'estuet a el entendre." These lines echo Enide's fateful comments to Erec, where she has said,

Que si vos ai lacié et pris

¹⁰⁷ Hunt, "Chrétien's Prologues Reconsidered," 160

¹⁰⁸ To the recurrent critical notion that Enide is silenced by the romance's conclusion, I would counter that it is rather the author who is. Ramey and Burns both see this sequence as silencing Enide: see Ramey, "Representations of Women," and Burns, *Bodytake*, 193. See also Barbara Sargent, "Erec's Enide: 'sa fame ou s'amie?'" for a view of Enide as silenced.

Que tot en perdez vostre pris,
Ne ne querez a el entendre. (2559-61, my emphasis)

That I have so ensnared and entrapped you, that you are losing all your honor and don't wish to do anything else (but remain with me).

The narrator's words themselves "a el entendre," since they refer not only to the banquet but also to the problems in the marriage.¹⁰⁹ As in *Yvain's* resolution, this strongly suggests that something else is happening: that the conclusion "a el entendre." The narrator all but says as much, evoking as he does the possibility that he is lying—"mençonge sembleroit..."—and quite unnecessarily protesting that he wasn't present at the meal, thus gratuitously implying his distance from the resolution: "se je ne les vi..." Therefore, while Geometry, according to Erec's robe, "esgarde [et] mesure,/Con li ciel[s] et la terre dure,/Si que rien nule ne i faut" (surveys and measures as far as the heavens and earth extend, so that nothing goes unremarked; 6739-40), the interest of this final sequence, and of the romance, may instead lie in how it fails to add up. "We can...read the ending of the romance as a radical criticism of reification/objectification," to borrow from Leupin's description of Jean de Meun's conclusion.¹¹⁰ For more than anything else, this scene crowns the radically negative, queer irony that has infected and colored the entire romance, and that has made it so dangerously seductive. *Quant plus regarde, plus lui plaist*: the pleasure of this romance lies in remembering to dis-member it, which is an anti-authoritarian and queer pleasure.

III. *Cligès*

¹⁰⁹ For intelligent discussion of the narrator's concluding lines, see also Buckbee, "*Erec et Enide*," 87-88.

¹¹⁰ Leupin, "*The Roman de la Rose as a Mobius Strip*," 68.

I have argued that irony is more pervasive and perverse in *Erec et Enide* than has previously been recognized; we therefore teased queer irony out of the romance of Chrétien's that critics tend to consider the least ironic.¹¹¹ I now turn to *Cligès*, the romance already most identified with irony and the *second-degré*, in order further to explore why this queer conception of irony is useful and illuminating even in works attributed to Chrétien where this terrain seems already to have been extensively mined.¹¹²

Like that of *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès*'s infamous prologue has elicited much debate, with scholars focusing on its famed evocation of the topos of *translatio studii et imperii*. The prologue, some hold, may include an ironic wink to an audience in-the-know.¹¹³ It has nonetheless been unanimously understood as using genealogy to establish various levels of *auctoritas*: that of France in relation to the Christian East; that of Chrétien's own romance, in its relation to various intertexts; and that of the genealogical prominence of the protagonist's lineage. In the prologue, then, "[t]he narrator's articulation of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*...is indistinguishable from his dual concern with the provenance—the paternity—of both the vernacular text and its titular protagonist," as Kinoshita writes; or we might say that the prologue stages a concomitant *translatio*

¹¹¹ For example, Donald and Sara Sturm Maddox write that, Chrétien would "never retur[n] to the mode of forthright idealization he so masterfully developed in *Erec et Enide*" ("The First Arthurian Romance," 119). For Sharon Kinoshita, "in *Erec et Enide* the word is inseparable from deed and language from truth" ("The Poetics of *Translatio*, 344).

¹¹² For an excellent recent introduction to these particularities of *Cligès*, see Joan Tasker Grimbert, "*Cligès* and the *Chansons*: A Slave of Love."

¹¹³ Sharon Kinoshita, for example, notes that "Saint Peter's of Beauvais, the library putatively housing Chrétien's source, burned in 1180"; this reference may, then, refer to an impossible place. Kinoshita, "The Poetics of *Translatio*," 335. Michelle Freeman had earlier queried the validity of the notion that Chrétien stumbled upon the library: "*Cligès*," in *Chrétien: A Symposium*, 95.

between extra-textual geo-politics, the romance's intertexts, and the story at hand.¹¹⁴ The first two claims to authority are bound to remain largely unverifiable, since, despite some very welcome speculation, we cannot know for sure how a twelfth-century public would have reacted either to the notion of French supremacy or to the attribution of these various intertexts to one author.¹¹⁵ The relationship of the prologue to *this* romance, however, is far more demonstrable, and it is logical to postulate that if elusive ties to the ensuing tale subvert the prologue's claims to authority, the other facets of its *auctoritas* may be equally tenuous.¹¹⁶

Like in *Erec et Enide*, this prologue suggestively clashes with the tale it introduces. If Alexander's intra-diegetic westward movement from Greece to England, occupying roughly the first third of the romance, clearly echoes the trajectory of *translatio studii et imperii*, this parallel will prove problematic, because Alexander's demurral in Britain creates the problems of succession that will plague him and his progeny. Before Alexander's father dies, he,

...fist amasser
Touz les hanz barons de sa terre
Por Alixandre envoier querre,
Son fil, qui en Breteigne estoit,
*Ou trop volentiers s'arestoit.*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Kinoshita, "The Poetics of Translatio," 334. For a similar notion, see Freeman, "*Cligès*," 95.

¹¹⁵ For the relationship of the Christian West, and specifically France, to the Christian East, see both the above-cited article by Sharon Kinoshita and also her, "Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* in the Medieval Mediterranean." For interesting recent takes on the question of authorship as it is articulated in the prologue, see two articles by Levilson Reis: "The Paratext to Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*" and "*Clergie*, Clerkly *Studium*, and the Literary History of Chrétien de Troyes's Romances." For Reis, "The sense of an implied author's presence or persona resulting from the list of works would not normally have raised the medieval reader's interest in the biographical or literary persona of an implied author" ("The Paratext," 7).

¹¹⁶ I proceed in a similar way in my reading of *Aucassin et Nicolette* in "De la filiation à la subversion," looking at how intra-textual modalities may correspond to inter-textual ones, which we could not otherwise describe with confidence.

¹¹⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Méla and Collet, vv. 2352-56, cited in text.

Brought together all the high-ranking barons of his land, that they may send for Alexander, his son, who was in Britain, where he overly eagerly remained.

The problematic effects of Alexander's stay in Britain may lend irony to the prologue's notion that it is a good thing that honor remain in France: "...que ja mais de France n'isse/L'ennors qui s'i est *arestee*" (may the honor which has settled in France never leave it; 38-39). Within the narrative, Alexander's son Cligès also short-circuits this itinerary from Greece to the Occident, taking leave of his uncle in Germany, because to head back to Greece and from there to Britain would take too long: "Et se je en Grece en aloie,/Trop me seroit longue la voie/De Costentinoble en Breteigne..." (And were I to go to Greece, the route from Constantinople to Britain would be too long for me; 4265-67). The prologue's claims about *translatio studii et imperii* may be stronger, were the titular protagonist to make the entire voyage, rather than short-circuit it.¹¹⁸ When he arrives at Arthur's court, Cligès disguises himself as French, in one of the romance's sole mentions of French-ness: "Mes bien fu atorné ançois,/Vestuz a guise de François" (But before he dressed up well, clothed as a Frenchman; 4925-26). Since Cligès's French clothing hardly negates his Greek roots, the image does not embody the lofty ideals of *translation studii et imperii*; rather, it is a sort of travesty of it. Cligès's heart remains in Greece—"Ça fu mes cuers et la mes cors" (Here was my heart and there was my body; 5121) he will say to Fénice—whereas the prologue hardly asserts that the "heart" of *chevalerie* and *clergie* remains in Greece, despite their physical presence in the West.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Kinoshita doubts the "straightness" of this trajectory in terms of twelfth-century perceptions of literary history: for her, "the lines of transmission running from Greece through cosmopolitan centers like Toledo or crusader Antioch appeared eminently more enticing than those running 'straight' from Greece to Rome to the West" ("Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*," 52).

¹¹⁹ There has been much interest in whether the prologue considers *clergie* and *chevalerie* on equal footing; Michelle Freeman has argued that it is upholding "French" *clergie*, not *chevalerie*,

Comparison of the prologue to the epilogue further undermines the prologue's pretensions to *auctoritas*. Just as scholars understand the *Charrete*'s epilogue as a curious re-writing of its prologue, so too does *Cligès*'s epilogue uncomfortably recall its prologue.¹²⁰ Introducing the romance's concluding sequence, Arthur rushes to Cligès's defence, mustering all the force of the Occident: "Tote Engleterre et tote Flandres/Normendie, France et Bretaigne/Et trestot jusqu'a por d'Espaigne/A fait semondre et amasser" (he called upon and gathered together all England and all Flanders, Normandy, France and Britain: everything through the ports of Spain; 6620-23).¹²¹ Alis suddenly dies, though, so Arthur's forces have no reason to sack Constantinople:

*Mes remese est del tot la voie,
Car li rois sa gent en envoie,
Si se depart l'oz et retourne.* (6657-59, my emphasis)

But the expedition is abandoned, for the King releases his men, and the army breaks up and returns.

By dramatizing the antagonism between the East and the West, this sequence recalls the prologue. The phrase, "remese est del tot la voie" more precisely hearkens back to the prologue's notion that, "Que des Grezois ne des Romains/Ne dit en mais ne plus ne mains,/D'eus est la parole remese" (Of the Greeks or the Romans, we don't say much any more; of them talk is abandoned; 41-43). Yet this imbrication is hardly comfortable; for why, we might ask, would the text liken Arthur's not-quite-battle, all show and no might, to *translatio imperii et studii*? More provocatively (and hilariously), France's

while Kinoshita instead finds Western military superiority to have been firmly established in the late twelfth century (with the capture of Constantinople), while *clergie* would be much more suspect. See Freeman, "*Cligès*," and Kinoshita, "Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*."

¹²⁰ See Ch. I for discussion of the conclusion to the *Charrette*.

¹²¹ Kelly considers this sequence to be playing on the Trojan War: see "Honor, Debate, *Translatio Imperii* in *Cligès*," 45.

retention of power in the prologue bears uncanny similarities to the Byzantine tradition of trapping the Empress in a jail cell, which the epilogue describes. Compare the narrator's initial statement about *clergie*,

Dex doint qu'ele i soit retenue
Tant que li leus li embelisse
Si que ja mais de France n'isse
L'ennors qui s'i est arestee.
Dex l'avoit as altres prestee... (36-40)

God Grant that it (*clergie*) be retained in France until the place so fosters its beauty that the honor which has demurred in France should never leave it. Previously God had loaned it to others...

to the grim Byzantine tradition motivated by Fénice's infidelity:

Por ce einsi com an prison
Est gardee an Constantinoble,
Ja n'iert tant riche ne tant noble
L'empererriz, quex qu'ele soit,
Que l'empereres ne la croit
Tant com de cesti li remanbre.
Toz jorz la fait garder en chanbre
Plus por peor que por le hasle... (6690-97)

For this reason, the Empress is retained as in a prison-cell in Constantinople. The Empress will never be so rich or so noble, whoever she is, that the Emperor trusts her, as long as he remembers her (Fénice). Every day he has her locked in a room, more out of fear than because of the blazing sun.

These lines in the epilogue are overflowing with irony. Scholars have noted that they shatter Fénice's dream of not going down in infamy, while decrying adultery in a manner unlike anything the narrator has previously expressed.¹²² Furthermore, enclosing a woman in a chamber is, in the romance, not the means of preventing adultery, but rather the means of executing it, as Fénice stows herself away so as to consort at leisure with

¹²² See, for example, Norris Lacy, "*Cligés* and Courtliness," 20.

Cligès.¹²³ We may then extend these ironies, by “remembering” the French retention of *clergie* and *chevalerie* when the epilogue discusses the Byzantine custom; for the prologue’s notion of “holding” (*retenir*) an *elle* that must not escape (“n’isse”) for reasons having to do with honor (“l’ennors”) and who has previously been possessed by others (“as altres preste”) seems eerily close to the very foreign and dubious tradition of imprisoning the empress.¹²⁴ This notion that the foreignness of this tradition is imperfect is all the more probable given that, as Kinoshita remarks, the most famous contemporary empress to be imprisoned was not Byzantine but far more local: Eleanor of Aquitaine, the mother of Chrétien’s supposed patroness, Marie of Champagne.¹²⁵

The effect of the epilogue’s elusive irony is, furthermore, to invite us to link together irony and transgressive sex. According to *Cligès*’s epilogue,

...ainc puis n’i ot empereor
 N’eüst de sa fame peor
 Qu’ele nel deüst decevoir,
 Se il oï ramantevoir
 Comant Fenice Alis deçut
 Primes par la poison qu’il but
 Et puis par l’autre traïson. (6683-89)

Never again was there an emperor who didn’t fear that his wife were unfaithful to him, if he heard recounted how Fénice tricked Alis, first by the poison he drank and then by the other treason.

¹²³ Joan Tasker Grimbert also notices this: see “*Cligés* and the *Chansons*,” 134.

