

The *Romance of the Rose* in Fourteenth-Century England

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Abstract

This thesis traces the afterlife of the *Romance of the Rose* in fourteenth-century England. Whether it was closely imitated or only faintly recalled, I argue that the *Rose* exercised its influence on fourteenth-century English literature in two principal ways. Firstly, in the development of a self-reflexive focus on how meaning is produced and transmitted. Secondly, in a concern with how far the author’s intentions can be recovered from a work, and to what extent the author must claim some responsibility for the meaning of a text after its release into the world of readers. In the *Rose*, many of these issues are presented through the lens of a disordered erotic desire, and questions of licit and illicit textual and sexual pleasures loom large in the later responses. My investigation focuses on four English writers: William Langland, John Gower, the *Gawain*-Poet, and Geoffrey Chaucer. In my final chapter I suggest that the *Rose* ceased to be a generative force in English literature in the fifteenth century, and I try to offer some explanations as to why.

In examining the influence of the *Rose* in England I am not trying to suggest a linear transmission of cultural dominance, but rather a complex and plural process of interaction that expands to include texts that both antedate and post-date the *Rose* — especially Neoplatonic allegories and Ovid, on the one hand, and, on the other, Deguileville and Machaut. The individual English writers I look at are not seen as having a single and stable attitude towards the *Rose*; instead, I argue, the *Rose* emerges as a way of thinking about the interaction between texts, how meaning is produced, and how authorial ownership is claimed or refused.

Using not only literary evidence but also detailed archival research into the manuscript circulation of the *Rose*, I question the usefulness of ‘English’ and ‘French’ as critical categories for the study of late-medieval literature, and attempt to show that, for a certain kind of literary activity, the *Rose* occupied a central position in England: not a stable foundation of cultural authority, but a realm of self-questioning subversion and instability.

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I submit this piece of research with a small regret, knowing that its completion will bring to an end (at least officially) my regular meetings with my two supervisors — meetings that have been both incalculably productive and immensely enjoyable. To the wisdom, diligence, and good humour of Nicholas Perkins and Helen Swift, this thesis owes a huge debt.

Parts of chapters 1 and 6 began life auspiciously as an M.St. dissertation supervised by Vincent Gillespie. I have benefitted from our conversations then and since, which have steered the direction of my thought in ways I am still learning to appreciate.

I have also profited from discussing these materials in formal and informal settings with many individuals in Oxford and beyond: Laura Ashe, Mattia Cavanga, Kantik Ghosh, Sebastian Langdell, Daniel McCann, Olivia Robinson, Marion Turner, Daniel Wakelin, James Willoughby, and, especially, Mark Griffith.

A section of chapter 1 is derived from a conference paper delivered at a panel I co-organised with Jonathan Morton and Marco Nievergelt at the 49th International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, 8–11 May 2014. This panel, entitled ‘Reading the *Romance of the Rose*: Hermeneutics, Knowledge, and Desire’, was chaired by David Rollo and consisted of papers by myself, Morton, and Nievergelt. I am grateful to everyone who participated in the exhilarating discussion that day, but above all to Johnny and Marco, whose generosity in sharing ideas and enthusiasm has, from the beginning, shaped my thinking about the *Rose* and much else.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ii
List of Abbreviations	iv
List of Illustrations	v
INTRODUCTION	1
1. THE <i>ROMANCE OF THE ROSE</i>	12
‘Droit sens’: Undressing Meaning in the <i>Rose</i>	21
Nature, Sex, and Illicit Desire	27
‘Each of them lies dead and rotted’: Rewriting the Ovidian Tradition	31
Other Conduits: Deguileville and Machaut	46
2. BRITISH MEDIEVAL READERS OF THE <i>ROMANCE OF THE ROSE</i>	53
The Manuscripts	56
Interpreting the Evidence	71
3. WILLIAM LANGLAND	78
Langland’s Intertexts and the <i>Romance of the Rose</i>	81
Experiencing the Search for Meaning	87
Meddling with Makings and Meddling with ‘Makes’	93
Langland’s Naming	101
4. JOHN GOWER	107
Gower and French Literature	109
Exemplary Meaning	112
Controlling Meaning: Narcissus and Pygmalion	119
Controlling Desire: Arion and Orpheus	124
Self-Knowledge	133
In Bed with Gower	138
5. THE <i>GAWAIN</i> -POET	148
The ‘Clene <i>Rose</i> ’	150
Clean Meaning?	159
Sodomy, Artifice, Idolatry	163
Intelligible Acts	169
Desire and Failure: <i>Pearl</i>	174
6. GEOFFREY CHAUCER	183
Meaning and Dismemberment (i): ‘That is to seyn’: <i>Boece</i>	190
Meaning and Dismemberment (ii): The Physician’s Tale	198
Authorship and the <i>Romance of the Rose</i> (i): <i>The House of Fame</i>	208
Authorship and the <i>Romance of the Rose</i> (ii): Chaucer’s English <i>Rose</i> and the Prologue to the <i>Legend of Good Women</i>	219
7. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY	227
John Bale’s ‘John Mone’	227
Reading the <i>Rose</i> in England after 1400	231
The <i>Rose</i> of Lancaster	240
Bibliography	247

List of Abbreviations

BL	London, British Library
BnF	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
BodL	Oxford, Bodleian Library
CA	John Gower, <i>Confessio Amantis</i> , in <i>The Complete Works of John Gower</i> , ed. G.C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902)
CT	Geoffrey Chaucer, <i>Canterbury Tales</i> , in Larry D. Benson (gen. ed.), <i>The Riverside Chaucer</i> (3 rd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
DMF	<i>Dictionnaire de Moyen Français</i> (ATILF CNRS / Université de Lorraine, 2012); < http://www.atilf.fr/dmf >
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	extra series
OS	original series
KBR	Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België / Bibliothèque royale de Belgique
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. Hans Kurath et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954–2001); < http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ >
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , ed. James Murray et al. (3rd edition online, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); < www.oed.com >
PVH	Guillaume de Deguileville, <i>Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine</i> , ed. J.J. Stürzinger, Roxburghe Club (London: Nichols, 1893)
RR	Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, <i>Le Roman de la Rose</i> , ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols, Classiques français du Moyen Âge, 92, 95, 98 (Paris: Champion, 1965–1975)

List of Illustrations

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. BL, MS Yates Thompson 21, f.69v.
(Photograph: BL Online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts,
< http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts >) | 39 |
| 2. KBR, MS 9961–61, f.91v.
(Photograph: KBR-Belgica,
< http://belgica.kbr.be/fr/coll/ms/ms9961_62_fr.html >) | 52 |
| 3. BL, MS Royal 19 B XIII, f.2r.
(Photograph: BL Digitised Manuscripts,
< http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_19_B_XIII >) | 58 |
| 4. (a) Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2755, f.27v.
(b) <i>ibid.</i> , f.2v.
(c) <i>ibid.</i> , f.3r.
(Photographs: Ufficio riproduzioni, Biblioteca Riccardiana) | 59
60
60 |
| 5. (a) BodL, MS Rawlinson D.913, f.94av.
(b) <i>ibid.</i> , f.94bv.
(Photographs: P. Knox) | 61
61 |
| 6. Cambridge, St John's College, MS G.5, f.160v.
(Photograph: P. Knox) | 62 |
| 7. BodL, MS Bodley 920, f.47v.
(Photograph: P. Knox) | 69 |
| 8. Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 59, f.6v.
(Photograph: University of Glasgow Special Collections,
< ">http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/detail_i.cfm?ID=157?> >) | 106 |
| 9. BnF, MS fr. 264, f.91v.
(Photograph: Gallica, Bibliothèque numérique de la BnF,
< http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90588584/f93.item >) | 201 |
| 10. André Thevet, <i>Les Vrais portraits</i> (Paris, 1584);
Oxford, BodL, Douce T subt. 39, f.499r.
(Photograph: P. Knox) | 226 |

Introduction

This thesis argues that in the fourteenth century a number of English writers were profoundly influenced by a thirteenth-century French text called *The Romance of the Rose*. Just as, in France, the *Rose* had become an ‘inescapable’ influence,¹ literary culture in fourteenth-century England manifested a remarkable preoccupation with this work. In what follows, I will track this fascination, try to account for its presence, and, in my final chapter, attempt to explain its attenuation in the fifteenth century.

Reception studies of the *Rose* now threaten to outweigh analyses of the text itself.² This is no doubt due in part to the groundbreaking work of Pierre-Yves Badel and Sylvia Huot, whose studies have shown the rich potential of such an approach, and to whom this investigation is heavily indebted.³ But the proliferation of critical studies of the *Rose*’s reception is also a measure of an essential feature of the text itself: its capacity to generate new works, to stimulate continuations, responses, and critiques.⁴ Already this can be seen in the earliest history of the poem: the first four-thousand or so lines, written around the second quarter of the thirteenth century and left apparently incomplete by an author we know as Guillaume de Lorris, rapidly spawned a number of continuations.⁵ The most important of these, the seventeen-thousand line expansion by Jean de Meun usually dated to around 1270–1285,⁶ rapidly came to dominate the reception of the poem, and seems to have been largely

¹ The term is borrowed from Jane Taylor, ‘Inescapable Rose: Jean le Seneschal’s *Cent Ballades* and the Art of Cheerful Paradox’.

² See the useful summary of the current critical landscape in Jonathan Morton, ‘État présent: *Le Roman de la Rose*’.

³ Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le ‘Roman de la Rose’*; Sylvia Huot, *The ‘Romance of the Rose’*.

⁴ Nancy Freeman Regalado points out that whereas Dante’s *Commedia* seems to have generated commentaries, the *Rose* generated imitations, ‘The Medieval Construction of the Modern Reader’, 106. In this respect the *Rose* might be said to be a text that is *scriptible* rather than *lisible* (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*). Marco Nievergelt has analysed how the *Rose* generates imitations and continuations in an important paper delivered at the International Medieval Congress, 2014, ‘Organic Growth: Sexual (Re)production and Textual Proliferation in the Tradition of the *Rose*’.

⁵ David Hult argues that the apparent incompleteness of Guillaume’s poem should be seen as a deliberate literary strategy, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*, 6.

⁶ A seemingly contemporary reference at 6601–710 to Charles d’Anjou (d.1285) gives the poem a *terminus ante quem*. Félix Lecoy gathers the internal evidence for dating and suggests a shorter range of 1269–1278; see Lecoy (ed.), *Le Roman de la Rose*, 1:vi–x.

responsible for the wider diffusion of Guillaume's text.⁷ It is as a double-authored work that the poem spread over medieval Europe, was translated into Italian,⁸ Middle Dutch (twice),⁹ and English,¹⁰ and was able to leave as a testament to its remarkable popularity more than three hundred surviving manuscripts.¹¹ In France, the *Rose* went through more than forty printed editions before 1538, including a modernised-spelling edition attributed to Clément Marot and Jean Molinet's 'moralisation'.¹² Throughout the fourteenth century, French writers such as Guillaume de Deguileville, Guillaume de Machaut, and, later, Christine de Pizan felt compelled to respond to Jean de Meun, a compulsion that was still felt in the fifteenth century and beyond.¹³ The *Rose* is the only vernacular literary work whose popularity in the Middle Ages comes close to competing with that of the *Divine Comedy*,¹⁴ and indeed it seems to have left a deep impact on Italian literature. There is no doubt that Dante was deeply influenced by the *Rose*, as was Boccaccio.¹⁵ Petrarch certainly read it, and it has been suggested, less concretely, that he stages a literary response to it.¹⁶ Beyond the Middle Ages, the remote

⁷ Hult gathers the evidence for the early independent circulation of Guillaume's poem and examines the early continuation by Gui de Mori; *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*, 34–55; see also Huot, *The 'Romance of the Rose'*, 85–129; Andrea Valentini, 'Le Remaniement de Gui de Mori'.

⁸ See *Il Fiore* in *Le Opere di Dante*, 8:2–466. Whether the 'Durante' who names himself at LXXXII.9 is Dante Alighieri remains an open question.

⁹ The translation attributed to Heinric van Aken has been edited as *Die Rose* by Eelco Verwijs; there is also an anonymous Flemish adaptation which survives only in fragments, *Die Fragmenten van de Tweede Rose*. See Dieuwke E. van der Poel, 'A Romance of a Rose and Florentine'; Karen Lensik-Oberstein, 'Adapting the *Roman de la rose*'.

¹⁰ *The Romaunt of the Rose* is included in the *Riverside Chaucer*; see also Dahlberg (ed.), *The Romaunt of the Rose*.

¹¹ For the most up-to-date list of extant manuscripts, see romandelarose.org/#corpus, where at the time of writing (26 September 2015), there are 324 items listed. Note, however, that this list does not include the Crawford manuscript, presumably still in Balcarres house; see ch.2, below.

¹² See Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, 206, n.13; Pettegree et al., *French Vernacular Books, 720–1*; Bourdillon, *The Early Editions of the 'Romance of the Rose'*.

¹³ For Villon and the *Rose* see John H. Watkins, 'À la recherche de François Villon'. The definitive study of the influence of the *Romance of the Rose* in the later medieval period is Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance*.

¹⁴ The Dante Society lists 827 manuscripts at the time of writing (26 September 2015), http://www.danteonline.it/italiano/codici_indice.htm

¹⁵ For Dante and the *Rose*, see Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, *Il 'Roman de la Rose' e la letteratura italiana*; Earl Jeffrey Richards, *Dante and the 'Roman de la Rose'*. The discussion of women's euphemisms for the genitals in the epilogue to the *Decameron*, 778–9, is clearly indebted to the *Rose*.

¹⁶ Petrarch sends a copy of the *Rose* to Guido Gonzaga (d.1369); the commendatory letter is preserved amongst the *Epistolae metricae*: Domenico Rossetti (ed. and trans.), *Poesie minori del Petrarca*, 2:342–5. The only scholar I know of to claim the direct influence of the *Rose* on Petrarch's writings is John Fleming, *Reason and the Lover*, 137ff.

influence of the *Rose* has even been claimed on the political philosophy of Hegel and Marx, via the intermediary of Rousseau.¹⁷

In short, the *Romance of the Rose* is a profoundly influential text — not, as will be seen, because it exerts an oppressive cultural dominance, but because there is something about it that provokes response — combative, participatory, or both. It is remarkable that there have been so few attempts to map the full extent of its influence in England.¹⁸ The depth of its impact means that I can only make a first step towards an understanding of the *Rose*'s English afterlife, and I am painfully aware of this study's limitations. A more complete analysis would be entitled 'The *Romance of the Rose* in Fourteenth-Century Britain', and would begin by assessing how perhaps the first British poet to respond to the *Rose*, Dafydd ap Gwilym, articulates himself in relation to it.¹⁹ Such a study would also be able to compare the how those Hainaulter francophone poets who wrote in England — Jean de le Mote and Jean Froissart — staged their own responses to the *Rose*.²⁰ But I have constrained my investigation to focus on a group of writers more closely linked in time and, perhaps, space, who share a number of important points of comparison in their attitude to the *Rose* and how it relates to their own activity. They are William Langland, John Gower, the *Gawain*-poet, and Geoffrey Chaucer.

Even after narrowing this study's range, the extent of the *Rose*'s impact remains immense, and an exhaustive list of echoes and parallels is probably impossible. The hunt for

¹⁷ Jean Charles Payen, *La Rose et l'utopie*, 256–7. Although the claim that the *Rose* exercised a mediated influence on twentieth-century political philosophy is perhaps far-fetched, Rousseau was certainly a close reader of the text. See Payen, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le *Roman de la Rose*'.

¹⁸ Both of the last two major collections of essays devoted to the *Rose* have included sections devoted to the reception of the work; yet only one article addresses the English context — the reprint of Lee Patterson's study of the Chaucer's Wife of Bath and the *Rose*, 'Feminine Rhetoric', in Brownlee and Huot (eds.), *Rethinking the 'Romance of the Rose'*, 316–58. See also Bel and Braet (eds.), *De la Rose*, where among the ten articles in the section devoted to reception studies there is nothing that examines England. There have, however, been a number of works which have usefully illuminated its English reception, generally with a focus on Chaucer or Gower: Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 30–41, 71–97, 204–13; Calin, *French Tradition*, 161–183, 273–418; Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, 113–45, 163–98. A usefully wide-ranging survey is presented by Kamath, 'The *Roman de la rose* and Middle English Poetry'.

¹⁹ Several scholars have suggested this connection: Helen Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context*, 189–90, 215, 223–4; Andrew Breeze, 'Jean de Meun and Dafydd ap Gwilym'.

²⁰ These responses are analysed by Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 127–9, and 82–94. For Froissart and England see also David Wallace, *Premodern Places*, 33–44.

the *Rose* as a ‘source’ is rendered more complex by the fact that even when narrative materials can be traced to some work anterior to the *Rose*, the French text can still occupy a central position as a conduit for these materials, or as a model for how they might be deployed. As a ‘source’, and as a source of sources, the *Rose* exerts a far wider influence than a list of direct echoes could ever trace. In recent years increasing attention has been granted to the intellectual-historical context of the *Rose*, and the ways in which it at once transmits knowledge and questions the processes by which knowledge is acquired.²¹ In English Studies, particularly in connection to Chaucer, scholars have likewise fruitfully explored the relationship of the *Rose* to aspects of Middle English poetry that might be broadly termed ‘philosophical’.²² A great deal of work still remains to be done on how far Jean de Meun’s text transmits not merely literary motifs but also philosophical ideas and methods of broaching them within a fictional frame. I will touch on some of these issues as they occur. But I have chosen to focus primarily on how the texts by these fourteenth-century English writers reverberate with what I see to be the central questions of the *Rose*: how is meaning produced in a text and received by its readers? How far can that meaning be controlled by the author? How does the desire for meaning relate to other forms of desire?

I have deployed the term ‘influence’ several times in this introduction, and I would like to briefly define my usage. The most important study of literary influence remains Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, a work that has, in its own way, become inescapable. Although Bloom specifically limited his analysis to post-Enlightenment poets, his use of Freudian and Nietzschean ideas to model literary interaction has proven popular, and medieval scholars have borrowed this approach.²³ Bloom’s schemata may well be useful in

²¹ Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, *Knowing Poetry*; Mary Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World*; Morton, ‘Nature, Sex, and Language’. Renewed emphasis has been placed on Gérard Paré’s argument in *La Scolastique courtoise* and *Les Idées et les lettres* that Jean de Meun was an arts master at the University of Paris: Ian Wei, *Intellectual Culture*, 359–74; Morton, ‘Nature, Sex, and Language’, 4–6, 9–14.

²² Chapters on the *Rose* appear in Mark Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer* and Peter Travis, *Disseminial Chaucer*. Most recently, see Nicolette Zeeman, ‘Philosophy in Parts: Jean de Meun, Chaucer and Lydgate’.

²³ Bloom’s ‘anxiety of influence’ has been used to describe the relationship between Machaut and Eustache Deschamps in Lori Walters, ‘Fathers and Daughters’, 72. It has been used to describe the relationship between Brunetto Latini and Dante in Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 38–60. Many critics

such contexts (although medievalists have also suggested compelling alternatives),²⁴ but aside from the obvious critiques that can be leveled against the use of Oedipal anxiety as a model for literary influence,²⁵ it strikes me that such a model is inadequate to describe the cultural history of the *Rose*. This is partly because, by imagining the genealogical transmission of anxiety from author to author, Bloom seems to suggest that author and *œuvre* are co-extensive. It is not pedantic to state that no reader is ever really influenced by an author — instead readers are influenced by their reading of a text or a series of texts, and the extent to which they might project some notion of the authorial self who produced that text, and the extent to which that notion might inform their reading, will vary across history and culture with different reading practices. If this process of stimulus and output must be compared to a mental disorder, it would be interesting to explore the full ramifications of a model derived not from Oedipal anxiety, but from schizophrenia — in the generative, revolutionary sense explored by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.²⁶ Such an exploration might find, instead of the genealogical tree of authors implied by Bloom, a different structure, something closer to Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome', a metaphor they use to evoke de-centered plurality and the complex interaction of social, psychological, and material phenomena.²⁷ This will be the kind of influence that I hope trace to in this thesis — something that is plural, supple, and, above all, embedded in a continually shifting social environment. The complexity of medieval

have used Bloom's terms to describe the relationship between Geoffrey Chaucer and his fifteenth-century successors: references to these are usefully gathered by Sebastian Langdell, 'Religious Reform, Transnational Poetics and Literary Tradition', 81, n.11; See especially A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 92–110.

²⁴ Chief among these is Helen Swift, whose *Gender, Writing, and Performance*, looks at the influence of Jean de Meun in the later Middle Ages through Derrida's notion of *hantologie*, examining how conspicuous absence can also be a sign of influence; see esp. 34–9. The model has been redeployed by Nicholas Perkins in an article that acts as a useful corrective for Bloomian readings of Hoccleve's relationship with Chaucer: Perkins, 'Haunted Hoccleve?'

²⁵ The fact that, for example, it only seems to allow literary influence to be transmitted between men.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

²⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Eleanor Johnson suggests the possibilities of the 'rhizome' as a way of conceiving of literary influence in the Middle Ages in *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages*, 11. Although the 'rhizome' has become somewhat ubiquitous in contemporary cultural studies, it does not yet seem to have been welcomed into the critical vocabulary of medieval literary scholars. Sarah Kay presents some first steps towards exploring the usefulness of the rhizome and its opposite, the tree, in *Place of Thought*, 19–20, 40–41. Textual critics, interestingly, have investigated the rhizome as a model that offers an alternative to stemmatic diagrams, see David Greetham, 'Phylum-Tree-Rhizome'.

intertextuality, particularly in the *Rose* and its successors, asks us to conceive of a non-linear structure in which vectors of textual interaction overlap and interfere, and in which there is often no reason to imagine that the author of a predecessor text is being evoked as a fully psychologised self to be suppressed or supplanted by the new author.

‘Intertextuality’, a term that in its earliest incarnation evoked the relationship between texts and their cultural and social situations, is perhaps a more useful critical tool than ‘influence’.²⁸ We must be sensitive not only to a range of possible textual interactions that stretch from the precise citation to the vague generic similarity, but also to the different kinds of meaning that these different interactions might produce.²⁹ I will continue to use the term ‘influence’, and with it I hope to suggest on the one hand a certain directionality, but also its etymological root — *fluēre*, to flow.³⁰ For just as the *Rose* might reveal the influence of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* or the *De planctu Naturae*, it also helps to constitute the expectations of a reading community who must then return to those works with altered expectations in an interaction that is nothing if not fluid. Likewise, while Deguileville and Machaut might expand or contract the possibilities of how a later audience might read the *Rose*, they themselves can be re-read against their predecessor texts in a flow of influence that must be situated at last in the minds of a reading community towards whom authors consciously direct their texts or among whom they form and then expand the horizons of what they consider possible.³¹

My study will emphasise the presentation of meaning in the *Rose*, and how received interpretative strategies seem to fail in the face of a proliferation of possible readings. For this reason I will frequently touch upon one of the oldest hermeneutic techniques for delimiting

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, ‘The Bounded Text’, 37. Also *La Révolution du langage poétique*, 59–60.

²⁹ Gérard Genette attempts to refine the categories of intertextuality, or ‘transtextuality’ as he calls it, in *Palimpsests*, 1–7.

³⁰ Bloom also discusses the etymology of *influence* in terms of *influenza*, the effects of the stars on human physiology, ‘an astral disease’, *Anxiety of Influence*, 95.

³¹ My thinking here is indebted to Hans Robert Jauss, and his attempts to situate a text’s range of meanings in the shifting perceptions of its readers, perceptions that the text helps to shape. See *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, esp. ‘Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory’, 3–45; ‘Theory of Genre and Medieval Literature’, 76–109. Note that Bloom makes the claim that authors can ‘influence’ authors who are historically anterior to them — ‘imitated by their ancestors’ — but is not willing to examine how this effect might be produced by the textual environments in which these works are read, *Anxiety of Influence*, 141.

the range of potential meanings of a text: the author.³² Scholarship of medieval literature has generally tended to consider the question of authorship from two related but distinct literary-historical perspectives, both of which will be important here. On the one hand there is an academic tradition of exegetical practices, whose importance for the study of medieval literature was first argued in groundbreaking studies by Judson Boyce Allen and then, with a focus on authorship, Alastair Minnis.³³ Minnis's work in particular spawned a proliferation of studies investigating authorship in vernacular works, and the related concept of 'authority'. On the other hand there is a tradition of literary practice, the tradition of the *poetae*. Medieval writers could participate in this tradition by composing elevated Latin verse; these poetic works could in turn be commented upon in an academic environment. The production of a Latin commentary on Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* by Ralph of Longchamps in the early thirteenth century, for example, implies a recognition that Alain's poem belongs to the same privileged category as Virgil's *Aeneid* or Boethius's *Consolatio*.³⁴ The extent to which medieval vernacular writers saw themselves as engaged in a practice that was subordinate to that of the Latin *poetae*, and the extent to which they may have attempted to gain the prestige associated with these works for their own writings, is an important story in the development of European literature.³⁵ The *Rose* is clearly of great significance in any attempt to understand how the hermeneutic techniques of the commentary tradition or the prestige associated with classical poetry are brought into vernacular writing.³⁶ But a study of the *Rose* and its medieval reception does not seem to reveal a medieval author's attempts to displace and supplant a hegemonic discourse from which he felt excluded.³⁷ Instead, the *Rose* asks perplexing questions about the value of that discourse, and while it certainly does not reject outright the

³² Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', 147.

³³ Judson Boyce Allen, *Ethical Poetic*; Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

³⁴ Minnis and Scott (eds), *Medieval Literary Theory*, 158–64.

³⁵ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*; Glending Olson, 'Making and Poetry'. For a study of how Machaut makes use of these ideas, see Brownlee, *Poetic Identity*.

³⁶ Uitti, 'From *Clerc* to *Poète*'.

³⁷ The classic study of medieval literary culture as the competitive supplanting of classical prestige is Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*; she discusses Jean de Meun at 133–49.

privilege of classical writing, it does critically examine how far any stable position of ‘authority’ can be claimed, including the authors’ own.

The question of meaning will be seen to be closely linked to the question of intention in this thesis, but the *Rose* seems to insist upon the alienation of the text from the author’s intentions, for its potential to slip out of authorial control. For although studies of Latin commentaries on the *auctores* have suggested that the later Middle Ages saw the emergence of a new focus on the author and his responsibility for the text, it is possible to read the evidence in different ways. While the category of *intentio auctoris* persisted in academic prologues to the authors from the twelfth century until the end of the Middle Ages, there is an important question to be asked about how successfully this category constrained the meaning of the texts under scrutiny, even within academic environments.³⁸ The development in the thirteenth century of the ‘Aristotelian prologue’, which co-existed with the older tradition, dispersed the presence of the authorial identity as one among four ‘causes’ that produced the text — the ‘efficient cause’ (*causa efficiens*).³⁹ The notion of the ‘duplex causa efficiens’ allowed Biblical commentators to attribute Scriptural texts both to God and to their human authors,⁴⁰ but in non-Scriptural texts, this concept could lead to the suggestion that a commentator, translator or imitator, like the human author, is only one part of a *causa efficiens* that itself is only one of the four ‘causes’ of a work: a curious disavowal of agency.⁴¹ It is possible to read in Bonaventure’s famous hierarchical taxonomy of the four kinds of authorial activity (*auctor, commentator, compiler, scriptor*) not a rigid set of categories, but instead an anxiety to produce order in a culture with a fluid attitude to authorial responsibility, where the simple act of writing or copying existed on the same scale as the composition of

³⁸ For a description of the headings of the twelfth-century *accessus ad auctores* see Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*, 15–28.

³⁹ Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*, 28–9, 73–117.

⁴⁰ Minnis *Theory of Authorship*, 79–84. ‘From all this it would appear that the influence of Aristotle’s theory of causality as understood by late-medieval schoolmen helped to bring about a new awareness of the integrity of the individual human *auctor*’ (84).

⁴¹ ‘The author of this book is ‘duplex’ [*doppio*]: the first, who created this book of rhetoric from all of the teachings of the philosophers [...] The second author is Brunetto Latini’. Brunetto Latini, ‘Rettorica, ca. 1260’, in Copeland and Sluiter (eds.), *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 759.

original authoritative works.⁴² Christopher Baswell's study of manuscripts of the *Aeneid* in medieval England has shown how the tendency to historicise the activities of an *auctor* existed in parallel with, and indeed facilitated, the tendency to 'register, but then ignore authorial intention' through the imposition of violently divergent allegorical glosses.⁴³ Vincent Gillespie has argued that medieval commentaries on texts by Ovid, in particular, take pleasure in exploring the proliferation of possible meanings, and suggest the 'ellipsis of intention'.⁴⁴ If later medieval scriptural commentary increasingly emphasised the literal sense of the text,⁴⁵ at the same time there was a growth in secular allegoresis of literary texts that imposed radically dislocated meanings, a kind of reading that demonstrably ignored the *intentio auctoris* as a critical category.⁴⁶ It is this plural cultural environment that gives rise to the *Rose*, and in that text's multiplication of potential readings we perhaps see a reflection of the diversity of late-medieval attitudes to literary interpretation and the status of the author.

This study begins with texts produced in France, putting to one side the question of their English afterlives. First, I look at *Rose* itself in detail to examine how it presents a radically skeptical attitude towards how far meaning can be recovered from the text — a phenomenon, I argue, that will provoke or fascinate successive generations of writers. I then turn to look briefly at the other continental poets whose works were widely available in late fourteenth-century England, and who might contribute, in some way, to the understanding of the *Rose* in that environment. Like Jean de Meun, Guillaume de Deguileville and Guillaume de Machaut

⁴² Bonaventure's prologue to his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, where this taxonomy is laid out, is quoted in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 94.

⁴³ Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 165.

⁴⁴ Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to c.1450', 191. Gillespie is here referring to an *accessus* to the *Heroides*; he goes on to point out that the commentaries rarely fulfill the promise of their subtle and plural *accessus*, 192.

⁴⁵ See Minnis and Scott (eds), *Medieval Literary Theory*, 197–212.

⁴⁶ For example, John of Garland, *Integumenta Ovidii* (late 12th century), or the *Ovide moralisé* (early 14th century); cf. the discussion in Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to c.1450', 148–9; for John of Garland, 194; for the *Ovide moralisé*, 200–2.

will link poetry's potential to generate indeterminate meanings to their own identities as writers, and their responsibilities for their texts.

In my subsequent chapters, I turn to fourteenth-century England, beginning by attempting to establish the kinds of cultural environments in which *Rose* may have been consumed, and tracing the evidence for the text's circulation in Britain through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. With the magisterial *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418* soon to emerge, it is becoming increasingly clear just how habitually texts traversed national and linguistic boundaries, and my own study of the movements of the *Rose* reveals a fluid cultural exchange between the continent and the whole of the British Isles in the later Middle Ages.⁴⁷ I also explore what the material evidence might tell us about the social status of *Rose* manuscripts, the kinds of networks in which they circulated and the spaces in which they were stored or read. When I turn to examine individual writers in Chapter 3, I resist the temptation to insist upon a singular attitude towards the *Rose* in each writer's imagination: their relationship with the text is something that is recorded and perhaps also produced *in writing*, it shifts and develops as the works call for different effects and intertextual manoeuvres, and their relationships cannot at last be reduced to a singular stance.