¹²⁴ McCracken has recently read this conclusion as emphasizing the importance of perpetual memory: “it...suggests that to conclude is to remember into the future.” See *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, 143.

¹²⁵ Kinoshita writes that this passage, “must have evoked the famous queen ‘tenue anclose’ in the mid- to late 1170s: Eleanor of Aquitaine” (“Chrétien de Troyes’s *Cligés*,” 57). She does also note that this representation does have “some historical basis” (57). Leslie Dunton Downer has offered a remarkable reading of this concluding sequence; for her, “here is a vivid example of the generating of cultural differences for the sake of preserving the mythology of a specific culture’s distinction...” (“The Horror of Incest,” 376).

Similarly, the epilogue may itself function as an “autre traïson,” since if it bears a problematic relation to the prologue and to the narrative, there is a strong possibility that, like Fénice, it functions to “deceive.” This in turn suggests a privileged relationship between irony and transgressive sexuality; for rather than clearly denouncing or resolving Fénice’s adultery, the narrator would be using irony to echo and to perform it. As in the concluding lines of *Yvain*, *Cligès*’s epilogue undermines its explicit assertion of control and normativity.

To understand *Cligès*’s prologue and epilogue as ironic in this manner is new for three principal reasons. At the most basic level, it extends irony to the romance’s paratexts, whereas it has previously been largely restricted to the narrative itself. More importantly, it is new because its anti-authoritarian implications are diametrically opposed to a conception of irony that fosters, rather than rejects, authority. According to Haidu’s classic account, still relied upon by nearly all critical studies of the text and still dominating discussion of irony, irony signals “the poet’s virtuosic control over the language and conventions of his verbal universe,” as Robert Hanning writes, whereas I am arguing that irony problematizes the very possibility of authorial control.¹²⁶ Haidu also argues that irony “establishes the aesthetic distance the author and audience share as against [sic] the characters, and which allows us to enjoy the work as gratuitous aesthetic display.”¹²⁷ Instead of limiting irony to “gratuitous aesthetic display,” I would suggest

¹²⁶ The quote is from “Courtly Contexts,” 40. Grimbart summarizes Haidu’s argument and its lasting influence on criticism of the romance, in the “*Cligès* and the *Chansons*,” 124. For other recent work that draws on this Haidu text see, for example, McCracken, “Love and War in *Cligès*”; Bruckner, “Of Cannibalism and *Cligès*,” 31 n9. The one critic, to my knowledge, extensively to take issue with Haidu is Tracy Adams, who argues against Haidu’s notion that the text queries Fénice’s conception of *fin’amors*. See *Violent Passions*, 191-2 for discussion of Haidu.

¹²⁷ Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes*, 48.

that it participates in the ethical concerns of the romance, and specifically its depictions of sexuality.

As in *Erec*, this queer conception of irony is not only justified by the paratexts, but also by the narrative itself, whether we approach the romance's irony on a larger, structural scale, or on a more intimate one. As has been amply remarked, *Cligès*'s structure functions by twice juxtaposing "two apparently independent narrative events," inviting comparison in its first *volet* between Alexander's love story and the rebellion shaking Arthur's kingdom, and then juxtaposing this entire *premerains vers* with the story of Alexander's progeny, *Cligès*.¹²⁸ In the first segment, the parallels between the love and war plots are insistent. Soredamors exclaims in her initial monologue,

Oeil, vos m'avez traïë!
Par vos m'a mes cue[r]s enhaïe
Qui me soloit estre de foi.
Or me grieve ce que je voi. (475-78)

Eyes, you have betrayed me! It is your fault that my heart has turned on me,
which used to be loyal to me. Now what I see pains me!

This amorous treachery foreshadows the war plot, which stages a *mise en abyme* of betrayal. Initially, Angrés, upon whom Arthur has conferred his kingdom in his absence, betrays Arthur; yet, "[c]ar de plusors estoit haïz" (because he was hated by many; 1213), Angrés "redotoit estre traïz" (feared being betrayed; 1214) and flees from London to Windsor. When Angrés's men attempt to ambush Arthur's forces, they fear that they have been betrayed: "Li traïtor molt s'en esmaient,/Si s'ecrient: Traï! Traï!" (the traitors are quite afraid and they cry out: Betrayed! Betrayed!; 1858-59). Disguising himself as

¹²⁸ The quote is from Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, 107. The phrase "premerains vers" comes from *Erec et Enide*, v. 1840.

one of them, Alexander then infiltrates (betrays) Angrés's forces and, upon seeing his abandoned clothing, the Greco-Arthurian forces, like Soredamors, mistakenly believe their eyes, convinced as they are that Alexander has been killed: "Si fesoient .I. duel si fort/ Por lor seignor li Greu a tort" (the Greeks were thus loudly in mourning for their lord in error; 2033-34). Both the love and the war plots, then, foreground the notion of being "gabez" (to borrow the text's term), but it is unclear what this rapprochement implies. For Peggy McCracken, "it is not surprising that the vocabulary of love is also the vocabulary of war," but "the relation between love and war seems to go beyond a shared vocabulary."¹²⁹ I would argue that rather than necessarily going beyond "a shared vocabulary," the romance problematizes this lexical overlap. Indeed, when Soredamors wonders whether Alexander's use of the term *amis* comports a specifically amorous valence, she is drawing our attention to a possible tension between the (private) amorous and (public) feudal meanings of the term: "Mes ce me resmaie de bout/ Que c'est .I. parole use,/ Si repuis tost estre amusee" (But it worries me thoroughly that it is a cliché, and I can thus easily be fooled; 4374-76). Furthermore, were linguistic and thematic overlaps between the love and war plots merely nominal, the romance also complexly incorporates this notion, since the question of coming together "in name only" will characterize Fénice's marriage to Alis. If love and war are coming together "in name only," this would, in other words, tap into a crucial—and problematic—question in the romance.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ McCracken, "Love and War," 11.

¹³⁰ The question of the status of Alis's and Fénice's marriage has been explored by many scholars. For Lucie Polak, there may have been a *jeu-parti* about whether Fénice was purer than Yseult: see *Chrétien de Troyes: Cligés*. See Grimbart, "Cligés and the *Chansons*," 129-30, for a survey of how critics have mapped Fénice's marriage on to contemporary discussions about consent and consummation.

By pre-empting any means by which we may dismiss the lexical overlap between love and war, the romance pushes us to examine its implications. The irony, however, is that we also can't, since both elements foreground "the opacity of the signifier," as Kinoshita has nicely observed.¹³¹ Insisting on "the opacity of the signifier" as a way of linking the storyline's two registers is paradoxical, because it presents the reader with two mutually exclusive options: either to exaggerate this opacity, by reflecting that the link between the two levels will necessarily remain opaque; or to ignore this opacity before the weight of their connectedness, understanding the relationship between the two as stable, because each foregrounds the same thing. Critics have preferred this second route: McCracken, for example, concludes that the love and war plots finally complement each other, since "love is defined with reference to war, and war is defined with reference to love."¹³² The text may itself figure such a reading, when Guinevere encourages the lovers to come together *en toute honneur*:

Or vos pri que ja n'i queroiz
 Force ne volenté d'amor.
 Par mariage et par ennor
 Vos entr'acompeigniez ensemble... (2262-65)

Now I beg of you that you do not resort to force or to love's ways. By marriage and by honor you should come together.

Similarly, we might understand the war and love plots as coming together in a sort of honorable marriage, rather than as being opposed (as in war) or unofficially, even transgressively, linked (as "volenté d'amor" would imply). Guinevere thus assumes the

¹³¹ Kinoshita, "The Poetics of *Translatio*," 344.

¹³² McCracken, "Love and War," 11. Kinoshita reads this first section similarly: for her, "Nowhere else in Chrétien's five romances do passion and political expediency so exactly coincide" ("The Poetics of *Translatio*," 346).

role that Haidu assigns to readers of the romance, since she sees beyond the fragmented vision of the characters: “the reader [is] the privileged observer for whom [the romance’s] world is spread out without secrets.”¹³³ Guinevere surprises the amorous “secrets” of the couple, which are spread out before her and us.

The identification of Guinevere with the reader nonetheless serves to expose problems in such a conception of the reader; for if scholars have come to debunk Jean Frappier’s formerly influential notion that Chrétien opposes the “troubadour’s concept of *fin’amors*...to the more marriage-oriented approach featured in his romance,” then this idea that the reader, like Guinevere, uses privileged knowledge to harmonize or to marry various disparate elements of the text may, by analogy, also crumble.¹³⁴ The relationship of the second *volet* of the romance to the first reflects a fundamental indeterminacy that bears a problematic relationship to the stability of the institution of marriage and to the normative conception of genealogy it ostensibly promotes. At one level, the story of the son recalls that of the father by returning to the theme of the “opacity of the signifier.” When a disguised Cligès kills the Duke of Saxony’s nephew, the Greco-German army mistakenly thinks he has died, similar to how the Greco-Arthurian army earlier mourned for Alexander: “S’est por...celui [Cligès]/Toute l’ost en molt grant ennui” (All the army is, on account of Cligès, in very great distress; 3875-76). While this parallel between the story of the father and the son initially seems unproblematic, this latter scene mines the problematic potential of parallelism. The relationship between Cligès and his uncle is mirrored in the opposing forces, as the Duke of Saxony, like Alis, privileges his nephew

¹³³ Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, 89.

¹³⁴ The quote, as well as the very fair notion that Frappier’s notion was formerly overly influential, come from Grimbert, “*Cligès* and the *Chansons*,” 124.

above all others; and if it seems somehow neat to oppose one nephew and uncle to another, its implications are rather messy, because it implies that in combating the Duke's nephew, Cligès is figuratively combating himself.¹³⁵ This notion of self-harm is all the more pertinent given that, as Thessala remarks, Cligès “a son deseritement sert” (serves his own dis-inheritance; 3226), since in liberating Fénice, he makes his uncle's marriage possible, thus creating the conditions for a rival progeny to contest his claim to the throne. Over the course of this scene, Cligès is, moreover, hardly alone in acting against his own best interests: the narrator says of the Duke's nephew's desire to combat Cligès, “Mes tex cuide... Venchier sa honte qui l'acroist” (But he believes he is avenging his shame who multiplies it; 2885-86) and the Duke's goal of showcasing his prowess leads him repeatedly to humiliate himself. McCracken, referring to the first *volet*, “locate[s] Chrétien's irony” in the notion that “betrayals always ground love.”¹³⁶ In this scene, which is predicated on Alis's betrayal of his promise to Alexander not to remarry, parallelism emphasizes and, insofar as it allows characters to combat themselves, performs, notions of (self-) betrayal. Stahuljak has powerfully argued that in medieval literature, “filiation between fathers and sons does not begin in the so-called natural relationship of blood, but rather in the act of linguistic alliance”; and I would suggest that, by foregrounding the “opacity of the signifier” and its propensity to mislead and to betray, *Cligès* dramatically problematizes this “linguistic alliance” between father and

¹³⁵ Certainly, the uncle/nephew relationship is common in Old French literature. By staging how one nephew combats against his own self-interest while combatting the other nephew, the scene would nonetheless seem to portray one uncle-nephew relation as saying something about the other.

¹³⁶ McCracken, “Love and War,” 17.

son.¹³⁷ This *mise en scène* of betrayal unleashes a “force field” of “irony,” the effect of which is to foster a knotty indeterminacy that, by characterizing the relationship between father and son, necessarily has subversive implications for linear or normative conceptions of genealogy.¹³⁸

If we move from a structural plane to a more intimate look at the romance’s use of detail, the relationship between irony and transgressive sexuality becomes more apparent. It may be argued that the romance figures how unexpected resurgences can be both problematic and related to transgressive sexuality when, as it nears its conclusion, a peasant unknowingly stumbles upon the adulterous queen. The figure he encounters so resembles the Queen, the peasant Bertrand thinks, that,

Q’onc riens autre tant ne sembla.
Tel front, tel boche, tel nés a
Com l’empereriz ma dame ot.
Unques mienz Nautre ne sot
Faire .II. choses d’un semblant. (6375-79)

Never before, it seemed to him, did one thing so resemble another. She had the same forehead, mouth, nose, as milady the Empress did. Never before did Nature make two things of such similar appearance.

We have been studying unexpected repetitions of the same language. This moment may, then, point to some sort of relationship between this rhetorical technique of staging unexpected repetitions and the romance’s adulterous content.¹³⁹ I would perhaps seem to be over-reading, were irony and transgressive sexuality not suggestively linked

¹³⁷ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 2. Note that I used this quote and concept in Ch. II’s discussion of *Silence*; it is even possible that *Silence*’s two-generational structure is inherited from *Cligés*.

¹³⁸ The quote is from Edelman, *Homographesis*, 230.

¹³⁹ This sort of repetition is what J. Hillis Miller calls “Nietzschean repetition,” rather than “Platonic.” For theorizing different conceptions of repetition, see Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 1-21, and my “De la filiation à la subversion.”

throughout the romance. In one wonderful instance, Haidu observes that when Alis mistakenly believes that he is consummating his marriage with Fénice,

Tenir la cuide, n'en tient mie
Mais de neent est a grant ese,
Neent enbrace et neent baise,
Neent tient et neent acole,
Neent voit, a neent parole, (3312-16)

He believes he holds her, but doesn't hold her at all; but from nothing he experiences great pleasure, he embraces and kisses nothing, holds nothing and hugs nothing, sees nothing and speaks to nothing;

this recalls Alexander's nocturnal obsession with one of Soredamors's hairs:

Quant il est couchiez en son lit,
A ce ou n'a point de delit
Se delite en vain et soulace.
Tout nuit la chemise enbrace,
Et quant il le chevol remire,
De tout le mont cuide estre sire.
Bien fet Amors de sage fol... (1627-33)

When he is lying in his bed, with that which holds no delight he enjoys himself and takes pleasure with nothing/in vain. All night he embraces the shirt, and when he admires the hair, he believes he is the King of the World. Thus Love makes the wise man silly.

While, for Haidu, this “principle of a suggested juxtaposition of two apparently independent narrative events” reflects “gratuitous aesthetic pleasure,” gratuitous sexual pleasure is also what the characters experience here.¹⁴⁰ Each of these instances describes sexual activity without intercourse; in both moments, there is “semence [qui] ne puet reprendre” (seed which can not take; 1033) to quote Soredamors. A reigning ambiguity also characterizes the relationship *between* these two moments, since Alis's marriage represents the uncourtly betrayal of Alexander, and the two instances do not, then, seem

¹⁴⁰ Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, 84-87 for the comparison between scenes; 107, 48 for the quote.

fundamentally alike. Therefore, just as Alis (in a possible allusion to Guilhem IX) embraces *nothing*, so too is the reader unable to find justification for this ironic juxtaposition; we are also embracing nothing, striving in vain to discover what motivates this parallel. This in turn suggests that the repetition is performing a “rhetorical masturbation” reflective of the actual masturbation of the characters!

This last example is dramatic, but this is fitting, because linking the ethical and the sexual to the rhetorical represents a new way of understanding the romance. Consistent with a critical tradition that conceives of the (meta-)literary and the sexual in *Cligès* as distinct planes, Michelle Freeman opposes “le commentaire sui-référentiel du discours poétique” to the story of the characters; she locates the former chiefly in the actions of secondary characters who function as proxies for the author: namely, Thessala, who concocts two influential potions; and Jean, who constructs Fénice’s sepulcher and the clandestine fortress.¹⁴¹ Freeman then turns her attention to the scene where Soredamors sews one of her hairs into a shirt for Alexander, writing,

[P]our gratuit qu’elle puisse paraître, la description de la chemise, donnée pour ainsi dire à contretemps, sert un double but: elle présente d’une part un objet qui doit, en compagnie de sa réplique—la tasse donnée en cadeau par Arthur—, amener la conclusion du premier récit; simultanément, par le jeu des schèmes et des motifs tristanesques, elle fonctionne comme le commentaire sui-référentiel du discours poétique qui se déroule.¹⁴²

More emphatically than Thessala or Jean, Soredamors simultaneously functions as a site for “metapoetic reflection,” sewing as she does a tissue of literary allusions, and as a participant in the love-story; this double function invites us to re-examine the neat

¹⁴¹ The quote is from Michelle Freeman, “Transpositions structurelles et intertextualité,” 54. See her overlapping argument in both “*Cligès*” and *The Poetics of Translatio Studii and Conjointure*.

¹⁴² Freeman, “Transpositions,” 54-55.

separation of the one from the other. Is it, we might ask, possible not to divorce these planes, not to read *Cligès* as divided between metaliterary content (reflection on authorship and intertexts, namely the *Tristan* material) and the diegetic story of the characters? In a manner not entirely dissimilar from Renart's *Rose*, *Cligès*, I would argue, resists this opposition by entangling the meta-literary and the erotic.¹⁴³ Close reading in fact suggests that much of the self-conscious metapoetic discourse takes place within the contexts of the protagonists' discourse about sexuality, rather than beyond it. For example, when, in this scene, Soredamors wonders, "Se jel [Alexander] porré mestre a la voie/Par semblanz et par moz coverz" (if I can put Alexander on the right track through appearances and disguised words; 1036-37), discussion of sexuality mirrors the romance's poetics, since by all accounts, "Chrétien" would be communicating with the reader—about, say, his transformation of *Tristan* material—by "semblanz" and "moz coverz." When the narrator then describes these two lovers as too timid to approach each other—"si pres la vit aprochier/Que il la poïst atouchier/Mais il n'a tant de hardement/Qu'il l'ost regarder solement" (he saw her get so close to him that he could touch her, but he wasn't so bold that he dared even to look at her; 1571-75)—this nervousness also resonates with the romance's poetics, where different instances, as we have seen, glance back at each other, without explicitly touching. Furthermore, the romance only explicitly alludes to the *Tristan* material fleetingly, as has been amply remarked; it is therefore like the timid lover who cannot avoid sneaking glances at the object of her or his affection, however much s/he tries to hide her/his gaze.¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴³ For discussion of Renart, see Ch. III.

¹⁴⁴ The question of the relationship of *Cligès* to the *Tristan* material has long dominated study of the romance. As Kinoshita writes, "most recent interpretations of *Cligès* have concentrated almost exclusively on literary historical questions, namely its programmatic rewriting of the *Tristan*

romance also routinely depicts each lover as extremely affected by the presence of the other:

Li uns por l'autre color mue
Et merveille est com il se tiennent
La ou pres a pres s'entraviennent,
Qu'il ne s'entracolent et baisent
De cels baisiers qui amors plaisent,
Mes folie fust et forsens... (5062-67)

The one on account of the other changes colors (=blushes), and it is a miracle how they are able to contain themselves, when they come so close one to the other, without embracing or kissing with the sort of kisses that are pleasing to Love: but it would be folly and inappropriate.

This notion that the lovers' faces change colors will be playfully literalized when Cligès, striving to remain anonymous at Arthur's court, alternates the colors of his knightly gear each day (as Lancelot will). The act of changing colors therefore itself changes colors over the course of the romance. And if intertextual allusions also alter the color of the romance, then why should we understand the meta-poetic discourse as opposed to, or separable from, the romance's depiction of sexuality? My point—and I am only scratching the surface of it—is that, just as lyrics *couple* sexuality and the meta-poetic (according to this structuralist conception to which we keep returning), so too does this romance; and reading the descriptions of sexuality as having metapoetic *portée* lends new significance to otherwise somewhat banal amorous rhetoric. Is Chrétien flirting with the *Tristan* material and other intertexts? Is this relation somehow adulterous?

legend" ("The Poetics of *Translatio*, 318). Critics, and foremost Freeman herself, have long asked themselves if Chrétien "intended to write an *Anti-Tristan*, a *Neo-Tristan* or a *Super-Tristan*" (Freeman, "*Cligès*", 98). It seems to me that there is no longer much disagreement, because no one reads *Cligès* anymore as an "anti-Tristan," like Frappier once did. Grimbert does attempt to read the romance as neither "for" or "against" the *Tristan* material, "Fénice's Vain Attempts to Revise a Romantic Archetype."

The narrator even explicitly likens sexuality to literature, writing,

Bien vos savrai le voir aprendre
Coment dui cuer a .I. se tienent
Sanz ce qu'ansemble ne parviennent...
Bien puet estre li voloires uns
Et s'a adés son cuers chascuns,
Ausi com maint home divers
Puent ou chançonete ou vers
Chanter a une concordance. (2784-86, 2795-99)

I will be able to instruct you well on the truth of how two hearts can be said to be as one without coming together. It can so happen that the will is one, but still each (lover) has his or her own heart, just as many different men can come together and sing in unison a little song or lyrics.

The narrator's likening of the effects of sexuality to the performance of lyrics is a remarkably stark manifestation of the structuralist equivalency between *aimer*, *chanter*, and *trouver*. And, as the applicability of various citations about sexuality to the romance's poetics begins to suggest, there is no reason to bar romance from participating in this equivalency; for not only is divorcing the rhetorical from the ethical completely unjustified in medieval letters, but if discussion of sexuality frequently comports meta-poetic implications, the "voloires" of the sexual and the meta-literary may be "uns." The narrator, in fact, routinely implies that his work is somehow performing *amors*, by frequently returning to the topos that discussing love means nothing if words are not complemented by deeds: for example, "Amors n'est pas si gracieuse/Que par parole en soit nus sages/Se avec n'i est li usages" (Love is not so agreeable that one can learn about it through words, if words are not complemented by experience; 1018-20). By linking poetics to the performance of sexuality, the romance escapes the charge of being only nominally about love. Its poetics are not linked to conceptions of sexuality "in name

only,” as Fénice is linked to Alis, but far more intimately, in the manner of Soredamors’s bond with Alexander or Fénice’s with Cligès.

The final analogy is particularly revealing, because it suggests that if *Cligès* stages an equivalency between sexuality and literature, it would more precisely be likening its poetics to transgressive, even queer, conceptions of sexuality. This is not to deny the queerness already potentially characteristic of troubadour and trouvère lyrics.¹⁴⁵ At one level, *Cligès* is queer like the lyrics may be said to be; for, deriving so much of its plot from other literary sources, *Cligès*, like the lyrics, depicts sexuality as inextricably tied to pre-existent discursive constructions, which resonates with Foucault’s contention that public discursivity precedes private sexuality.¹⁴⁶ If, furthermore, one understands *Cligès* as a “meta-literary” romance, then it may represent a homosocial conversation among *clerics*, in a manner similar to how Gaunt makes the case for the queerness of the *Charrete*.¹⁴⁷ As with the *Jugements* and *Erec*, I prefer, though, to make the case for an Edelmanian queerness, because the romance invites a link between irony—or indeterminate and anti-figurative poetics—and anti-normative conceptions of sexuality. The romance’s concluding sequence best exemplifies this connection. Fénice concocts quite a scheme, telling Cligès that,

...tant se voldra plaindre
Qu’en la fin morte se fera,
Et la nuit Cligés l’embrera,
Si seron toz jors mais ensemble.
En autre guise, se li semble,
Ne li porroit avoir duree... (5372-77)

¹⁴⁵ Carla Freccero, though not a medievalist, has an interesting chapter about the queerness of lyrics in *Queer/Early/Modern*, cf. 22-30.

¹⁴⁶ I am referring to Vol. 1 of the *Histoire de la sexualité*.

¹⁴⁷ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 91-103.

She will manifest such distress that in the end she will pretend to be dead, and at night Cligès will steal her away. This way we will always be together. In no other way, it seemed to her, could they be together at length.

Fénice's plan is not only idiosyncratic, but it also has quite perverse consequences, as we may gauge from the gruesome attempt of the three doctors to revive her:

Et li troi mire unt descosu
Le suare a la dame a force,
Que onc n'i ot cotel ne force...
Lors la getent fors de la biere,
Si la fierent et si la batent...
Lors li redonnent un assuat
Parmi le dos de lor corroies,
S'en perent contreval les roies,
Et tant li batent sa char tendre
Que il en funt le sanc espendre. (5854-56, 5882-83, 5904-8)

And the three doctors undid the stitching of her shroud by force, without a knife or scissors. Then they threw her out of the coffin, and they strike and beat her. Then they again assault her in the middle of the back with their whips, and the lashes are visible on it; they so beat her tender flesh that they make blood spurt out.

The violence of this passage is multi-pronged; it is not only literally gruesome, but things are also relentlessly “*out of joint...comme l’oblique, le tordu, le tort ou le travers à la rectitude,*” to borrow from Derrida’s description of the “perversion” of the ghost.¹⁴⁸ The scene does violence to gender roles, as Fénice, rather than her chivalric lover, must physically suffer for their love to succeed. It also recalls other scenes of torture throughout the romance, namely the description of Angrès’s torture; and because the connection between torturing the Empress and torturing rebellious soldiers is unexpected, their *mise en relation* signals a poetic violence which may reflect the gratuitous violence

¹⁴⁸ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 44-45. For commentary on this passage, see Bruckner, “Of Cannibalism and Cligès,” 25, 28.

of each instance.¹⁴⁹ There is, too, the violence to the signifier, since the promise that Fénice's body, *qua* sign, will carry discernable and valid meaning is violated. And, of course, ethical violence, as the morality of her adulterous actions is unclear, as the epilogue suggests. These various manifestations of perversion suggest that the scene is playing on things being "out of place"; it therefore invites us to link literal disfiguration or dismemberment with poetic disfiguration and, given that this is done in the name of adultery's threat to marriage, with desire and transgressive sexuality.

The radical negativity of this portrayal of sexuality becomes apparent if we take into account how the scene stages love's proximity to death. Hearing of the Empress' demise, "les genz" exclaim:

Dex! quel annui et quel contraire
Nos a fait la mort deputaire...
Morz, qu'as tu fet? Dex te confonde,
Qui as toute biauté esteinte...
Trop est Dex de grant patience
Quant il te soefre avoir poissance
Des soës choses despecier.
Or se devoit Dex corocier
Et geter hors de ta baillie,
Car trop as fet grant sorsailie
Et grant orgueil et grant outrage. (5711-12, 5718-19, 5723-29)

God! What distress and misfortune did bastardly Death inflict on us! Death, what have you done? God curse you, who has extinguished all beauty! God is overly patient, when He allows you to have the power to ruin His things. God should now get angry, and throw you from His troop, for you have done something presumptuous, arrogant and outrageous!