For William Langland, I argue that the *Rose* constitutes an object lesson in the limitations and even the dangers of literary activity as he plots the course of a disordered will on its allegorical journey towards a fugitive and shifting object of desire. John Gower, meanwhile, uses it as a model for his encyclopaedic *Confessio Amantis*, in which knowledge is transmitted even as the grounds for the acquisition of that knowledge are undermined by a threateningly powerful erotic compulsion. The *Gawain*-poet reveals a similar preoccupation with the problematic interaction of knowledge and desire in *Pearl*, even as *Cleanness* shows his final refusal or his inability to embrace the radical instability of meaning transmitted by the *Rose*. Chaucer, more than anyone else, allows himself to be inhabited by the aporia of the *Rose*, and comes close to going as far as Jean with his vision of meaning unmoored from intention and language unmoored from reference. In each instance I examine how far this

⁴⁷ David Wallace (ed.), *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418*.

attitude to meaning relates to the kind of writerly selfhood that the authors inscribe in their texts, and I relate this in turn to their reading of the *Rose*. In my final chapter I examine why this hugely important force in English literary culture seems to fall away after 1400, and why the earliest examples of a self-conscious English literary history were unable to recognise or accept this force.

Chapter 1. The *Romance of the Rose*

Qui ce rommans voudra entendre
 Et les raisons en bon sens prendre
 Noble science y trouuera
 Dont sages hons se prouuera
 Et qui ou droit sens lentendra
 Pour vaillant clerc lateur tendra¹

[He who wants to understand this romance, and to take the argument according to the right meaning, will find here noble knowledge by which he will prove himself to be a wise man; and he who understands it according to the correct/straight sense will hold the author to be an excellent cleric.]

This note occurs as part of a scribal colophon on the final folio of Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 3337. The manuscript contains only the *Romance of the Rose*; the colophon dates the copy to 1390, and states that it was carried out in Sully-sur-Loire.² As a piece of literary criticism of the *Rose* it encapsulates some of the text’s most important features. While acknowledging that the poem contains knowledge (‘noble science’), it also makes it clear that this knowledge is not transmitted directly and unproblematically: it must be sought through the interpretative work of the reader. But with the very suggestion that there is a ‘droit sens’, this scribe summons the possibility of other kinds of reading: a crooked sense that might lead to something less elevated than ‘noble science’. Finally the note suggests that the right reading will offer an insight into the beneficent intentions of the author or ‘ateur’³ — a ‘vaillant clerc’ — but then refuses to prescribe what this right reading might be. The scribe reveals himself or herself to be a sensitive reader of the *Rose*, a poem whose indeterminate meanings are shown to depend upon the unknowable intentions of an elusive author. It is this gap between the poem’s unstable meaning and the envisaged intentions of the author — a gap traversed by the interpretative desires of the reader — that will exercise the imaginations of fourteenth-century English poets, just as it seems to have exercised the imagination of this fourteenth-century scribe in the Loire Valley.

¹ Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 3337, f.123r.

² The colophon is quoted by Huot and the circumstances of the manuscript’s production are discussed in detail in ‘*Romance of the Rose*’, 27, 55–8.

³ Romance languages seem reflect the range of available spellings for *auctor* in Latin, a range that reflects differing interpretations of the word’s etymology. See M.D. Chenu, ‘Auctor, Actor, Autor’.

The threat that the ‘droit sens’ of the *Rose* might slide towards something unacceptably crooked has haunted the poem throughout its twentieth-century critical reception, creating a host of often radically opposed readings.⁴ As Douglas Kelly has noted, critical disagreement seems almost to be ‘an effect the *Rose* demands of its readers’.⁵ After C.S. Lewis’s notorious dismissal of Jean de Meun’s section of the poem as disorganised chaos, critics attempted to rehabilitate Jean’s work by insisting that a right reading would reveal the unity of its meaning, often by sacralising aspects of the *Rose*’s representation of desire and sexuality.⁶ It was the problem of the *Rose*’s meaning that formed one of the contested territories in the conflict that followed studies by D.W. Robertson and John Fleming; these critics attempted to read the poem as an ironic work that, when read rightly, reveals a set of ideas entirely consistent with the orthodox Christian morality of the Middle Ages.⁷ These approaches often relied on the early fifteenth-century *Querelle de la Rose* as a way of circumscribing the range of historically authorised interpretations of the text, even as they ignored the entirely medieval contention of two participants in that debate — that the *Rose* really is an amoral text that privileges the satisfaction of the sexual desire over conventional ethical codes.⁸ Lee Patterson’s famous critique of this kind of reading described its practitioners as ‘Exegetics’, echoing E.H. Gombrich’s critique of a Hegelian ‘exegetical’ philosophy of history in which the singular spirit of an age is thought to manifest itself in every facet of a culture.⁹ The Robertsonian approach has coloured a considerable number of critical studies of the *Rose*’s influence on English poets; all of the writers that I examine have

⁴ It is no longer true, as Alan Gunn claimed in 1951, that all the collected studies of the *Rose* ‘would hardly require a shelf of average length’, *Mirror of Love*, 10. For a guide to the vast bibliography, see Morton, ‘État présent’, and the further bibliographical resources listed there, 79–80.

⁵ Douglas Kelly, *Internal Difference*, 3.

⁶ See for example Gérard Paré, *La scolastique courtoise*, 202–3; Gunn, *Mirror of Love*, 215.

⁷ D.W. Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, 195–207; John V. Fleming, *The ‘Roman de la Rose’*; Fleming, *Reason and the Lover*; see also Charles Dahlberg, ‘Love and the *Roman de la Rose*’.

⁸ This flaw in the Robertsonian approach is pointed out by Per Nykrog, ‘Obscene or Not Obscene’, 324–5. For Christine’s comments on the *Rose* along these lines, see Hicks (ed.) *Débat*, 16; for Jean Gerson’s, *ibid.*, 62. All references to the *Querelle de la Rose* will be to this edition.

⁹ Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*; E.H. Gombrich, ‘In Search of Cultural History’, 31–2.

been viewed by scholars as explicitly anticipating the terms of the *Querelle de la Rose*.¹⁰ This inheritance from Robertson unhelpfully flattens the plurality and subtlety of possible responses to the text, and throughout this study I will resist the temptation to retroject the terms of the *Querelle* onto the decades that precede it. Although Robertson's and Fleming's readings have some alarming implications, their contribution to the field is nevertheless of enormous importance, for, as Gombrich concedes, 'Having criticized a Hegel, a Burkhardt, or a Lamprecht for their excess of self-confidence in trying to solve the riddles of past cultures, I am bound to admit in the end that without confidence our efforts must die of inanition.'¹¹

In the 1980s and 1990s, the question of the meaning of the *Rose* remained central, but with critics emphasising the permissive pluralities of the text rather than attempting to impose a singular interpretation. For Howard Bloch, the *Rose* was a work of radical deconstruction, and Sarah Kay concluded her fine critical guide to the text by suggesting that she found 'considerable similarities' between Jean de Meun and Jacques Derrida.¹² More recently, critics have tried to withdraw a little from the precipice of deconstructivism, not least Kay herself, who has cautioned that by privileging the multivalent and the indeterminate, we run the risk of analysing only the absence of meaning in literary works.¹³ Nevertheless, the suggestion remains that, at its core, the *Rose* might be unknowable.¹⁴ The most committed and convincing attempt to restore a meaning to the *Rose* in recent years has come from Jonathan Morton, who suggests that it is at last an ethical work: 'a new kind of rhetorical-philosophical text that, while following medieval traditions of the moral usefulness of poetry going back via twelfth-century allegoresis and the prosimetrum tradition at least as far as

¹⁰ Isabel Davis, 'Piers Plowman and the *Querelle* of the *Rose*'; R.F. Yeager, *New Arion*, 71; Michael W. Twomey, 'Cleanness 1057–64 and the *Roman de la rose*'; André Crepin, 'La Querelle du *Roman de la rose* anticipée par Chaucer'. See also Fleming, 'Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*'.

¹¹ Gombrich, 'Cultural History', 52–3. Stephen Justice has written an excellent critique of the reflex among medievalists to demonise Robertson without engaging head-on with his approach; Justice points out that Robertson's philosophy of history had much in common with Foucault, and that the backlash against Robertson imposed an equally totalising perspective on the Middle Ages, 'Who Stole Robertson?', 611.

¹² Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*; Sarah Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 116.

¹³ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, xi.

¹⁴ See Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces*, 9–10. But note also Noah Guynn's interesting suggestion that the radical fragmentation of the *Rose* is what allows it to carry out its interpellation of masculinist ideologies, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics*, 165.

Horace, blurs the boundaries between education and entertainment, between dialectic and rhetoric, and gives conclusions less secure than the *scientia* and *opinionones* of the schools.¹⁵ This is a bold and welcome intervention that will shape future studies of the text. Within the constraints of this investigation, I feel unable to gesture towards the final meaning of the *Rose*, or the ends that its authors might have wanted to pursue. There can be no doubt that Jean de Meun deliberately attempts to render the meaning of his poem elusive, and to occlude his own intentions — perhaps these intentions must remain irretrievable. The best readings of the *Rose* have negotiated between a reductive monologism (the text has one meaning) and a reductive dialogism (the text has no meaning): this negotiation must take place in the experience of reading the *Rose*, of navigating a plurality of proffered and retracted meanings. In later chapters, I will examine in detail how English writers respond to particular passages in the *Rose*. In the rest of this chapter I will try to trace the processes that give rise to the dislocating experience of reading the poem, an experience as multiple as the poem's many readers.

How is meaning presented in the *Rose*, and how is this shown to relate to or to be detached from the authorial selves who produced it? To analyse how the *Rose* explores and renders inaccessible its own meaning is no easy task; in my experience the text provokes chains of associative readings by which each episode in the poem can be refracted through the lens of other episodes, problematising the interpretation of the work as a whole. But the *Rose* not only reflects upon its own meaning, it also questions how we should read the texts that it draws into itself and for which it acts as a conduit. To study how the *Rose* presents meaning is also to study a complex system of intertextuality. It is perhaps as a technique of intertextuality that the *Rose* leaves one of its most indelible marks on fourteenth-century poetry.

Guillaume de Lorris begins his poem with the memorable rhyme-pair *songes* and *mençonges* (dreams and lies),¹⁶ before evoking the authority of Macrobius to argue that

¹⁵ Jonathan Morton, 'Nature, Sex, and Language', 125.

¹⁶ This rhyme-pair is exploited in a number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts, and will recur in the *Rose*. See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Remarques sur *songe/mensonge*'. All references to the *Rose* are to *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy.

dreams are not always lies — indeed they are sometimes prophetically true.¹⁷ Already interpretation has been foregrounded as a theme, and already the threat of the poem's own possible untruth has been raised. The interpretation of the prophetic meaning of the dream and the allegorical meaning of the text are superimposed, and Guillaume shores up this emphasis with the narrator's repeated reassurances that the meaning of the dream (and thus also the text) will become clear when a *glose* or interpretation is supplied.¹⁸ After describing the arrows carried by the God of Love, Guillaume's narrator promises to recount their 'verité' and 'senefiance' (980–1), but only at the point at which his narrative comes to an end ('ainçois que define mon conte', 984). Later, having described the fountain of Narcissus — a zone of central importance — the narrator makes a similar claim:

Mes ja mes n'oroiz mielz descriivre
 la verité de la matere,
 quant j'avré apost le mistere.
 (1598–1600)

[You could never hear the truth of the matter better described, when I will have expounded the mystery]

Whether or not it is a deliberate literary effect, Guillaume's text ends abruptly, without providing the promised interpretation of the dream and without closing the dream frame. Guillaume's poem leaves the reader suspended in his unfulfilled desire for interpretative closure just as the Lover is suspended in his unfulfilled desire to pluck the rose. However we read Jean's attitude or attitudes to Guillaume's text,¹⁹ there is no doubt that Jean was provoked by the open-endedness of Guillaume's poem, its refusal to deliver on its promise of a final and conclusive interpretation.

¹⁷ Macrobius's relevance to the late-medieval understanding of the interpretation of dreams (and texts) is discussed by Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, esp. 130–3; see also Whitman, *Allegory*, 94–8.

¹⁸ Blumenfeld-Kosinski tracks some of these self-referential comments on the dream/poem's meaning in 'Overt and Covert'.

¹⁹ Daniel Poirion argued for 'un malaise, une distance, une critique dans la lecture de Guillaume de Lorris par Jean de Meun', 'De la signification selon Jean de Meun', 166. And while scholars continue to present Jean's continuation as largely antagonistic (e.g. Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts', 219), I am convinced by David Hult's suggestion that although Jean's poem can be interpreted as a 'comprehension, revision and perhaps a transcendence of what had become an ossified poetic tradition', there is still an 'irreducible duality' to the text as a whole that fails to undermine Guillaume's activities. Hult, 'Closed Quotations', 269.

In Jean's continuation the narrator will again promise to reveal the text's meaning in the future, but the promise is amplified, and linked more directly to the status of the writer who stands behind the poem and his responsibility for the text that he is writing. This slippage between 'author' and 'narrator' — between the subject who writes the text and the subject who participates in the dream — is symptomatic of Jean's approach:

Et se vos i trovez riens trouble,
 g'esclaircirai ce qui vos trouble,
 quant le songe m'orrez espondre.
 Biens savrez lors d'amors respondre,
 s'il est qui an sache opposer,
 quant le texte m'orrez gloser;
 et savrez lors par cel escrit
 quant que j'avrai devant escrit
 et quant que je bé a escrire.
 (15115–23)

[And if you find anything obscure here, I will explain what troubles you when you hear me expound the dream. Then you will know how to respond regarding love if there is anyone who knows how to oppose it, when you hear me gloss the text; and you will know by this writing what I will have written before and what I intend to write]

Here again we see the assimilation of the *songe* that can be expounded to the *texte* that can be glossed; but as with Guillaume's opening lines, the identification of dream interpretation with textual interpretation opens the destabilising possibility that the *songe* may well be untrue (*mençonge*). But with what seems to be a passing reference to 'what I will have written before', the moment of the text's composition *as* writing is paradoxically presented as subsequent to the moment of its narration *in* writing. Jean collapses author into narrator, *scriptor* into speaker, and the moment of recollection into the moment of experience. The promised *glose* never arrives, and these curious lines detach themselves from the text to which they belong even as they announce their comment upon it. Jean's elusive point seems to be that while we might entertain the fantasy of a total meaning, it must remain external to the text, perhaps something that the reader imposes upon it.

It is one of the features of allegory that it emphasises a tension between what a text seems to mean and what it claims to mean, or the meaning that is claimed for it: 'Allegorical interpretation [...] proposes itself as the unveiling of the text. Yet, paradoxically, such an

interpretation, aiming to “save” or recuperate the text, is itself an act of placing a veil over the *visibilia* of the text, a covering of the text so that it can be hermeneutically “recovered”.²⁰ Allegory, in one famous definition, is ‘other-speaking’, and the interference between the ‘other’ of meaning and the ‘self’ of the text is played with and exploited throughout Jean’s *Rose*.²¹ Yet as well as embodying this tension, the *Rose* also stages it, depicting episodes involving the interpretation of dreams or texts. Raison recounts to Amant the story of Croesus, who tells his daughter Phanie about a strange dream in which he was raised on a tree and attended by the gods. Phanie insists on an allegorical ‘glose’ (6517): the dream means that he will be hanged from a gibbet. Croesus refuses to believe this, insisting upon the literal sense of the dream — it must be taken ‘a la letre’ (6580). Unfortunately for Croesus, Phanie’s gloss is entirely accurate.²² Much later, the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha is recounted.²³ Here it is Deucalion who correctly allegorises the obscure prophecy of the goddess Themis, giving what he calls an ‘exposicion’ (17598): the prophecy does not refer to the literal bones of their literal grandmother, but instead to their figurative grandmother (the earth) and her figurative bones (rocks, 17600–2). Here again the allegorical is seemingly privileged over the literal. But useful allegoresis depends upon the truth-value of the dream or text itself, and Guillaume has already introduced the haunting association of dream (*songe*) with lie (*mençonge*). Against the possibility of an allegorical reading of the dream-text is the alarming suggestion that what we are reading is an entirely unrevelatory account of a meaningless dream that occurred due to a physiological perturbation in the body of the dreamer. The shadow of this possibility is raised by Guillaume, when his Amant, speaking to the God of Love, is told that lovers often dream that they hold their sweethearts in their arms, but that these dreams are

²⁰ Copeland and Melville, ‘Allegory and Allegoresis’, 171.

²¹ ‘Allegory (*allegoria*) is ‘other-speech’ (*alieniloquium*), for it literally says one thing, and another thing is understood’, Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 1.37.22 (63). The bibliography on the *Rose* and allegory is vast; influential studies include Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 112–56; Quilligan, ‘Allegory, Allegoresis’; Wetherbee, ‘The Literal and the Allegorical’. See, in particular, Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s fascinating comparison of allegorical texts, including the *Rose*, to medieval theories of optics, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 45–113.

²² Scholars have attempted, unsuccessfully, to interpret this episode as a guide to how the *Rose* should be read — see Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s discussion of these approaches, ‘*Overt and Covert*’, 437, n.9.

²³ For a comparison of Deucalion and Phanie as represented readers within the text, see Blumenfeld-Kosinski, ‘*Overt and Covert*’, 440–1.

entirely false.²⁴ This piece of advice echoes the vocabulary of Guillaume's opening lines, where the narrator insists that his dream is not an example of *mençonge* or *fable* (1–2):

et avras joie de noiant
 tant con tu iras foloiant
 en la pensee delitable
 ou il n'a que mençonge et fable
 (2431–4)

[And you will have baseless joy, as long as you will continue behaving foolishly in this delightful thought in which there is nothing but lies and fables]

Jean de Meun picks up on this playful self-reflexivity in Guillaume's poem when he presents a radical extension of the same idea. Nature, in her list of the fragmented images that can appear in the disordered imagination, gives as one example what amounts to a compressed summary of Guillaume's narrative:

ou voit Jalousie venant
 un petaill a son col tenant,
 qui prouvez ensamble les treuve
 par Male Bouche, qui contreuve
 les choses ainz que fetes saient,
 don tuit amant par jour s'esmaient
 (18359–74)

[Or he sees Jealousy coming, carrying a pestle round her neck, who finds them caught red-handed²⁵ together, thanks to Male Bouche, who invents things before they can be done, because of whom all lovers are disquieted in the daytime]

On the one hand, we are shown the fruitful possibilities of allegorical interpretation; on the other hand, it is suggested that the text we are reading has no truth to reveal. It seems, then, that a deep reading of the *Rose* that attempts to draw together the dispersed elements of this vast poem does not bring the reader closer to a final and total meaning — instead it undermines the suggestion that such a meaning might exist. It is interesting to note that some of the poem's early readers approached it with exactly the kinds of associative reading that would emphasise these internal ambiguities and contradictions.²⁶

²⁴ Brownlee has identified this as part of a repeated pattern in the *Rose*: the 'programmatic linking of dreams, lies, and the mimesis of naked lovers embracing'; 'Pygmalion, Mimesis, and the Multiple Endings of the *Roman de la Rose*', 199–204.

²⁵ See *DMF*, s.v., *prouver*, B.3.

²⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 3874 contains a detailed thematic index to the *Rose* compiled by a fourteenth-century reader (ff.1r–2v). Its first entry is instructive:

This tension between literal and allegorical meanings is also manifested by the personifications who populate the *Rose*. These potentially decodable allegorical figures have a tendency to become almost contaminated by their surface-meaning in ways that interfere with their claims to represent deeper truths. Nature, a personification of the principles of divine order in the created world, is female; this reflects a tradition of rendering the gender of personified abstract concepts according to the grammatical gender of the words they represent.²⁷ But more than once Nature slips from feminine representation to represented woman, revealing herself to be vulnerable to the weaknesses and vices claimed for women by the misogynistic tradition.²⁸ Similarly, a great deal of the ‘action’ of the plot in both parts of the *Rose* involves the Lover’s relationship with Bel Acueil, a figure usually understood to represent some aspect of the psyche of the female object of desire primarily represented by the Rose. Bel Acueil, again following the grammatical gender of the term he is supposed to personify, is a man. Jean de Meun seems to enjoy amplifying the dissonance between the literal and allegorical levels of the text, by representing what claims to be a story of heterosexual seduction through the interaction of two men. The queer potential of this interaction is undeniable, and as has been shown, medieval readers were not insensitive to the problems and/or pleasures that this dissonance produced: ‘allegories like this derived not from the convergence of the literal and allegorical in one inevitable and morally uplifting truth, but from the possibilities that allegory offers for the exuberant exploratory play and indeterminacy that seems to pervade the *Rose*’.²⁹ This sense of play can also be sensed in Jean’s use of a particular strand of the allegorical tradition, one that, as we shall see, becomes

Que songes peuent apparoir .I.
 Que songes vient de frenesie .VI^{XX}. et .XI.
 (f.1r)

[That dreams can come to pass .I.
 That dreams come from frenzy .VI^{XX}. and .XI.]

See also Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 84.

²⁷ This principle is not always followed in the *Rose* — Male Bouche is represented throughout the text as a man, despite being grammatically feminine.

²⁸ Discussed in Kay, *Romance of the Rose*, 30–1; Wetherbee, ‘The Literal and the Allegorical’, 281. For a study of the conventions of misogyny see Bloch, ‘Medieval Misogyny’.

²⁹ Simon Gaunt, ‘Improper Allegory’, 91; in the quotation above Gaunt is comparing the *Rose* to Rutebeuf’s *Dit du mensonge*. See also David Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 145–67.

central to the *Rose*'s claim to be an 'other-speaking' allegory whose meaning lies beneath the literal level of the text.

‘DROIT SENS’: UNDRRESSING MEANING IN THE *ROSE*

Hans Robert Jauss has demonstrated how Guillaume's *Rose* brings together a number of different allegorical traditions in a new and striking way.³⁰ But with his opening reference to 'Macrobe', Guillaume signals the importance of one particular kind of allegorical reading. Although he is cited as an authority on dreams, Macrobius's fourth-century commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* was also an important conduit for medieval Neoplatonism, and Macrobius was a key author for the twelfth-century Neoplatonists once known as 'Chartrian'.³¹ William of Conches, a major figure in this 'school', wrote an important commentary on Macrobius,³² and Jean de Meun's own cosmology seems to combine various Neoplatonic elements that may be traceable to Macrobius, intermediary twelfth-century sources, or Jean's own idiosyncrasies.³³ Macrobius can be best understood as not simply an authority on dreams, but an authority on the interpretation of a rationally intelligible universe, which includes dreams, poetic fictions, and the natural world. Central to Neoplatonic allegory was the notion of the *integumentum*.³⁴ In the commentary on the *Aeneid* attributed to Bernard Sylvester, it is defined as 'a kind of teaching which wraps up the true meaning inside a

³⁰ Jauss, 'La Transformation de la forme allégorique'.

³¹ R.W. Southern argues that there was no significant intellectual movement based in the cathedral school at Chartres, 'Humanism and the School of Chartres'; he has met resistance from Dronke, 'New Approaches to the School of Chartres'. More recently, Lodi Nauta suggests that the term 'Chartrian' may have outlived its usefulness: Nauta (ed.), William of Conches, *Glosae super Boethium*, xvi. Certainly the elements of the classicising humanism traditionally associated with Chartres can be found well beyond its bounds — particularly in England: see Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 130–5. I will use the term 'Chartrian' with reservations and in inverted commas as an imperfect shorthand for a geographically dispersed group of twelfth-century Neoplatonic authors with an interest in allegory, myth, poetry, and nature. For discussion of their ideas see Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, 49–98; Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*; Stock, *Myth and Science*; Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*; Wei, *Intellectual Culture*, 40–4.

³² An edition of the *Glosae super Macrobius* is in preparation by Helen Rodnite Lemay.

³³ Faith Lyons, 'Some Notes on the *Roman de la Rose*'. For more on the unconventional aspects of Jean's cosmology, see Lucie Polak, 'Plato, Nature and Jean de Meun'.

³⁴ Jeanneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum*'; Chenu, 'Involucrum'. See also the interesting comments of Copeland and Melville, 'Allegory and Allegoresis', 170–1.

fictitious narrative (*fabulosa narratio*), and so it is also called ‘a veil’, (*involucrum*).³⁵ Crucially, Bernard says that the purpose of the integument is to give the reader self-knowledge.³⁶ William of Conches says that within the wider category of the *involucrum* there exist the subgroups of the *integumentum* (fictional coverings of truth in secular texts) and the *allegoria* (the hidden truth of the historical facts recounted in Scripture).³⁷ Alain de Lille describes the *integumentum* in his *De planctu Naturae*, a major source for Jean’s poem; Alain’s Nature concedes that while there are some poetic fictions that transmit veiled truth, these exist on a scale that also includes pure fiction without truth-content.³⁸ Jean de Meun will be the first poet to transfer the term *integumentum* into the vernacular with his reference to the ‘integumentz auz poets’ (7138).

But although Jean demonstrates his clear awareness of integumental theory, his poem contains only very problematic examples of this kind of allegorical approach. The ‘integuments of the poets’ were primarily understood to be *fabulae* — mythological narratives.³⁹ But although both Jean and Guillaume include mythological materials in their work, they tend to read these narratives literally rather than allegorically. We find this first with Guillaume, who turns the tale of Narcissus and Echo into an implausible narrative exemplum addressed to women: ‘Dames, cest essample aprenez’ (1505). Jean echoes this

³⁵ Tr. Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 152. ‘Integumentum est genus demonstrationis sub fabulosa narratione, veritatis involvens intelluctum; unde et involucrum dicitur’, ‘Bernardus Sylvestris’, *Commentum*, ed. Riedel, 3.18. See the discussion of this commentary in Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 84–135.

³⁶ He then quotes the maxim ‘know thyself’ from Macrobius; Minnis and Scott, 153. On the history of this phrase in the Middle Ages see J.A.W. Bennett, ‘*Nosce te ipsum*’.

³⁷ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 42, n.89. The *allegoria* of Scripture was not primarily a feature of its language; Scriptural allegory was also *allegoria in factis*, the historical events recorded by Scripture, but which, ordained by God, signify future events. See Copeland, ‘Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense’; Strubel, ‘*Allegoria in factis et allegoria in verbis*’.

³⁸ Nature says that there are three kinds of poets: those who present ‘naked falsehood to their audience with no protecting garment’; those who ‘clothe falsehood itself with a kind of hypocritical probability’; those who can produce a work that ‘inwardly [...] proclaims the mystery of a deeper truth to the listener, and thus by casting aside the outer rind of falsehood the reader may discover the sweeter kernel of truth hidden within’; *De planctu Naturae*, 8.17, in Alain de Lille, *Literary Works*, ed. and tr. Winthrop Wetherbee. All quotations and translations from Alain will be from this edition.

³⁹ See Peter Dronke, *Fabula*, 5. Note also Marcia Colish’s interesting observation of Augustine, ‘The poets, he says, use words erroneously, since they use them to refer to things and ideas which are nonexistent or untrue’, *Mirror of Language*, 20. Mythological narratives are thus inherently ‘improper’. There was a more-or-less constant discomfort or hostility felt towards the use of mythical fictions in certain contexts in the later Middle Ages; see, e.g., Aquinas’s attitudes to the poets, summarised in Dronke, *Fabula*, 3, n.1.

with his story of Venus and Adonis, which concludes with an equally unlikely exemplary moral addressed to men: ‘Biau seigneur [...] de cest exemple vos souviegne’ (15721–2).⁴⁰ Integumental readings are refused in favour of highly literalistic moral or ironically moral interpretations; Jean in particular manifests a literalising tendency, and the discourse of literal, ‘naked’ satire jostles against the discourse of the *integumentum*.⁴¹ The only mythological narrative that seems to offer the possibility of integumental reading is Raison’s notorious account of the castration of Saturn and the birth of Venus. Raison recounts this myth in her attempt to prove that love is superior to justice, but she does not provide any key to how the allegory should be glossed. Later, Amant will rebuke her for telling this tale, horrified by her use of the word *coilles* (‘balls’) to designate the now detached genitals of Saturn — a violation, Amant feels, of the God of Love’s commandment that a courteous lover’s mouth should never be opened ‘por nommer vilainne chose’ (2099). Figural language is inherently ‘improper’, but Raison both insists that she can speak ‘proprement, sanz glose metre’ (7154) *and also* that, in the case of the castration of Saturn, she spoke integumentally: ‘En ma parole autre sen ot, / au main quant des coillons parloie’ (7128–9, ‘there was another sense in my speech, at least when I was talking about bollocks). This begs the question of how a reader should distinguish between a term meant ‘properly’ and a term meant ‘improperly’ (figuratively). But even worse, Raison seems to situate the allegorical meaning of her narrative in some unspecified external piece of writing: whoever understands the text, ‘le sen verroit en l’écriture, / qui esclarist la fable occure’ (7132–4 ‘he would see the meaning in the writing that would clarify the obscure fable’).⁴² Scholars have noted that there are many available integumental readings of the *fabula* of the birth of Venus; none of them seem to

⁴⁰ For a comparison of the two exemplary morals see Brownlee, ‘Orpheus’s Song Re-sung’, 202.

⁴¹ Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 105–6, 91–9. See also Brown’s analysis of these two competing discourses, ‘Critique and Complicity’.

⁴² In a paper delivered at the Warburg Institute, Nievergelt presents a fascinating alternate reading of these lines: Raison is not positioning meaning, as I suggest, in an external piece of writing (‘l’écriture’), she is instead reflecting Aquinas’s notion that the parabolic sense is contained within the literal sense: Nievergelt, ‘Impropriety, Imposition, and Equivocation’.

offer much help for how we should interpret Raison's story in context.⁴³ When Raison's discourse on 'proper' speech slips into an exploration of the conventional nature of human language, she provides a provocative illustration by suggesting that the word *coilles* could just as easily designate relics, and the word *reliques* could just as easily designate bollocks. In the castration of Saturn and the detachment of *nomen* from *res*, David Hult has seen a central preoccupation of Jean's *Rose*, a 'poetics of dismemberment' which on one level allows for the free play of language, but also makes possible figuration itself.⁴⁴ Other scholars have built on Hult's study to cast light on how this episode reveals Jean's sophisticated use of medieval semantic theory, something that intensifies rather than detracts from its deliberate and wonderful absurdity.⁴⁵ If the principles of integumental allegory suggest that words represent things which in turn represent other, truer things, Raison's discourse on signification ends up suggesting that words represent things only through arbitrary human convention, a claim that threatens to radically destabilise the basis of allegoresis.

The integumental notion of truth covered in fiction is further problematised by being brought into contact with the idea of hypocrisy — a hugely important theme in Jean's poem. Hypocrisy is symbolised above all through the figure of Faux-Semblant, who, after a bewildering speech, is welcomed into the God of Love's army. But a concern with hypocrisy runs all the way through Jean's poem; he seems to suggest that it is inseparable from a certain kind of desire. This linkage of desire and deceit probably stems from Ovid's advice in the *Ars amatoria*, 'fallite fallentes' (1.645, 'deceive deceivers') — and even Raison seems to have been contaminated with this notion when she says that 'it is better to deceive than be deceived' (4369–70).⁴⁶ If the *integumentum* is a fictitious covering that is removed to reveal

⁴³ Sarah Kay, 'Birth of Venus'; Kay reproduces extracts from a number of mythographical sources which interpret the birth of Venus at 29–37. See also Jill Mann, 'Castration of Saturn'.

⁴⁴ Hult 'Language and Dismemberment', 122.

⁴⁵ For readings of this passage in the context of language theory see John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, 69–100; Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, esp. 140–3; Poirion, 'Les mots et les choses'; Poirion, 'De la signification'. Nievergelt has argued for this episode's hitherto unrecognised dependence on a number of grammatical treatises circulating in thirteenth-century Paris, 'Impropriety, Imposition, and Equivocation'.

⁴⁶ Christine de Pizan was particularly troubled that this advice should be given by Raison (*Débat*, ed. Hicks, 14), and I do not feel that Raison's apologists have been able to justify this convincingly. All quotations from the *Ars amatoria* will be from *The Art of Love*, ed. and tr. J.H. Mozley.

the elevated truth it shields, hypocrisy is a fictitious covering that is removed to reveal the ugly truth it disguises. Perhaps what really distinguishes these two discourses of covering is intention: one exists to protect the truth, the other to suppress it. Hypocrites are discussed in terms of their mendacious exterior at several points in the *Rose*. During his discussion with Amant, Amis evokes the figure of a misogynistic jealous husband (*Le Jaloux*). *Le Jaloux* describes a well-dressed and adorned woman as a dung-heap covered in silk:⁴⁷

qui voudroit un fumier covrir
de dras de saie ou de floretes
bien colorees et bien netes,
si seroit certes li fumiers
(8878–81)

[whoever might want to cover a dung-heap with very colourful and clean silk sheets or little flowers, it would still be, certainly, a dung-heap]

But this misogynist depiction of cosmetic deceit carries with it shades of the central metaphor for religious hypocrisy in the Middle Ages, the image of the whitewashed sepulchre, used by Christ to describe the Pharisees in Matthew 23:

quia similes estis sepulchris dealbatis quae a foris parent hominibus speciosa, intus vero plena sunt ossibus mortuorum et omni spurcitia
(Matthew 23:27)

[because you are like the whitewashed tombs which appear externally beautiful to men; inside they are in truth filled with the bones of the dead and all filth]

As we might expect, this image returns repeatedly with reference to Faux-Semblant as he tries to persuade the God of Love to welcome him into his host. The narrator describes Faux-Semblant as ‘blanche dehors, dedenz nercie’ (11983, ‘white outside, inside blackened’), and later Faux-Semblant will actually heavily quote from and provide an extensive gloss on Matthew 23, citing his source (‘de saint Maci’, 11572). There is something provocative in Jean giving to Faux-Semblant the *Rose*’s only explicit reference to the Gospels, and to allow the direct quotation of the words of Christ to appear in the mouth of a figure who explicitly claims, ‘Je sui des vallez Antecrit’ (11683). In quoting Matthew’s Gospel, Faux-Semblant repeats Christ’s advice to the apostles that they should follow Pharisees in speech but not in deed:

⁴⁷ Discussed in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, ‘*Overt and Covert*’, 443.

Fetes ce qu'il sarmoneront,
 ne fetes pas ce qu'il feront
 (11581–2, cf. Matthew 23:3)

[Do as they say/preach; do not do as they do]

Earlier, Raison had said essentially the same thing, telling the Lover that false preachers are in fact themselves deceived — another curious echo of Ovid's 'fallite fallentes':

Deceüz est tex decevierres,
 car sachez que tex preeschierres,
 combien qu'il aus autres profit,
 a soi ne fet il nul profit,
 car bone predicacion
 vient bien de male entencion
 (5079–84)

[Such deceivers are deceived, for know that such preachers, however much they benefit others, they do not benefit themselves, for good preaching certainly comes from bad intention]

It is entirely orthodox to suggest that the ritual powers invested in the clergy meant that the words they uttered in sermons would always have a positive effect, no matter how evil their intentions.⁴⁸ But although orthodox, this notion is extremely destabilising, and the lengths to which Augustine goes to justify this in the final sections of the *De doctrina Christiana* reveal an anxiety, perhaps, about its implications.⁴⁹ For if intention is completely unmoored from the speech of hypocritical preachers, where does that leave other speech-acts, not supported by the verifying powers of religious ritual? By shifting the terms of integumental uncovering to suggest that a mendacious exterior reveals only deeper and worse falsehoods, Faux-Semblant raises some very difficult questions about how far we might be able to uncover the intentions of the author we are reading.

NATURE, SEX, AND ILLICIT DESIRE

One of the ways in which Jean explores meaning, intention, and truth is, as I have mentioned, through Raison's comments on the 'integumentz aus poetes'. A strange consequence of the

⁴⁸ For an examination of this tradition, see Irene Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*; Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 40–8. Minnis points out that preachers were positively encouraged to hide their sins from their congregation, 40–1.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 277ff.

Neoplatonic idea of the *integumentum* — and one that Jean was particularly sensitive to — was the implicit eroticisation of the revelation of truth.⁵⁰ Macrobius tells the story of Numenius, who, having revealed the Eleusinian mysteries, receives a dream in which he sees the Eleusinian goddesses outside a brothel, dressed as prostitutes, complaining that he has violated their modesty by revealing them to any common passer-by.⁵¹ When Boethius's narrator first sees Philosophy, her dress has been torn by the ravages of philosophers, suggesting a parallel between intellectual violence and sexual violence (1.pr1.22–4). The twelfth-century Latin poem *Nuda Natura* recounts the narrator's vision of an embarrassed female personification of Nature, who has been stripped naked by the expository efforts of natural philosophers.⁵² Strangest of all, perhaps, is the epitaph written for Thierry of Chartres: Philosophy exposed herself naked to him, then they got married and produced children together.⁵³ Jean de Meun is fully aware of this tradition, and plays with the reader's position in relation to the truth that might be uncovered through interpretation. Just as Amant finds his approach to the Rose obstructed by a series of concentric enclosures which he must penetrate,⁵⁴ the reader remains outside the outermost structure that encloses the rose: the dream and the text whose surface must be penetrated and whose meaning must be uncovered. When Genius delivers his sermon to the God of Love's host, exhorting them to reproduce sexually, one of his favoured metaphors for sexual reproduction, along with ploughing and hammering, is writing.⁵⁵ This metaphor is derived from Alain de Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, and is related to the Aristotelian notion that reproduction is the result of male form imposed upon female matter (the phallic pens, 'greffes', writing on the passive 'beles tables precieuses', 19599–601).⁵⁶ There is something figuratively erotic in the reader's act of

⁵⁰ See Vincent Gillespie, 'Allegory, Allegoresis, and the Erotics of Reading'.

⁵¹ Macrobius, *Dream of Scipio*, 86–7.

⁵² The poem is edited and discussed in F.J.E. Raby, 'Nuda Natura and Twelfth-Century Cosmology'.

⁵³ André Vernet (ed.), 'Une épitaphe inédite de Thierry de Chartres'. Cited and trans. Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 29.

⁵⁴ Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 46–8.

⁵⁵ Huot suggests that Genius's focus on writing and generative sex should be contrasted with the potentially sterile valences of the lyric activities of Orpheus, *From Song to Book*, 97; see also Morton, 'Ingenious Genius', 14–18.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the importance of artificial metaphors for natural activity, see Morton, 'Ingenious Genius', 4.

interpretative undressing,⁵⁷ and there is something figuratively erotic in the poet's act of writing. But the nature of this erotic experience is highly problematic.⁵⁸

It is in the context of her discussion of the 'integumentz auz poetes' that Raison echoes the Horatian maxim about the purpose of poetry, 'en delitant profiteras, / en profitant deliteras' (7143–4).⁵⁹ David Rollo has argued that Jean emphasises *deliz* over *profiz*, privileging a kind of reading in which the pleasure of the text is extended and the consummation of the desire for interpretative clarity is endlessly deferred.⁶⁰ But if this kind of reading and this kind of writing are available as metaphors for an erotic activity, what manner of activity might this be? The presentation of textual activity begins to overlap in disorienting ways with questions of licit and illicit desire. By having Amant first see his Rose after looking into the fountain of Narcissus, Guillaume raises the possibility that what is really desired is not an external object, but an internal image — a mental phantasm, in Giorgio Agamben's remarkable reading.⁶¹ There is a potential sterility in this desire and the pleasure it produces, and the authors of both parts of the *Rose* are acutely aware of this. It is this awareness that underpins a passage towards the end of Guillaume's poem, where Amant laments that he has sown his seed on barren ground (3932–42). This wasting of seed is significant: while the history of Christian sexual prohibition is extremely complicated, and there is no space to explore it here, one radically teleological strain of thought emphasised the reproductive ends of sexual activity to such an extent that all non-generative sexual acts became associated with sodomy. Walter of Châtillon, for example, presents a telling euphemism for homosexual activity: 'semen fundunt in arena' (they scatter their seed on sand).⁶² Peter Damian, who is likely to have been the originator of the term *sodomia* in the

⁵⁷ See Brown, 'Critique and Complicity', 139.

⁵⁸ 'The verbal patterns suggest that the amorous and the interpretive conquests in the *RR* are identical: the consequence of this confusion is [...] the subversion of the allegorical system as it is usually defined.' Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Overt and Covert', 438.

⁵⁹ *Ars poetica*, 333–4. For the importance of Horatian poetics to the Middle Ages see Gillespie, 'Never Look a Gift Horace in the Mouth'.

⁶⁰ Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 199.

⁶¹ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 73–89; see also Poirion, 'Narcisse et Pygmalion', 161–2.

⁶² Quoted in Ziolkowski, *Grammar of Sex*, 67. For Alain de Lille's use of a similar metaphor, see *ibid.*, 67, n.46. The classic discussion of the history of Christian sexual regulation remains Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*; for prohibitions against sodomy see Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*; for

eleventh century, similarly associated homosexual activity with the wasting of seed: for him the category of sodomy included masturbation on its lowest level.⁶³ Later scholastic accounts will increasingly assimilate all sexual sin to the wasting of pre-embryonic sexual matter (i.e., semen), drawing a categorical link between male–male homosexual intercourse and other non-generative acts of spilling seed (including heterosexual acts).⁶⁴ It is partly as a response to these elements in Guillaume’s poem and partly as a response to Alain de Lille that Jean discusses sodomy in very explicit terms.⁶⁵ Jean’s Genius excommunicates the sodomites who refuse to use their genitals for reproductive activity, pronouncing the curiously self-defeating penalty of castration (19641–2), which he will later condemn as a terrible sin (20020). But Genius’s condemnation of the sodomites comes immediately after his vehement condemnation of another group who do not use their genitals to perpetuate the species: virgins. Jean de Meun does not go quite so far as to have Genius make an explicit connection between sodomy and virginity, but he comes very close; the practitioners of both activities should feel ‘grant honte’ (19531, 19652, ‘great shame’). There is a sense here that a teleological understanding of sexual sin is being parodied, or perhaps simply that the drives and motivations of the species are shown to be incommensurable with the experience of the individual.

Jean’s Raison also comments on licit and illicit sexual activities. In a strange example of the kinds of intertextual complexities that the *Rose* weaves, Raison makes what seems to be a passing reference to the *De planctu Naturae* which turns out also to be a reference to what will come to pass later in the *Rose* itself. Everyone experiences the pains of love, she says, apart from those

literary representations see Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and the Law*. John Boswell has attempted the more difficult task of a history of individuals with a preference for sexual activity with other individuals of their own gender: *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*.

⁶³ See Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, 4; on Damian, see Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 45–66.

⁶⁴ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 128–30.

⁶⁵ The presentation of sodomy in Alain’s *De planctu* and Jean’s *Rose* has been compared by many scholars. See Susan Schibanoff, ‘Sodomy’s Mark’; Morton, ‘Queer Metaphors and Queerer Reproduction’; Morton revises this article as ch.5 of ‘Nature, Sex, and Language’. Where Schibanoff sees Jean as an ‘anxious’ writer attempting to forestall the threats of sodomy in Alain’s poem, Morton sees Jean as consciously playing with Alain’s implication that poetic activity itself runs the risk of being figuratively ‘sodomitical’.

de male vie
 que Genius esconmenie
 pour ce qu'il font tort a Nature
 (4313–5)

[evil living ones, whom Genius excommunicates because they commit wrongs against Nature]

But it is not clear how easily such evil-living people can be distinguished from lovers in general. There is a blurring between the different categories of sexual transgression; just as it is Iocus, Delight, who is produced by deviance in Alain's *De planctu* (10.12–3), the pursuit of pleasure detracts from (if it does not deviate from) the natural *telos* of sexual activity.⁶⁶

Reason hints at this in one of the definitions she offers for love:

Amant autre chose n'entant,
 ainz s'art et se delite en tant.
 De fruit avoir ne fet il force,
 au deliter sanz plus s'esforce.
 (4355–8)

[A lover does not understand anything else, since he delights and burns in it so much. He doesn't care about producing fruit/profit, his efforts are directed towards pleasure and nothing more]

Whether or not Jean is understood to be critiquing the sterility of the 'courtly' desire represented in Guillaume's poem, the fact remains that the 'delit' generated by reading the *Rose* is presented in terms remarkably similar to the pleasures of ungenerative sex. This suggestion is shored up by one of Genius's more detailed metaphors for sodomitical desire: perverting the meanings of the texts you read as you transmit them:

cil qui tel mestresse despisent
 quant a rebours ses regles listent,
 et qui, por le droit san antandre,
 par le bon chief nes veulent prandre,
 ainz pervertissent l'escriture
 quant il viennent a la lecture
 (19627–32)

[those who despise such a mistress when they read her rules backwards, and who do not want to take them the right way up in order to understand the correct/straight sense, but they pervert the writing when they come to the reading]

⁶⁶ Peter Lombard states that sex engaged in purely for pleasure, and not aimed at the generation of offspring, is no better than adultery or fornication; quoted in Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 611.

It is here that we begin to understand the fuller significance of the scribal note with which this chapter opened. The very attempt to insist upon a ‘droit sens’ (straight sense) raises the possibility of other kinds of meaning, and although Genius condemns the pleasurable deviations of those who ‘follow Orpheus’ (19621–4), the pluralities of the text seem to incline away from the stability of a ‘straight sense’ and towards the dangerously seductive pleasures of the indeterminate.

‘EACH OF THEM LIES DEAD AND ROTTED’: REWRITING THE OVIDIAN TRADITION

Meaning is thematised in the *Rose*, and meaning is deliberately withheld. This problematisation of meaning is directly related to Jean de Meun’s intertextual processes — illuminated in Huot’s invaluable *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets* — and these in turn are related to Jean’s self-presentation as an author in some way responsible for the meaning of the text he creates:

Guillaume and especially Jean encourage their readers to discover new meanings in old texts. Even more to the point, the dynamic of this intertextual mosaic allows a different ‘knowledge’ to emerge: unspoken, but discernable nonetheless as a key to the poem’s meandering pathways and sometimes puzzling disputations. It is this bodily knowledge of sexual pleasure, pain and desire that determines many of the textual reminiscences and associations throughout the *Rose*, and which therefore may be absorbed by a reader who engages with the poem.⁶⁷

In what follows I will examine how the *Rose* positions itself in relation to one of its most important intertexts, the works of Ovid, before examining how this Ovidianism is superimposed upon on a number of other texts and traditions, not least the tradition of Neoplatonic cosmological allegory. But before turning to these interactions, I will pause to examine the practices of citation and allusion in the *Rose*, a practice that can be illuminated as much by the *Rose*’s own internal self-reference as its relationship with external texts.

If it does not stretch the meaning of the term ‘intertextuality’ beyond its usefulness, it is possible to suggest that the *Rose*’s most important intertext is itself: it is, perhaps, ‘intra-textual’. On one level, this self-reference takes place diegetically, within the constraints of the narrative. Amant receives the ten commandments of the God of Love, which he claims to

⁶⁷ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 101. See also Nancy Freeman Regalado, ““Des contraires choses””.

report ‘mot a mot’ (2057); later, in Jean’s narrative, Amant is asked to recite these as part of his penance to the God of Love, ‘en leu de *Confiteor*’ (10366), and later still La Vieille refers to them again, suggesting that the final two should be removed from the list (12980–98). The God of Love’s commandments are taken as a fallible ‘texte’ (13003) whose authority can be twisted in different directions by different speakers. But the self-reference of the *Rose* also takes place, as it were, extra-diegetically, with figures inside the narrative referring to the text in which they participate as if it were a written object to which they were somehow external. The most extended example of this is Genius’s sermon, in which he takes as his text the narrative of Guillaume de Lorris — the narrative that Jean has continued and within which Genius is contained. Genius begins by claiming that he will make a ‘comparaison’ (20255) of his beautiful circular park of the lamb with the square-walled garden seen earlier by the Lover,

ou cil amanz vit la querole,
ou Deduiz o ses genz querole
(20251–2)

[Where this lover saw the *carole*, where Dedit and his retinue dance a *carole*]

But although he begins by referring to Guillaume’s narrative as if it were something seen and experienced by ‘cilz amanz’ — the diegetic narrator who remains present within the fiction of the narrative — Genius curiously slips into referring to the events of Guillaume’s narrative as if they were a mendacious text, produced by an author with the intent to deceive:⁶⁸

Puis si reidit que c’est sanz fins
qu’ele est plus clere qu’argenz fins.
Vez de quex truffles il vos pleide!
(20401–3)

[Then he says again that it is eternally more clear than fine silver. See what trifles he relates to you!]

Genius slides from seeing Guillaume’s dream as an experience recounted by a narrator to a text produced by an author. But Genius also refers to parts of Jean’s own narrative in this

⁶⁸ Kevin Brownlee suggests that ‘the status of Guillaume de Lorris throughout Genius’s extended comparison is that of a poet-narrator (even when he is treated as lover)’, ‘Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance’, 121. I feel, however, that there is a perceptible shift in Genius’s presentation of Guillaume between an emphasis on his *participation* in the narrative and his *production* of the narrative.

destabilising way. In his sermon Genius mentions that the vices that lead to Hell are recounted by his mistress Nature, and ‘vos an trouveroiz .XXVI.’ (19840). He then goes on to say:

Assez briefmant les vos expose
li jolis *Romanz de la Rose*
(19851–2)

[The lovely *Romance of the Rose* expounds them to you quite briefly]

This is the only occurrence in Jean’s narrative of the title which Guillaume claimed for his own poem (37),⁶⁹ but Genius is without doubt referring to Jean’s narrative — he is in fact referencing his own dialogue with Nature a few hundred lines earlier, where, sure enough, twenty-six vices are mentioned (19195–207).

The *Rose* is thus an excellent example of that literary self-reflexivity that so fascinated and perturbed Borges.⁷⁰ It comments on itself, contradicts itself, and is in some ways incommensurable with itself. This incommensurability can also be seen in the way in which the *Rose* uses its intertexts. Just as the profusion of voices in the *Rose* makes it very difficult to identify a stable authorial position, the fact that the poem functions as an echo-chamber of quotation and allusion further diffuses the text’s meaning away from any singular, central position. When the narrator makes his notorious ‘apology’ to women and to members of religious orders who might be offended by his anti-feminist or anti-fraternal satire, he is in one sense entirely accurate in his claim that ‘je n’i faz riens fors reciter’ (‘I do nothing except repeat’, 15204).⁷¹ The fact that the narrator has already undermined the grounds of this apology by claiming that the poets who transmit these antifeminist ideas do so entirely accurately, their knowledge supported by the proof of experience (15195–200), should make us alert to Jean’s relentless strategies of occluding any singular authorial opinion within his narrative voice or within the voices of the figures that populate his text.

⁶⁹ Brownlee, ‘Limits of Romance’, 127–8.

⁷⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Partial Magic in the *Quixote*’.

⁷¹ Huot gathers some occurrences of the word *reciter* in the *Rose*, and suggests that it ‘implies a use of language that is less concerned with expressing the ideas of the speaker, or with representing the empirical world, than with citing the ideas of the previous speaker, or even with the representation of language itself as an object’, *The ‘Romance of the Rose*’, 180.

In some ways Jean's use of Ovid reflects this attitude, for the *Rose* does not present a singular version of Ovid, but rather a proliferation of available medieval Ovidianisms that are difficult to reconcile with each other.⁷² It seems likely that Jean has deployed these divergent versions of Ovid systematically, drawing on the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ars Amatoria* in a series of concentric nested episodes.⁷³ Dead in the centre of the *Rose*, at its mid-point, we find yet another Ovid, as Jean imitates the elegy for Tibullus from Book 3 of the *Amores*. In the romance tradition, the mid-point of the narrative is a heavily significant point, and it is often a moment at which identities are contested or revealed.⁷⁴ In the *Rose*, it is the identities of the poem's two authors that are exposed, all as part of an extended imitation of the *Amores*. I will conclude this chapter with a close analysis of this passage, since it encapsulates the elaborate play with meaning that is so typical of Jean de Meun, and that will form a hugely important model for the English poets that I examine in the rest of this thesis.

Everything we know, or think we know, about the biography of Guillaume de Lorris is related to us by this passage in Jean's *Rose*. And while it has been examined many times by scholars,⁷⁵ less work has been done on the dependence of this passage on its Ovidian intertext.⁷⁶ It occurs when the God of Love is addressing his army. The God of Love exhorts his barons to storm Jealousy's castle to ensure the release of Bel Accueil, and in emphasising the importance of this mission he slips into an imitation of the elegy for Tibullus from the *Amores*:

⁷² For the medieval reception of Ovid, see Ghisalberti, 'Medieval Biographies of Ovid'; Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*; Demats, *Fabula*, 101–77; Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to c.1450', 186–206.

⁷³ For Jean de Meun's use of Ovid, see Bouché, 'Ovide et Jean de Meun'; Cahoon, 'Raping the Rose'; Allen, '*Ars amandi, ars legendi*'. Several scholars have commented on Jean's 'nesting' of concentric narratives within each other (e.g., Narcissus towards the beginning and Pygmalion towards the end; Books I and II of the *Ars amatoria* in the mouth of Amis and Book III in the mouth of La Vieille). See Porion, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 125; Patterson, "'For the Wyves love of Bathe'", 670, 672–3; Kay, *Romance of the Rose*, 58.

⁷⁴ Uitti, 'From *Clerc* to *Poète*', 212; Huot, *From Song to Book*, 72, 93–4.

⁷⁵ Uitti, 'From *Clerc* to *Poète*'; Brownlee, 'Orpheus's Song Re-Sung', esp. 208, n.15; Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces*, 54–60; Mary Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World*, 280–6; Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics*, 141–50.

⁷⁶ The notable exceptions being Sylvia Huot, *Dreams of Lovers* and John Fleming, 'Jean de Meun and the Ancient Poets'. Michèle Gally examines the passage as part of a wider investigation of the Ovidianism of the *Rose*, *L'Intelligence d'amour*, 35–7. Cahoon does not look at this passage in her study of the *Rose*'s debt to the *Amores*, 'Raping the Rose'.

S'il n'en ist, je suis maubailiz,
 puis que Tibullus m'est failliz,
 qui connoissent si bien mes teiches,
 por cui mort me brisai mes fleiches,
 quassai mes ars
 (10478–81)

[If he should not get out of it [the Castle of Jealousy], I am hard done by, since I have lost Tibullus, who knew my teachings so well, at whose death I broke my arrows, broke my bows]

Jean's fiction allows Cupid to express his grief at Tibullus's death as if it were a remembered experience; in the *Amores*, the speaker of the lyric mourns Tibullus's passing by imagining a distraught Cupid at the poet's funeral pyre:

ecce, puer Veneris fert eversamque pharetram
 et fractos arvus et sine luce facem
 (3.9.7–8)

[Look, Venus's boy comes with an inverted quiver and broken arrows and an extinguished torch]
 (my translation)⁷⁷

Later in the elegy, Ovid permits himself to imagine or to hope that Tibullus will be joined in Elysium by the other writers of elegiac love-poetry: Calvus, Gallus, and Catullus (3.9.59–64). Jean will echo this notion by having his God of Love continue to mourn other dead love-poets who have fallen since Tibullus: 'Gallus, Catillus et Ovides, / qui bien sorent d'amors trestier' (10492–3). Already there is something extremely suggestive in the inclusion of Ovid in a list of dead poets derived from a poem by Ovid. Extending this notion, the God of Love goes on to name another poet, who, he seems to suggest, is present amongst them, presumably as the fictive narrator, Amant:

Vez ci Guillaume de Lorriz
 cui Jalousie, sa contraire,
 fet tant d'angoisse et de deul traire
 (10496–8)

[Behold here Guillaume de Lorris, who Jealousy, his opponent, caused to experience so much anxiety and pain]

In his reading of the *Rose*, Daniel Heller-Roazen has placed a great deal of emphasis on the status of the narrator as a 'contingent subject', who can be associated with neither

⁷⁷ All quotations and most translations of the *Amores* will be taken from *Heroides and Amores*, ed. and tr. Grant Showerman. My own translations, when used, will be indicated as such.

Guillaume de Lorris nor Jean de Meun — Heller-Roazen suggests that the ‘I’ of the poem must constitute ‘a third figure, irreducible to the two authors of the poem’.⁷⁸ But in fact the text does seem to suggest that Guillaume is somehow present in the body of the narrator at this moment: ‘Vez *ci* Guillaume de Lorris’ (‘Behold *here* Guillaume de Lorris’, my emphasis). This modification would only strengthen Heller-Roazen’s argument that ‘The text of the romance, in this scene, refers the poetic ‘I’ to Guillaume and Jean and, at the same time, renders that reference impossible; it attributes the discourses of the poem to two figures and yet contests the very possibility of such an attribution’.⁷⁹ For, strangely, the God of Love goes on to prophesy that after Guillaume’s death, his incomplete narrative will be continued by a poet called Jean de Meun, who, we are told ‘n’est mie *ci* presanz’ (10579, ‘is not present *here*’, my emphasis). Through the bizarre fiction of projecting into the future the writing of the text in which he is contained, the God of Love is able to cite the lines at which Guillaume’s text will end (i.e., has ended). He directly quotes the final lines of Guillaume’s narrative (10525–30, quoting 4023–8), stating ‘*Ci* se reposera Guillaumes’ (10531, ‘*here* Guillaume will rest’, my emphasis). This suggests both the termination of Guillaume’s poem at a particular textual point, line 4028, and the final resting of Guillaume after death, as well as deeply problematising the earlier reference to Guillaume as fictively present within the imagined space of the narrative. Jean’s poem, a great deal of which the reader has already passed through by this point, is also prophesied, with the God of Love quoting the lines that will begin (i.e., have begun) Jean’s section of the poem, and even echoing the final lines of the entire work.

Before pursuing the full significance of this central Ovidian interaction, it is worth pausing to consider the profound ambiguities that this episode creates around the identity of the narrator and how that narrator might relate to the author.⁸⁰ Heller-Roazen is certainly right to stress that one of the central indeterminacies of the *Rose* is the difficulty we have with

⁷⁸ Heller-Roazen, *Fortune’s Faces*, 53.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁰ See Laurence de Looze’s attempts to situate this passage in the *Rose* in a longer tradition of authorial signatures in francophone literary texts, ‘Signing Off in the Middle Ages’.

associating the text with a single authorial identity. If Jean's poem delimits the boundaries between his section and Guillaume's, it also introduces a curious overlap. Guillaume is 'present' and Jean is 'not present' within his own text; the present absence of Guillaume becomes analogous to the more troubling present absence of any writer in their text. A.C. Spearing's recent monographs are important interventions in medieval studies for many reasons, not least through the contention that medieval texts rarely or never seek to construct a fully psychologised 'character' in the narrator, a figure whose utterances are always ironically distanced from that of the author.⁸¹ The dynamics of Jean's poem reveal an excellent example of how the narratorial voice — perhaps any voice — can neither be securely associated with nor distanced from the author who produces it; the *je* of the poem becomes 'multireferential', and if there is a distinction between these different kinds of reference it is perhaps not in terms of authorial identity but in terms of the distinction that separates different orders of experience, 'direct erotic experience from the mediated work of the writer.'⁸² Medieval manuscripts of the *Rose* reveal this ambiguity at work: Huot has described the attempts of rubricators to distinguish between authorial and narratorial utterances with the tags 'Cy parle acteur' (here the author speaks) and 'Cy parle amant' (here the lover speaks); she argues that these reveal the scribes' attempts to straighten out the confusing pluralities of this polyvocal work.⁸³ But the early reception of the *Rose* might also show, in some cases, a willingness to embrace a more supple and permissive attitude to how meaning might be generated. The most radical example of this that I have seen occurs in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Aquisti e Doni 153.⁸⁴ The manuscript is heavily rubricated, and takes a particular interest in identifying speakers: 'l'acteur parole'; 'Li amans parole'; 'Raison parle a lamant'.⁸⁵ However, after the God of Love's prophecy introduces an ambiguity into the relationship between narrator and author, a new kind of rubric begins to

⁸¹ A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*, 69. See also Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*.

⁸² Hult, 'Closed Quotations', 268.

⁸³ Huot, "'Cy parle l'auteur'", esp. 45.

⁸⁴ Described in Langlois, *Manuscrits*, 184–7. See also Simonetta Mazzoni Peruzzi, *Il Codice Laurenziano Aquisti e Doni 153*.

⁸⁵ Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Aquisti e Doni 153, f.11r, f.27r, f.39v. Peruzzi also transcribes all rubrics in *Il Codice Laurenziano*, 11–28.

appear: ‘Lauteur *et* amant *parle*’.⁸⁶ This interpretation allows the speech of the narrator to be referred *both* to the fictional figure of Amant *and* to the extra-diegetic author of the *Rose*. By my count the rubric ‘Lauteur *et* amant’ occurs forty-three times in the rest of the manuscript, interchangeably designating speech that could be attributed to either the diegetic narrator or the extra-diegetic author. Although ‘Lauteur’ and ‘Amant’ continue to appear singularly in a few instances, the God of Love’s prophecy seems to have irremediably blurred the distinction between them for this rubricator.

We see evidence of a similar effect in a late fourteenth-century manuscript, BL, MS Yates Thompson 21. The producers of this manuscript have not marked the beginning of Jean’s continuation: instead, the rubric ‘*Ci commence maistre Iehan de meun*’ appears above an author portrait at the point where the God of Love begins his prophecy.⁸⁷ This is a reasonably common error, and bespeaks the confusions that could arise from the revelation of the authorial identities at this point. In this author portrait, a clerical figure is shown seated at a desk, writing into a book.⁸⁸ The miniaturist has gone to considerable lengths to show exactly what the author is writing at this point, even rendering the actual text on the page: on one leaf, ‘*Maintes gens dient que en*’, then, on the other ‘*songes nent se fiable*’.⁸⁹ These, of course, are the incipit of the *Rose* — that is to say, the beginning of that part of the poem attributed to Guillaume de Lorris. But with the portrait positioned immediately between a rubric that reads ‘*Ci commence maistre Iehan de meun*’ (f.68r) and the line of the text that reads ‘*Puis viendra Jean Chopinel*’ (f.68v), it is very difficult to interpret this as a portrait of anyone other than the figure whose arrival the text and paratext are announcing. This image may represent a confusion of the identities of Guillaume and Jean, or it may reveal a different conception of how the subjectivity of the text should be associated with the authors who

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, f.126r.

⁸⁷ BL, MS Yates Thompson 21, f.69r.

⁸⁸ This is ‘unrealistic’: scribes wrote on unbound quires. It has been suggested that author portraits depict authors writing into bound books as a way of representing their authoritative status: Hult, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*, 80; see also Herman Braet, ‘Du Portrait d’auteur dans le *Roman de la Rose*’, 87, n.28.