Ostensibly denouncing Death's ethical error, the populace is, of course, in error; it is not Death, but Love, that removes Fénice from them. Throughout this lengthy passage, one

¹⁴⁹ Bruckner also links this to the various other broken, disarticulated members in combat scenes: see "Of Cannibalism and *Cligès*," 25.

could simply replace “Morz” with “Amors.” The romance is, then, offering an unusually stark depiction of the proximity between the two, with such a naked equation between Love and the antisocial, uncontrollable and radically negative Death pointing to a conception of love in keeping both with de Man’s equation of irony and radical negativity and Edelman’s of queer sexuality and the (affirmation of the) Death Drive. The effect of this is, furthermore, to push Fénice to adopt the role of the ghost. As Derrida writes of the “esprit philosophique,”

...son processus même consiste à marcher visiblement en tête au moment de sa ‘disparition’ et de sa ‘mise en terre,’ à conduire la procession de ses propres funérailles et à s’*élever* au cours de cette marche, à espérer du moins se redresser encore pour tenir debout (‘résurrection,’ ‘exaltation’)... La philosophie...la voici qui devient son propre revenant; elle hante elle-même ses propres lieux plutôt qu’elle ne les habite.¹⁵⁰

If this (very complex) passage literally applies to Fénice, who, consistent with the bestiary association of the phoenix with resurrection, becomes “son propre revenant,” I am drawing attention to it because it suggests that Fénice’s actions may be somehow paradigmatic; they may figure something about the romance’s ghastriness.¹⁵¹ It seems to me, that is, that critics have not elected to “learn to live” with the ghost that is Fénice in the manner that Dinshaw sketches: as we saw in the introduction, she argues that, “learning to live with” ghosts implies “learning to live in a world in which no opposition between death and life can hold. And...related foundations crumble: the oppositions between inside and outside, presence and absence, materiality and ideality, reality and

¹⁵⁰ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 67.

¹⁵¹ In a twist on this idea, Robert Hanning, also drawing on previous scholarship, has developed the Biblical allusions to “Christ’s passion, death and resurrection” in this sequence: see “Courtly Contexts for Urban *Cultus*,” 41.

fiction, true and false, present and past, subject and object...”¹⁵² We have studied how the romance muddles—de-constructs—many of these oppositions. Learning to live with Fénice, I would then suggest, figures the challenges of learning to live with *Cligès*. Sure, we can label this romance “exceptional,” in terms of Chrétien’s *oeuvre* or even the canon, and then re-integrate it into the *oeuvre*, as Fénice is given a pass on her adultery and then reintegrated into society. We can also blunt the romance’s subversiveness, finding it “metaliterary” or even derivative in a gesture not entirely dissimilar from arguing that Fénice doesn’t escape the ghost of Iseult’s infamy, since each would be subsumed by the larger *Tristan* material. Or we can, and I think should, try to glimpse how this woman and this romance generate their power by refusing to add up, to behave, or to lie dead.

IV. *Le Voir Dit*

While the preceding chapters have each analysed three texts, I wish to examine a fourth here: Machaut’s *Voir Dit*. At the most superficial level, this is in order to grant equal audience to the ghosts of Chrétien and of Machaut. More importantly, I believe the *Voir Dit* represents the most magnificent medieval eruption of queer irony, and because this critical optic significantly differs from previous accounts of the text, it stands to open up *novel* readings both of this *dit* and of the *Chose Machaut* more broadly. It also makes sense to conclude the dissertation with the *Voir Dit*, as it perhaps most powerfully demonstrates the rhetorical and ethical indeterminacy that, I have been arguing, lies at the heart of verse romances and the *dits*.

¹⁵² Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now*, 136.

In the preceding paragraph, I stressed the term “novelty,” because it figures prominently in the *Voir Dit*, as of its opening sequence:

A la loenge et a l’onnour
De tresfine Amour que je honnour...
Vueil commencier *chose nouvelle*,
Que je feray pour Toute Belle.
Et certes je le doy bien faire,
Qu’elle est de si tresnoble affaire,
Tant scet, tant vault, qu’en tout le monde
N’a de villenie si monde
Ne de bonté si bien paree
Ne de biauté si aournee;
Quar Nature qui la fourma
Mis en li si douce fourme ha
Qu’onques mais œuvre si subtive
Ne fist, si plaisant ne si vive:
Assez y puet estudier,
Penser, muser, et colier,
Quar jamais ne fera pareille.
Brief, tous li mondes se merveille
De sa bonté, de sa biauté
Et de sa tresgrant loyauté. (2-3, 11-28)¹⁵³

In praise of and to honor the very noble Love whom I honor, I wish to begin a new creation that I will undertake for Toute Belle (All-Beautiful). And certainly, I should do this well, because she is of such noble ways; she knows so much and is worth so much that in the entire world, there is no one so free of villainy, nor so decorated with good or ornamented by beauty. For Nature, who formed her, made her of such a sweet form that she had never before made a work so intricate, pleasant, or alive. One can greatly study, consider, ponder and admire it, but she will never again make its equal. In short, everyone marvels at her goodness, beauty, and very great loyalty.

This opening gambit is a prime example of a narrative text playing on, and then subverting, the established lyric equivalency between the lady and the text. While Guillaume will shortly thereafter exclaim, “Si m’en tais, que pas n’en sui dignes” (And

¹⁵³ Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre du Voir Dit*, ed. Imbs. For verse, cited in text by verse number; for prose letters, cited by letter number and page number.

now I go silent, for I am not worthy; 34), the irony is that the reader will discover that Toute Belle is hardly “digne” of this description of her; one doesn’t have to “estudier” the text much to query “sa bonté” or “sa tresgrant loyauté.” Rather, her description better applies to the larger text, which is both notable for its formal ingenuity—“douce fourme ha”—and unparalleled in Machaut’s *oeuvre* or contemporary French letters: “onques mais oeuvre si subtive/Ne fist.” In these opening lines, we therefore read through the lady to the literary, which suggests, as Leupin writes, that in the *Voir Dit*, “Tout commence dans la littérature, non dans la présence (même fictive)” of the lady.¹⁵⁴ Leupin is referring to the *dit*’s plot, which dramatically exemplifies this tropological turn from an actual lady to literature, insofar as the lyrics, rather than the physical presence of the Lady, prompt the love. We might even say that the *dit* serves as a remarkably stark instance of Foucault’s metaleptic inversion of the anteriority of natural or individual expressions of sexuality to larger discursive forces. In the *Voir Dit*, the love object is not only discursive, but discursivity itself.

As this recourse to Foucault suggests, the *Voir Dit* may emphasize the queer potential resulting from the manipulation of the lyric equivalency of *aimer*, *chanter*, and *trouver*. In fact, queer theory’s pertinence to this *dit* would be difficult to overstate. If, as we just saw, the text is characterized by its self-conscious novelty, “nouvelleté” also comes to represent the threat to Guillaume’s love, as it is the term used to describe Toute Belle’s infidelity (5195). The fact that the same term is both constructive and threatening (a *pharmakon*) within the love story may reflect Butler’s notion that hetero-normative

¹⁵⁴ Leupin, *Fiction et incarnation*, 184. I note in passing that Leupin’s chapter on the *Voir Dit* is astonishing. This is also almost exactly what Dragonetti argues about the lady in trouvère lyrics in *La Technique poétique des trouvères*.

discourse always-already contains the elements of its own deconstruction. Indeed, while certain critics have resisted the pertinence of “de-constructive play” to Machaut’s texts, I would argue that the *Voir Dit* seems to invite deconstructive readings by repeatedly making statements about the love affair that might smack the modern ear as uncannily Derridean: Guillaume says, “Mais en li est de moi faire ou deffaire” (but in her is the power to make or break me; 1306) or “Qui tout me donne, tout me tost” (she who gives all to me, takes all from me; 2742).¹⁵⁵ For Butler, the “de-constructability” of heteronormativity points to its radical contingency, and the *Voir Dit* obsesses over contingency, figured as Lady Fortune; for Cerquiglini-Toulet, the entire *dit* is even modelled on Fortune’s wheel.¹⁵⁶ The text also links contingency to gender. An anonymous *clerc* asserts that Guillaume’s inconstancy makes him characteristically feminine: “Vous avés maniere de fame:/Trop souvent mue vos courages” (You have a woman’s way: you too often have changes of heart; 8697-98). This is but one of many instances where the *Voir Dit* problematizes gender roles.¹⁵⁷ Toute Belle thrice describes how she would behave toward Guillaume were she a man: for example, “se je fusse uns homs je vous veysse bien souvent...” (Were I a man, I would have come to see you very often; V.138). She may even behave like one in explicitly sexual terms; for, in her sole sexual encounter with Guillaume, she effectively rapes him: lying “plus simplement c’une pucelle” (stiller than a maiden; 3690), he cries, “On m’efforce!” (I am being forced; 3678). This

¹⁵⁵ It is, I think, fair to argue that Butler’s *Gender Trouble* is the earliest text that we associate with this argument, which has since been taken up in various ways by countless others. See note 15 for Swift’s notion that “there is a poststructuralist temptation to equate any perception of disorder with indeterminacy and deconstructive play,” temptation that the Machaldian critic should resist.

¹⁵⁶ Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin si Soutil*, cf. 67.

¹⁵⁷ Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin si Soutil*, 125-38.

eroticized inversion of gender roles may be likened to numerous instances of unnatural procreation which dot the text—Vulcain “son germe en terre espandi” (spilled his seed into the earth; 7831) with the earth then conceiving the deformed child that Athena will hide—as well as to the gayness of various *exempla*, with the first two elaborate ones relating the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Adonis, who “trop volentiers” (too eagerly; 5962) spends his time hunting with other men.¹⁵⁸

It is odd that critics have not queered the *Voir Dit*; I find it no less strange than if gender performativity had not been discussed in *Silence* or the *Mutacion de Fortune*. Yet, while queer theory may stand to open up new interpretations of the *dit*, the worry—as the preceding paragraph may suggest—is that it is almost too easy to queer the text in overly broad strokes. For this reason, I wish to work with extant readings, exploring how sexuality may contribute to readings which downplay it, and how these readings may in turn nuance our conception of the *dit*’s specific queerness, in a manner perhaps similar to how the different literary forms dialogue with each other in the *Voir Dit*.

As this analogy suggests, criticism of the *dit* has traditionally focused on formal questions. This focus on the meta-literary rather than the sexual is, to some extent, encouraged by the text; for just as Guillaume substitutes his affair with Toute Belle for his other concerns (“ne porroie je mie bien faire vostre livre et penser a faire autres choses, qu’il me couvient laisser l’un pour l’autre” [I would not be able to work well on your book and remember to do other things at the same time, since I need to abandon one for the other; XXV.428]), so too do the lyric and epistolary exchanges substitute for the physical presence of the absent lover. Literary exchanges, however, do not so much

¹⁵⁸ For the story of Sodom and Gormorrah, see vv. 5554-89. See also Cerquiglini-Toulet’s discussion of “l’écriture androgyne” in the text: *Un Engin*, 151-55.

eradicate sexuality as they assume the traits and characteristics associated with it.¹⁵⁹ Repeated stress that lyrics are composed “on the spot”—for example, “[s]i qu’en present fis sans atente/Ce rondel pour ma dame gente” (thus on the spot, without waiting, I wrote this rondeau for my noble lady; 368-69)—signals an emphasis on the present which, insofar as it contrasts with near-constant evocations of deferral within the correspondence, substitutes the “now” of composing or receiving literature for the immediacy of the sex act.¹⁶⁰ Guillaume also routinely describes both seeing letters and touching them: to give but two examples, he writes, “Bien avés vëu l’escripture/De ma dame plaisant et pure” (you have now seen the writing of my pleasant and pure lady; 6271-72) or “Ceste lettre li envia,/Qu’escris *de* ma main et ploiai” (I sent her this letter, which I wrote by hand and folded; 3299-300).¹⁶¹ This focus on seeing and touching correspondence suggests that the critical commonplaces according to which Machaut grants a new, privileged role both to the literary text *qua* visual object and to its materiality reflect their “statut de supplémentarité à la presence et à l’événement,” to quote Leupin—or, their status as supplements to physical expressions of sexuality.¹⁶²

The fetishizing of the literary object, most dramatically figured in the text by Guillaume’s obsessive love for Toute Belle’s *ymage*, presents the reader with a choice

¹⁵⁹ Katherine Kong comments at length on the relation of presence to absence in the tradition of the *ars dictaminis* in *Lettering the Self in Medieval and Early Modern France*; see her chapters on Baudri of Bourgueuil and Abelard and Eloise: 15-108.

¹⁶⁰ *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* attempts to “think through” this notion of “thinking on the spot” in Chrétien.

¹⁶¹ I make a similar argument in relation to the *Prison amoureuse* in Ch. II.

¹⁶² Leupin, *Fiction et incarnation*, 186. Cerquiglini-Toulet was the first to insist both on the visual character of the relationship to literature, and the *dit*’s interest in its own materiality. For another influential account of the turn to “visual” literature see Huot, *From Song to Book*. For the most influential account of Machaut’s stress on the materiality of his literature, see McGrady, *Controlling Readers*.

similar to those I have identified in the other texts we have examined: either to jump from the erotic to the self-consciously literary plane, in a gesture which would imply either their separability or the priority of the one over the other, *or* to understand the very temptation to leave behind sexuality as itself eroticized. If this choice seems abstract, the *dit* makes it clearer, because the verb that dominates the sole sexual encounter between the protagonists emphasizes the interrelation between sexuality, absence, and tropology: *partir*. After Guillaume first meets Toute Belle, he says,

Je prins congié et me parti;
Mais ce fu en si dur parti
Que je cuidai au departir
Que li cuers me deüst partir. (2002-5)

I took leave and went away, but it was in such a rough state that I believed when leaving her that my heart would split/burst.