⁸⁹ BL, MS Yates Thompson 21, f.69v. It can be usefully contrasted with the example looked at by Herman Braet, ‘Du Portrait d’auteur dans le *Roman de la Rose*’, 89.

produced it. Even if this is the result of a simple error or misunderstanding on the part of the scribe, it nevertheless produces an ‘accidental meaning’ for the reader, a meaning with extremely suggestive implications.⁹⁰

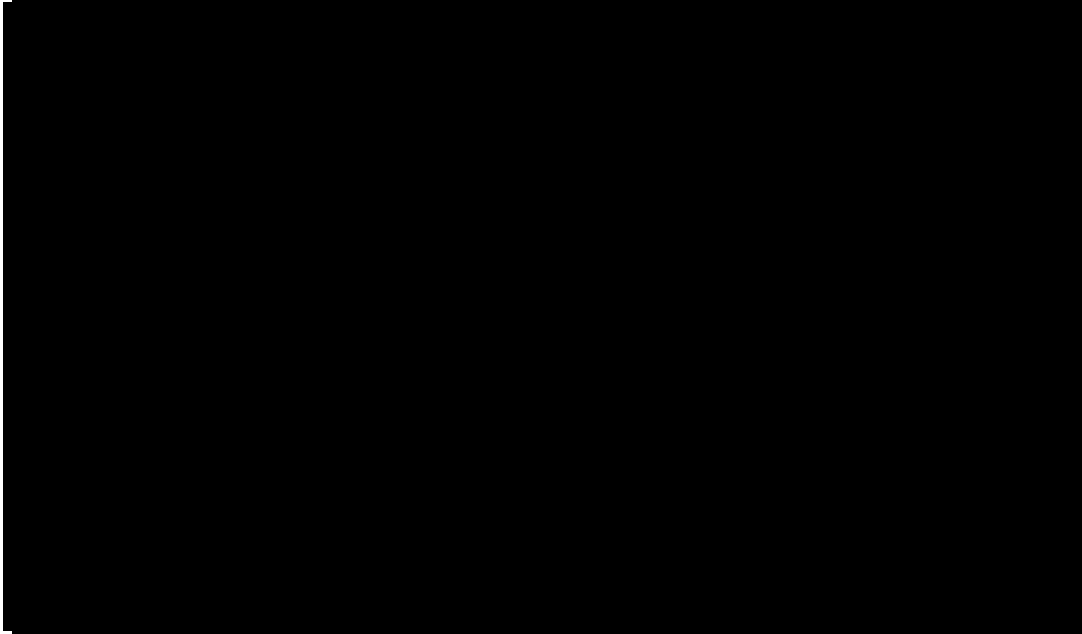


Fig. 1. BL, MS Yates Thompson 21, f.69v.

Jean’s identity not only overlaps with Guillaume’s, it is also dispersed among the intertexts that cross through his poem; his own self-naming in imitation of Ovid is an excellent example of this phenomenon. By naming himself and Guillaume de Lorris fifth and sixth in a sequence of authors that includes Tibullus and Ovid, Jean, it has been argued, makes a claim to the kinds of value associated with the classical poets; his self-presentation here has been compared to the twelfth-century *accessus ad auctores*.⁹¹ But while there can be no doubt that Jean is doing something quite unprecedented in vernacular writing,⁹² the claims that he seems to make for his own status, and, perhaps even the value of the classical

⁹⁰ The term ‘accidental meaning’ is used by Alcuin Blamires and Gail C. Holian, *The ‘Romance of the Rose’ Illuminated* to describe possibly unintended but nevertheless available meanings produced by the interactions of image and text in *Rose* manuscripts. Sylvia Huot takes the notion further in her ‘Women and “Woman”’.

⁹¹ Uitti, ‘From *Clerc* to *Poète*’, 215; Zumthor, ‘Narrative and Anti-Narrative’, 199–200.

⁹² It is perhaps a testament to the innovative nature of this manoeuvre that several medieval scribes seem to have understood Jean’s literary predecessor to be not ‘Guillaume de Lorris’ but ‘Guillaumes Tybullus’. Hult notes one example of this in *olim* Oxford, BodL, MS Astor A 12, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*, 78 (this manuscript was temporarily lodged at the Bodleian when Hult consulted it; returned to private ownership, it has since been stolen). I have seen the same variant in Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 479 (911), f.90r.

tradition, are highly qualified. This moment of self-naming as sixth in a group of six has been compared to Dante's narrator in Canto IV of the *Inferno*, who is welcomed into the *bella schola* of pagan poets, forming with them a company of six (*sesta compagna*).⁹³ But a sensitivity to Ovid's *Amores* deeply problematises Jean's activities at this central point of his poem: this is not a self-authorising or self-monumentalising moment. For although Ovid expresses his hope that Tibullus will encounter his fellow elegiac love-poets after death, *Amores* 3.9 is also shot through with a remarkable quasi-materialism, not least in its almost Lucretian skepticism towards the existence of the gods:

Quid vos sacra iuvant? quid nunc Aegyptia prosunt
 sinistra? quid in vacuo secubuisse toro?
 cum rapiunt mala fata bonos — ignoscite fasso! —
 sollicitor nullos esse putare deos.
 (3.9.33–6)

[What boot your sacrifices? What now avail the sistrums of Egypt? What your repose apart in faithful beds? When evil fate sweeps away the good — forgive me who say it! — I am tempted to think there are no gods.]
 (489)

It is perhaps for this reason that Ovid introduces the possibility of the soul outliving the body only contingently, as a hypothesis:

Si tamen e nobis aliquid nisi nomen et umbra
 restat, in Elysia valle Tibullus erit.
 (3.9.59–60)

[Nevertheless, *if* (my emphasis) anything of us remains apart from name and shade, Tibullus will be in the Elysian vale.]
 (my translation)

The point of Ovid's elegy is to insist upon the work, the poem, as the only thing that can be said with any certainty to outlast the body:

defugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos;
 durant, vatis opus
 (3.9.28–9)

[Only the songs avoid the rapacious funeral pyre; the work of the poet lasts]
 (my translation)

⁹³ See Wallace, 'European Rose'; Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 80–1.

It is perhaps as a response to this that Jean's list of Roman poets places such emphasis on their death, a fascination with mortality that, through the rhyme of 'porriz' with 'Lorriz', extends also to Jean's direct vernacular predecessor:

Gallus, Catillus et Ovides,
 qui bien sorent d'amors trestier,
 nous reüssent or bien mestier
 mes chascuns d'aus gist morz porriz.
 Vez ci Guillaume de Lorriz
 (10492–7)

[Gallus, Catullus and Ovid, who well knew how to treat of love, we would have had great need of them then, but each of them lies dead and rotted. Behold here Guillaume de Lorris]

One of the particularly fascinating aspects of this passage is the nature of the Roman poets Jean mentions, and the question of what they might have meant to him and to his readers. If Jean ever came across the poetry of Tibullus, this encounter was almost certainly fragmentary. Although significant extracts from Tibullus circulated in the *Florilegium gallicum* associated with twelfth-century Orléans,⁹⁴ and although Richard de Fournival's library catalogue mentions a now-lost Tibullus manuscript,⁹⁵ the renewed production of full Tibullus codices begins in fourteenth-century Italy (probably derived from Fournival's manuscript, rediscovered in the Sorbonne by Petrarch),⁹⁶ and no verbal echoes of Tibullus have ever been identified in Jean's work.⁹⁷ The other poets mentioned have an even more elusive textual history in the Middle Ages: Catullus's work seems to have been virtually unknown for most of the medieval period, with copies of some poems again emerging in late fourteenth-century Italy. The poetry of Gallus, meanwhile, was lost to the world until a papyrus fragment was found in Egypt in the nineteen-seventies.⁹⁸ For all or most thirteenth-century readers who encountered the names 'Tibullus', 'Catullus', and 'Gallus', all that survived of these writers was, quite literally, the 'nomen'. The survival of *nomen* in the sense

⁹⁴ L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmissions*, 421–2. See also R.H. Rouse, 'Florilegia', 135–8.

⁹⁵ Leopold Delisle, *Cabinet des manuscrits*, 2:531.

⁹⁶ Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmissions*, 423–4; for Petrarch's discovery of the Sorbonne copy of Tibullus, likely to have derived from the donation of Richard de Fournival's books, see Rouse, 'Florilegia', 152.

⁹⁷ While Langlois finds no echoes of Tibullus, he does suggest that he may be the point of origin for certain widespread medieval tropes, *Origines et sources*, 10, n.1.

⁹⁸ Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmissions*, 175.

of ‘reputation’ is something Ovid takes for granted for his poetic predecessors and himself (*Amores*, 3.9.59), a sentiment that finds a remarkably close analogue in the Hebrew tradition (Eccl. 44:14). Jean’s refashioning of these lines suggests something quite different. Indeed, for many readers, including probably Jean himself, the most important source for the names of these Roman poets was nothing other than Ovid’s poetry. They have become Ovidian constructions, and Ovid’s praise of their value and fame becomes deeply ironic by the simple fact of their near-total oblivion.

If Jean is playing with this double sense of *nomen* as both fame and name, he seems to be tapping into a more pessimistic, Stoical attitude to the emptiness of literary fame, a position transmitted not least through Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*.⁹⁹ In the *Consolatio*, Philosophy literally literalises *nomen*, shifting its meaning from ‘renown’ to simply ‘name’:

Ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent,
 Quid Brutus aut rigidus Cato?
 Signat superstes fama tenuis pauculis
 Inane nomen litteris.
 (2.m7.15–8)

[Where now are the bones of good Fabricius?
 What is Brutus now, or stern old Cato?
 What little fame is left them – just their names
 In a few old stories! (*lit.* ‘an empty name in a few letters’)]
 (223)¹⁰⁰

While Ovid voices his hope that fame through poetry will outlast the physical indignities of death, Jean leaves open the possibility that even the *nomen* left after the extinction of the body might be an unstable and essentially useless commodity — an ‘empty name in letters’, something that can be (mis)appropriated by subsequent writers, just as Jean tampers with the writings of Ovid and Guillaume.

This fixation on poetic death is extended from Ovid to Guillaume, into the prophesied future moment when Guillaume will die and Jean will continue his work:

⁹⁹ See Piero Boitani’s excellent intellectual history of fame, *World of Fame*, 18–71, and for Boethius, 45–7.

¹⁰⁰ All quotations and translations of the *Consolatio* will be from *Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and tr. S.J. Tester. Deviations from the translation will be noted as such.

Ci se reposera Guillaumes,
 cui li tombleaus soit pleins de baumes,
 d'encens, de mirre et d'aloé,
 tant m'a servi, tant m'a loé.
 (10531–4)

[Here Guillaume will rest, may his tomb be full of balm, incense, myrrh and aloe, he has served and praised me so much]

The focus on Guillaume's tomb, his 'tombleaus', establishes a link with the tomb of Tibullus, while the marked emphasis on the sweet scents that the God of Love hopes will be there evoke their own opposite, the inevitable stink of rot we have already encountered in relation to the Roman poets ('chascuns d'aus gist mors porriz'). Inevitably, the presence of the tomb evokes the *Rose's* central metaphor of hypocrisy and covering, and the suggestion is raised that Guillaume de Lorris, or perhaps the God of Love, is a hypocrite.¹⁰¹ This focus on the death of Guillaume and the Roman poets threatens to extend to include the sixth poet named, Jean de Meun. On one level Jean de Meun may be trying to present himself here as a 'vernacular *vates*', but he is also exposing the considerable limitations of such a position.¹⁰² On the one hand the God of Love's prophecy of Jean de Meun's arrival emphasises birth and regeneration rather than death and degeneration. Not only do we find Cupid promising to watch over the newborn Jean in his 'berceul' (10605, 'cradle'), we also find the invocation of 'Lucina, la deesse / d'enfantemant' (10593–4). But if Cupid's 'oignements' (10544) will smell sweeter than 'balme' (10544) in Jean's cradle, the positions of Guillaume and Jean begin to strangely overlap: both figures will be contained within structures filled with the sweet scent of balm, and in both cases, this sweet scent seems to imply its converse, the stink of rot. Again the spectre of the whitewashed tomb is raised.

These metaphors of birth and death encourage an association of this passage with wider themes that run through the *Rose*. Indeed the very notion of Jean's *continuation* seems to hover between the artificial (literary) and the natural (sexual), just as sexual and textual

¹⁰¹ cf. Matthew 23:27.

¹⁰² Brownlee, 'Orpheus's Song Re-sung', 208, n.15. Kelly suggests that Jean's reference to 'li poete' at 15207 is 'the earliest recorded reference to 'poet' as vernacular author', but it is important that Jean is referring to others, not himself ('Si con font antr'eus li poete'), and the relationship to his own activity is one of analogy and not identity; *Internal Difference*, 14.

metaphors occur frequently elsewhere in the poem.¹⁰³ The God of Love claims that ‘quant Guillaume cesserá, / Jehans le continuera, / enprés sa mort’ (10557–9), using remarkably similar language to the description of Nature in her forge:

por continuer les espieces;
 car les pieces les font tant vivre
 que Mort ne les peut aconsivre
 (15868–70)

[to continue the species; for the individuals give them [the species] life to such an extent that Death cannot catch them]

Jean seems to be asking how far his literary ‘continuation’ can be seen as a reflection of the natural generative continuation that was so central to the Neoplatonic cosmological allegories that he is here imitating. But by raising the suggestion that his work of continuation might be compared to the continuation of Nature, Jean also makes available the possibility that his poem will be found lacking, a piece of artifice that is inescapably ungenerative — that is to say, illicit and potentially sodomitical. The story of Pygmalion that occurs near the end of the *Rose* is a story of human creation breaking out of its own cycle of artificiality into the world of nature: Pygmalion’s statue comes alive and, crucially, reproduces with her creator.¹⁰⁴ But Pygmalion’s statue is also directly compared to Narcissus’s fountain, and we are forced to ask whether this tale only emphasises the failure of human artifice to ever break away from its alienation from the natural world.¹⁰⁵

The *Rose* ends with a scene of violent penetration that has been read in many conflicting ways.¹⁰⁶ But by concluding his poem with what at least seems to be an act of insemination,¹⁰⁷ Jean makes a last gesture towards the ‘Chartrian’ allegorical tradition. The conclusion of Bernard Silvester’s *Cosmographia* is analogous in ways that are rarely recognised: the poem ends with an allegorical representation of human reproduction, an act

¹⁰³ cf. Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 111.

¹⁰⁴ cf. Huot, *From Song to Book*, 144.

¹⁰⁵ In addition to Pygmalion’s statue, one kind of human artifice is said to genuinely affect and participate in nature — alchemy, described as an ‘art veritable’ (16054).

¹⁰⁶ As rape (Cahoon, ‘Raping the Rose’, 271); as a homoerotic sex act (Gaunt, ‘Improper Allegory’, 71–2); as hermaphroditic sexual contact (Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 201–8).

¹⁰⁷ For the argument that an act of impregnation is narrated at the end of the *Rose*, see Thomas D. Hill, ‘Narcissus and Pygmalion, the Castration of Saturn’, 414–7; Wetherbee, ‘The Literal and the Allegorical’, 290.

that constitutes mankind's point of participation in the divine order.¹⁰⁸ Jean's poem can certainly be read as a parody of twelfth-century cosmic allegory,¹⁰⁹ but this parody comes about by presenting the generative processes of the human species alongside a cynical and deceitful school of seduction derived from Ovid, and also alongside a more reflective questioning of how the value of poetry itself might compare to the value of the natural work of the species. This combination of incommensurable elements allows each to parody the other. An Ovidian cynicism deflates the elevated possibilities of a poem that describes man's participation in the order of nature, just as Ovidian codes of amorous behaviour are shown to be crass, base, and essentially mendacious.

Does poetry produce anything worthwhile? Is there any profit in the pleasure of the *Rose*? Jean refuses to answer these questions, instead making available a host of possible interpretations, none of which can be easily domesticated. One possible extreme reading of the poem's final scene has been playfully put forward by Sylvia Huot. Amant scattering his seed after a detailed allegorical description of a sex-act can be read as a 'euphemistically worded, if thinly disguised, story of a nocturnal, or more properly matitudinal, emission' — it may be possible to take seriously the poem's potential as a pornographic work, culminating in the *jouissance* (pleasure/orgasm) of the Lover.¹¹⁰ Augustine tells the story of an acquaintance who once imagined coitus so vividly that he physically ejaculated.¹¹¹ Guillaume begins his

¹⁰⁸ 'Militat adversus Lachesim sollersque renodat / Mentula Parcarum fila resecta manu', Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, 14.165–6. 'The Phallus wars against Lachesis and carefully rejoins the vital threads severed by the Fates', *Cosmographia*, tr. Wetherbee, 126. But even Bernardus seems to be haunted by the possibility of the obscene — while Wetherbee translates *mentula* as 'Phallus', the word was obscene in classical Latin ('cock'; I am grateful to Professor Mattia Cavagna for his suggestions regarding *mentula*). Morton examines both the obscenity and the inherent artificiality of these lines to argue that they suggest 'a fundamental impossibility in the mimetic project of representing nature allegorically through poetry even while attempting such a mimesis', in 'Ingenious Genius', 9–10. For the originality of Bernard's thought here, see Peter Dronke, 'L'Amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle', 468–70; Dronke also hints at the connection of this scene to the conclusion of the *Rose*, 470; see also Stock, *Myth and Science*, 216–8. For the *Cosmographia* more generally see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 158–86; Whitman, *Allegory*, 218–64; Stock, *Myth and Science*. Jane Chance Nitzsche examines the tradition behind the various *genii* of Bernard's poem, *Genius Figure*, 65–87, esp. 85–7; the tradition is also summarised in Morton, 'Ingenious Genius'.

¹⁰⁹ 'It is true that Genius's message overall is that the sexual body gives eternal life to the spirit. But the very outrageousness of this contention draws attention to the gap between bodily and metaphysical discourses, more than it asserts continuity between them'. Sarah Kay, 'Sexual Knowledge', 82.

¹¹⁰ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 101.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 52.

poem by stating that it is a prophetic dream that came true, that it reflects some event that came to pass in the world. What if this event is the sexual arousal and actual physical orgasm, not only of the poem's author, but of an imagined male reader? Such a reading is perhaps about as far as it is possible to go, but it is not unavailable. Indeed the *Rose*, through its open-endedness, through its refusal to submit to any received hermeneutic scheme, always seems ready to threaten us with deeply destabilising possible readings. As Croesus says to Phanie when she tries to gloss his dream, in a phrase that can almost be read as Jean de Meun's covert challenge, 'Onc ausi noble vision / n'ot si vils exposicion' (6583–4, 'never has such a noble vision received such a base exposition').

OTHER CONDUITS: DEGUILEVILLE AND MACHAUT

I have tried to trace the maddening complexities of the *Rose*, the features that will provoke English writers to return to it incessantly over the course of the fourteenth century. But the English reception of the *Rose* cannot be studied in isolation from the other texts that mediated the *Rose* and that were also consumed in England. Two authors in particular will occur repeatedly in the course of this thesis: Guillaume de Deguileville and Guillaume de Machaut, both creative readers of the *Rose*, or what Badel terms 'lecteurs-écrivains'.¹¹² They represent distinct ways of staging a response to the *Rose*, within two different genres: the religious allegory and the *dit*.¹¹³ This is not to claim a bifurcation in the tradition of the reception of the *Rose*: elements of these genres are already overlapping in the writings of Deguileville and Machaut. But these authors did suggest different ways of interacting with the maddening open-endedness of Jean's text, they helped constitute the kinds of meaning available to readers of the *Rose*, and, crucially, they inscribed their own texts in the network generated by the *Rose*, opening themselves to unanticipated readings. Both authors are concerned with how their poems produce meaning and how they as authors must claim or refuse responsibility for

¹¹² Badel, *Le 'Roman de la rose'*, 81.

¹¹³ Badel discusses the 'double descendance' of the *Rose* in relation to Machaut and Gilles li Muisis, *ibid.*, 94. In England, these two realms of response are dominated by the reception of Machaut and Deguileville. On the *dit*, see Cerquiglioni, 'Le Clerc et l'écriture'.

that meaning. There is no room here to do justice to the sophistication of their responses to the *Rose*, but a brief survey will be useful for what follows.

Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* (*PVH*) survives in two different redactions, dated to 1331 and 1355 respectively. Deguileville left a significant mark on English poetry, one that was still being felt well beyond the Middle Ages.¹¹⁴ He cultivates a direct relationship with the *Rose* in *PVH*, something announced explicitly by the rubrics of several manuscripts: 'Exposé sur le *Roman de la Rose*'.¹¹⁵ Deguileville's explicit and self-conscious use of the *Rose* brings Jean's and Guillaume's text into contact with an older tradition of religious allegory; but above all, Deguileville's relationship with Jean expresses a certain anxiety about how far the poet can control his text's meaning. Deguileville expresses this anxiety more clearly than many late-medieval poets in the second recension of *PVH*, where he retracts his earlier work and claims, perhaps disingenuously, that it was taken from him and circulated without his authorisation. The transition from first to second recension also has Deguileville seemingly rescind his praise for the 'Biau Romans de la Rose', instead attacking the text by having Venus, who represents the sin of *luxuria*, claim it as her own work.¹¹⁶ This may, as Huot has suggested, reveal a shift in his attitude to the *Rose* that stems from an exposure to a different manuscript tradition, but it may also be simply another reflection of Deguileville's anxiety to control meaning, to step back from the pluralities offered by the *Rose*.¹¹⁷

Kamath has shown the importance of the *Rose* for Deguileville's authorial self-presentation through the narrator-figure of his dream-vision.¹¹⁸ But perhaps what Deguileville owes most to Jean de Meun is not the assertive claim of authorial ownership, but something

¹¹⁴ See Josephine Houghton, 'The Works of Guillaume de Deguileville'; Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*; Burrow, *Langland's Fictions*, 113–8. For Deguileville's influence beyond the Middle Ages, see Nievergelt, *Allegorical Quests from Deguileville to Spenser*.

¹¹⁵ Huot, 'Romance of the Rose', 207; Philippe Maupeu's detailed study of manuscripts of *PVH* reveal that at least seven copies explicitly suggest a relationship with the *Rose* in their incipits or explicits, *Pèlerins de vie humaine*, 617–20.

¹¹⁶ See Badel, *Le 'Roman de la rose'*, 368–9; Badel suspects that Deguileville was compelled to compose the second redaction after receiving some genuine criticism, 367.

¹¹⁷ Huot, 'Romance of the Rose', 228; see also, more generally, *ibid.*, 207–38

¹¹⁸ Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 30–8.

more contingent and self-effacing. Just as Jean de Meun names himself as absent from his text in a passage that toys with but ultimately seems to refuse the prestige and fame of classical poetry, Deguileville's self-naming in the first recension of *PVH* seems, if anything, to be an erasure of authorial identity — indeed any kind of historical, bodily identity. In one of the few hints at the author's historical name, Grace Dieu insists that the pilgrim should disavow his patrilineal identity and, with it, the name of his biological father:

Dieu est ton pere et tu son fil,
Ne cuide pas que soie file
(A) Thomas de Deguileville¹¹⁹
(5963–5)

[God is your father, and you are his son, don't believe that you might be the offspring of Thomas of Deguileville]

It is in Deguileville's strange and I think rather anxious manoeuvres around authorial identity, his ambivalence towards the notion of writerly fame, and above all his attempts to shape and redirect the meaning of his text when it is released into the world of readers that we see the impact of Jean's *Rose*.

Machaut exerts an equally important and more often recognised influence on subsequent writing, an influence that has long been understood as operational in England.¹²⁰ Machaut is an enormously sophisticated reader of the *Rose*, and I think a writer who can come close to the radical irony that Jean's *Rose* presents, but one of his important contributions to literary history was the introduction of a certain poise and balance to the aggressively self-undermining ironies of Jean's text. In the poem known as the *Prologue*, a work that Machaut composed to introduce his unprecedented self-curated 'complete works' manuscripts, the poet-narrator is visited by Nature and Amour. Machaut is clearly writing himself into the tradition that Jean de Meun has opened up and that leads back beyond Jean

¹¹⁹ All quotations are from *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine*, ed. Stürzinger.

¹²⁰ While Muscatine claimed that Chaucer was more profoundly influenced by the earlier poets than Machaut, (*Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 5) the importance of Machaut to Chaucer has since been emphasised particularly by James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries*, 77–173. See also William Calin, 'Machaut's Legacy', 29–46; Calin *French Tradition*, 272–301. The influence of Machaut on Gower has been examined by, among others, John Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', and Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 9–30. Butterfield has changed the terms of the question of influence entirely by exploring the shared world of lyric refrain-citation of Machaut, Froissart, Chaucer, and Gower, *Familiar Enemy*, ch.7.

towards Ovid.¹²¹ But there is an important shift in Machaut's presentation of these ideas. If Machaut does not quite reconcile desire with reason, he does create a poetics in which desire is no longer the overwhelming, chaotic, all-encompassing force that it was in Jean's *Rose*.¹²² For Badel, following Daniel Poirion, Machaut builds on the *Rose* to create a literature in which 'l'amour de l'amour' can begin to accommodate 'l'amour de sagesse'.¹²³ This accomplishment in some ways bridges a notional social gap, exploring 'the possible alliance of love, the summation of aristocratic values, with wisdom in the medium of learned poetry about love'.¹²⁴ One effect of this is the greater emphasis placed on the value of poetic activity: Machaut 'replaces procreation with poetic creation'.¹²⁵ Machaut's texts are open-ended (perhaps infinitely so), but they are not as aggressively self-undermining as the *Rose*, and in this sense Machaut opens the path for the later fourteenth-century domestication of the *Rose* into a series of conventional emblems or symbols evocative of stasis, superable desire, and marvellous opulence.

Machaut's intervention in the history of poetic self-presentation has been rightly emphasised.¹²⁶ As an author-figure who compiles his own works in monumental collections, appears in his own narratives and dramatises his own intimate relationships with important noblemen across Europe, he suggests that the meaning of his works might be traceable to his own historical identity, even as that identity seems strangely elusive, in one case bleeding into and becoming almost indistinguishable from the identity of his patron.¹²⁷ As a final note to

¹²¹ Huot, *From Song to Book*, 237. On Machaut's organisation of his own 'complete works' manuscripts, see Sarah Williams, 'An Author's Role in Fourteenth-Century Book Production'.

¹²² Douglas Kelly suggests that Machaut presents a 'sublimation' of love, creating a realm of moderation in which '[l]ove is to rise above desire if the lover is to be happy and virtuous'; *Medieval Imagination*, 122, 136.

¹²³ Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 91; see also Poirion, *Le Poète et le prince*, 580: 'La sagesse n'efface pas l'amour, mais elle le dépasse, ou au moins le remplace, dans l'ordre d'une succession naturelle qui fait suivre la saison des amours d'un "âge de raison"', ('wisdom does not erase love, but it surpasses it, or at least replaces it, in a natural order of succession that has the season of love be followed by an "age of reason"').

¹²⁴ Huot, *The 'Romance of the Rose'*, 246. An earlier version of Huot's study of Machaut and the *Rose* appeared as 'Reliving the *Roman de la Rose*'.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Guillaume de Machaut*, 95.

¹²⁶ Brownlee, *Poetic Identity*.

¹²⁷ In the *Fonteinne Amoureuse*, Machaut's narrator transcribes a complaint that he overhears his patron, Jean duc de Berry, spontaneously proclaiming; he then presents that poem to the Duc when

this chapter, I will mention one example of how Machaut's unprecedented insistence on his own authorial identity slips out of his control when his texts enter the world of readers and are twisted in different directions.¹²⁸ This example bears particular relevance to the intimate connection of Machaut to the *Rose*. BnF, MS fr. 1587 is a single-author codex containing only works by Machaut. But what is bizarre and fascinating about this manuscript, following the single-author principle supposedly designed to preserve and transmit the author's identity, is that its scribe or the scribe of its exemplar has systematically replaced every reference to 'Guillaume de Machaut' with 'Guillaume de Loris'. We see this in the opening rubric ('Ci commence le liuvre mestre Guillaume De loris', f.1r), and also in the rubrics of the *Jugement du Roy de Navarre*, where the narrator, depicted in a miniature, is identified as 'guillaume de loris' (f.79r).¹²⁹ But most remarkable of all, in this poem the scribe has actually committed a violence on the metre and rhyme of the text. When a knight informs the lady as to the identity of the poet-narrator who is hunting hares nearby, we find the following astonishing variant reading:

Dame dit il foi que dois mame
 Cest li guillaume de Loris.
 Et sachies bien qui ne lui chaut
 De riens fors de ce que il sachasse¹³⁰
 (f.79r)

asked to provide him with some entertainment. The elision of their identities goes further when they both fall asleep at a fountain and share the same the dream.

¹²⁸ For Machaut's attempts to control his own reception, see Deborah McGrady, *Controlling Readers*, esp. 67–75.

¹²⁹ The slippage in this rubric was first noted by Jacqueline Cerquiglini in her indispensable *'Un engin'*, 127; see also Kay, *Place of Thought*, 95, n.3. The full rubric contains another remarkable slippage: 'Coment guillaume cheuauche grisart et court apres le li[^]e[^]ure et la dame cheuauche a grant compaignie et fait venir guillaume de loris et argue a lui'. Until a later scribe corrected the rubric by adding the letter *e* in 'lieure', Guillaume was chasing after a book (*livre*) rather than a hare (*levre*).

¹³⁰ Here are the lines as they appear in Hoepffner's edition of the *Œuvres*:

'Dame', dist cils, 'foy que doy m'ame,
 C'est la Guillaumes de Machaut.
 Et sachiez bien qu'il ne li chaut
 De rien fors que de ce qu'il chace'
 (572–5)

[‘Lady,’ he said, ‘by the faith that I owe my soul, that’s Guillaume de Machaut. And know that he doesn’t care about anything apart from what he’s hunting’]

The modern hand that has made several corrections in this manuscript has struck through ‘Loris’ and written ‘Machaut’ in the margin.

Not only does this manuscript demonstrate how desperately powerless even ‘controlling’ writers like Machaut could be in the hands of the transformative interpretations of their readers, it also shows the extent to which the *Rose* continued to cast a long shadow over literary culture, and how Machaut’s readers could associate him so closely with the tradition of the *Rose* that he becomes, at last, identified with one of its authors.

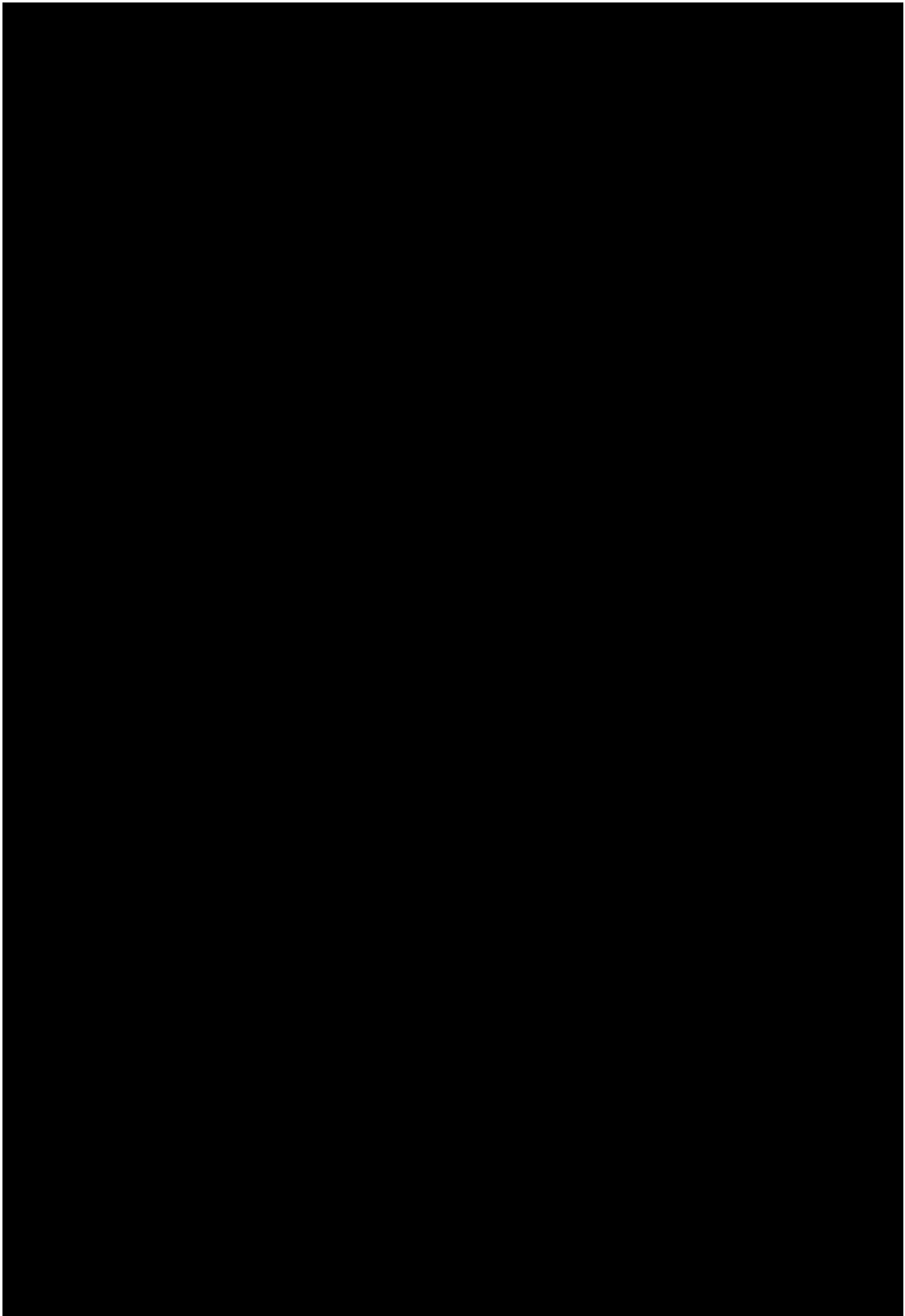


Fig. 2. KBR, MS 9961-61, f.91v (Peterborough Psalter).

Chapter 2. British Medieval Readers of the *Romance of the Rose*

When the artist of the Peterborough Psalter draws a scene in which knights are storming a castle defended by ladies who wield roses as weapons (fig.2), is he recalling Jealousy's Castle from the *Rose*, or is he reflecting an earlier tradition in visual art and civic pageantry?¹ When, in 1395, the Carmelite Friar Richard Maidstone says that the evil rumour perpetuated by 'Perfida Lingua' has damaged the loving relationship between Richard II and the personified city of London, is he recalling the Male Bouche of the *Rose*, or simply turning to a conventional notion that has lost its associations with its original source?² Is the author of the trilingual 'Dum ludis floribus' in BL, MS Harley 2253 — with its references to 'Le Dieu d'Amour', its images of flowers and mirrors, and its association with 'la vile de Paris' — simply replicating a set of literary preoccupations that were at large in his cultural environment, or is he recalling his reading of the *Rose*?³ It will never be possible to offer definitive answers to these questions, but with a fuller understanding of the availability of manuscripts of the *Rose* in England and the environments in which it was consumed, we might return to these parallels informed by a renewed sensitivity to the importance of the *Rose* and its position in fourteenth-century English culture. In this chapter I present the material evidence for English and British interaction with the *Rose*, facts that will help reconstruct the *Rose*'s place in English literature. It will surprise no-one to learn that the text was widely distributed, but as we will see, the sheer scale of its circulation is astounding. I begin by considering the broader question of the position of continental French literature in England, before presenting the evidence I have gathered and attempting to draw some conclusions.

Recent years have seen literary scholars renew their focus on the status of the French language in England, its position as a 'second vernacular', and its relationship with

¹ The Peterborough Psalter now carries the shelfmark KBR, MS 9961–62; the siege of the castle appears at f.91v. Keith Busby suggests that this recalls the *Rose* in *Codex and Context*, 757, but Thomas Greene has shown that the tradition of knights storming castles defended by ladies where flowers are used as weapons predates the *Rose*: Greene, *Besieging the Castle of Ladies*, 19.

² Richard Maidstone, *Concordia*, 22.

³ See 'Dum ludis floribus', Art. 55 in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Susanna Fein et al.

continental forms of French. The essays gathered by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne in her collection examining the ‘French of England’ have demonstrated the richness of francophone literary production in England long after the Norman Conquest, while Richard Ingham has used the historical-linguistic record to argue for the full bilingualism of Anglo-Norman users well into the late fourteenth century.⁴ Ardis Butterfield has shown how complex questions of language, identity and nationhood were generative forces in both French and English literature in the Middle Ages, and has argued for the limitations of a linguistic and cultural category like ‘French’ when a host of dialects, including Anglo-Norman, jostled against each other across Northern Europe alongside Germanic vernaculars and, of course, Latin.⁵ A recent cluster of articles in *Speculum* has explored the position of late-medieval French as part of a complex linguistic ecology across the British Isles, and in a variety of social environments, while, from a different perspective, Simon Gaunt has argued for a French literary history that focuses on ‘peripheral’ francophone cultures like England, Picardy, and Italy, where various local vernaculars interacted in subtle ways with the ‘supralocal’ language of French.⁶ Yet there have been attempts to qualify this new emphasis on the importance of the French language to English literary history. Christopher Cannon, for example, has argued that French remained the language of a socially removed elite, and that ‘we can only use the phrase the “French of England” to refer to the production and consumption of literature in England if we are prepared to accept the practices of an elite as equivalent to “England” as a whole.’⁷ Elsewhere I have argued that a close look at the evidence of French language-learning in England does not reveal a linear decline, but rather a host of different environments in which different needs were served by different levels and uses of French.⁸ The question of class that Cannon raises is an interesting intervention, and certainly my analysis below will point to what seems to be

⁴ See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (ed.), *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100–c.1500*; Richard Ingham, ‘Later Anglo-Norman as a Contact Variety of French?’.

⁵ Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*.

⁶ See the four articles by Christopher Baswell, Christopher Cannon, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, gathered under the shared title ‘Competing Archives, Competing Histories’; see also Gaunt, ‘French Literature Abroad’.

⁷ Christopher Cannon, ‘Class Distinction and the French of England’, 55.

⁸ Knox, ‘The English Glosses in Walter of Bibbesworth’s *Tretiz*’. See also Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 308–50.

a particular concentration of manuscripts of the *Rose* in aristocratic circles — although the surviving evidence will always tend to be skewed towards aristocratic owners.⁹ If there was, as seems likely, a particular interest in manuscripts of the *Rose* among English aristocrats, this may not be because of its status as a continental francophone work, but because of its status as a valuable, often heavily illustrated book-object.¹⁰ Indeed, Cannon's own subsequent work has helped show how French was certainly used in late-medieval England in bureaucratic, mercantile, educational and other contexts; future research will no doubt add to our understanding of the particularities of these environments.¹¹ If the *Rose* was not consumed there, its absence cannot be purely a question of linguistic competence.

Although the poets that I will examine in the main body of this thesis are all English, the evidence gathered below goes beyond the bounds of medieval England to show the circulation of the *Rose* in Scotland and Wales — and later, in the sixteenth-century, there is evidence for the ownership of the *Rose* in Ireland.¹² Some of these manuscripts can be traced moving from the Celtic nations of Britain into England — leap-frogging England from the continent before moving further south or east. It is thus important to stress that the *Rose* never acted as a singular, monolithic influence across England, but was always interacting with a number of local cultural and literary preoccupations. There is perhaps no such thing as the 'English' reception of the *Rose*, instead a number of individual interactions with the text in distinct social and regional contexts that do not respect the shifting borders of the medieval English kingdom (a kingdom that held territories on the continent).¹³ While the main body of this thesis focuses on the fourteenth century, the list below includes manuscripts of the *Rose* handled by British users in the fifteenth century. It is often impossible to make a firm

⁹ See Richard Firth Green's comments on aristocratic book collections, *Poets and Princepleasers*, 91–9. For a general study of Francophone literature and the English royal court see Butterfield, 'French Culture and the Ricardian Court'.

¹⁰ Green draws attention to Froissart's emphasis on the physical visual opulence of the book he offers to Richard II, *Poets and Princepleasers*, 65.

¹¹ See Cannon, 'Competing Archives, Competing Histories'; Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 201–33.

¹² Byrne, 'The Earls of Kildare and their Books', 147.

¹³ For some comments on the complex international migrations of medieval books, see Rundle, 'English Books and the Continent'. For more on the longest-lasting English enclave on the continent, see Wallace, *Premodern Places*, ch.1, 'At Calais Gate'.

distinction between fourteenth- and fifteenth-century users on palaeographical grounds, and documentary evidence for manuscript circulation usually presents only the latest possible date at which the manuscript was in the hands of the named owner: excluding the fifteenth century would be unhelpful. I first list extant manuscripts, then lost or unidentified manuscripts, numbering them chronologically from their first datable appearance in Britain or association with a British reader.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

Extant Manuscripts¹⁴

1 Location unknown, *olim* Crawford Library, MS Fr. 3 (1322–3)¹⁵
Copied for a British patron, 1322 or 1323.

Contents: *Romance of the Rose*.

Medieval owners: Christine de Lindsay (d.1333).

The manuscript once known as MS Fr. 3 in the Crawford library was not described by Langlois in *Les Manuscrits*, and few scholars today know of it.¹⁶ There are two different notes in this manuscript identifying its patron as ‘Chrestienne de Lingdeser dame de couci’, one listing the date of its completion as 1322 and the other as 1323.¹⁷ Christine de Lindsay was a Scoto-Norman aristocrat and niece of the former King of Scotland, John Balliol. She married Enguerrand of Guines, Lord of Coucy, at a wedding in Scotland presided over by King Alexander III.¹⁸ She left Britain for France c.1311 but retained lands in Scotland and northern

¹⁴ This list has been compiled by extracting all relevant information from Langlois, *Manuscrits*, and as far as possible (since Langlois does sometimes miss evidence), consulting the manuscripts themselves or digital surrogates on romandelarose.org. Several manuscripts and fragments were not known to Langlois and are perhaps still in private hands; for these I have relied on the descriptions made by other scholars since the publication of Langlois’s study. These manuscript descriptions are listed by Heather Arden, *The ‘Roman de la rose’: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1–32, (items 47, 52, 54–7, 63, 67–73, 75, and 77). Only one of these, the article by Fawtier (see below) has recorded any evidence of British users. Langlois did not examine the manuscripts that entered the National Library of Wales from the private collection of Bourdillon; for these, see Blamires and Holian, *The ‘Romance of the Rose’ Illuminated*, 103–28.

¹⁵ Described by R. Fawtier, ‘Deux Manuscrits du *Roman de la Rose*’, 265–70. It is given the shelfmark MS Fr. 3 in Lord Crawford, ‘List of Manuscripts’, 224.

¹⁶ By the time he came to publish his edition, Langlois had become aware of this manuscript and referred to it in a note along with other codices he had missed (Langlois (ed.), *Rose*, 1:49, n.1). However, Langlois was relying on Bourdillon’s description, and the date of copying is given, wrongly, as 1532. Badel notes this manuscript and points out that this date must be wrong, *Le ‘Roman de la Rose’*, 56, n.3. Badel seems to have been unaware of Fawtier’s description.

¹⁷ Fawtier, 265; Fawtier does not address the discrepancy in the date here.

¹⁸ Badel, 56; M.A. Pollock, *Scotland, England and France*, 196

England. After the death of Enguerrand in 1321 she returned to Scotland for a brief period to pursue a claim to her lands there, and was still moving between England and Scotland in 1324.¹⁹ While it seems unlikely that Christine would have this fine and expensive manuscript with 95 miniatures copied for her during an unstable period in which she was pursuing legal claims away from her main home, the dates do suggest that manuscript was copied while she was in Britain. Perhaps it was copied in France and sent to her; it is not impossible that it was copied for her by a French scribe in her retinue in Scotland or England.

We do not know what happened to this manuscript after Christine's death. It was already in England by the seventeenth century.²⁰ It is perhaps relevant that Christine's great-grandson, Enguerrand VII de Coucy, would go on to renew the family's close ties to the British Isles, marrying Edward III's eldest daughter and becoming the first Earl of Bedford until Richard II's accession to the throne.²¹ The manuscript is probably still in the private collection of the Crawfords; it was not sold with the main body of the library to Henriqueta Rylands in 1901.²²

2 London, British Library, MS Royal 19 B XIII (s.xiv)²³

In England before 1395.

Contents: *Romance of the Rose*.

Medieval owners: Richard Stury (c.1327–1395); Thomas, Duke of Gloucester (1355–1397); Edmund Stafford, Bishop of Exeter (1344–1419).

A note on f.2r of this fourteenth-century manuscript (fig.3) states that it was bought by Thomas, Duke of Gloucester from the executors of Richard Stury (d.1395). It was still in Thomas's possession when he was imprisoned and executed in 1397 and is included in the list of his goods seized by the crown.²⁴ But these goods seem not to have remained in royal hands. Edmund Stafford's will calls for the sale of 'omnes libri quos habui ex emptione de

¹⁹ Pollock, *Scotland, England and France*, 196. See also *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, 3:155.

²⁰ Fawtier, 266.

²¹ M.H. Keen, 'Coucy, Enguerrand (VII) de, earl of Bedford (c.1340–1397)'.

²² Nicholas Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana*, 352–53, 374.

²³ Described by Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 141–2.

²⁴ Vicount Dillon and W.H. St John Hope, 'Inventory of the Goods and Chattels Belonging to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester', 300.

bonis quondam domini Thome ducis Gloucestrie'; the proceeds were to be spent on prayers for the souls of Stafford and Gloucester.²⁵ Presumably this copy of the *Rose* came into the bishop's possession along with Gloucester's other books after his execution.

Richard Stury was a friend of Chaucer and had some interest in continental French literature; his name appears alongside that of Sir Lewis Clifford and others at the back of a fourteenth-century manuscript containing poems by Baudouin and Jean de Condé.²⁶

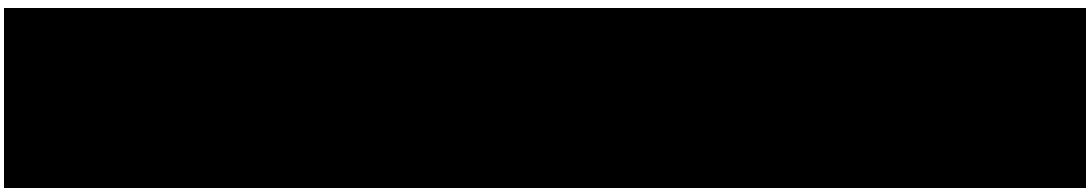


Fig. 3. BL, MS Royal 19 B XIII, f.2r.

3 Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2755 (s.xiv)²⁷

Handled by an English reader c.1400.

Contents: *Romance of the Rose*.

Owners: 'Friar John of Lincoln'; 'Robert of Beccles'(?).

This manuscript contains a marginal note made by an English scribe in a script that I would date to c.1400 (fig.4a).²⁸ It occurs at the beginning of Jean de Meun's continuation. The annotation reads,

Ici commence louere mestre Jon de Meoun *par ceo que* mestre Gylliam cy cessa. son ouere *par ceo qil ne pout plus fere ou ne vout plus fere*
(f.27v)

[Here begins the work of Master Jean de Meun because Master Guillaume stopped his work here because he could not write any more or did not want to write any more]

There are other interventions by what may be a different, and perhaps earlier, English scribe.

Where the text has been damaged by a spillage on ff.2–3, this English scribe has filled in the

²⁵ Cavanaugh, *Books Privately Owned*, 806.

²⁶ Elizabeth Salter, *English and International*, 243; the manuscript in question is KBR, MS 9411–26.

²⁷ Described by Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 187–8. N.B. that Langlois erroneously gives the shelfmark as MS 2775, an error that has been replicated in several later sources.

²⁸ In its combination of insular and continental letter-forms, this hand broadly corresponds to the late-fourteenth-century 'secretary' hand described by Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands*, xx. Mixed hands, however, are difficult to date; it could well be later. For more on the history of 'secretary' hand, see Parkes, 'Handwriting in English Books', 133–34.

missing text (figs.4b–c). Perhaps the overwritten text was still legible, perhaps it had to be copied from another manuscript witness.

The scribe of the marginal annotation can be identified as English due to a number of Anglo-Norman dialect forms (*ceo*, *pout*, *vout*),²⁹ and also a number of graphs associated with insular book-hands (two-compartment *a*; long *r*; word-final *s* shaped like the figure 6).³⁰ The scribe also displays several features typical of the continentally influenced ‘secretary’ hand that became more widespread in England from the end of the fourteenth century (broken strokes in the lobe and ascender of the *d*, the occasional use of short *r*).³¹ The overwriting of the damaged text, in perhaps a different (earlier?) hand, displays some typical insular graphs (two-compartment *a*, long *r*, the limb of the letter *h* falling below the line of writing, in one instance perhaps the suggestion of decorative curved hooks on the ascender of *l*).³²

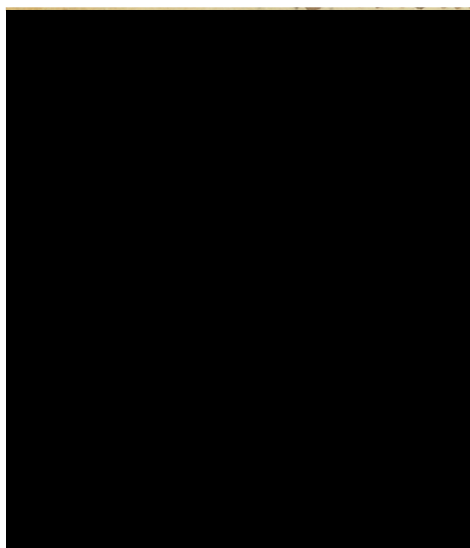


Fig. 4a. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2755, f.27v.

²⁹ See Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, § 32.2, § 6.9.

³⁰ See the description of the ‘Anglicana’ script in M.B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands*, xiv–xv. See also the description in Albert Derolez, *Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books*, 134–41.

³¹ Parkes, *English Cursive Books Hands*, xix.

³² *ibid.*, xv.

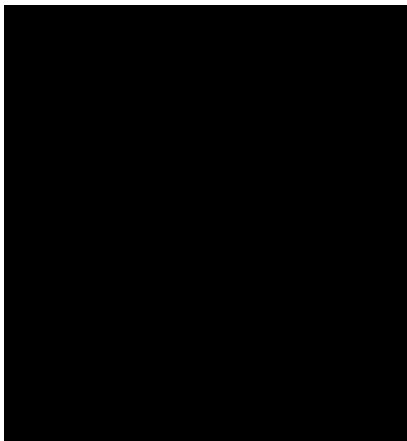


Fig. 4b. f.2v.

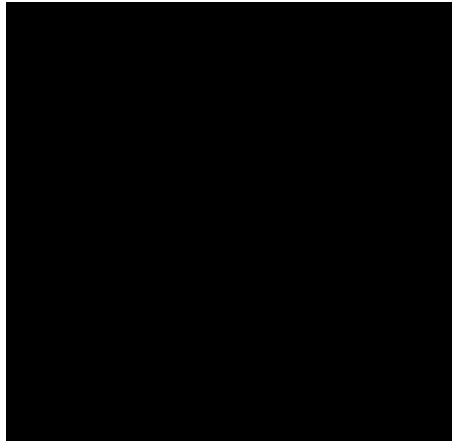


Fig. 4c. f.3r.

Langlois transcribes an erased ownership note on the final folio of this manuscript; today only the first three words are legible even under ultraviolet light: ‘Ceste libre est a Robert de Becchys (?), de la don[ation] f[rere] Joh[an] de Nichole’.³³ In the century that has elapsed since Langlois’s study this note has become unreadable and we have no choice but to accept his transcription. However, since I have been unable to find any record of the family name ‘Becchys’ in medieval England or anywhere else, I would suggest that Langlois has mistranscribed ‘Beccles’ or ‘Becclys’. The toponymic name ‘de Beccles’ is fairly well attested in fourteenth-century England, with a wide range of variant spellings.

This manuscript also contains some fourteenth-century lexical glosses in Italian.³⁴

4 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D.913 (s.xiv)³⁵

Handled by an English reader c.1400.

Contents: miscellaneous medieval fragments, including leaves from two different copies of the *Romance of the Rose*.

Unknown owners.

A fifteenth-century English hand has filled in a line left out of the original fourteenth-century copy of the *Rose* preserved in this manuscript: ‘Quar de caroller se iossasse’ (f.94av; *RR*, 791–2, fig.5a). The same scribe has filled in the missing rhyme-word ‘rotuenges’ (f.94bv; *RR*, 747, fig.5b).³⁶ This scribe displays a number of typically insular graphs (two-compartment *a*,

³³ Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 187.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 187.

³⁵ Described by Langlois, *ibid.*, 160. Langlois does not mention the English scribe’s intervention.

³⁶ The word ‘rotuenge’ is an attested form of *rotrouenge*, a refrain-based song; see *DMF*, s.v., *rotrouenge*.

long *r*, ‘backwards’ *e*, figure-of-8 *g*).³⁷ The use of these graphs in combination with the broken strokes presumably influenced by continental cursive scripts suggests that this hand belongs to the early period of assimilation of ‘anglicana’ to ‘secretary’, that is, perhaps c.1400.³⁸

The scribe must have collated more than one copy of the *Rose* to correct these lacunae.



Fig. 5(a). f.94av.

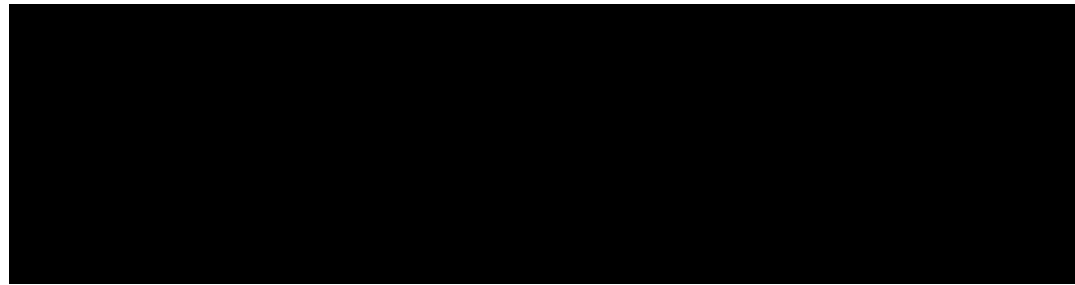


Fig. 5(b). f.94bv.

5 Cambridge, St John’s College, MS G.5 (s.xiv med.)³⁹

Handled by an English reader before c.1400.

Contents: *Romance of the Rose*; ‘La Bonté des femmes’; ‘En mon deduit a moys de May’.

Medieval owners: unknown, perhaps ‘Wymund Bonvyle’.

This manuscript displays some of the clearest evidence of use by an English reader and is of considerable importance to the history of francophone literature in England. Its English elements go unremarked by Langlois. On the verso of the final leaf of the *Rose*, an English hand of c.1400 has transcribed what looks like a royal patent issued by Richard II:

³⁷ Derolez notes that the ‘backwards *e*’, that is, an *e* formed by a distinctive single circular stroke, was not unknown on the continent; *Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books*, 137.

³⁸ Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands*, xx.

³⁹ Described by Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 151. Langlois does not mention its English connections. See also M.R. James, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of St John’s College Cambridge*, now available online:

<http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/G_5.htm> (accessed 28 June 2015).

Richardus dei gracia Rex anglie et ffrancie Dominus Hibernie et dux Aquitaine
 omnibus balliuis Baronibus vicecomitibus salutem sciatis quod per finem quem
 Wymund Bonuyle nobiscum fecit concescimus et licenciam dedimus par nobis et
 heredibus nostris quantum in nobis est quod iuste et sine delacione intret in
 tenementum suum de stanton
 (f.160v)

[Richard, by the grace of God King of England and France, Lord of Ireland and Duke of Aquitaine, to all bailiffs, barons, and viscounts, greetings. Know that by the fine that Wymund Bonvyle paid to us we granted and gave licence through us and our heirs, as much as is in our power, that justly and without accusation he should enter into his property of Stanton.]

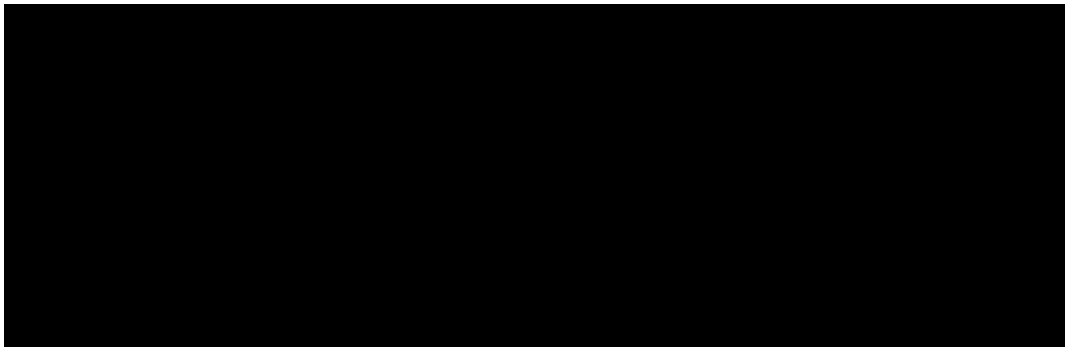


Fig. 6. Cambridge, St John's College, MS G.5, f.160v.

The Calendar of Patent Rolls for Richard's reign does not contain any document that matches this one; a certain William Bonevill appears many times in the rolls, and does pay a fine to the King over a property dispute in 1392. But the details of this case seem to be quite different, and relate to the property of Thurlbear, Somerset, rather than Stanton.⁴⁰ There are numerous towns and villages by the name of Stanton throughout England. Whoever 'Wymund Bonvyle' might be — and William Bonevill seems like a reasonable candidate — it is likely that this manuscript belonged to him.

After this final leaf of the *Rose*, a number of leaves have been bound into the codex, containing two Anglo-French poems in an English hand probably of the early fifteenth century.⁴¹ Although it is difficult to be certain, it seems very likely that these poems were deliberately added to this copy of the *Rose* by a medieval user; as in the main text of this codex, the English scribe has ruled two columns with thirty-four lines per column, suggesting

⁴⁰ See *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Richard II*, 5:54.

⁴¹ 'La Bonté des femmes' is transcribed in part by Paul Meyer, 'G.5 – *Roman de la Rose – La Bonté des femmes – Pastourelle*', 334–5. The second poem is transcribed by H.E. Sandison, 'En mon deduit a moys de may', 235–44; the final lines of the poem, missing from the Cambridge manuscript, are given by Charity Scott Stokes, 'Thomas Hoccleve's *Mother of God* and *Balade to the Virgin*', 82–3.

a deliberate aesthetic imitation of the layout of the *Rose* in MS G.5. ‘La Bonté des femmes’, a poem in praise of women, could be well understood as a conscious response to the antifeminism of *Rose*. The second Anglo-French poem, a piece that begins with the springtime setting of a *dit* or *pastourelle* but then reveals itself to be a devotional Marian poem, was later translated into English by Thomas Hoccleve.⁴² It, too, can be seen as a reappropriation of some of the themes of the *Rose*.

There are some marginal comments in English in an early sixteenth-century hand, comparing the text to the Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose*, and also, in what might be the earliest evidence of this text being consumed in England, to the *Rose moralisé* of Jean Molinet (completed 1500, first published 1503).⁴³

6 London, British Library, MS Royal 19 B XII (s.xv)⁴⁴
In England by 1446–1457.

Contents: *Romance of the Rose*; *Testament de Jehan de Meung*; *Le Songe*; *Les Sept articles de la foi*.

Medieval owners: Humphrey Stafford, first Duke of Buckingham (1402–1460); Nicholas Upton (c.1400–1457); Henry VII (1457–1509) or Henry VIII (1491–1547).

Elizabeth Urquart transcribes an erased ownership note in this manuscript that goes unmentioned by Langlois: ‘Liber magistri Nicholas Vpton precentoris Sarum presenti humffridi comes Stafford’.⁴⁵ I am unable to make out the note fully today, even under ultraviolet light, and it looks as if it may have been damaged by the application of a reagent. The compilers of the Royal Manuscripts catalogue give the same transcription, and may have been Urquart’s source.⁴⁶ Although Humphrey was created as the first Duke of Buckingham in 1444, in this instance he is referred to by his father’s heraldic title. Nicholas Upton was Precentor of Salisbury Cathedral from 1446 until his death 1457 — the book must thus have

⁴² See Stokes, ‘Thomas Hoccleve’s *Mother of God* and *Balade to the Virgin*’.

⁴³ f.30r, f.38r, f.79v. The note on f.30r appears beside the ligature between Guillaume’s and Jean’s section, and includes a cross-reference to ‘the Romant moralised [...] fo: 24’. In the 1521 Le Noir edition of *Le Roman de la rose moralisé*, f.24v contains an explanation that Jean has here taken over from Guillaume.

⁴⁴ Described by Langlois, 140–41.

⁴⁵ f.194v; Urquart, ‘Fifteenth Century Literary Culture’, 156.

⁴⁶ ‘Liber magistri Nicholai Vpton [...] pñti Humffridi comes (*sic*) Stafford’, Warner and Gilson, *Royal and King’s Collections*, 2:328. Emden also list this manuscript among Upton’s known books, *Biographical Register*, 1934.

changed hands between the men in the period 1446–1457.⁴⁷ Stafford, the grandson of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester (also an owner of the *Rose*, cf. 2), spent the years 1430–2 in France, where he was granted high office (governor of Paris, constable of France, and lieutenant-general of Normandy).⁴⁸ He may have acquired or perhaps even commissioned this manuscript during this period. Upton was an Oxford University cleric who had become a doctor of canon law in 1439; yet he had also been at war in France as the chaplain to Thomas Montagu. Upton composed his popular *De studio militari* in 1447 — a treatise on heraldry and war dedicated to a different Humphrey (Duke of Gloucester).⁴⁹ The connection between Upton and Humphrey Stafford remains obscure, but the fact that they were both at war in France in the early 1430s could explain at least their acquaintance.⁵⁰

On the final folio of the text of the *Rose* in this codex, an English scribe has appended the words ‘la Romaunce de la Rose’ to the main scribe’s ‘Explicit’ (f.147v). As Langlois notes, the unusual spelling of ‘Romaunce’ suggests that it already belonged to an English reader at this point.⁵¹ ‘Romaunce’ is an attested Anglo-Norman form;⁵² confusion over the gender of articles (‘*la* Romaunce’) is also common in insular French.⁵³ The hand is of the mid or late fifteenth century, and displays no insular graphical features.