Here, this verb signals an absence of sexual activity—the lover is just too timid—but it will then be used to describe the problematic resurgence of Desire: “Mais j’avoie un trop cruel hoste/En Desir, qui ne se partoit,/De mon cuer, ainçois le partoit” (But I had an overly cruel host in Desire, who didn’t leave my heart, rather he split it; 2376-78). Itself moving around, *partir* then slides into a more literal register, as Toute Belle leaves precisely when Guillaume should return: “elle en aloit hors de son estre/Le droit jour quë y devoie estre... Nonpourquant partir se devoit” (she went away from her abode the same day that I should be there; nevertheless she had to leave; 2923-24, 2925). The two ensuing letters focus not only on when the lovers will see each other again, but also on how they shall take leave of each other: “veuillés penser comment je me partirai de vous” (please consider how I will take leave of you; XV.292), writes Guillaume. Given this obsession with *partir*, it seems fitting that sex occurs in these contexts; Toute Belle

whispers to Guillaume—“Quant il fu temps de departir...bas me dist: Celle par[t] tir” (When it was time to leave she said softly to me, go over there; 3501-2)— and the two will go at it. The verb then takes a pornographic turn (as in modern French), describing their orgasms; Toute Belle writes in the *rondeau* composed during their climaxes, “Merveille fu quant mon cuer ne parti/Quant de moi vi mon doulz ami(s) partir...” (it was a miracle that my heart didn’t burst when I saw my dear lover leave/finish; 4172-73). If *partir* is the principal erotic verb in the *dit*, this singular choice not only establishes a strong link between eroticization and absence, but also implies that if the larger *dit* seems to move away from erotic questions by turning to literary ones, this does not necessarily signal the irrelevance of sexuality, but rather the eroticization of the tropological gesture of moving on or leaving.

In fact, many of the formal questions that have piqued critical interest are more tightly bound up with sexuality than has been previously recognized. The question of lyric insertion has dominated much criticism, with Cerquilini-Toulet and others arguing that the lyrics are the *dit*’s “élément premier”: “Le texte narratif sort tout entier, telle une fleur japonaise, des pièces lyriques.”¹⁶³ The love affair also raises this question of anteriority: Guillaume reflects, “Que ce fu de son [Toute Belle’s] mouvement,/Qu’ onques a li pensé n’avoie/Quant elle me mist en la voie” (that it was due to her initial movement, because I had never considered it when she put me on the path; 877-79). This overlap suggests that the questions of anteriority, which have been approached in purely formal

¹⁶³ Cerquigliini-Toulet, *Un Engin si Soutil*, 24. It is worth noting that this argument also circulated before Cerquigliini-Toulet: see, for example, G.B. Gybbon-Monnypenny’s “L’‘autobiographie’ amoureuse de Guillaume de Machaut” and Sarah Jane Williams’s, “La dame, les chansons et les lettres.”

terms, have erotic connotations.¹⁶⁴ Beyond this question of which comes first, Cerquiglini-Toulet and others have also studied the relationship between the various literary forms as it plays itself out in the text: for her, “l’hétérogène qui naît de cette confrontation de formes différentes, loin d’être gommé, est mis en valeur.”¹⁶⁵ This tension between bringing together and holding apart also characterizes the dynamic of the erotic relationship. As the *dit* concludes, Guillaume writes,

Ainsi fumes nous racordé,
 Com je vous ay ci recordé
 Par tresamiable concorde,
 Grant joie hai quant je m’en recorde
 Et grant bien est du recorder
 Quant on voit gens bien acorder,
 Et plus grant bien de mettre accort
 Entre gens ou il ha descort. (8966-73)

Thus we were reconciled, as I have told you, by amiable agreement. I feel great joy when I recall this, and it is a great good to recount when we see people happily come together, and a bigger good to bring harmony to people who have been at odds.

This tension between *accorder* and *discorder*, which has dotted the whole *dit*, therefore has sexual as well as formal implications.¹⁶⁶ The protagonists’ oft-repeated insistence on their co-dependence—Guillaume, for example, writes, “je ne més nulle difference entre vous et moi que le bien de l’un ne soit le bien de l’autre” (I put no difference between

¹⁶⁴ Guillaume later invites Thomas Paien to compose a *ballade* about Toute Belle; he explains to her that, “je fis l’emprise pour vous, comment que j’ordenasse que li autres feist premiers” (I took upon this endeavor for you, although I commanded that the other should go first; XXXVII.592). Given that Guillaume stages Thomas’s anteriority, we may, by extension, wonder if the “anteriority” of the lyrics to the narrative, or of Toute-Belle’s correspondence to Guillaume’s, reflect postures in fact coordinated by the other element.

¹⁶⁵ Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin si Soutil*, 41.

¹⁶⁶ Cerquiglini-Toulet discusses the tension between *accord* and *discort* in, “Le clerc et l’écriture.” See Ch. III’s discussion of the *Châtelain de Couci* for this tension between *accord* and *discord*.

you and me, so the good of one is the good of the other; XXVII.448)—may, by extension, be pointing to the co-dependence both of the various literary forms and of the sexual and the poetic planes of the *dit*. For Derrida, when conceiving of the ghost, we ought to strive, “[n]on pas de maintenir ensemble le disparate mais de se rendre là où le disparate *maintient ensemble*, sans blesser la dis-jointure, la dispersion ou la différence, sans effacer l’hétérogénéité de l’autre.”¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the *Voir Dit* challenges us to avoid *either* restricting or exaggerating the tension between the various literary forms, between the two lovers, *or* between these two planes; for, like the ghost, the *dit* repeatedly performs the predicament of “bringing together” (*maintenir ensemble*) the heterogeneous in such a manner as to call attention to its perpetual, but heavily eroticized, irresolution.

This brings us to the question of the resolution of the very text we read. Critics and editors once took it upon themselves to continue the narrator’s struggle to re-order the letters: “j’ai trop a faire a querir les lettres qui respondent les unes aus autres” (I have too much to do in trying to figure out which letters go with each other; XXVII.450), he writes to Toute Belle.¹⁶⁸ This erudite effort implied that we may hope for something less problematic and contradictory, in a manner analogous to how Guillaume hopes to attain *souffisance* in his affair.¹⁶⁹ Yet, if the affair hardly lives up to this promise, formal instability and inconsistencies may be performing this crucial aspect of the relationship; and, it follows, we should check our impulse “to immure [the text] in some stable and

¹⁶⁷ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 58. His emphasis.

¹⁶⁸ For a summary of efforts to re-order the text, see “L’édition Paulin Paris et la question de l’ordre des lettres” in Cerquiglini-Toulet’s “Introduction” to Imbs’s edition, or Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, “Le *Voir Dit* mis à nu par ses éditeurs.”

¹⁶⁹ For extensive discussion of *souffisance*, see Catherine Attwood, “Temps et lieux du souvenir” or *Fortune la contrefaite*.

positive *form*, ” at the risk of obfuscating the text’s engagement with, and eroticization of, relentless uncertainty.¹⁷⁰

More recently, critics have evoked this possibility of working with the text’s disorder. For McGrady, Machaut is simultaneously “subduing” his readers and “challenging them to disseminate, disperse, recoup, and rewrite a hybrid and resilient text”; as Laura Hughes summarizes it, “the deliberate disordering that is the fundamental architecture of the *Voir Dit* would discourage any readerly meddlings from disturbing the author’s textual authority.”¹⁷¹ Like Fortune, the *dit* would, then, demand submission not despite, but because of, its apparent disorder. McGrady’s gesture of associating authorship with disorder rather than order is brilliant, and I would argue that we can carry it further, by querying the necessity of turning *en fin de compte* to the “author’s textual authority.” For if Guillaume’s frequent ascriptions of “order” within the text to Toute Belle have the effect of inviting us to question the possibility of order, since it is unclear that Toute Belle can or will provide the “ordenance” repeatedly ascribed to her, can we imagine a larger *dit* where indeterminacy never gives way to “the author’s textual authority”? In a somewhat similar vein, Hughes argues that, “Each interruption of time and narrative, each surprise of formal interplay, as well as the instances of creative chaos that run counter to attempts at ordering collected correspondence into a material book—all of these singular events puncture the warp and weave of a stable textual experience, allowing for another experience of the work to be disclosed.”¹⁷² This “other experience” is, for her, that of a “virtual sphere in which the entirety of the *Voir Dit* could exist,

¹⁷⁰ The quote is from Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

¹⁷¹ McGrady, *Controlling Readers*, 13. Laura Hughes, Machaut’s “Virtual *Voir Dit* and the Moment of Heidegger’s Poetry,” 194.

¹⁷² Hughes, “Machaut’s Virtual *Voir Dit*,” 207.

preserved and unbounded.”¹⁷³ But what if the text instead pointed precisely to the impossibility of this ideal? This is not as abstract an argument as it may seem; in fact, it is the effect of taking the affair more literally than critics tend to do. For if, in terms of his affair, Guillaume seems misguided in holding out hope for a virtual universe where physical and emotional absence might be overcome, maybe the larger text performs this uncertainty. In this case, to postulate that the larger text believes in *souffisance* is both to divorce formal questions from erotics ones and to defuse the text’s erotic engagement with indeterminacy.¹⁷⁴

Speaking of rhetorical structures in general, de Man writes, “one more ‘turn’ or trope added to a series of earlier [ones] will not stop the turn towards error.”¹⁷⁵ Similarly, I am attempting to harness the energy of McGrady’s and Hughes’s astute observations on disorder in the *Voir Dit* without “stopping the turn towards disorder” by finding an order in this disorder which we then ascribe to the author’s intentions, the virtual, or the “implicit author.” This also amounts to challenging a long and deeply held tenet of Machaut criticism: the distinction between the (orderly, professional and brilliant) author and his (disorganized and clumsy) fall-guy, the protagonist.¹⁷⁶ I would suggest that the

¹⁷³ Hughes, “Machaut’s Virtual *Voir Dit*,” 205.

¹⁷⁴ Hughes relies on Heidegger’s notion of the *Augenblick*. I note that, interestingly, Derrida considers his notion of the *spectre* to run directly contrary to Heidegger’s notion of the *accord* or *harmonie* art can provide: see *Spectres* 49ff.

¹⁷⁵ De Man, *Allegories*, 113.

¹⁷⁶ In a statement that speaks to the pervasiveness of this notion, Kay writes, “As in other *dits* by Machaut, there is a distinction in the *Navarre* between an authoritative author-function and his comic fall guy and alter ego. This is a feature of his writing that has attracted extensive critical attention, and so as not to labor the obvious I shall focus here only on how it related to the problem of happiness” (*The Place of Thought*, 113). For an earlier “narratological” reading, see Calin, “Problèmes de technique narrative au Moyen Âge.” The text which arguably canonizes this notion is Brownlee’s *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut*. Brownlee prefers the term “poète” when referring to the author, and also uses such terms as “poet-narrator,” “witness-participant” and “lover-protagonist.”

Voir Dit deconstructs this opposition by figuring within the protagonist's erotic relationship with Toute Belle a transformation akin to that of the "protagonist" to the "author" and then inviting us to view this transformation with suspicion. When, for example, Guillaume claims that Toute Belle has, "fait plus grans miracles a ma personne que je ne vi unques faire a saint n'a sainte qui soit en paradis; quar je estoie assourdis, arudis, mus et impotens" (performed greater miracles on my person than I ever seen performed by a saint, male or female, who is in Heaven, for I was dumbstruck, stupefied, mute and impotent; II.78) the alleged transformation of an "impotent," "senseless" *je* into someone more joyous and wise seems *akin* to the critical gesture of making the silly protagonist into the wise author. If this parallel holds, it would suggest that this transformation may be more wishful than actual. To approach this question from a slightly different angle, Guillaume wonders why Toute Belle, in her "hautesce" (greatness; 1267), deigns to consider (*penser*) him in his "petitesce" (feebleness; 1268), and we may similarly wonder why the "poète" or "implicit author" would, from his "hautesce," stage a protagonist so remarkable for his "petitesce." Again, the analogy would have the effect of cautioning us against taking this *hautesce* for granted, as Toute Belle's perfection is dubious. Critics have long debated whether Toute Belle corresponds to a real person who existed, and/or whether this subaltern can or does speak in the *Voir Dit*.¹⁷⁷ I am offering a very different argument: that she may be the author of the larger text, both in the very superficial sense of being the protagonist's inspiration, and in the

¹⁷⁷ For discussion of the "name" of Toute Belle, see Cerquiglini-Toulet, *Un Engin*, 227-30. This debate goes back to Anthime Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste*. For discussion of whether this "voice" can speak, see, for example, Maureen Boulton, "L'idéologie de la forme." For her, "Elle n'est jamais la simple projection du désir du poète, elle existe en tant que force—et force motrice—au sein du récit" (207).

far more profound sense of figuring the uncertainty of any order behind the text, which is not always-already dubious. Put otherwise, Guillaume comically obsesses over Toute Belle's correspondence and *ymage*, saying of her initial *rondeau*:

Et puis ostai mon chaperon
Et devant lui m'agenouillay;
De moy pas ne l'eslongnay,
Ains le garday tresdoucement,
Sus mon coer et soingneusement;
Et souventefois le baisoie... (192-97)

And then I removed my little hat and kneeled down before it; I didn't remove it from me, but pressed it very sweetly and carefully against my heart, and repeatedly kissed it.