This manuscript bears the royal monogram ‘HR’ (Henricus Rex) on f.2r, and so at some point belonged to Henry VII or Henry VIII; it has been associated with one of the copies of the *Roman de la rose* mentioned in the 1542 Westminster palace library catalogue.⁵⁴ It is unknown how it made its way from the possession of Nicholas Upton into the royal collection.

⁴⁷ Carole Rawcliffe, ‘Stafford, Humphrey’; Andrew Brown and Craig Walker, ‘Upton, Nicholas’; Emden, *Biographical Register*, 1933–4.

⁴⁸ Rawcliffe, ‘Stafford, Humphrey’.

⁴⁹ Brown and Walker, ‘Upton, Nicholas’.

⁵⁰ Urquart, 156

⁵¹ Langlois, *Manuscrits*, 140.

⁵² Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, § 1.6: ‘The AN orthographical practice of substituting *aun* for *an* is particularly distinctive’ (49).

⁵³ Mentioned in Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, 123.

⁵⁴ Carley (ed.), *Libraries of King Henry VIII*, 224.

Documentary Evidence for Lost or Unidentified Manuscripts⁵⁵

7

In Wales before 1316

Medieval owners: Llywelyn Bren (d.1318); William Montagu, second Lord Montagu (c.1285–1319).

After a failed rebellion against local English lords, Llywelyn Bren of Glamorgan was imprisoned and brought to the Tower of London in May 1316.⁵⁶ Having suppressed Bren's uprising, William Montagu, second Lord Montagu, passed on his seized valuables to the King's custodian in Glamorgan, Payn Turberville (d. in or before 1327).⁵⁷ This list of goods and chattels survives, and is dated to 8 May 1316. Another, undated list, presumably part of the same transfer, inventories the items found in Bren's treasury, which Montagu likewise passed over to the custody of Tuberville. This list includes some books:

j romanz de la rose. iij liures Galeys. iiij autres liures⁵⁸

[One *Romance of the Rose*, three Welsh books, four other books]

A further indenture, dated 10 May 1316, shows that some of the smaller valuables had passed from Payne Turberville back to Montagu, including the books:

Sachetz nos auer resceu de Monsr Payn Turb'uill Gardein des dites prtyes dys aneus de or, vn fermaille de or, Vn autre dargent, Treys liueres escritz de Galeys & vn liure de Romaunce, des bens qe furent a Lewelin⁵⁹

[Know that we have received of Master Payne Turberville, custodian of the aforementioned parts, ten gold rings, one gold clasp, another of silver, three books written in Welsh and one in French, from the goods that belonged to Llywelyn.]

It seems safe to assume that the book of 'Romaunce' is the book mentioned in the more detailed list as the 'romanz de la rose', and that this book passed into and perhaps remained in

⁵⁵ A methodological caveat: there were (at least) two thirteenth-century poems that went by the title 'Roman de la rose'. One is the *Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, the other is the work also known today as *Guillaume de Dole*, by Jean Renart. Since Renart's *Rose* survives today in a single manuscript copied in fourteenth-century Picardy (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS Regiensi latini 1725), I think it is safe to assume that all documentary references to the *Rose* refer to the *Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. By the same token, since there is only one known surviving manuscript of Guillaume's text without Jean's continuation (BnF, MS fr. 12786), it is also safe to assume that documentary references to the *Rose* are referring to manuscripts that include both parts of the text.

⁵⁶ T.A. Tout and R.A. Griffiths, 'Llywelyn Bren'.

⁵⁷ See David Crouch, 'Turberville family'.

⁵⁸ John Hobson Matthews (ed.), *Cardiff Records*, 4:58. Also quoted in Chotzen, *Recherches sur la poésie de Daffyd ab Gwilym*, 110.

⁵⁹ Matthews, *Cardiff Records*, 4:57.

the keeping of William Montagu. Montagu's son, also William, will later be sent another copy of the *Rose* by Charles V of France (= item 8).

8

Sent to England 1373–1380.

Medieval owners: Charles V of France; William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury (1328–1397).⁶⁰

In 1380, two months after the king's death, Jean Blanchet made a copy of Gilles Malet's 1373 inventory of Charles V's library, noting any additions or absences in the margin.⁶¹ This manuscript is preserved as BnF, MS fr. 2700. One such explicatory note appears beside one of the king's four copies of the *Rose* (a volume described as 'bien escript et historié'):

Le Roy l'a envoieé au conte de Salzebery [par] l'arcevesque de Rouen⁶²

[The King sent it to the Earl of Salisbury by the Archbishop of Rouen]

The Earl of Salisbury in the period 1373–1380 was William Montagu (d.1397). The 'arcevesque de Rouen' here mentioned is Guillaume de l'Estrange (d.1389), a man occupied almost exclusively between 1372 and 1373 as a papal nuncio overseeing peace negotiations between England and France.⁶³ Delisle notes Charles V's prodigality with the manuscripts in his library, but does not suggest why he might have sent this book to an English nobleman.⁶⁴ Presumably it was a diplomatic gift.

William Montagu, like his brother John (his successor as Earl of Salisbury, who was admired by Christine de Pizan for his poetry and was briefly guardian of her son), seems to have had considerable interests in francophone literature. He bought the copy of the *Bible historiale* captured along with Jean II at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356 — this manuscript survives today as BL, MS Royal 19 D II.⁶⁵ He also owned a copy of Brunetto Latini's *Livres*

⁶⁰ Badel mentions this manuscript, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 60. However, Badel supposes, wrongly, that the Earl of Salisbury referred to here is John Montagu, William's successor. Kamath replicates this error, and also incorrectly supposes the opposite direction of travel, from England to France, 'The *Rose* and Middle English Poetry', 1119, n.4.

⁶¹ For an analysis of these inventories, Delisle, 1:23–9.

⁶² See Lepold Delisle, *Recherches sur la librairie de Charles V*, 2:192; see also BnF, MS fr. 2700 f.19v (=f.XXv).

⁶³ For a biography of Guillaume see Léon Jouen, *Manoir archiépiscopal de Rouen*, 15–19.

⁶⁴ Delisle, *Recherches*, 1:120–1.

⁶⁵ See f.1v for William's ownership note and his description of the circumstances in which he purchased this book.

dou tresor.⁶⁶ He seems to have been involved in a legal dispute with the Savoyard knight and poet Oton de Graunson in 1385.⁶⁷ Like Chaucer, he was a witness at the Scrope–Grosvenor heraldry case.⁶⁸

9

In England before 1377.

Medieval owners: Edward III (1312–1377); Richard II (1367–1400).

After the death of Edward III in 1377, several of the king's valuables were entrusted to John Bacon, Chamberlain of the Exchequer. Bacon seems to have begun to sell off some of these valuables to pay royal debts, and, as a result, the crown demanded that they were returned to its jurisdiction in 1383.⁶⁹ But earlier, in 1379, Bacon had handed over three of the books in his custody to the king's *valet de chambre*, named (remarkably) John Rose.⁷⁰ These were a French Bible, a 'Romance de Percevall et Gawayn' and a 'Rommans de la Rose'.⁷¹ Richard Firth Green, in his detailed analysis of the documents relating to these books, supposes that by 1384 most of the books inherited from Edward III had been sold.⁷² The evidence of sale seems less clear for the books in the custody of John Rose than for the other volumes mentioned.

10

In England before 1384–1385.

Chained to the desk in the library of St George's Chapel, Windsor.

St George's Chapel is one of the two English religious institutions known to have possessed a copy of the *Rose* as part of their main library collection. The catalogue to the library of the chapel, created in 1384–5, mentions 'Duo libri gallici de Romaunces de quibus vnus liber de

⁶⁶ See Cavanaugh, 591–2.

⁶⁷ John L. Leland, 'Montagu, William'.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Green, 'King Richard II's Books Revisited', 235–39. Green usefully clarifies some observations from an earlier article, Edith Rickert, 'King Richard II's Books'.

⁷⁰ Green, 237.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 237.

⁷² *ibid.*, 238.

Rose et alius difficilis materie'.⁷³ These are the only vernacular books mentioned, and are included as part of a list of more predictable codices, categorised as 'Libri diuersarum scientiarum catenati in ecclesia'.⁷⁴ Like these, then, the *Rose* would have been chained to the desk in the chapel.

The chapel was founded by Edward III in 1348 to maintain prayer for the royal line; it was outside ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The secular canons there were, from the beginning, prominent royal administrators appointed by the king, and the chapel also supported twenty-six Alms Knights (or Poor Knights).⁷⁵ Willoughby speculates about the presence of the *Rose* in this collection: 'Conceivably, the books had been received from an aristocratic donor who had left them with the familiar instruction that they be chained in the church, an arrangement, incidentally, to benefit the Poor Knights, who would have had the books accessible to them there.'⁷⁶

11

In England before 1389.

In Dover Priory Library.

John Whytefelde's detailed 1389 catalogue of the library of Dover Priory survives as BodL, MS Bodley 920.⁷⁷ As part of a section devoted to the library's small collection of vernacular romances, Whytefelde identifies the 'Romans de la Rose'. The catalogue also includes the incipits of every text in the library. For the *Rose*, instead of the famous opening 'Maintes gens', Whytefelde's inventory erroneously gives 'Seyntes gens' (fig.7).⁷⁸

⁷³ James M. W. Willoughby (ed.), *The Libraries of Collegiate Churches*, 894. See also Busby, *Codex and Context*, 750–51.

⁷⁴ Willoughby (ed.), *Libraries of Collegiate Churches*, 892.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 861–2.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 884–5.

⁷⁷ William P. Stoneman (ed.), *Dover Priory*, 148. See also Busby, *Codex and Context*, 751–52.

⁷⁸ Stoneman (ed.), *Dover Priory*, 148. While Lecoy's edition follows its base text in reading 'Aucunes gens' for line 1 of the *Rose*, 'Maintes gens' is chosen by Langlois and occurs very often in manuscripts. 'Seyntys gens' is likely to be an accidental error, rather than a witness to an unknown variant. In this catalogue, the first letter of all titles and incipits were left out by the original scribe to be filled in later by the rubricator; in the event, the first letters were filled in using dark ink, but still distinguishable from that of the main scribe; the 'S' of 'Seyntys gens' looks like a pleasingly inaccurate guess at the first letter of what had once been 'Meyntes gens'.

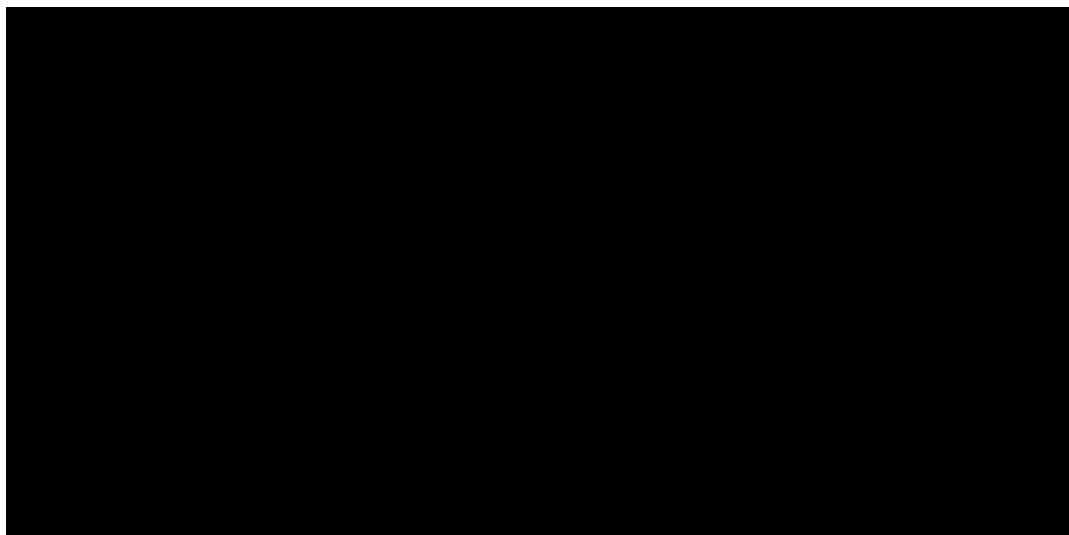


Fig. 7. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 920, f.47v.

12–14

In the hands of the Duke of Bedford by 1425.

Medieval owners: Charles V; Charles VI; John, Duke of Bedford.

After the death of Charles VI, the French royal library was sold in its entirety to John, Duke of Bedford and Regent of France. The library had dwindled under Charles's reign, and the catalogue produced to value the king's goods after his death in 1422 lists 843 volumes.⁷⁹ However, Charles V's three copies of the *Rose* (the fourth having been given to William Montagu in 1373–80) seem to have remained in the collection, and are included in this list.⁸⁰ Thus, although it is impossible to say what became of them, three copies of the *Rose* certainly passed into the Duke of Bedford's hands when the transaction was finalised in 1425. Many of the volumes from the French royal library seem to have been taken to John's castle in Rouen, but there is also evidence that after his death they were brought to London and gradually dispersed.⁸¹ The inventory made after John's death includes a passing reference to 'þe grete librarie þat cam owte of France', and suggests that the French royal collection has been placed in the hands of Cardinal Beaufort.⁸²

⁷⁹ Stratford, 'Manuscripts of John, Duke of Bedford', 339. Note that Delisle's study of Charles V's library lists 1239 volumes, *Recherches*, 2:200.

⁸⁰ Louis Douët d'Arcq, *Inventory de la bibliothèque du roi Charles VI*, xxxii, 33, 80, 91.

⁸¹ Stratford, 'Manuscripts of John, Duke of Bedford', 341.

⁸² Jenny Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories*, 226.

15

In England before 1448.

Medieval owners: Sir John Fastolf.

A 1448 inventory of some items in Sir John Fastolf's castle of Caister in East Anglia lists a number of French books, including one item described as 'liber de Roy Artour et Romaunce de la Rose'.⁸³ Perhaps this is one of the *Rose* manuscripts that had passed from the French royal library into the hands of John, Duke of Bedford, although none of the *Rose* manuscripts listed in the inventory of Charles VI's books made for John include any Arthurian material.⁸⁴ Co-occurrences of the *Rose* with Arthurian material in a single manuscript are rare.

Fastolf's interest in French literature is well known: Stephen Scrope and William Worcester dedicated their translations of works by Christine de Pizan to him, and he possessed a *de luxe* copy of Christine's *Epistre Othea* (BodL, MS Laud misc. 570).⁸⁵

Insecure Evidence of British Readers

Ghent, University Library, MS 548 (s.xiv ¾)⁸⁶

Copied by a scribe with Anglo-Norman dialect traces

In addition to the sixteenth-century pen trials in English in this manuscript, Langlois notes that the dialect of the scribe contains traces of Picard and, less prominently, Anglo-Norman dialect forms.⁸⁷ Examples of typically Anglo-Norman orthographies include *jeo* and *ceo* for *je* and *ce*; also *aun* for *an*.⁸⁸ The *textura* or *textualis* script contains features that are common to set hands across northern Europe.⁸⁹ Perhaps this scribe lived or trained in England. He cannot be straightforwardly designated as 'English'.

⁸³ Richard Beadle, 'Sir John Fastolf's French Books', 103.

⁸⁴ Douët d'Arcq, *Inventaire de la bibliothèque du roi Charles VI*, 33, 80, 91.

⁸⁵ Beadle, 'Fastolf's French Books', 97–8; see also Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property*, 61–107.

⁸⁶ Described by Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 172–3.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁸ Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, § 32.2, § 1.6.

⁸⁹ Derolez, *Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books*, 72–101.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A.446 (s.xiii–s.xiv)⁹⁰
Perhaps in England before 1477.

The front flyleaves of this codex consist of two leaves from the *Rose*. The binding is medieval: an inscription is written directly onto the pastedown which remains attached to the boards, and shows the book to have been owned by the cleric Nicholas Kempston, who died in 1477.⁹¹ We cannot be certain, but since the binding is medieval it seems likely that these fragments of the *Rose* were in England and bound into the codex before this date.

INTERPRETING THE EVIDENCE

The sheer number of manuscripts of the *Rose* that can be certainly associated with British readers in the Middle Ages is astonishing. In her detailed study of the English reception of Deguileville, Josephine Houghton was unable to securely locate *any* manuscripts of the hugely popular *Pèlerinages* in England in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.⁹² Machaut also presents a very different picture: although I have not conducted a comprehensive investigation into the Machaut manuscripts, I know of no extant codices of Machaut's works with evidence of medieval English readers, and only one piece of documentary evidence for their English ownership.⁹³ In comparison, the circulation of the *Rose* is entirely exceptional. And just as Sylvia Huot's study of *Rose* manuscripts on the continent has demonstrated the diversity of the environments in which it was consumed and the wide variety of responses that it provoked, it is clear that despite the marked concentration of the text in aristocratic circles, its appeal was relatively broad.⁹⁴

Kate Harris has observed that '[i]f the particularity of the evidence of the extant or the recorded manuscripts on which the study of book ownership relies were merely arbitrary, a matter of incompleteness only, it would be possible to draw generalisations from the

⁹⁰ Described by Langlois, *Manuscripts*, 159–60.

⁹¹ BodL, MS Rawl. A.446, inner front board; cf. Kempston's entry in Emden, *Biographical Register*, 1034.

⁹² Houghton, 'The Works of Guillaume de Deguileville', 32–3.

⁹³ Isabella, Duchess of York, mentions a Machaut manuscript in her 1392 will (Cavanaugh, *Books Privately Owned*, 460–1).

⁹⁴ Huot, *The 'Romance of the Rose'*.

surviving evidence'.⁹⁵ Worse than partial, book-ownership evidence is drawn from corpora which in some cases actively occlude secular vernacular works. It is likely that many more copies of the *Rose* were handled by English users than the above list suggests, yet the nature of the evidence means that we should be wary of extrapolating broad conclusions. In extant manuscripts, for example, ownership notes are often erased (as in item **3**), and although I have found some palaeographical evidence for English book users in marginal notes or corrections (items **3**, **4**), it is by no means necessary that every reader who handles a book will leave some traceable mark, nor even that the palaeographical or linguistic evidence is entirely secure: 'books can sit in supercilious silence, refusing to confirm or deny the provenance that probability or speculation suggest to us.'⁹⁶ In items **3** and **4**, it is only the fact that these manuscripts happened to have been damaged or contain omissions that led English scribes to intervene and leave one stratum of evidence for their use of that book. Finally, it is important to note that over the course of the fifteenth century, as the continental 'secretary' hand gains ground, and as Anglo-French moves towards Central French dialect forms, it becomes increasingly difficult to state with any certainty whether a marginal note or correction in French came from the pen of an insular scribe.⁹⁷

Documentary evidence for book circulation is equally problematic. In general, across Europe, the only private libraries to produce full catalogues were royal or aristocratic, but the first formal catalogues of the English royal collection were not produced until the reign of Henry VIII. Wills and testaments are certainly witness to the widespread ownership of books in many different social environments in medieval England, but their tendency to list only liturgical books by name is such a widespread feature that it is almost a law of the genre.⁹⁸ A much more fruitful resource can be found in the detailed inventories produced by English state authorities after a political killing; it is remarkable that two very different executed men,

⁹⁵ Kate Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers, Owners', 163.

⁹⁶ Rundle, 'English Books and the Continent', 281.

⁹⁷ Andres Max Kristol, 'Le début du rayonnement Parisien'. Evidence for English attempts to learn continental French can also be seen in the diffusion of a number of language-learning texts — see Kristol (ed.), *Manières de langage*.

⁹⁸ Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers, and Owners', 164.

Thomas, Duke of Gloucester and Llywelyn Bren, should both have owned a copy of the *Rose*.⁹⁹

Despite these problems, it is still possible to interpret the evidence. What is most immediately striking is the prevalence of aristocratic and royal owners. The record is skewed towards preserving this kind of evidence, but it remains significant. The fact that Edward III and then Richard II should own a copy of the text is not surprising. Richard II, in particular, is thought to have cultivated a relationship with continental francophone literature, and it has been suggested that the volume of poetry that Froissart claims to present to Richard survives today as BnF, MS fr. 831.¹⁰⁰ The royal court, it must be remembered, was not an impermeable body; it interacted closely with the urban book trade in London and, no doubt, the continent.¹⁰¹ In certain cases, manuscripts of the *Rose* seem to have acted as symbols of aristocratic wealth and cultivation, and sometimes they just quietly changed hands as heritable commodities of value. The fact that Christine de Lindsay should have a copy of the *Rose* carried out for her while attempting to re-establish her claims to territories in Britain might suggest that this large and lavishly illustrated volume could act as a public or personal claim to aristocratic refinement (item **1**). Most telling is the fact that Charles V should send one of his high-grade copies of the *Rose* ('bien escripte et historié') to William Montagu in what seems to have been a diplomatic manoeuvre (item **8**) — Charles could not have suspected that the rest of his *Rose* manuscripts, indeed his whole library, would end up in English hands within a few decades (items **12–14**). Montagu had been instrumental in capturing Charles's father at the Battle of Poitiers, and that the French King should send him

⁹⁹ K.B. McFarlane says that '[t]hese chance survivals are likely to suggest a very unlikely correlation between crime, in particular treason, and literacy', *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 237. It should also be mentioned, however, that the inventory of the belongings of an accused traitor will not always reveal a copy of the *Rose*. Sir Simon Burley (executed 1388) had several French romances, but no *Rose*; see Scattergood, 'Two Medieval Book Lists'. In this article Scattergood also prints a list of the books confiscated from the debtor priest William de Walcote; again, no *Rose*. The posthumous inventory and the will of Henry le Scrope likewise do not reveal any copies of the *Rose*, although it is clear that these lists do not include all of Scrope's books; Kingsford, 'Two Forfeitures in the Year of Agincourt', 82–3.

¹⁰⁰ Huot, *From Song to Book*, 241. For an investigation of the role of the English court in book production, see A.I. Doyle, 'English Books In and Out of Court'.

¹⁰¹ See Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Aristocratic Cultural Patronage and Book Bequests', 523; Doyle, 'English Books', 171.

a gift is a fascinating reminder of the strange aristocratic intimacy fostered by the Hundred Years War.¹⁰² If we understand well-executed, heavily illustrated manuscripts of the *Rose* to be high-value symbols of aristocratic wealth and status, then perhaps their circulation in England can be compared to the focus on the visual aspect of the *Rose* that developed in certain aristocratic milieux: on the continent, in the late fourteenth century, it seems to have been a favourite subject for tapestries.¹⁰³ While I know of no evidence for tapestries depicting the narrative material of the *Rose* in England, there is, among the belongings of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, a ‘pece Daras sanz or de lestorie dun assaut fait as Dames en un Chastel’.¹⁰⁴ As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the depiction of the ‘siege of the castle of ladies’ was widespread; it predates the *Rose* and flourished well into the Renaissance.¹⁰⁵ But for a man who owned a heavily illustrated copy of the *Rose* which contained illustrations of suggestively similar scenes, such an image could well have evoked the literary analogue of the *Rose*.¹⁰⁶

But if some of the evidence gathered here gestures towards the commodity-value of *Rose* manuscripts while revealing little about its literary reputation, the St John’s College Cambridge manuscript (item 5) is of huge importance for demonstrating how the *Rose* continued to be a vital literary force. If, as I suggest above, the Anglo-French poems bound into this manuscript were selected and copied as a deliberate response to the *Rose*, this shows

¹⁰² Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 179.

¹⁰³ Hicks (ed.), *Débat*, xliii, n.90; Fleming, *Allegory and Iconography*, 329. Philippe le Hardi, Duke of Burgundy, purchased three tapestries depicting the *Rose* in the last two decades of the fourteenth century, one of which (carried out in 1387) he gave to his brother, Jean duc de Berry. See Arthur Piaget, *Martin le Franc*, 59–60; Georges Doutrepoint, *La littérature française à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne*, 329. It is interesting to note that Philippe also sends several tapestries to Richard II in the 1390s, although none are known to have depicted the *Rose*: Guiffrey, *Histoire générale de la tapisserie*, v.2, pt.2, 19. Fleming suggests that one sixteenth-century narrative tapestry of the *Rose* survives in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad — the similarities are striking, but there are some key differences (the figure of the lover kneeling before the God of Love is labeled ‘Bouche d’Or’, for example); see N.Y. Biryukova, *The Hermitage, Leningrad*, 107–16. It has even been suggested that the tapestry sequence *La Dame à la licorne* in the Musée de Cluny might be derived from the allegorical language of the *Rose*. See Dulce Ma Gonzalez Doreste, ‘Du *Roman de la Rose* à *La Dame à la Licorne*’.

¹⁰⁴ Dillon and Hope, ‘Inventory of the Goods and Chattels Belonging to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester’, 288.

¹⁰⁵ Greene, *Besieging the Castle of Ladies*.

¹⁰⁶ BL, MS Royal 19 B XIII contains the following visual analogues: *Bel Accueil* and *La Vieille in Jealousy’s Castle*, f.31v; *Franchise fighting Dangier*, f.103r; *Venus setting fire to the Castle* (seemingly populated by men), f.141v.

that these manuscripts were not merely objects of value and display, but could be living components of a continued literary and cultural activity.

The evidence for Llywelyn Bren's ownership of a copy of the *Rose* (item 7) is very interesting, and not just as a demonstration of the far westward diffusion of the text. Bren was a large landowner and certainly wealthy, but he had no genealogical connection to the traditional Anglo-Norman aristocracy; regional households like his in the Celtic nations of Britain may well have been more important centres for continental literary culture than we appreciate today.

St George's Chapel was a unique religious institution, and while it is fascinating to see a copy of the *Rose* afforded what seems to be a particularly privileged position in the religious space of the chapel (item 10), St George's was still within the orbit of the royal court. But the presence of a copy of the *Rose* in the library of the Benedictines at Dover Priory (item 11), coupled with the reference recorded by Langlois to 'frere Johan' of Lincoln (item 3), show that the *Rose* was amenable to a clerical audience in England, just as has been demonstrated for clerical readers on the continent.¹⁰⁷ While the record of the English universities does not reveal an analogue for the copy of the *Rose* chained to a desk in the Sorbonne in the fourteenth century, we can at least say that if English institutional libraries held copies of the *Rose*, it is easy to imagine it as part of the private book collections of clerics and scholars.¹⁰⁸

While several of the manuscripts listed above can be localised to England or elsewhere in Britain, others reveal the presence of English readers without telling us anything about who owned them or where they were held. Item 3 is particularly interesting in this regard; although we do not know at what point this manuscript arrived at the Biblioteca

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Huot's analysis of the copy of the *Rose* owned by cleric Michel Alès and copied in the papal court in Avignon, *The 'Romance of the Rose'*, 40–6. Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, gathers some evidence for clerical readers of the *Rose*; the Cistercian monk Pierre Ceffons, for example, cites it in his commentary on the *Sentences* (171–2).

¹⁰⁸ For the Sorbonne *Rose* see Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 57; Huot, *The 'Romance of the Rose'*, 84, n.42. For the Cambridge libraries see P.D. Clarke (ed.), *Libraries of Cambridge*. The volume of the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues dealing with the Oxford University and college libraries, ed. R.M. Thomson, has not yet been published. I am grateful to James Willoughby for consulting the index of the unpublished proofs and confirming that there is no mention the *Rose*.

Riccardiana, the presence of fourteenth-century lexical glosses in Italian show that these codices could have richly complex histories. Did the English reader and the Italian reader both encounter this codex in Italy? Or did they both read it in England? Or did they both access it somewhere else? — Northern France, for example, where the codex was produced. Travel not only to France but also to Italy was one way in which English readers could encounter francophone literary culture.¹⁰⁹

The fascinating Ghent University Library manuscript presents a challenge to the archival study of manuscripts that I cannot address here. Scholars tend to essentialise the national or regional identity of the medieval individuals we encounter; this scribe, neither straightforwardly ‘French’, ‘Picard’, nor ‘English’, is an excellent example of how subtle and permeable medieval identities can be. Scholarship is only beginning to reveal the complex interactions of varieties of French across North-Western Europe, and Serge Lusignan has recently demonstrated that thirteenth-century Picard scribes would sometimes deliberately imitate Anglo-Norman language forms.¹¹⁰ If nothing else, this manuscript reveals a degree of cultural fluidity that helps demonstrate the limitations of scholarly attempts to isolate manuscripts within strictly insular or continental contexts.

Apart from the uncertain case of the Ghent manuscript, I have found no evidence for the *Rose* having been copied in England by English scribes. Other continental francophone works were copied by English scribes in the fourteenth century: works by Raoul de Houdenc appear in BodL, MS Digby 86, for example, and there are *fabliaux* with widespread continental distribution in BL, MS Harley 2253.¹¹¹ Documents associated with Jean II’s imprisonment in England show that he purchased the *Roman de Renart* and Huon de Mery’s *Torneiement d’Antecrist* from English booksellers in Lincoln and London respectively. What is not clear is whether these booksellers were acting as importers or book producers — or

¹⁰⁹ Keith Busby has shown the circulation of French narrative verse in Italy, *Codex and Context*, 766–97.

¹¹⁰ Lusignan, ‘A chacun son français’.

¹¹¹ Raoul’s *Songe d’enfer* appears in BodL, MS Digby 86, ff.97v–102r. It is identified explicitly in the rubric as the work of ‘Rauf de Hodenge’. Butterfield discusses the Anglo-French circulation of some *fabliaux* in *Familiar Enemy*, 78–92.

even whether the distinction matters: '[i]f the English *librarii* ordered books especially from France for individual customers such as Jean le Bon, it is not impossible that they would have had copies made to add to their own repertoire before completing the transaction.'¹¹² Perhaps, if in some contexts a heavily illustrated manuscript of the *Rose* could be a visual symbol of wealth and power, English buyers preferred to import their books from the northern French *ateliers*.

It is difficult to say how far English readers of the *Rose* may have retained a sense of its cultural difference, its origin in a different political territory; it is certainly difficult to find, in the literary responses, any sense that Jean de Meun was seen as any more 'French' than, say, Alain de Lille. But if the *Rose* was consumed and owned by the upper echelons of aristocratic society in medieval England, there is also evidence that the text had soaked into other parts of British society, that it was not hermetically sealed in the aristocratic court. It is this kind of distribution that helps explain why writers who were positioned on the peripheries or lower levels of both aristocratic and clerical society — like Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and perhaps the *Gawain*-poet — could use the *Rose* as a powerfully generative intertext, a shared literary experience that addressed central questions of meaning and authorial control.

¹¹² Busby, *Codex and Context*, 646; see also Salter, *English and International*, 241; Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 177.

Chapter 3. William Langland

I persist in thinking that Langland was, as nearly as can be, uninfluenced and unbiased by foreign ideas, principles, and sentiments. By which I do not mean that no reminiscences of ‘French and Latin literature’ [...] can be found in his work¹

There is something strange in Jusserand’s insistence that although Langland had read Rutebeuf, the *Rose*, and Deguileville’s *Pèlerinages*, and that ‘more or less conscious reminiscences of those poems are afloat in his memory’,² he remained ‘uninfluenced and unbiased’ by the fundamental ‘ideas, principles, and sentiments’ contained in these works. Like many late nineteenth-century thinkers, Jusserand reveals a tendency to essentialise medieval cultures along ethnological lines.³ But, putting to one side his problematic concern over ‘foreign influences’, Jusserand is also expressing a fundamental problem with the analysis of Langland’s ‘sources’ that continues to cause difficulties today. For although scholars are still alert to the presence of francophone writings in *Piers Plowman* — often approaching this relationship in innovative ways, as will be shown by the forthcoming special cluster in the *Yearbook of Langland Studies*⁴ — it remains difficult to trace literary citations or allusions in *Piers Plowman* in the way that we can with Chaucer, Gower, or Jean de Meun.⁵ Langland is in many ways an allusive writer, but it is also clear that he directs the

¹ J.J. Jusserand, ‘Work of One or Five: A Reply’, 297

² Jusserand, *Piers Plowman*, 173.

³ Jusserand associates Langland with ‘the race which had the deepest [...] knowledge of tender, passionate and mystical aspirations [...] the race of the Anglo-Saxons’, *Piers Plowman*, 219. Compare, for example, Ruskin’s general thesis that Gothic ‘savageness’ was ‘an expression of its origin among Northern nations’, *The Nature of Gothic*, 12. See also Butterfield’s comments on the attitudes of Hippolyte Taine to medieval English literature, *Familiar Enemy*, 36–7, 42.

⁴ This forthcoming essay-cluster is a development from a roundtable discussion organised by Elizaveta Strakhov and R.D. Perry at the Sixth International *Piers Plowman* Conference, 23–26 July 2015, ‘Langland and the French Tradition’.

⁵ Dorothy Owen’s *Piers Plowman* is a judicious treatment of the evidence for Langland’s French antecedents that remains exemplary; for Langland and the *Rose*, see 54, 84–5, 118–9, 128; see also Isabel Davis, ‘*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*’. Perhaps the best brief analysis of Langland’s relationship to the *Rose* is Andrew Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, 3–6. For Langland and the *Roman de Fauvel*, see Roberta D. Cornelius, ‘*Piers Plowman* and the *Roman de Fauvel*’, John A. Yunck, *The Lineage of Lady Meed*, 225–6. Much attention has been given to the relationship between Langland and Deguileville: Guy Bourquin, *Piers Plowman*, 780–98; John Burrow, *Langland’s Fictions*, 8–9, 113–18; Josephine Houghton, ‘The Works of Guillaume de Deguileville’, 193–313; Vincent Gillespie, ‘The Senses in Literature’, 168–9; Gillespie, ‘Dame Study’s Anatomical Curse’; Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, 9. See also Barney, ‘Allegorical Visions’, 126–8. Scholars have pointed out that the explicit connection of *PVH* to the *Rose* means that the two texts form something of a joint source for Langland: Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 61–2; Emily Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, 13; Nievergelt, ‘Allegory, Hermeneutics, and Textuality’.

reader's attention towards a relatively narrow range of cited and quoted works, allowing other intertexts to hover in the background. I will begin, therefore, by examining some of the problems that occur when we try to locate the spectral presence of the *Rose* in *Piers Plowman*. I will then address the issues that form the core of this thesis: how Langland derived from the *Rose* a model for his own presentation of the relationship between a reader's desire for a fugitive meaning and the authorial self who produces that meaning. My central contention will be that if Langland was awakened to the penitential and salvific potential of the poetic dream-vision by Deguileville, Jean's *Rose* gave him the tools to re-ironise and re-dialogise that structure and his own relationship to it. Nievergelt has stressed the importance of triangulating *Piers Plowman* in relation to both the *Rose* and Deguileville's *Pèlerinages*, and while there will be no space here to fully address the richness of Langland's interaction with Deguileville, I will attempt to keep this complex, three-way interaction in sight.⁶

We still know too little for certain about Langland's life to begin to explore in detail how his encounter with *Rose* might have been mediated by social or institutional transactions: manuscripts of the *Rose*, as I showed in my last chapter, often had aristocratic owners in England, although there is also evidence of ownership in clerical and institutional environments. For decades now, scholars have accepted the authority of the note that appears at the end of the c.1400 copy of *Piers Plowman* in TCD, MS D.4.1.⁷ The note states that the poem was written by 'willelmi de Langlond', son of Stacy de Rokayle of Shipton under Wychwood (Oxfordshire), and recent studies have placed renewed emphasis on Langland's possible aristocratic connections.⁸ This evidence must be seen alongside the hints of seemingly 'autobiographical' information scattered through the poem (particularly in the C-Text *apologia*), which suggest that the author was a cleric in minor orders, a sort of 'clerical odd-job man'.⁹ It will perhaps suffice to say that the image of the historical Langland,

⁶ Nievergelt, 'Allegory, Hermeneutics, and Textuality'.

⁷ George Kane, *Evidence for Authorship*, esp. 26; Ralph Hanna, *William Langland*; Kane, 'Langland, William (c.1325–c.1390)'.

⁸ Robert Adams, *Langland and the Rokele Family*; for a different approach with some similar implications, see Michael Bennett, 'William Called Long Will'.

⁹ Derek Pearsall, 'Langland's London', 197.

sketched with increasing detail by new studies, at least suggests a man who moved around or through aristocratic circles in which ownership of the *Rose* was remarkably widespread in fourteenth-century England. Two interesting co-incidences help draw this out. In the TCD manuscript, Langland's father, Stacy or Eustace, is said to be a tenant of the Despensers.¹⁰ We know that Eustace de Rokele's own father, Peter de Rokele, had been in the service of Hugh Despenser the Younger,¹¹ the same man who agitated for and then oversaw the execution of Llywelyn Bren in 1318.¹² Bren's copy of the *Rose* had already passed into the hands of William Montagu in 1316. But Montagu's grand-daughter Elizabeth (d.1359) would go on to marry the son of Hugh the Younger (another Hugh), who would become the head of the Despenser estate in Langland's father's time.¹³ It is not impossible that she had inherited Bren's copy of the *Rose* from her grandfather and brought it with her to her new home when she married. Another coincidence develops from Michael Bennett's remarkable suggestion that the author of *Piers Plowman* can be identified with the 'Longe Wille' mentioned in newly discovered legal documents as belonging to the party associated with the murder of the eldest son of the Earl of Stafford in 1385.¹⁴ The victim's nephew, Humphrey, would later acquire a fifteenth-century copy of the *Rose* and give it as a gift to the cleric Nicholas Upton.¹⁵ If, as seems likely, the author of *Piers Plowman* is the historical William Langland increasingly emerging from the archives, then he can be placed in a social environment through which copies of the *Rose* are at least known to have passed. A question that is more difficult to answer is whether the *Rose* was read by Langland's actual earliest readers, or, yet more problematic, whether Langland conceived of it as part of the literary and cultural terrain of his imagined public. This question must affect any attempt to understand how the *Rose* might function as an intertext in *Piers Plowman*, for its author and its readers.

¹⁰ 'Stacy de Rokayle [...] tenens domini le Spenser in comitatu Oxoniensi [...] Stacy [that is, Eustace] de Rokayle [...] holding [land] of the lord Despenser in Oxfordshire', Kane, *Evidence for Authorship*, 26.

¹¹ Kane, 'Langland, William (c.1325–c.1390)'.

¹² See above, ch.2 (item 7); T.A. Tout and R.A. Griffiths, 'Llywelyn Bren (d.1318)'.

¹³ W. M. Ormrod, 'Montagu, William, first earl of Salisbury (1301–1344)'.

¹⁴ Bennett, 'William Called Long Will'.

¹⁵ See above, ch.2 (item 6), also Carole Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 9, for the family genealogy.

LANGLAND'S INTERTEXTS AND THE *ROMANCE OF THE ROSE*

Perhaps more than any other medieval work, the intertextuality of *Piers Plowman* has been analysed in ways that come remarkably close to Kristeva's original definition of the term.¹⁶ Langland seems less interested in using his poem to address specific texts by individual authors than he is in addressing whole socially embedded discourses — methods for approaching the transmission and recovery of meaning that he almost inevitably finds wanting. *Piers Plowman* has been read as 'exhausting the potential' and revealing the limitations of these discourses, whether legal, academic, ecclesiastical or penitential.¹⁷ I do not doubt for a moment the huge potential of such readings to enhance our understanding of Langland's activities as a writer, but I also feel that we have much to gain from a renewed focus on how Langland's textual environment also included particular literary works that he absorbed and transformed. And in the process of gathering analogues and parallels between *Piers Plowman* and earlier French allegories, I have come to the conclusion that, of all possible texts to which it could be compared, Langland's strange and exceptional poem is least unlike the *Rose*.

Langland uses the *Rose* in such diverse ways that there is little use in a list of analogues. Yet it is perhaps worth reviewing some of the more obvious similarities between the two texts, before I examine their deeper interactions. As dream poems with springtime settings, there are certainly broad generic parallels that might be nothing more than shared conventions — although we should always be cautious of a too-rapid recourse to the notion of 'conventionality'.¹⁸ The very generic heterogeneity of the two poems is one feature that unites

¹⁶ 'The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history', Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text', 37.

¹⁷ James Simpson, *Introduction*, 113. For Langland's relationship with penitential discourses, see especially David Lawton, 'Subject of *Piers Plowman*', 16–21. See also Middleton's important study of the C Text's connection to the 1388 Statute of Labourers, 'Acts of Vagrancy'.

¹⁸ Middleton, 'Audience of *Piers Plowman*' suggests that the springtime setting of the poem is derived from the 'fully naturalized English form' she terms the *chanson d'aventure* (114). This term was coined to describe narrative songs (including pastourelles) by E.K. Chambers; see Chambers and Sidgwick, *Early English Lyrics*, 266–7. It was then developed by Helen Eastbrook Sandison, *The 'Chanson d'aventure'*, 2–3. Today *chanson d'aventure* confusingly overlaps with the term used by scholars of French literature to designate fourteenth century romance-epics; on which see Philip E. Bennett, '*Chansons de geste* and *Chansons d'aventures*'. While many *pastourelles* and other narrative

them, with each imitating or parodying ecclesiastical or academic forms of utterance: the sermon, the confession, the pardon, the *disputatio*.¹⁹ More telling, perhaps is the fact that both the *Rose* and *Piers Plowman* are narrated by figures who represent to some extent an aspect of the human *voluntas* and who find themselves at odds with personifications of the rational faculties. As they traverse their dream landscapes to reach their objects of desire, these narrators have analogous experiences; when Guillaume's Lover kisses his rose and feels its 'odor' enter his body, he is accosted by antagonistic forces such as Honte and Dangier, triggering a crisis in the narrative whereby time is telescoped and Jealousy's castle is constructed in the space of a hundred lines.²⁰ When Langland's Will desires to 'assaïen' the 'savour' of a fruit on the Tree of Charity, he is prevented by the Devil and triggers a crisis in the narrative whereby time is telescoped and the Incarnation and Passion are related in the space of a hundred lines.²¹ Langland certainly seems to have drawn on the siege of the Castle of Jealousy for his psychomachic battle outside the Barn of Unity, even including a remarkable travesty of the God of Love in the form of Leccherie, who carries a bow with allegorical arrows and is armed, significantly, 'in ydelnesse' (B.20.116);²² Langland's practice here might be compared to Deguileville's transformation of the Venus of the *Rose* into the vice of Luxuria in the second recension of *PVH*. A final telling analogue is that, in both the *Rose* and *Piers Plowman*, it is a friar who first penetrates the besieged allegorical

songs do begin with a spring setting, this convention is also transmitted by the *Rose* itself, and the charge of conventionality does not mean that the source of that convention was not the *Rose* in any of the numerous copies of it that were circulating in England in the mid fourteenth century.

¹⁹ The *Rose* contains the sermon of Genius (19475–20638, esp. 19877–88), Faux-Semblant's 'confession' of Male Bouche (12331–7), the long speech of Nature described as a 'confession' (16255–64), the pardon of Nature (19351–75), the *quaestio*-cum-confession of Faux-Semblant (10901–11981). On this last mixed form, see Brownlee, 'Problem of Faux Semblant', 257. *Piers Plowman* contains the sermon of Reason (B.5.10–59), the confession of the Sins to Repentance (B.5.60–478), the pardon from Truth (B.7.107–10b) and various echoes of the forms and language of scholastic debate, e.g. "'Contra" quod I as a cleric' (B.8.21). See Simpson, *Introduction*, 58–60, 64–8, 96–8. Quotations from the B Text of *Piers Plowman* are from Schmidt (ed.), *Piers Plowman*; variant quotations from Kane and Donaldson (ed.), *Piers Plowman* will be announced as such. Quotations from the C Text are from Pearsall (ed.), *Piers Plowman*.

²⁰ *RR*, 3459–66; 3779–892.

²¹ B.16.74; B.16.79–166. In his analysis of this passage Robert Adams makes a suggestive comment: 'A person reading the poem for the first time might sense here the approach of a fitting allegorical culmination for the whole dream quest, something like the plucking of the Rose', 'Langland's Semi-Pelagianism', 381.

²² Oiseuse (Idleness) is the first figure that Guillaume's Lover meets in the garden where he will encounter the God of Love and his arrows (573–80).

buildings.²³ This list is far from exhaustive, as we will see, but it forms a basis from which we can begin to take seriously the interaction of the two texts.

I will argue throughout this chapter that the *Rose* was a profoundly important work for Langland. But why, despite the wealth of suggestive analogues, did Langland resist cultivating any explicit connection with the *Rose*, when a writer like Deguileville could cite it both as an object of admiration and of disquiet? Perhaps this absence can be linked to Langland's methods of composition — scholars have attempted to show that Langland may have worked outwards from his Latin quotations, drawing out his text from the Latin compendia and *distinctiones* that he had to hand.²⁴ Certainly it is striking that the entirety of classical *auctoritas* seems to have been reduced, for Langland, to a single named figure, 'Cato'.²⁵ Even though Langland would have read *auctores* like Ovid and Statius, firmly fixed in the grammar school curriculum, the whole question of the nature of classical *poetria* and its relation to vernacular making — a question that looms large in the *Rose* — seems to be absent.²⁶ Perhaps the lack of explicit reference to classical materials, and indeed explicit reference to the *Rose*, is related to the paucity of materials available to Langland as he crafted his poem. But Langland might also be trying to limit his citations to those that might be known by an imagined broad public.²⁷ Perhaps in the constrained range of his explicit intertexts, Langland is even gesturing towards the salvific notion of 'doing what is in you', implying that the knowledge of what it takes to 'Dowel' is widely available, not locked in abstruse learning — even as the optimism of this thought is undercut by the pessimism of the

²³ Faux-Semblant in the *Rose* (12341–50), and 'Sire *Penetrans-Domos*' in *Piers Plowman* (B.20.355). Compare also Conscience welcoming Sire *Penetrans Domos* into the Barn of Unity (B.20.357) with an earlier scene in which the God of Love concedes to welcome Faux-Semblant into his host to (11980).

²⁴ Alford, 'The Role of the Quotations'; Judson Boyce Allen, 'Langland's Reading and Writing'.

²⁵ The *Distichs of Cato* were actually late-antique, mis-attributed to Cato the Younger in the Middle Ages. Note that *Piers Plowman* does contain an unattributed quotation from Juvenal, *Satires* 10.22 at B.14.304a.

²⁶ Noted by Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations*, 24. There is one point at which Langland may reveal his awareness of the tradition of *poetria* in its technical sense. When the Four Daughters of God dance a *carole* together at the end of B.18, Peace is said to accompany them by singing a note of 'poesie' (B.18.410). The Latin quotation that follows is identified by Schmidt as coming from the *Liber parabolorum* attributed to Alain de Lille. If Langland was aware of this attribution, his reference to the song as 'poesie' might reflect the widespread late-medieval estimation of Alain de Lille as a *poeta*. However, Langland's insistent references to Plato as a 'poete' might suggest that he uses *poetrie* and associated terms for their alliterative value more than their technical sense (see B.10.175, B.1137).

²⁷ For Langland's projected idea of his public, see Middleton, 'Public Poetry'.

poem's repeated formal breakdowns.²⁸ But if Langland did seek to limit his own explicitly acknowledged intertextual relationships, the *Rose* still leaks into his poem, revealing his deep engagement with it.

Whether or not Langland imagined his poem as destined for an audience who were easily familiar with the *Rose*, it is possible to argue that some of Langland's readers did have that familiarity. When the dreaming Will looks out over the field full of folk he sees a Pardoner who produces a 'bulle with bisshopes seles' (B.Pr.69). A few lines later, we learn that

Lewed men leved hym wel and liked his wordes,
Comen up knelynge to kissen his bulles.
(B.Pr.72–3)

I agree entirely with Derek Pearsall that 'the illogical plural admits the obscene pun' (C.Pr.71n), but I also suspect that Galloway is right to follow the Kane-Donaldson text (and the minority of manuscripts) to read 'kissen his bulle', and attribute the inconsistency between the earlier 'bulle' (B.Pr.69) and these 'bulles' (B.Pr.73) to a scribal error.²⁹ But if we accept that the possible obscenity was understood as such by the scribes who inserted or transmitted the reading 'bulles', then we enter into a complex and fascinating intertextual interaction between Chaucer's Pardoner (whose 'coillons' Harry Bailey wishes to hold instead of 'relikes', *CT*, VI.952–3) and the world of the *Rose*, where Raison's discourse on *coilles* and *reliques* creates a slippage between the organs of reproduction and the objects of devotion — objects or organs that are kissed, of course, by the kneeling lover at the climax of the *Rose* (21561–3). Langland may or may not have inscribed a deliberate allusion to the *Rose* here, but it's certainly likely that such a reading was available to his scribes; if this variant is

²⁸ 'For if the thought of the poem is orthodox, Christian, and hopeful, its art suggests instability: the imminent collapse of orthodoxy and failure of hope', Charles Muscatine, *Poetry and Crisis*, 107. Nicholas Watson has presented perhaps the most optimistic reading of Langland's soteriology, 'Visions of Inclusion'. However, if Janet Coleman and Robert Adams are right to situate Langland's theology in the fourteenth-century academic discourse of the *moderni*, then man is guaranteed salvation through God's *potentia ordinata*, but — crucially — that guarantee can be undermined through God's *potentia absoluta*. See Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni*, 18, 29; Adams, 'Piers's Pardon', 375–7. On the notion of 'doing what is in you' see Coleman, 24.

²⁹ Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, 89. Although *ballok* is more common than *bal* to denote a testicle in Middle English, the latter term was in use, see *MED*, s.v., *bal* (n.), 8.

scribal, I think it stemmed from a reader who understood this line through the combined lens of Chaucer and the *Rose*.³⁰ Whether or not Langland wanted his poem to be understood as directly responding to the *Rose*, some of his readers were going to do so anyway.

A final example will help illustrate the kinds of difficulties that are encountered when one tries to analyse in detail the connection between Langland's poem and the *Rose*. In his dialogue with Anima in Passus XV of the B Text, Will is told about hypocrisy in conventional terms that recall Christ's association of the Scribes and Pharisees with whitewashed tombs in Matthew 23. As I demonstrated in my first chapter, the question of hypocrisy, and the disparity between what is inside and what is outside, is central to the poetics of the *Rose*. Since these ideas are widespread in the Middle Ages, it should not be surprising to find the notion expressed in similar terms in *Piers Plowman*. Below I quote the relevant lines from Schmidt, followed by an interesting variant that appears in the Kane–Donaldson edition:

For in Latyn ypocrisie is likned to a dongehill
 That were bisnewed with snow, and snakes withinne,
 Or to a wal that were whitlymed and were foul withinne.
 Right so manye preestes, prechours and prelates —
 Ye ben enblaunched with *bele paroles* and with clothes,
 Ac youre werkes and wordes therunder aren ful wolveliche.
 (B.15.111–16)

Ye ben enblaunched with bele paroles and wiþ [bele cloþes]
 (Kane–Donaldson, B.15.115)³¹

Siegfried Wenzel has identified this cluster of ideas — the snow-covered dunghill, the whitewashed wall, the lupine priests — in a thirteenth-century sermon-collection. The ambiguous phrase 'in Latyn', Wenzel suggests, might relate to the etymology of *hypocrisy* given in the same text: 'Unless some of Langland's original text has been lost at this point, the phrase "in latyn" may have been intended to serve as a highly curtailed allusion, a signal to learned readers to recall standard commonplaces and images of the topic under discussion, of

³⁰ Note Gillespie's comments on Langland's possible use of an obscene joke channeled through his reading of both Deguileville and the *Rose*: 'Dame Study's Anatomical Curse', esp. 102–3.

³¹ Here, as throughout their edition, Kane and Donaldson use square brackets to signal their substitution of a reading in their base manuscript with a reading from another witness.

which only a few are selected'.³² Wenzel's discovery is fascinating and judiciously examined, but I would like to suggest another possible text that lies in the background here. As I have already described, Amis, in the voice of the misogynistic Jaloux, turns to the image of a beautified dung-heap to describe a well-dressed woman:

qui voudroit un fumier covrir
de dras de saie ou de floretes
bien colorees et bien netes,
si seroit certes lie fumiers
(8878–81)

[whoever might want to cover a dung-heap with very colourful and clean silk sheets or little flowers, it would still be, certainly, a dung-heap]

Le Jaloux goes on to connect this image to the wider question of deceit and hypocrisy in the *Rose*, suggesting that those who are taken in by a woman's adorned exterior are unable to understand the 'sophime' (8899). Faux-Semblant, who is himself 'blanche dehors, dedenz nergie' (11983, 'white outside, inside blackened'), is later referred to in similar logical terms as a walking 'soffime' (12113). The major contention of Le Jaloux is that women who wear beautiful clothes are not in themselves beautiful, and his speech becomes implicitly a warning not to confuse substance and accident:

car les biautez des beles choses,
saient violetes ou roses
ou dras de saie ou fleur de lis,
si con escrit en livre lis,
sunt en eus, et non pas es dames
(8867–71)

[for, as you read written in books, the beauty of beautiful things — be they violets or roses or silk sheets or lily-flowers — is in themselves, not in the ladies.]

Schmidt has suggested that the francophone and romance-origin lexis in Langland's 'enblanched with *bele paroles*' deliberately evokes 'a language associated in the fourteenth-century English mind with outward elegance and polish'.³³ But perhaps, as in Wenzel's reading of the unexplained phrase 'in Latyn', Langland's 'bele paroles' is a trace of the francophone text that was likewise in his mind at this point, interacting with a web of ideas also familiar from sermon literature. The presence of the *Rose* is heightened if we follow the

³² Wenzel, 'Medieval Sermons', 169.

³³ Schmidt, "'Lele Wordes'" and "'Bele paroles'", 140.

Kane–Donaldson reading of ‘with bele paroles and wiþ bele cloþes’, evoking more clearly the woman’s beautiful clothing and echoing le Jaloux’s philosophical point on the nature of ‘bele choses’. The *Rose* might not be the dominant influence in *Piers Plowman*, but it is certainly present, and the echoes of it that reverberate through the poem take their place among the host of other works and discourses out of which Langland crafted his text. But *Piers Plowman* also reveals a particular sensitivity to what I see as one of the most striking features of the *Rose*: its bold examination of how meaning is created and received.

EXPERIENCING THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

At the beginning of Passus 1, Langland’s narrator promises to expound the vision that he has recounted so far:

What this mountaigne bymeneth and the merke dale
And the feld ful of folk, I shal yow faire shewe.
(B.1.1–2)

The promise is similar to that made by Guillaume and echoed by Jean in the *Rose*: to provide at some point an authoritative gloss on the dream that is being related. Later, as with both Guillaume and Jean, Langland’s narrator will self-reflexively question the truthfulness of dreams, comparing successful and unsuccessful examples of dream-interpretation to explore how meaningful his own vision might be: ‘I have no savour in songewarie, for I se it ofte faille’ (B.7.149).³⁴ But while Guillaume’s narrator’s promise to interpret his dream remains utterly unfulfilled, propelling Jean’s continuation as he toys with the ever-deferred possibility of a final and conclusive meaning, Will’s promise to provide meaning proceeds, at first, rather well. Holy Church descends from a tower, like Raison in the *Rose*, to provide this meaning directly, beginning with an exposition of the mountain and its castle: “‘The tour up the toft”, quod she, “Truthe is therinne”” (B.1.12). When prompted by Will, she also explains what the ‘dungeon in the dale’ might ‘bemeene’ (B.1.59–60). But the final part of the narrator’s promise, to show the meaning of ‘the feld ful of folk’, remains unfulfilled, as Will becomes distracted first by his desire to know the identity of his interlocutor, and then by his

³⁴ Note, however, that Richard K. Emmerson argues against interpreting Langland’s dream through the Macrobian tradition played with in the *Rose*, “‘Coveitise to Konne””, 104–5.

desire to ‘knowe the false’ (B.2.4). It is the messy world of lived experience that silently displaces Holy Church from the narrative with the chaotic appearance of Meed, and in some ways Will’s attempt to explain ‘the false’ and to reconcile it with the injunction to ‘Dowel’ is what motivates the rest of the poem. But the very nature of this desire for knowledge that inhibits and interrupts the unmediated understanding offered by Holy Church suggests that the category of ‘the false’ includes not only the world around Will, but also Will himself, the structures and modes of thought through which he attempts to access truth. Throughout *Piers Plowman*, Langland will continue to explore not only the limitations of human understanding, but also how the experience of running against these limits can generate its own kind of knowledge. In this respect, I will argue, Langland’s presentation of the meaning of his own poem constitutes a detailed response to the *Rose*.

In Jean’s poem, the abrupt termination of the dream and the text at the same moment emphasises the author’s denial of the long-promised and long-deferred gloss. In its B and C versions, *Piers Plowman* concludes with the phrase, ‘til I gan awake’ (B.20.387, C.22.386) — strikingly similar to the final phrase of Jean’s *Rose*: ‘et je m’esveille’ (21750). The two endings produce the same effect: the suggestion that the poem’s total meaning cannot be imposed upon it, but that it has to be generated, perhaps endlessly, through a renewed process of reading.³⁵ The ending of *Piers Plowman* directs us back into the ‘insistently provisional enterprise’ of the poem,³⁶ back into a quest for Dowel for which no definite and final answer has been reached — and while this is quite different to *Rose* drawing us back into the pleasures of deferral and indeterminacy, their techniques are closely aligned. The sense that in *Piers Plowman* there is no final point of arrival for the reader is perhaps related to the wider sense in which the didacticism of Langland’s poem does not constitute an accretion of new knowledge so much as a transformation in the quality of that knowledge, or in the means by

³⁵ Burrow reads this differently, emphasising the difference in tone between the endings of *Piers Plowman* and the *Rose*, *Langland’s Fictions*, 25.

³⁶ Stephen Justice, ‘Genres of *Piers Plowman*’, 306.

which that knowledge is understood.³⁷ This transformation in quality can be well illustrated by the advice given by Kynde in the poem's hectic final passus — something that carries a sense of revelation, even though we have already witnessed Holy Church tell Will something very similar in Passus 1:³⁸

‘Counseilleth me, Kynde,’ quod I, ‘what craft be best to lerne?’
 ‘Lerne to love,’ quod Kynde, ‘and leef alle othere.’
 (B.20.207–8)

Treuthe is tresor the trieste on erthe.’
 ‘Yet I have no kynde knowynge,’ quod I, ‘yet mote ye kenne me bettere
 By what craft in my cors it comseth, and where,’
 ‘Thow doted daffe!’ quod she, ‘dulle are thi wittes.
 To litel Latyn thow leredest, leode, in thi youthe:
Heu michi quod sterilem duxi vitam iuvenilem!
 It is a kynde knowynge that kenneth in thyn herte
 For to loven thi Lord levere than thiselve
 (B.1.137–43)

If Will traces any kind of developmental trajectory between passus 1 and 20, it is perhaps best viewed as the recognition of this longed-for ‘kynde knowynge’, an innate, experiential knowledge of God.³⁹

Jean de Meun's *Rose* also has a great deal to say about experiential knowledge.⁴⁰ The experience involved here, of course, is sexual: drawing on Ovid's suggestion in *Ars Amatoria* 1.29 that ‘*Usus opus movet hoc*’, and combining this with the conventional notion that desire itself is a contingent suspension between positive and negative emotions,⁴¹ Jean presents his notorious narratorial claim that the experience of the painful and the disordered is what allows us to understand the good, immediately before Amant penetrates the rose:

Ausinc sachiez, et n'an doutez,
 que qui mal esaié n'avra
 ja du bien guieres ne savra;
 ne qui ne set d'aneur que monte
 ja ne savra connoistre honte;
 n'onc nus ne sot quel chose est ese

³⁷ Mary Carruthers has called *Piers Plowman* ‘an epistemological poem’, *Search for St Truth*, 10. This suggestion has been influentially developed by James Simpson in ‘From Reason to Affective Knowledge’, and ‘Desire and the Scriptural Text’.

³⁸ cf. Carruthers, *Search for St Truth*, 165.

³⁹ For ‘kynde knowynge’ see White, *Nature and Salvation*, 41–59.

⁴⁰ Crucial to Jean's conception of experiential knowledge — a conception then echoed by Chaucer's Wife of Bath — are La Vieille's comments on love, 15261–72.

⁴¹ As suggested by Raison in her imitation of Alain de Lille's *De planctu*, RR, 4263–310.

s'il n'ot avan apris mesese,
 ne n'est pas digne d'ese avoir
 qui ne veust mesese savoir;
 et qui bien ne la set soffrir,
 nus ne li devroit ese offrir.
 Ainsinc va des contreres choses,
 les unes sunt des autres gloses
 (21532–44)

[Also know this, and don't doubt it, that whoever will not have tried the bad will never know the good; nor will he who does not know the value of honour ever know how to recognise shame; never could anyone know what thing ease is if he had not first learnt about disease, and he is not worthy to have ease who does not wish to know disease; and who does not know very well how to endure it should never be offered ease. That's how it goes with opposite things, the one is a gloss of the other.]

On one level Jean is simply presenting an ironic justification for the more sordid aspects of his own poem. But these lines also open a perplexing paradox: the good can be known only through the bad, but, by the same token, the bad can be known only through the good. The real object of knowledge is not fully possessed, but mediated by its opposite, which seems to imply either an infinite spiral of gloss and counter-gloss, or else a fantasy of total experience and total knowledge. These difficult lines remain a crux in the *Rose*; they might be read as suggesting that desire produces an endless and sterile oscillation between conflicting emotions. But they might also be read as hinting that the experience of disordered desire offers a way out of emotional conflict: that every *ars amatoria* contains its own *remedia amoris*.

Langland refracts these ideas about experiential knowledge in the *Rose* in a striking way, as Andrew Galloway has argued.⁴² No doubt there were other sources from which Langland could develop the notion that the bad might offer a way of knowing the good — Zeeman has drawn out the evidence for a 'negatively revelatory' Christian tradition, whereby a doctrine of contraries allows the world to point beyond itself to 'the divinity that it cannot contain'.⁴³ But the *Rose* no doubt also has its place in the development of Langland's notion of experiential knowledge. In Passus 18, Peace makes a statement that chimes remarkably with Jean's *Rose*:

⁴² *Penn Commentary*, 3–4.

⁴³ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 187.