As critics, we should be careful not to fall into a similar trap. We must strive not to bow down adoringly before a potentially misleading *ymage* of "Machaut," both because this is the danger the text warns of and because this obfuscates the text's obsession with authority's indeterminacy.

To argue that we should be wary of the construction of the "poète" (to borrow Brownlee's term) is not necessarily to vilify Toute Belle. Rather, I am using it to raise the question, largely neglected by critics, not of *how* the narratological predicament functions, but of *why* "Machaut" should wish to stage (here as elsewhere) such a faulty, demented protagonist trapped in such an unsuccessful affair.¹⁷⁸ In thinking through such questions, I have found de Man's conception of irony useful. For him,

ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an

¹⁷⁸ See Ch. I for discussion of the relation of narrator or author to protagonist in the *Fontaine amoureuse*.

authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic.¹⁷⁹

De Manian irony signals the fundamental inability of the “knowing” self to be of any help to the empirical one; irony “asserts and maintains its fictional character by stating the continued impossibility of reconciling the world of fiction with the actual world.”¹⁸⁰ It may seem counter-intuitive to understand the *Voir Dit* as maintaining a radical separation between “art” and “life” (to use de Man’s terms), but the *dit* does seem to resonate with this notion, because it portrays all attempts to aid this protagonist in reconciling art with “life” as impossible. At one level, Guillaume’s notion that, “c’est la guise d’Alemaigne/Qu’on garist la gent par paroles” (it’s the way of Germany that people are healed by words; 2660-61) hardly holds up in terms of his affair with Toute Belle. Guillaume is also repeatedly given paradoxical advice. Although he encounters *Le Roy qui ne ment* in a dream, the King tells him he shouldn’t believe dreams: “Tu dors et paroles ensemble/Et si m’est avis que tu songes...” (You sleep and speak at the same time, and it is also my opinion that you are dreaming; 5535-36). In the other extended *songe*, the *Ymage* chides him for being overly credulous: “c’est grans pechiés de si tost croire” (it is a great sin to believe so readily; 7715). Again, given that this advice comes *en songe*, believing the *ymage* would also amount to being overly credulous. While Guillaume is constantly receiving advice throughout the *Voir Dit*, the irony is that it never does, and probably cannot, help him—which may be precisely the point. In discussing metalepsis in Chapter II, we saw how the effect of introducing the *narration* within the text is to emphasize its inability to disentangle itself from the *énoncé*, rather

¹⁷⁹ De Man, *Blindness*, 214.

¹⁸⁰ De Man, *Blindness*, 218.

than its power over the *énoncé*. Similarly, the *Voir Dit* stages a world where, although art initially seems to confer status and power, it proves itself incapable of sorting out the protagonist's situation. There is no hope that literature or any other force can help or guide Guillaume in any meaningful way.

Yet, could there be? Were Toute Belle more loyal, could the relationship have attained the stability and certitude that it lacks in its present form? I do not believe so, because the *dit* depicts desire in such a manner as to make it destined to fail, and the responsibility for the amorous failure of the couple therefore lies less with Toute Belle alone than in the queerness of desire more generally. Like in Edelman's work, the *Voir Dit* figures Desire as a recurrent, destructive and antisocial drive: Desire "prés le manoir tout ha/A force ars, malgré mien, par m'ame/Et mis tout a feu et a flame" (has nearly forcefully burnt down all the manor, despite my wishes, and, I swear, set everything ablaze with flames; 5167-19). Throughout the *dit*, Desire specifically "refuse[s] the insistence of hope itself as affirmation," as Edelman writes: "Mais moult souvent le pris emporte/Desirs, quant Esperance forte/N'est contre li pour bien combattre" (But quite often Desire emerges victorious when Hope is not strong enough to combat him; 3531-33).¹⁸¹ Desire figures both a hopeless mindset and a hopeless relation to a hopeless world: as Guillaume says to the King:

N'ame n'oy qui ne prophetise
Pis pour le peuple et pour l'Eglise,
Si que trop serons ac(r)oupis...
Mais toutes ces maleürtés,
Ces(t) pestilences, ces durtés
Ne font a moi ne froit ne chaut,
Car par ma foi il ne m'en chaut,
Mais ce me fait pene et anoy

¹⁸¹ Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

Que je ne voi ma dame n'oy... (5460-62, 5486-91)

Nor is there a soul who doesn't foresee worse for the people and the Church, and we will all be brought to our knees. But all these horrors, epidemics, and sufferings leave me rather indifferent, since, I swear, it is neither here nor there for me, but what makes me feel pain and suffering is that I can neither see nor hear my lady.

As in Edelman's conception of queer sexuality, Guillaume's desire may be threatening because it "forsakes *all* causes, *all* social action, *all* responsibility for a better tomorrow"; it leads him to renounce larger "consequence."¹⁸² Edelman calls for queers to embrace this hopeless and futureless sexuality; and I would argue that the *dit* also embraces something similar, by coming out on the side of Desire rather than Hope. At one level, it tips its hand in Desire's favor, because Hope behaves oddly like Desire. Rather than being presented as a stable, benevolent force, she is (comically) figured as an antisocial outlaw who scares, kidnaps, and ransoms the protagonist: before stumbling on Hope, Guillaume makes his way through the country, observing, "En ce pays sont tuit pilleur,/Qui prennent les gens et detiennent/Et roben..." (In this country they are all looters, who kidnap and hold people, and rob them; 4317-19). Like Desire, Guillaume's Hope inhabits the fringes, limits, or shadows of civilization. And not only does the depiction of Hope depart from traditional means of allegorizing her, but the structure of the *dit* also seems to grant Desire the upper-hand: Guillaume says of him,

...il m'aministroit pensees
Diverses et desordonnees
Qui estoient entortillies
De courrous et merancolies... (5174-77)

He provided me with disparate and disordered thoughts, that were all caught up in anger and melancholy.

¹⁸² Edelman, *No Future*, 101.

This description of Desire mirrors the structure of the *dit*, since the latter stages *diverses et desordonees* notions and forms, relentlessly entangled in one another. And if Desire influences the structure of the *Voir Dit*, the text would be performing not only the indeterminacy of Toute Belle's persona or of this specific affair, but also of a certain—and queer—conception of desire as violent and chaotic meaninglessness.

The series of lengthy *exempla* provided by Guillaume's secretary, where Toute Belle's infidelity is first alluded to and which launches the many other *exempla* that dominate the *dit*'s final two-thousand lines, also figure Desire's queer resistance to normative figuration. This secretary, who, as Leupin observes, is an authorial stand-in, first tells an extended (nearly two hundred line) story about Circe, Picus, and Canens.¹⁸³ He only tenuously ties this *exemplum* back to his notion that Guillaume shouldn't venture out to see Toute Belle, saying,

Mais de Circé l'enchantement
 Ne de Piquus le hardement
 Ne de Caneüs le chanter
 Ne porroient si enchanter
 Le vent, le froit et les Compagnes,
 Qui sont au bois et aus champagnes,
 Qu'il vous menassent la seür
 Sens avoir aucun maleür. (6734-41)

But neither Circe's enchantment, Picus's temerity, nor Canens's singing could so enchant the wind, the cold and the mercenaries which are in the woods and the countryside, that they could bring you there (to Toute Belle) in security without encountering any misfortune.

Rather than explicitly relating the erotic predicaments of the mythological characters to Guillaume's, the secretary emphatically doesn't connect this story to his master's. The

¹⁸³ Leupin, *Fiction et incarnation*, 193.

point seems to be that it is impossible to bring the *exemplum* and the affair together, like it is impossible for Guillaume and Toute Belle to come together. This lengthy *exemplum*, which corroborates this conception of the *Voir Dit* as staging the impossibility of providing meaningful guidance, therefore functions as “almost meaningles[s] [erudite or linguistic] acrobatics,” to borrow Edelman’s terms.¹⁸⁴ Such a description also applies to the ensuing *exemplum*, where, over the course of 400 lines, the secretary tells the story of Polyphemus. This *exemplum* has various fleeting connections to Guillaume’s predicament, many of which have been recognized by scholars, but they do not seem to justify its long-windedness.¹⁸⁵ Rather, like its monstrous protagonist, Polyphemus, who blindly stumbles about, so too are we blindly searching for meaning in the *exemplum*:

Jamais d’yable ne verrés
 Si forsené, si *enragié*
 De son oeil qu’on a *arragié*.
 Ne portoit perches ne bastons,
 Ainçois aloit a *atastons*,
 Querant les voies et les sentes,
 A ses ordes mains et *senglentes*. (6851-57)

You will never see a devil so out of his mind, so rabid, on account of his eye that has been wrested from him. He didn’t have sticks or staffs, but was rather groping around, looking for paths and ways with his sullied and bloodied hands.

We tread through this *exemplum* and others “a *atastons*,” “querant les voies et les sentiers” of meaning, which are not at all obvious and which probably don’t exist. The ensuing series of equally dubious *exempla* would suggest that the final quarter or so of

¹⁸⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 118. Edelman borrows this phrase from Robert Kapsis’s, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (154).

¹⁸⁵ For a study largely devoted to the status of *exempla* in the *Voir Dit*, see Nicole Elise Lassahn, “Vérité historique et vérité fictionnelle dans le *Voir Dit*.” Julie Singer offers a sophisticated reading of this *exemplum* in *Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry*, 180-85.

the *Voir Dit* performs “almost meaningless acrobatics.” We may in turn wonder if the *dit*’s many formal knots and inconsistencies serve a similar function, functioning as “almost meaningless acrobatics.” I would then hypothesize that the *raison d’être*, insofar as it admits of one, for this insistence on “meaningless acrobatics” is that it corresponds to a certain, very negative and very queer, conception of sexuality as “meaningless acrobatics.” Indeed, like Alexander’s and Alis’s embracing nothing in *Cligès*, Guillaume’s affair is one with absence or with nothing, which goes nowhere.¹⁸⁶ Yet, we have also seen that this is what makes both Guillaume and his lady *partir*. I would thus argue that the very paradoxical achievement of the *Voir Dit* is that it makes “almost meaningless acrobatics,” both sexual and poetic, so pleasing to the reader, when they perhaps shouldn’t be. And this would point to a radically anti-normative conception not only of sexuality, but also of language, literature, authorship, and the *Chose Machaut*.

V.

Over the course of this chapter, I have relied on various different metaphors. Its titular one: screwing, where I have argued that we have everything to gain from saying, “Screw Chrétien, screw Machaut.” The goal in saying this is to be wary of limiting our readings by circumscribing them within dubious conceptions of “Chrétien’s” or of “Machaut’s” personae. In the case of Chrétien, assumptions about the author-figure are essentially baseless; and criticism, it seems to me, tends to perform a funny discursive operation, constructing an image of “Chrétien” out of the various romances and then retroactively

¹⁸⁶ I will return to this idea in the conclusion.

applying this image to authorize certain readings of them.¹⁸⁷ I have attempted to read “Chrétien” as a textual construct that cannot limit readings or assert authority, but that partakes of textual engagement with paradoxes, disorder, impossibility, and the scrambling of meaning. In the case of Machaut, things are somewhat different, because there is no doubt as to the historical existence of the man or to the literal (or material) bounds of the *oeuvre*. Yet various crucial, and rather similar, questions remain. If Machaut projects an “author-figure” and an *oeuvre*, should we accept or resist these notions? And does he necessarily project them in the ways that criticism has held? In theoretical terms, our modernist colleagues have certainly shown that it is worth resisting the projection of an author figure. In more specifically Machaldian terms, I have argued that various *dits* impel us to resist authority, by thematizing disorder and deconstructing notions of the orderly; there is no reason, then, to accept the author’s authority or intentionality. Furthermore, there is little to suggest that the modern association of notions of the author and the *oeuvre* with authority, control, normativity, or formal rather than ethical questions are necessarily valid in terms of Machaut. Instead of asserting “control,” the *Chose Machaut* seems to be so successful because it rides waves of uncertainty and indeterminacy, which are larger than the individual, the author, or the *oeuvre*.¹⁸⁸ This would imply an equation between authorship and *impuissance*, disorder, helplessness and hopelessness, which jars with the recurrent image of Machaut constantly asserting the “power” of the writer and his control over his texts and his *oeuvre*.

¹⁸⁷ For similar notions, see Virginie Greene’s discussion of authorship in *The Medieval Author*, esp. 210.

¹⁸⁸ Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay write that, “Whereas Philosophy [in Boethius] exhorts the protagonist to rise above Fortune, medieval poets are more inclined to surf it...” (*Knowing Poetry*, 63). I would argue that (high and late) medieval poets seem to associate authorship with surfing this wave.

This question of order brings us to the second sense of “screwing with”: the notion that these texts are “screwing” both with meaning and with us, raising burning and subversive questions that, like the ghost’s injunction or the advice in the *Voir Dit*, are loud but persistently unintelligible. I have portrayed certain romances attributed to Chrétien and *dits* to Machaut as studies in radically negative indeterminacy. The goal has not been to imply that it is possible to have a perfectly unstable text (whatever that would mean), but to suggest that criticism can and should push further in emphasizing various forms of indeterminacy. I have turned to de-construction and to queer theory because I believe these frameworks allow the critic to account for, without neutralizing, the unreadable, the unstable, and the unsayable.¹⁸⁹ Queer theory has the added benefit both of showcasing how these ghosts raise questions that we know are thorny because they are still hotly contested today, and of locating these ghosts in a medieval context by tying their indeterminacy to contemporary concerns with gender and with sexuality. Paradoxically, that is, queer theory can both bring these texts into the modern era and foreground their medievalness, because textual concern with gender and with sexuality prohibits us from understanding their indeterminacy as a formal property of all texts or as a “trans-historical deconstructive insight.”¹⁹⁰

While I have entitled the chapter, “screwing Chrétien and Machaut,” within it I have relied heavily on the metaphor of “remembering” to “forget” or to “dismember.” At the most general level, this metaphor is an example of the pleasure these texts glean from aporia. It is also pertinent to medieval rhetoric, as Hugh of Saint Victor famously called upon medieval authors both to “bring together the disparate” and “to separate the united”

¹⁸⁹ Obviously this is a subjective account of de-construction and queer theory.

¹⁹⁰ Edelman, *Homographesis*, 225.

(*disgregta coniungere* and *coniuncta segregare*).¹⁹¹ I think it fair to say that criticism has, by-and-large, done a better job emphasizing the construction of “*conjointures*” than the propensity of texts to disjoint.¹⁹² There is also an important temporal aspect to this metaphor. Rethinking notions of temporality, as Dinshaw has notably shown, is imperative to rethinking our relationship to medieval literature, for the obvious reason that we seem to be dealing with a distant past.¹⁹³ We can, I think, also conceive of the passage from Chrétien to Machaut as “remembering to forget” or “to dismember.” As the reader will have noticed, this chapter has not sought to specify the nature of the connection between Chrétien and Machaut, beyond claiming that both verse romances and the *dits* have similarly fostered author-figures and *oeuvres* that are granted more authority than is necessarily warranted or advisable. I could have proceeded differently. I once wrote a paper about uncanny similarities between the portrait of the lion in *Yvain* and that in the *Quixote*; I argued that not only are the similarities uncanny, but that this may have something to do with the prominent role allotted to the uncanny in the poetics of each work. This chapter could have substituted Machaut’s lion in the *Dit dou lion* for Cervantes’s and identified more specific points of connection between these two authors.¹⁹⁴ If I didn’t, it is because I find that this isn’t the point; for my goal is not to imply any linear connection between Chrétien and Machaut. In the introduction, I noted that while Chrétien and Machaut represent the author-figures who preside over two of the

¹⁹¹ For detailed analysis of Hugh’s remarks on their influence on medieval rhetoric and romance, see Kelly, *The Art of Romance*, 21-22.

¹⁹² Bruckner makes a similar observation in her article on *Cligès*, writing, “But if we read that *bele conjointure* a bit against the grain, it becomes clear that Chrétien’s cannibalistic art is as much predicated on dis-membering as on remembering and replacement to form a whole” (“Of Cannibalism and *Cligès*,” 20).

¹⁹³ See Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*

¹⁹⁴ See Machaut, *Dit dou lion*, ed. Hoepffner.

most influential medieval *oeuvres* and genres, they have not been studied together since 1919. Perhaps this argument needs some revision; for, by virtue of considering each as an author-figure who has constructed an influential *oeuvre* which “sets the measure” for each genre, the two have *de facto* been considered together (or similarly), insofar as both are understood as steps toward the modern author (which is tied up in notions of the modern subject) capable of commanding a unified *oeuvre*.¹⁹⁵ My goal, then, has ironically been to bring them together so as to tear them apart, by upsetting this narrative. I have sketched a directly opposite one, according to which both “figures” penned texts that can just as validly be read as crucial steps *against* this progression of authorial *auctoritas*, regardless of how they have been interpreted by posterity (medieval and/or modern). I have attempted to “remember” the narrative that “dis-members” *both* the respective *auctoritas* of each “author-figure” and the gradual emergence of this figure over the Middle Ages.

I will conclude with a final paradoxical metaphor, related to this last one: the notion that to move backward is to move forward, and *vice versa*. In this chapter, I have shown that when texts seem to move and to look forward—presenting normative programs, implying everlasting stability—they simultaneously disrupt these notions and move backward. This is how I have read *Yvain*’s conclusion, as well as that of *Erec*, or, say, the progression from the *Behaingne* to the *Navarre*. This is also what I would argue about the progression *from* the *Chose(s) Chrétien* to the *Chose(s) Machaut*. “Chrétien” and “Machaut” wrote texts that admit a backward thrust that can be said to overwhelm any forward movement; and the move from Chrétien to Machaut, whether articulated in

¹⁹⁵ For questions of subjectivity in particular, see Ch. I.

terms of authorship, the *oeuvre*, or the subject, is thus a perfectly forward movement in appearances only, since it also moves backward, deconstructing as much as it constructs. I choose to conclude with this metaphor here, because it also nicely describes the relation of this chapter to criticism of both “authors.” Machaut criticism is moving forward in exciting new directions, namely branching out into manuscript studies and musicology. This is, by all accounts, a very good thing; in fact, it is a pity that Chrétien studies do not seem as dynamic (although new directions would, of course, have to be different). At the same time, when de-construction and queer theory are at their best, they remind us to be wary of “progress.” I hope that this rigorous but unorthodox—and by moments outmoded—study of the *Choses Machaut et Chrétien* can prove useful to those who are more adamantly “moving forward” than I, by serving to “remind” that there are a lot of holes in what we think we know, and that we have everything to gain from some critics’ looking and pushing backward. After all, this a fair way to read these verse romances and *dits*: as coupling any move forward with many a suspicious glance backward, wary of progress and linearity.

Epilogue: Questions of History and Narrativity

“Dites moi, fu ce bien songié?” (Machaut, *La Fontaine amoureuse*, 2848)

In concluding this dissertation, it may be useful to provide a chronology of the works studied in it¹:

1170	<i>Erec et Enide</i> (ch. IV)
1176	<i>Cligés</i> (ch. IV)
1176-81	<i>Le Chevalier de la Charrete</i> (ch. I)
1182-5	<i>Partonopeu de Blois</i> (ch. II)
1208-10	<i>Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole</i> (ch. III)
1250-1300	<i>Le Roman de Silence</i> (ch. II)
1285-1300	<i>Le Roman du Châtelain de Couci et de la Dame de Fayel</i> (ch. III)
1290-1328	<i>Le Dit de la Panthère</i> (ch. III)
Before 1342	<i>Le Jugement du Roy de Behaingne</i> (ch. IV)
1349-50	<i>Le Jugement du Roy de Navarre</i> (ch. IV)
1360	<i>La Fontaine amoureuse</i> (ch. I)
1363-5	<i>Le Voir Dit</i> (ch. IV)
1372-3	<i>La Prison amoureuse</i> (ch. II)
1404-5	<i>Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans</i> (ch. I)

This chronology suggests that the narrative which I have traced is rather continuous; it moves from the second half of the twelfth century to the early fifteenth with relatively few gaps. I have argued that this narrative is new and important for various reasons. At the most basic level, it considers verse romances and the *dits* together, rather than moving from verse romances to prose ones. More significantly, it has the effect of bringing together the medieval French genres which most emphasize “deconstructive rhetoricity,” to return to the term used in the introduction; it is, in other words, a narrative that considers together the medieval French texts which most relentlessly explore the instability and deviancy of language—and of literature. While many verse romances

¹ The first footnote in each chapter provides sources for the dating of each text.

and *dits* have already been considered as self-conscious by critics, this dissertation has wagered that tracing this larger narrative will allow us both better to contextualize and to deepen our knowledge of the self-consciousness of these genres, as the juxtaposition of verse romances and the *dits* invites us to look more closely at the modalities and stakes of indeterminacy in texts belonging to each. Finally, I have argued that this narrative foregrounds the relationship of poetic indeterminacy to the indeterminacy at the heart of gender and sexual identity. As we have seen, texts from one end of this narrative to the other obsessively return to the problematic—disturbing but seductive—relationship between language, gender and sexuality.

Each of the preceding chapters has approached this narrative from a different angle. The first chapter suggests that texts from both genres are similarly obsessed with the contradictory and problematic emergence and being of the politicized, gendered and eroticized subject, for which grammatical logic does not provide a satisfactory account. In the second chapter, I argue that the rhetoric of both genres grants a prominent place to metalepsis. Studying the entanglement of narrative levels with each other has the effect of muddying the “readability,” or the ability to posit positive meaning, of narrators, authors, and texts; our investigations of metalepsis have also suggested that gender and sexuality serve as privileged loci of this unreadability. The third chapter focuses on the particular receptivity of texts associated with each genre to the insertion of lyrics. Rather than using various binary schemas to understand the technique of lyric insertion—opposing, for example, lyricism to narrativity, song to writing, or synchronicity to diachronicity—I argue that texts from both genres insert lyrics so as to push us to query, or de-construct, the very tendency toward binarism. When, furthermore, the deconstruction of poetic

binaries is “inserted” into stories of love, it amounts to a stern challenge to the binaries on which heteronormativity relies. The fourth chapter looks at how each genre has fostered larger-than-life author-figures renowned for their use of irony. I argue that the construction of such figures problematically overlooks the precariousness of *auctoritas* as these texts present it, while also disallowing the possibility that irony finally resists, rather than asserts, notions of stability, control, and order.

The transition from the first paragraph of this “epilogue” to the second raises various questions which it may be useful to explore further. If I conceive of this dissertation as tracing a narrative, why does it proceed thematically rather than chronologically? In the introduction, I argue that, by virtue of resisting notions of determinacy and specificity, these two genres may be usefully conceived of as “anti-genres.” Similarly, I would suggest that the organization of this dissertation reflects how this narrative, which moves from verse romances to the *dits*, may also be understood as an “anti-narrative.” Indeed, each chapter problematizes basic assumptions about the narrativity of the texts studied. Chapter I examines the impossibility of “narratizing” the emergence of the subject as it is depicted in verse romances and *dits*. Chapter II also questions the logic of anteriority, looking at how narratological metalepses scramble the opposition of cause and effect, as we do not know which narrative level takes semantic precedence over the other(s).² Chapter III holds that the association of narratives with linear temporality belittles their engagement with the circularity and suspension of time, long-held to be characteristic of the lyrics; I also challenge the notion that these narratives push referent-less or self-referential lyrics into becoming mimetic representations of

² See the introduction to Ch. II for how this corresponds to the rhetorical definition of metalepsis as confusing notions of cause and effect.

specific stories or referents. Chapter IV resists the implicit narrative of progress underlying critical accounts of these genres. Instead of understanding texts attributed to Chrétien and Machaut as steps toward the modern author and his *oeuvre*, I suggest that they repeatedly and obsessively de-construct their own pretensions to *auctoritas*. The “narrative” that I have attempted to sketch may, therefore, be understood as an “anti-narrative,” because it links texts from each genre together by stressing how they resist the very features we tend to associate with narrativity, such as sequentiality, diachonicity, causality, mimeticism, referentiality, and progression.

Challenging these modern assumptions about narrativity also brings us to another potential question: given that many of these texts are among the most studied in the medieval French canon, why would this “narrative” (or “anti-narrative”) not have been uncovered before? I suspect that this is because this story is both non- (or anti-)linear and significantly non-teleological. The *dits*, to return to Edelman’s title, knew “no future”; it is no doubt because the genre is not the clear ancestor of any sixteenth-century or modern one that critics only began taking serious interest in it relatively late, in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Romance, on the other hand, is generally considered to be the ancestor of the modern novel, as Northrop Frye most famously argues.³ Cervantes, according to many, authors the first “modern”—self-conscious, meta-literary, ironic—novel as a reaction against late medieval and early modern chivalric romances, generally in prose.⁴ Various critics have attempted to nuance this notion that Cervantes is “against”

³ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. For Bakhtin’s position on the matter, see Segre, “What Bakhtin Left Unsaid.”

⁴ For bibliography on the relationship of Cervantes to chivalric romance, see the *Cervantes Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 624-26. Needless to say, I am not writing *about* Cervantes here, but using Cervantes as a figure for the modern novel, however imperfect this shorthand may be. See, in the Brownlees’ volume, articles by Harry Sieber (“The Romance of Chivalry in Spain”), Marina

medieval romance, by arguing that the tradition of romance was always characterized by a sort of ambivalent intertextuality, whereby, as Cesare Segre notes, “[w]e go back from *Don Quijote* to the twelfth-century French *roman* by way of a series of oppositions which are at the same time signs of continuity.”⁵ One could, I think, also argue that Cervantes’s *novela* evidences more important similarities to early verse romances than later prose ones, as the latter are not traditionally associated with the extreme self-consciousness of the former.⁶ It may, therefore, be that the experimental and self-conscious qualities routinely evoked in critical definitions of verse romance come, over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, increasingly to find an outlet in the *dits*, rather than in prose romance. This “story” would, however, have been lost from sight, because the *roman moderne* would reclaim this mantle or function once the tradition of the *dits* had sputtered out.

If, furthermore, this eminently self-conscious medieval tradition moving from verse romances to the *dits* does not enter into modernity in any clear, linear fashion—if, at least as it regards French literature, there are not many obvious points of contact

Brownlee (“Cervantes as Reader of Ariosto”), and Ruth El Saffar (“The Truth of the Matter: The Place of Romance in the Works of Cervantes”).

⁵ Segre, “What Bakhtin Left Unsaid,” 25. See also Caroline Jewers, *Chivalric Fiction*, for a different “possible histor[y] of the novel” (xiii). From the chivalric romances of the Old French tradition, Jewers takes us south, into Occitania (*Flamenca*) and Valencia (*Tirant lo Blanc*), where the latter greatly influenced Cervantes. It is interesting to note that while much criticism of Occitan lyrics has taken into account their diffusion in Southern Europe (namely Catalonia and Italy), similar questions are not as routinely asked of narrative. Certainly, there is a difference between the perceived southern dominance of the lyric tradition in the High Middle Ages and the northern dominance of narrative; looking south for questions of narrative might nonetheless be productive (see, of course, the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*).

⁶ Several critics have taken up the question of the relationship of Chrétien to Cervantes. See Edwin Williamson, *The Half-Way House of Fiction*; Eduardo Urbina, *Principios y fines del Quijote*; and Pedro Javier Pardo García, “Cervantes y Chrétien de Troyes.” Urbina’s work, I find, does the best job of accounting for nuance in Chrétien. The Brownlees’ *Romance: Generic Transformations* also forms an arc moving from one figure to the other, as does Jewers’s book.

between the *dits* and self-conscious early modern narratives—it is tempting to relate this scrambling of linearity and genealogy at the level of literary history to the problematization of linearity and genealogy within the verse romances and *dits* that we have studied.⁷ Put otherwise, if the *dits* knew “no future,” this might be related to the importance of “no future” poetics within them, or to their resistance to the promise that things will one day add up, have meaning and “consequence.”⁸ Perhaps the failure of this story to continue into modernity in any linear way represents the paradoxical sign of its success, insofar as it points to the contingency of this tradition and its resistance to linearity, legibility, and teleology, as well as to its propensity to confuse the very notions of success and failure.

But can we really argue that the lack of clear future for the *dits* reflects the *mise en cause* of such notions as futurity, hope, promise, legibility, and genealogy? Such a hypothesis is, at one level, important, because it signals an openness to reconceiving of some of the most entrenched narratives of literary history, such as our ability to move back from the modern novel to prose romance in “straight” genealogical terms. It also, I find, runs the danger of being so vague, even facile, as to be unconvincing. A similar charge of “facileness,” even “deconstruct-ability,” could also be directed at Edelman’s *No Future*, on which I have extensively drawn.⁹ The rhetoric of his text forcefully positions itself against progress, hope, normativity, meaningfulness,

⁷ I specify that it is in the French tradition that such points of contact are no obvious; Jewers is no doubt founded in looking to the Iberian one. For the most in depth study of genealogy in medieval French literature, I refer the reader again to Stahuljak’s *Bloodless Genealogies*.

⁸ Edelman’s play on consequence as weight or meaning and as containing the word “sequence”: see *No Future*, 35.

⁹ Note that this thesis opened with the example of a text notable for its almost egregious de-constructability: Alain’s *De Planctu Naturae*.

legibility, futurity, and so forth; his text is nonetheless located in a particular academic dialogue, which does seem to progress in constructive, even meaningful ways. By virtue of becoming a celebrated contribution to academic dialogue, *No Future*, in fact, even seems necessarily to locate its value in its legibility and legacy for a given audience. To argue that we can de-construct the terms of Edelman's project is not, however, to nullify his contribution. Rather, it serves to caution us against understanding it as the pure affirmation of anything positive (which would be antithetical to his project), instead encouraging us to view it as the "critical analysis" of the emphasis that the heteronormative places on legibility and futurity (amongst other notions), where "critical analysis" implies resisting these problematic terms without operating under the illusion either that we could free ourselves from them or that such freedom is necessarily desirable.¹⁰

It is useful to dramatize the "deconstruct-ability" of Edelman's text as this dissertation winds to a close, because it suggests, by analogy, that the queerness of verse romances and the *dits* cannot be a purely positive (or negative) "anti-narrative," unequivocally opposed to the terms of progress, futurity, legibility, and normativity. Rather, it would be more accurate to describe this dissertation as exploring *the narrative of the anti-narrative character of these genres*. At one level, that is, my goal has not been to write a "new" narrative, but rather to explore what does not fit into the extant ones, which necessarily predicate certain parameters; I have therefore used the juxtaposition of verse romances and the *dits* to figure and to open up ways of roaming off the beaten track—querying, say, the narrative of the turn from song to book, or the gradual rise of

¹⁰ "Critical analysis" is Butler's term: see Ch. I's analysis of the *Fontaine amoureuse*.

the modern author and *oeuvre*. At another level, studying verse romances and the *dits* together—rather than verse romances and prose ones, for example—may finally amount less to avoiding the inevitable compulsion to narrativize than to proving its inescapability, insofar as the structure of moving forward in time from one thing to another seems to hold.

This thesis can, it seems, *either* be understood as proving despite itself (*maleoit gré mien*, as Chrétien writes) the inevitable compulsion to narrativize, where dramatizing the anti-narrative elements in these genres becomes a different narrative, or as leveraging the distance of this “neo-narrative” from the reigning critical accounts of these texts and genres so as to expose their contingency and limitations. Again, I find thinking about Edelman particularly useful in this regard, because his text so dramatically brings to the fore the paradoxical nature of describing the undescribable, of figuring the unfigurable, and of reading the illegible. This has been my goal in approaching these medieval texts, however paradoxical, risky, futile and “deconstruct-able” this endeavor may be.

Momentarily remaining with Edelman also serves to raise a problem more specific to my immediate task of concluding. For on the one hand, the questions often taken up in conclusions—namely, “so what?” and “what’s next?”—are partially belied by the terms of this dissertation, where I argue that the point is precisely that things won’t add up and there isn’t a “next” which promises any sort of plenitude of meaning. On the other hand, I have begun to emphasize how such questions are neither avoidable nor necessarily undesirable. Within the dissertation, furthermore, I repeatedly argue that the “conclusions” of various verse romances and *dits* do not function to resolve much of anything. In *Yvain*, *Erec*, *Silence*, the *Dit de la panthère*, or the *Prison amoureuse* (to

provide examples from each genre and century), I hold that, rather than procuring stability or resolution, the concluding sequences elusively and provocatively re-assert the impossibility of ever doing so.

Because both the texts studied here and the theoretical framework lend themselves to a certain conception of “ending” whereby one adds a twist to what has come before, which does not re-affirm but problematizes what has previously occurred, I have been attempting to use this “epilogue” critically to confront my argument, rather than summarizing, tidying, or even accepting it. Asking another deceptively simple question—What would it mean for my argument to be successful?—will take us, I hope, one step further. In the introduction, I suggested that this work has two potential audiences: queer theorists and, of course, French medievalists. It seems fair to speculate that queer theorists may be more receptive to the theoretical bent. I have attempted to insert myself into queer dialogue by arguing that medieval French literature is a watershed moment in the discursive elaboration *and* problematization of gender and sexual identity. I have, that is, argued that “heteronormativity,” defined as the discursive representation of the compulsory role of heterosexuality in the construction of identity, is a total obsession of verse romances and the *dits*, as is the “critical analysis” of heteronormativity’s contingency and instability, where this gesture of critically analyzing may be called queer. If one accepts these conceptions of heteronormativity and of queerness, the implication is that by paying little attention to medieval French literature, queer theory has essentially deprived itself of its “ground zero”; for if one is to resist heteronormativity, it would seem imperative both to return to the moment in which it

most dramatically emerged and to look closely at the techniques of subversion that accompanied its nonlinear, non-instantaneous, bumpy and unstable rise.

But am I really writing for queer theorists? Ironically, queer theorists who are not invested in these medieval texts may necessarily end up overlooking the queerest aspect of this dissertation, which is its insistent coupling together of the potentially unhappy bedfellows of (often) polemic poststructuralist rhetoric and the seemingly old technique of close reading. A medievalist, on the other hand, might appreciate readings of various texts—say, the patient attention to the language of narratorial intrusions, prologues and epilogues, inset lyrics and particular scenes—without being overly sympathetic to the poststructuralist theoretical frame. A medievalist might even accept that there are important aspects, worth of study, in verse romances, which then seemed to be picked up by the *dits*, all the while querying whether this necessarily upsets conventional wisdom. Could it not be that reading verse romances and the *dits* together adds to, or expands on, our understanding of these texts and these genres, rather than destabilizing or queering it? Does this matter?

My response is twofold. On the one hand, my intentions cannot matter much. I have argued that it is a feature of intentionality in many verse romances and *dits* paradoxically to mobilize their energy to impel readers to liberate themselves from the constraints of attempting to locate intentionality. A similar logic would then, perforce, apply to this dissertation, relegating my appreciation as to what one “must” get from it to a distinctly secondary level of importance.

On the other hand, I find it provocative to consider whether the underlying structure of this work may have rhetorical features that reflect the elements I have

highlighted in these medieval texts. As we saw in the conclusion to Chapter III, de Man extremely provocatively queries the very notion of “literary history,” writing,

In literary studies, structures of meaning are frequently described in historical rather than in semiological or rhetorical terms. This is, in itself, a somewhat surprising occurrence, since the historical nature of literary discourse is by no means an *a priori* established fact, whereas all literature necessarily consists of linguistic and semantic elements.¹¹

Without delving into whether “the historical nature of literary discourse” is an “*a priori* established fact” or not, I find it interesting to reflect on whether the different elements brought together in this dissertation—most notably, poststructuralist theory and medieval literature, at one level, and verse romances and the *dits*, at another—may be understood not only as having a historical relationship, but also a rhetorical one. I have repeatedly gestured in the direction of a historical relation, or one that we may articulate in temporal, logical, and narrative terms. As it regards the relationship of poststructuralist theory to courtly literature, I have suggested that there is an important sense whereby the moments of the birth and infancy of Western heteronormativity curiously resemble contemporary challenges to its reign. It is almost as if the childhood and the old age of heteronormativity were wrapping back toward each other; this notion would be in keeping with the extremely productive and varied scholarship which explores connections between the “pre-“ and “post-modern.” But is it helpful, we may wonder, to assume a causal chain that moves from the “pre-“ to the “post-modern,” and do intriguing similarities speak to the linearity or rather to the circularity, even the suspension, of time? If the “late heteronormative” (to coin a neologism) or the “post-modern” has important similarities with the “early heteronormative” or the “pre-modern,” is this necessarily

¹¹ De Man, *Allegories*, 79. See also Ch. III’s conclusion.

because the Middle Ages functioned as “First Principles” of sorts in a story to which the pillars of our thinking are still bound? The questions I am asking might appear clearer in relation to verse romances and the *dits*. Is it more useful to think that the self-consciousness of verse romances potentially led to that of the *dits*, or that their juxtaposition fosters a performance that exposes provocative—interesting but frequently elusive, often illogical—connections between the two, in a manner more reminiscent of the rhetorical figure of metalepsis? The question, it seems to me, finally boils down to how attached one is to the notions of diachronic temporality, causality, and narrativity—or alternately, to how amenable one is not to the idea embracing anachronism *per se*, but to embracing “rhetoricity” in the subject who performs literary studies, not only in the object of these studies.¹² For de Man, “Literature as well as criticism—the difference between them being delusive—is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself.”¹³ It does seem somehow odd that criticism would aspire to “reliability” whilst medieval literature—as we have seen—so often fosters performances which challenge its own reliability *and* even the possibility of being stable or not deviant in language, identity, and so forth.

The question that I am asking myself is whether rather than acknowledging and confronting this recurrent tension between “history” or “narrativity” and the “rhetorical”—that which foregrounds language’s “instability” and “deviancy”—it is possible to write criticism differently, by not underpinning analyses of “unreliability” or

¹² See also Carolyn Dinshaw’s extremely spirited and interesting defense of “amateur reading” in *How Soon is Now?*

¹³ De Man, *Allegories*, 19. Also cited in introduction.

“deviancy” with pretensions to “reliability” or “order,” or by finding a way to write about non-narrative and non-mimetic texts that is not belied by a total lack of effort to free ourselves from the terms of narrativity and mimesis, or the representation of referents. Paradoxically, I feel like I have told a story about verse romances and *dits* that both must and cannot be a story. I have intensely studied, scrutinized and loved these textual objects, because, in a manner, I am so convinced there is nothing there, or little belief in the possibility of the stable referent. Like Alexander and Alis in *Cligés*, I am passionately embracing nothing:

Tenir la cuide, n'en tient mie
Mais de neent est a grant ese,
Neent enbrace et neent baise,
Neent tient et neent acole,
Neent voit, a neent parole... (3312-16)

He believes he holds her, but doesn't hold her at all, but from this nothing he experiences great pleasure; he embraces nothing and kisses nothing, holds nothing and hugs nothing, sees nothing and speaks to nothing.

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