For no wight woot what wele is, that nevere wo suffrede,
 Ne what is hoor hunger, that hadde nevere defaute.
 (B.18.205–6)

Peace develops this to say that God allowed Adam to sin (and therefore suffer)⁴⁴ in order for him to truly understand the good:

And siththe he suffred hym synne, sorwe to feele —
 To wite what wele was, kyndeliche to knowe it.
 (B.18.219–20)

While Jean's Lover desires to develop knowledge of the good and the bad through the experience of sexual consummation and even through a series of different lovers ('il fet bon de tout essayer', 21521), Langland's Will desires to experience the painful and the false to develop a 'kyndeliche' knowledge of 'what wele was'.⁴⁵ For Langland, the mediated nature of the knowledge of 'the good', accessible only through the experiential 'glose' of 'the bad' in which the human subject is immersed, results in a poem whose meaning must be elusive, as the reader (and the author) trace the infinitely expansive outlines of a divine truth that cannot be directly accessed by a fallen human will.

The idea that the poem is trying to express something only partially knowable is of huge importance in *Piers Plowman*, and some of Langland's personifications explicitly reveal the limitations of their own knowledge. Like Jean's Nature, Langland's Studie reveals her failure to understand theological mysteries.⁴⁶ But while Nature's difficulties lie with the metaphysics of the Incarnation, Studie finds a problem in the irreconcilability of New Testament morality with the Old Law — which is represented for her, curiously, not by the Old Testament, but the 'classical' author Cato. 'Theologie has tened me ten score times' (B.10.182), she says:

In oother science it seith — I seigh it in Catoun —
Qui simulat verbis, nec corde est fidus amicus,
*Tu quoque fac similie; sic ars deluditur ars.*⁴⁷
 Whoso gloseth as gylours doon, go me to the same,

⁴⁴ For the development of the notion of sin as instructive suffering, see *ibid.*, 45–51

⁴⁵ Galloway points out the frequent recurrence of the Pauline injunction *omnia probate* (*Penn Commentary*, 4) in *Piers Plowman*; note that Jean echoes precisely this phrase at 21521.

⁴⁶ *RR*, 19123–6.

⁴⁷ 'Who simulates in his words, but is no true friend at heart — / Imitate him yourself — thus art is beguiled by art (*Distichs of Cato*, 1, 26)', Schmidt (ed.), B.10.192–3n.

And so shaltow fals folk and fethlees bigile –
 This is Catons kennyng to clerkes that he lereth.
 Ac Theologie techeth noght so, whoso taketh yeme;
 He kenneth us the contrarie ayein Catons wordes,
 For he biddeth us be as bretheren, and bidde for oure enemys
 And loven hem that lyen on us
 (B.10.191–200)

Cato's instruction to 'deceive deceivers' or 'beguile beguilers' seems to stand in here for the Old Testament doctrine of 'an eye for an eye' repudiated by Christ in Matthew 5:38–9. There is another grammar school text that memorably presents the same injunction as Cato: Ovid's advice in the *Ars amatoria*, 'fallite fallentes' (1.645, 'deceive deceivers'). In the *Rose*, this notion becomes absorbed into Jean's presentation of the hypocrisy inherent in the learnt art of cynical seduction — even Raison problematically suggests, like Cato, that 'it is better to deceive than be deceived' (4369–70). Later in *Piers Plowman*, we are shown why Studie had such difficulty in understanding Theologie's injunction to abandon Cato's doctrine of like-for-like punishment, as Christ's attitude to justice is shown to be somehow paradoxical and beyond straightforward comprehension. In Passus 18, Mercy debates with Truth about whether the souls of those who died before the Incarnation can be released from Hell. Truth thinks not, but Mercy justifies her position with an appeal to her experiential (or even experimental) knowledge:

'Through experience,' quod heo, 'I hope thei shul be saved.
 For venym fordooth venym — and that I preve by reson.
 [...]
 And right as thorough gilours gile bigiled was man formest,
 So shal grace that al bigan make a good ende
 And bigile the gilour — and that is good sleighte
Ars ut artem falleret.'
 (B.18.151–2, 159–61a)

By deceiving the deceiver, Christ seems to directly contradict the teachings of Theologie who warned Studie against the doctrine of '*ars deluditur ars*' (B.10.192). Self-contradictory and ultimately unknowable,⁴⁸ divine mysteries are explicable only with recourse to 'experience': a kind of knowledge that is continuous and always partial. This passage seems to be linked to

⁴⁸ There is perhaps here some hint of a notion associated with the fourteenth-century *moderni*: that God is using his *potentia absoluta* to violate the laws he established through his *potentia ordinata*. See Coleman, '*Piers Plowman*' and the *Moderni*, ch.1.

another echo of Jean's 'contreres choses' in Clergie's definition of 'kynde knowynge': the experience 'of tastes of truthe and of deceites' (B.12.130).⁴⁹

The way in which Langland presents the relationship between meaning and experience, creating a poem whose meaning is continually generated through reading rather than closed and constrained, reflects ideas and techniques that he absorbed from the *Rose*. But where Galloway argues that Langland's echo of this idea of knowing the good through the bad constitutes a 'fullscale remoralizing of the notorious ending of the *Roman de la Rose*',⁵⁰ I feel that we cannot reduce Langland's relationship to this text to a single and unified opinion based on its moral worth. It is my contention in this thesis that we should resist the temptation to read fourteenth-century English authors through the lens of the *Querelle de la Rose* (as has been attempted for Langland by Isabel Davis, with some interesting results).⁵¹ Rather than approaching the *Rose* as a work upon which he might impose a singular moral judgement of praise or blame, I think that Langland responded in a more fluid way to the processes and techniques at work in that text. This is clearest, perhaps, in Langland's most extensive reworking of material from the *Rose*, in a passage that asks profound questions about his own activity as a maker of vernacular verse and the problematic pleasures of poetry.

MEDDLING WITH MAKINGS AND MEDDLING WITH 'MAKES'

As part of Will's 'inward journey' in B Passus 8–13, he experiences a 'dream within a dream' (B.11.4–6).⁵² In this inner vision, Will is compelled to look into two different mirrors; the first is 'a mirour that highte Middelthe' (B.11.9) presided over by Fortune, the second is 'a mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte' (B.11.323) — revised in the C Text to become 'the myrour of Mydelthe' (C.13.132) — presided over by Kynde. The co-occurrence of Langland's discussion of the goods of Fortune and carnal desire alongside a vision of an

⁴⁹ Note Simpson's comments on the association of 'tasting' with *sapientia* as opposed to *scientia*, 'Reason to Affective Knowledge', 5; see also Gillespie, 'Senses in Literature', 155.

⁵⁰ Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, 4.

⁵¹ Davis, '*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*'.

⁵² The term 'inward journey' is borrowed from Joseph Wittig's indispensable article, 'Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey'.

orderly creation commanded by Nature, and which includes a dialogue with a personified ‘Reson’, has led many scholars to compare this passage to the *Rose*.⁵³ This inner dream, when taken alongside the subsequent dispute with Ymaginatif — a personification who ‘has silently presided over’ B.11⁵⁴ — constitutes both Langland’s deepest interaction with the *Rose* and one of his most detailed reflections on his own activity as a writer.

Towards the end of this chapter, I will compare the two visions or ‘mirrors’ that confront Will in B.11, but I begin here with the second of these: the ‘mountaigne’ of ‘Myddelerthe’ (B.11.323) or the ‘myrour of Myddelerthe’ (C.13.132). This vision of the world is a vision of Nature: an enumeration of the orders of creation that belongs to both encyclopaedic writings and ‘Chartrian’ poetry — and, as we will see, the *Rose*.⁵⁵ As is typical of these enumerative descriptions of created things, Will begins his vision with an astral body, before moving erratically down the scale of creation:

I seigh the sonne and the see and the sond after,
And where that briddes and beestes by hir make thei yeden,
Wilde wormes in wodes, and wonderful foweles
With fleckede fetheres and of fele colours.
(B.11.326–9)

As with Nature’s complaint in the *Rose* and the *De planctu*, the question of appropriate sexual practice is raised when Will sees each animal with its ‘make’ (mate). This aspect of the vision then becomes more explicit, albeit in terms that deviate markedly from those of Jean and Alain:

Reson I seigh soothly sewen alle beestes
In etynge, in drynkyng and in engendryng of kynde.
And after cours of concepcion noon took kepe of oother
As what thei hadd ryde in rotey tyme; anoonright thereafter
Males drowen hem to males amorwenynges by hemselve,
And in evenynges also yede males fro femelles.
Ther ne was cow ne cowkynde that conceyved hadde
That wolde belwe after boles, ne boor after sowe.
Bothe hors and houndes and alle othere beestes
Medled noght with her makes that mid fole were
[...]

⁵³ Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language*, 45–50; Isabel Davis, ‘*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*’, 62; Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation*, 65–7.

⁵⁴ Minnis, ‘Langland’s Ymaginatif’, 82.

⁵⁵ See Mary Franklin-Brown’s comments on Jean de Meun’s use of this trope of the listing of the orders of creation in *Reading the World*, 189–200.

That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes
 Save man and his make: many tymes and ofte
 No Reson hem folwede
 (B.11.334–71)

The passage bears a strong similarity to the *Rose*, where Nature had imitated her model in Alain de Lille's *De planctu Naturae* by praising the orderly arrangement of all of creation. She has no need to complain about the sky (16771) or the seven planets (16803); only man gives her cause for complaint with his sexual malpractice:

Ne ne me plain des autres bestes
 [...]
 Li malle vet o sa femele,
 ci a couple avenant et bele;
 tuit angendrent et vont ansamble
 toutes les foiz que bon leur samble
 (18969–78)

[I do not complain of the other beasts [...] The male goes with his female, in a pleasing and appropriate couple; they all engender and come together every time that it seems good to them]

Langland must be responding to this joint antecedent of Alain and Jean de Meun when he presents own view of a reproductively well-ordered creation, troubled only by the sexual malpractice of humankind. But, as always, there are startling eccentricities and strangenesses in Langland's version of this familiar topos. I will begin by trying to address how it should be read before examining its relation to the *Rose* and how it affects Langland's own self-image as a writer.

The first surprise in this passage is that Will sees 'Reson' follow all the animals of creation except for mankind. John Alford has argued that here 'Reson' is not an internal psychological faculty, but in fact a principle of order identified with the divine *ratio*.⁵⁶ Most scholars accept, following Alford, that Langland uses the Middle English word 'wit' to render the faculty of the *ratio*, and 'reson' to refer to the more abstract principle of order in the natural law.⁵⁷ But while I would not seek to disagree with Alford's evidence, I don't feel that he has completely settled the issue, and tend to sympathise with Gillian Rudd's suggestion

⁵⁶ Alford, 'The Idea of Reason', 214.

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Introduction*, 92; Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 68.

that ‘Reson’ should here be ‘not only principle but also faculty’.⁵⁸ I say this not only because in some instances Langland does seem to use the Middle English word ‘Reson’ to refer to the psychological faculty,⁵⁹ but also because the idea that man was a ‘rational animal’ was so widespread that there must be something deliberately challenging in Langland’s decision to associate ‘Reson’ explicitly with every animal *except* man.⁶⁰ This seems to be another of the many moments in *Piers Plowman* where Langland deliberately exploits and prolongs the ambiguities inherent in polysemous words;⁶¹ if we are eventually able to control the strangeness of this passage by reaching for a less familiar meaning of *ratio*, the process of doing so should focus our attention on why Langland might be forcing us to perform this manoeuvre.⁶² By defining the sexual activities of man as ‘irrational’ in comparison to that of animals, Langland is suggesting that sexual malpractice is unnatural. It is reminiscent of the passage in Boethius where Philosophy says that self-knowledge is what distinguishes man from the animals (2.pr5): if he loses his reason and his self-awareness, man can become unnaturally more bestial than the beasts. Yet there are strange implications here. If man alone violates the *ratio* of divine order, then it is his uniquely human features that allow him to do this; through a curious kind of antiphrasis, the suggestion seems to be that the capacity for deviance is located in man’s rational faculties.

Langland is deliberately exploiting the range of meanings of the word ‘Reson’ to cast a particularly heavy judgement on human sexual deviance, locating it outside God’s created world, as something ‘unnatural’ or artificial, invented by mankind. As we will see, these ideas find some interesting parallels in *Cleanness*. But this also leads to the second perplexing question about this passage. If, as I believe, Langland has derived this vision of Kynde from

⁵⁸ Rudd, *Managing Language*, 45. See also White, *Nature and Salvation*, 7.

⁵⁹ Anima says that when she is the internal faculty of judgement, ‘Thanne is *Racio* my right name, ‘Reson’ on Englissh’ (B.15.28); the ‘Reson’ of C.5 *apologia* also seems to be an aspect of Will’s psyche.

⁶⁰ The idea that man is a rational animal is widespread in Augustine and other patristic authors (eg, *City of God*, 5:11). It also occurs in more demotic sources: the ‘Entre’ to the *Prik of Conscience* discusses God endowing man with rational powers in contrast to those ‘creatures withouten resouns’ (62).

⁶¹ The most famous example of this is the polysemous personification of Meed, see Simpson, *Introduction*, 37–44, Griffiths, *Personification*, 31.

⁶² Note also that Langland does in places seem to express genuinely unorthodox views on nature, such as the suggestion at B.8.52–6 that animals possess free will; this is removed in his C-Text revision. See Schmidt, ‘Langland and Scholastic Philosophy’, 145–7.

his reading of the *Rose*'s imitation of Alain de Lille, then why is the whole issue of sodomy so conspicuously absent?⁶³ The strange inverted echo of Jean's 'Li malles vet o sa femele' (18975), in Langland's 'Males drowen hem to males' (B.11.338) places particular emphasis on the invisibility of sodomy in this passage. Isabel Davis, in a fascinating reading of *Piers Plowman* alongside the *Querelle de la Rose*, has argued that, like Christine de Pizan, Langland's promotion of marriage led him to eliminate sodomy from the realm of possibility. Thinkers like Langland, she suggests, 'iterated a different structural opposition, not between natural and unnatural love but rather between sodomy and marriage, which required and produced a blindness to same-sex desire'.⁶⁴ Is Langland so unwilling to countenance same-sex desire that he erases it completely from his vision of the world? Perhaps so: it is an interesting point of comparison between Langland and the poet of *Cleanness* that both tend to present unusually positive views of human (hetero)sexual activity.⁶⁵ But while the *Cleanness*-poet repeatedly, almost obsessively reviles the sin of sodomy, Langland does not seem to manifest the same concerns. In the uncontroversial and widespread penitential manuals that Langland is likely to have read, there is indeed anxiety about acknowledging sodomy by name, but it is nevertheless referred to obliquely.⁶⁶ In comparison, Langland's attitude to sodomy and sexual transgression in general seems either idiosyncratically mild or else so suppressive that the sins barely enter into the poet's world-view. Patience, for example, uses the example of Sodom primarily as a warning against over-eating (B.14.75–80), while Holy Church tells the story of Lot's incest with his daughters to discourage Will from drinking too much (B.1.25–33). I would not want to rule out the possibility that Langland is silencing sodomy more radically and more successfully than his contemporaries, but I think we should also pay attention to what does seem to be his primary sexual concern, that is explicitly

⁶³ James J. Paxson, in one of the few attempts to explore a queer reading of *Piers Plowman*, does not look at this passage, 'Gender Personified'.

⁶⁴ Davis, 'Piers Plowman and the *Querelle*', 51.

⁶⁵ On which see Schmidt, 'Kynde Craft', and ch.5 below. Tavormina characterises Langland's attitude to sex: 'Besides avoiding strong negative language about non-virginal states of life, Langland displays a genuinely positive attitude toward sexuality in its proper time and place', *Kindly Similitude*, 178.

⁶⁶ See Frantzen, 'Disclosure of Sodomy', 454–5. The *Speculum Vitae*, for example, presents the typical anxiety of the penitential manuals to condemn sodomy without giving their readers any ideas: 'Parefore for som skille wil I noight / Shewe yhou hou þat syn es wrought' (9465–6).

evoked at almost every mention of human sexuality in the poem: the licit and illicit timing of sexual activity.

Will's vision of an ordered creation does not focus on generative reproduction, as in the *De planctu* and the *Rose*; instead, it focuses on an animal world in which sexual activity takes place only at appropriate times. The animals separate from their mates after 'cours of conception' (B.11.336), they do not 'meddle' with those mates that 'mid fole were' (B.11.343). The principal human sexual sin, it is implied, is sexual contact at illicit times. Although this is very unlike the concerns voiced by the Nature of the *Rose* or the *De planctu*, it does have its place in a tradition, and Tavormina has observed that, since Jerome, there had been discussion of animal sexual restraint, especially during pregnancy.⁶⁷ But Langland's focus on the periods of sexual prohibition in these lines reflects a more widespread concern felt elsewhere in the poem: Cain is said to have been conceived 'in yvel tyme' (B.9.121), and Wit is also keen to insist that 'in untyme, trewely, bitwene man and womman / Ne sholde no bedbourde be' (B.9.186–7).⁶⁸ Haukyn's list of lustful sins culminates in this transgression of 'untyme': 'as lef in Lente as out of Lente, alle tymes yliche'. (B.13.349). And if James A. Brundage is right to suggest that thinkers in the later Middle Ages were generally much less concerned with the periodic prohibition of sexual activity than in earlier centuries, Langland's eccentric focus deserves particular attention.⁶⁹

One possible explanation for Langland's emphasis, and something that might be related to how he viewed his own activities as a writer, is his treatment of time. Langland is fascinated by time and, connected to this, how human activity in the world must fit itself around the liturgical calendar. This might be one reason for Langland's stress on sexual abstinence at 'untyme' — one meaning of which was sex during certain liturgically defined periods such as Lent.⁷⁰ Commentators have pointed out how Langland's fascination with time

⁶⁷ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, 181.

⁶⁸ See M. Teresa Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, 84.

⁶⁹ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 508; for the earlier prohibitions, see 154–63, esp. the helpful diagram on 163.

⁷⁰ See Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, s.v., *untime*.

and time-wasting might connect to how he conceives his own activities as a writer.⁷¹ Might it also relate to his attitude to sexuality? In my first chapter, I argued that Jean de Meun presents his own activity as a writer as problematically analogous to human sexual reproduction, and in cultivating a potentially ungenerative and pleasurable poem, he raises the possibility that his own activity, and perhaps even the reader's, is sterile. Does Langland perceive his writing in similar terms? Not quite, I think, although there are some points of contact. As David Aers has observed, perhaps the closest Langland comes to claiming some sort of vatic authority for his work as a writer is in the co-occurrence of the verb *maken* to designate Will's own writings and the creative activity of God — yet, as Aers also observes, Langland is always ready to undermine any such claims to absolute validity.⁷² Langland does not seem to follow the Neoplatonic tradition refracted through the *Rose* by representing human generation as a kind of figurative writing ('greffes avez, pansez d'escire', *RR*, 19764). For Langland, metaphors of conception feed more directly into the presentation of the Trinity than into his view of natural and artificial creation, as Galloway has observed.⁷³

But if Langland does not seem to perceive a figurative link between his activity as a writer and human sexual reproduction, there is a link between his idea of sexual transgression as the misuse of time and the hint that his own writing might be a kind of time-wasting. This is expressed most clearly in Will's dialogue with Ymaginatif, immediately after the inner vision of Fortune and Kynde, where this personification accuses Will in very interesting terms:

And thow medlest thee with makynge – and myghtest go seye thi Sauter,
 And bidde for hem that yyveth thee breed; for ther are bokes ynowe
 To telle men what Dowel is, Dobet and Dobest bothe
 (B.12.16–8)

⁷¹ Burrow, 'Wasting Time, Wasting Words'. Burrow's relates Langland's representation to LeGoff's notion of 'merchant's time' in the fourteenth century, 199.

⁷² Aers, *Christian Allegory*, 65–7.

⁷³ Galloway, 'Intellectual Pregnancy'. Note that at one point Langland does use the metaphor of writing to figure divine creation (B.9.38–40), but this is specifically the documentary writing of a lord transmitting 'lettres': the focus is on the figurative dissemination of power and law, rather than the interaction of form and matter. For documentary metaphors in *Piers Plowman* more generally, see Steiner, *Documentary Culture*.

Ymaginatif is calling into question the whole project of the poem that contains him. And while his main contention seems to be that Will is wasting time, it is very interesting that his phrase ‘medlest thee with makynge’ should chime so closely with Langland’s vision of appropriate and natural sexual activity: at inappropriate times, we were told in the previous passus, the animals ‘Medled noght with her makes’ (B.11.343). The verb *medlen* becomes extremely suggestive in Will’s self-defence against Ymaginatif, and he expands its meaning to claim that he is right to mix in or interpose some pleasure amongst his care (B.12.20–2a).⁷⁴ The anxiety that seems to haunt this passage is not merely that the pleasure of Langland’s poetry might be an unprofitable and sterile pursuit, but also that that pleasure might be pursued at ‘untyme’, when Will could spend his hours better engaged in a devotional activity that was, if not reproductive, then at least productive. It may seem that Langland calling his own activities as a writer into question by implying that he might be wasting time is a much less troubling and incisive gesture than Jean’s suggestion that love poetry is an ungenerative activity that shades into sodomy. But it is not necessary to lessen the force of Ymaginatif’s accusation; for a writer as embedded in the liturgy and its rhythms as Langland, there is something heavily problematic about the suggestion that this poetic activity is extraneous and flippant. In his defence, Will claims that if only he were granted knowledge of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, he would abandon all ‘werk’, and instead lead a life entirely given over to devotion; he would ‘wende to holi chirche / And there bidde my bedes by what ich ete or slepe’ (B.12.27–8). The very existence of *Piers Plowman*, its manifold versions and restless revisions, becomes a sign of Langland’s failure to grasp what his poem claims to seek, his constant anxiety that this use of time might be at last unproductive.

⁷⁴ For an exploration of the range of meanings here, see Hanna, “Meddling with Makings”, 88.

LANGLAND'S NAMING

Langland's use of ideas absorbed from the *Rose* suggested a way of articulating his conflicted relationship with his work. I will conclude this chapter by examining the presence of another echo of the *Rose* that can be sensed in Langland's 'inner dream', one which intensifies this problem of authorial responsibility for a work whose value may not be self-evident to its readers or, at times, its author. As I have already mentioned, Will's vision of Kynde is the second of two visions that he receives in the inner dream. At the beginning of this episode, Will is brought by Fortune into 'the lond of longynge and love', where she compels him to look into the 'mirour that highte Middelerthe'. In this mirror, she tells him, 'myghtow se wondres, / And knowe that thou coveitest, and come thereto, perauunter.' (B.11.10–1). Fortune is attended by two allegorical damsels who then join Will; drawn as they are from the temptations mentioned in John 2.16, they clearly figure Will's disordered and misdirected desire: '*Concupiscentia Carnis*' (B.11.13) and 'Coveitise of Eighes' (B.11.14). The rich term 'lond of longynge' suggests both the Neoplatonic or Augustinian notion of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, as well as the *terra longinqua* of the Prodigal Son: Langland seems to be evoking the alienation from himself that Will experiences as a symptom of this turning towards the world and towards sin.⁷⁵ In an important article, Middleton has argued that this line also constitutes a deeply buried authorial 'signature' (the 'lond of longynge' decodable as 'Langland'),⁷⁶ suggesting perhaps that Langland is evoking his own historical life, his biographical experience of 'forty winter and a fite moore' (B.11.47) in the company of *Concupiscentia Carnis*.⁷⁷ After the destabilising interruption of Trajan, Will has his second vision of 'middelerthe'. As described above, this is a vision of nature, presided over by Kynde. In the B Text this second vision takes place as Will looks at a 'mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte' rather than a 'mirror', but in the C Text Langland revised this to read 'myroure of middlerthe'. This makes more explicit the direct comparison between the two

⁷⁵ See Wittig, 'Inward Journey', 232–4. Gilson discusses the idea of the *regio dissimilitudinis* in relation to Cistercian mysticism, *Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 295–6.

⁷⁶ Middleton, 'Langland's "Kynde Name"', 44.

⁷⁷ See also Burrow, 'Langland *Nel Mezzo Del Cammin*'.

visions that was already punningly present in the earlier version: Latin authors often play with the similarity of *speculum* (i.e., a ‘myrour’) and *specula* (a watchtower, ‘a high place from which to look out’, i.e., a ‘mountaigne’).⁷⁸

There is an important sequence from the *Rose* that seems to be in the background of these two visions: Genius’s sermon on the Garden of Deduit. Genius asks the audience of his sermon, or the poem’s readers, to compare the Garden of Deduit recounted by Guillaume’s narrator to the Park of the Lamb that Genius himself is describing. Attacking the narrator’s account of the Garden, he claims that ‘quan qu’il i vit est corumpable’ (everything he saw there is corruptible, 20324), encouraging his audience instead to turn their attention to his Park, where everything is ‘pardurables’ (20354). He mocks the narrator for praising the ‘fontaine perilleuse’ (20379) of Narcissus:

Dex, con bone fontaine et sade,
ou il sain devienent malde!
Et con il s’i fet bon virer
por soi dedanz l’eve mirer!
(20391–4)

[By God, that’s a good and sensible fountain, where the healthy become sick! And how he did well to turn to regard himself in the water!]

Genius’s alternative to the Mirror of Narcissus is a mirror of beatific contemplation, where white lambs stare into a triune fountain fed by three conduits (20435–48). When Langland sets his Fortune-governed Narcissistic mirror in opposition to the vision of ordered creation in which Will learns to know and love God ‘by ensaumplers’ of the created world (B.11.324–5), he seems to be echoing Genius’s suggestion that there are licit and illicit ways of looking, licit and illicit objects of desire.

There are, of course, some major difficulties with Genius’s Park, not least his insistence that it is to be reached by frantic generative copulation: ‘Pensez de Nature honorer, / servez la par bien laborer’ (20607–8, ‘concentrate on honouring Nature, serve her by labouring well’). But one way of reading Genius’s sermon is that the licit drives and

⁷⁸ Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v., *specula* (1.I.). This suggestion is made by Wittig, ‘Inward Journey’, 240. Jonathan Morton examined the importance of these two related concepts in the *Rose* in a paper delivered at the International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, 2014, ‘Curved Mirrors and Distorted Reflections of Neoplatonism in the *Roman de la rose*’.

responsibilities of the species are fragmented and rendered obstructive when experienced as the potentially illicit desires of the individual. Looking in the two different mirrors of the world, Will is, after all, confronting himself in some way, and in both instances he is found wanting: as an individual reflecting on the misdirected lusts of his historical life, and as an individual member of the human species reflecting on his deviant position in the natural order. These two versions of self-confrontation are what might allow Will some measure of self-knowledge, something that several scholars have seen to be the central dynamic of the inward journey.⁷⁹ His dubious self-confrontation leads to a fundamental ambivalence about the status of the author, his right to speak and his responsibility for his own words: '[t]he central intellectual and spiritual concerns of the poem are shadowed at every point by a self-referential doubt about the cultural, moral, and spiritual standing of the poem which claims to record this effort, and about the purpose of offering the record to the world as a made object or testimony.'⁸⁰ In this ambivalence we find, I think, the final analogue between *Piers Plowman* and the *Rose*. In the *Rose*, Jean presents himself as the governing consciousness behind a work that defers erotic and interpretative consummation. His own relationship with the text is ironised, and he presents the reader with a claim to textual authority that insists on the irrecoverability of his intention, focusing on the reader's responsibility to unpick the 'true' authorial utterance. His claims of authorial ownership are playfully contingent and conditioned by an awareness of their own deep problematics. Langland was clearly affected by this way of exploring the relationship between a narratorial subject and an extra-diegetic author. But, like Deguileville, his urgent attempts to reconcile the inevitable ambiguities of texts and the limits of human understanding with a pressing salvific message only intensified the problems of authorial identity. Like Deguileville, the named historical author was to some extent a symbol of the fleshly imperfection of human life, and, again like Deguileville, the intrusion of that historical personality into the text constituted, on some level, a necessary failure. Langland's famous 'authorial signatures' do not strike me as an attempt to promote

⁷⁹ Wittig, 'Inward Journey', 211. See also J.A.W Bennett, '*Nosce te ipsum*', 146–7.

⁸⁰ Middleton, 'Invention of Experience', 99.

the activities of an author to his public, but rather as an attempt to struggle with the tension between presenting the poem as the imagined record of a particular lived experience and the broadly applicable commonality that the indeterminacy of the name ‘Will’ allows.⁸¹ In this respect Langland’s Will is not unlike the narrator of the *Rose*, whose impossible identification with the historical Guillaume de Lorris is one of that poem’s most perplexing contingencies, something that seems to place its final meaning out of reach.

There is little that can be added to the excellent analyses of Langland’s self-naming in *Piers Plowman*, but I will conclude by looking briefly at one small instance that seems to have garnered little attention, and that might offer a further insight into how Langland explores a problematic connection between his status as a named, historical self and the text that he produces. Middleton points out that the A Text contains a passage that is only incipiently an authorial signature, and that will lead in the B Text to Langland’s coded naming as the zone of his own self-alienation in the ‘Lond of Longing’.⁸² The passage occurs as Studie fulfills Will’s request to give him directions to Clergie:

And ek the long launde þat leccherie hatte
 Leue hym on þi left half a large myle or more
 (A.11.118–9)

Although this line is not foregrounded by its direct association with the narrator in his own voice, to me it seems at least more ‘fully signatory’ than the passage Kerby-Fulton adduces from the C Text, ‘And so y leue yn London and openlond Bothe’ — a ‘pale reflection of the B-text’s anagrammatized self-naming, it barely even qualifies as an anagram’.⁸³ It might seem unlikely that Langland would deliberately associate himself with ‘leccherie’ or *luxuria*, a sin to which he elsewhere gives only glancing attention. But if this line can be read as Langland taking advantage of the alliterating pattern to identify himself with the sin of illicit desire, the ‘leccherie’ named here might be extended to include a wider understanding of lustfulness, the kind of desire that violates ecclesiastical regulations on when sex can take place, and perhaps

⁸¹ For the signatures, see Middleton, “‘Kynde Name’”, Kerby-Fulton, ‘Bibliographic Ego’. For Langland’s attempts to resist the imposition of a proper name to the narrator, see Simpson, ‘Power of Impropriety’.

⁸² Middleton, “‘Kynde Name’”, 51

⁸³ Kerby Fulton, ‘Bibliographic Ego’, 85.

the kind of desire that perpetuates the pleasures of writing and rewriting a poem like *Piers Plowman* when there is more urgent and more useful work to be done ‘in holi chirche’ (B.12.27). By presenting his own name, undisguised, as an external spatial zone that is identical with the sin of disordered desire, Langland seems to be suggesting that there is something inherently illicit about claiming ownership of his own poem. He wavers between two urges: on the one hand, to use his own historical life as the source of a poem that tracks experience and explores the meaning that experience generates, paradoxically rendering his own proper experience ‘common’;⁸⁴ on the other, to reject his own works, to disclaim his ownership of them, to turn his mind elsewhere.⁸⁵ Filtered and intensified through Deguileville, this is a radically contingent authorial stance that begins with Jean de Meun.

⁸⁴ Simpson, ‘Power of Impropriety’, 162–3.

⁸⁵ I remain open to the possibility raised by Mann and Bowers that the A Text is in fact a later version, a revision of B: see Mann, ‘Power of the Alphabet’, Bowers, ‘*Piers Plowman*’s William Langland’. If they are right, Langland’s self-naming in his texts reveals not a progressively fuller claim to ownership but a process of progressive self-erasure.

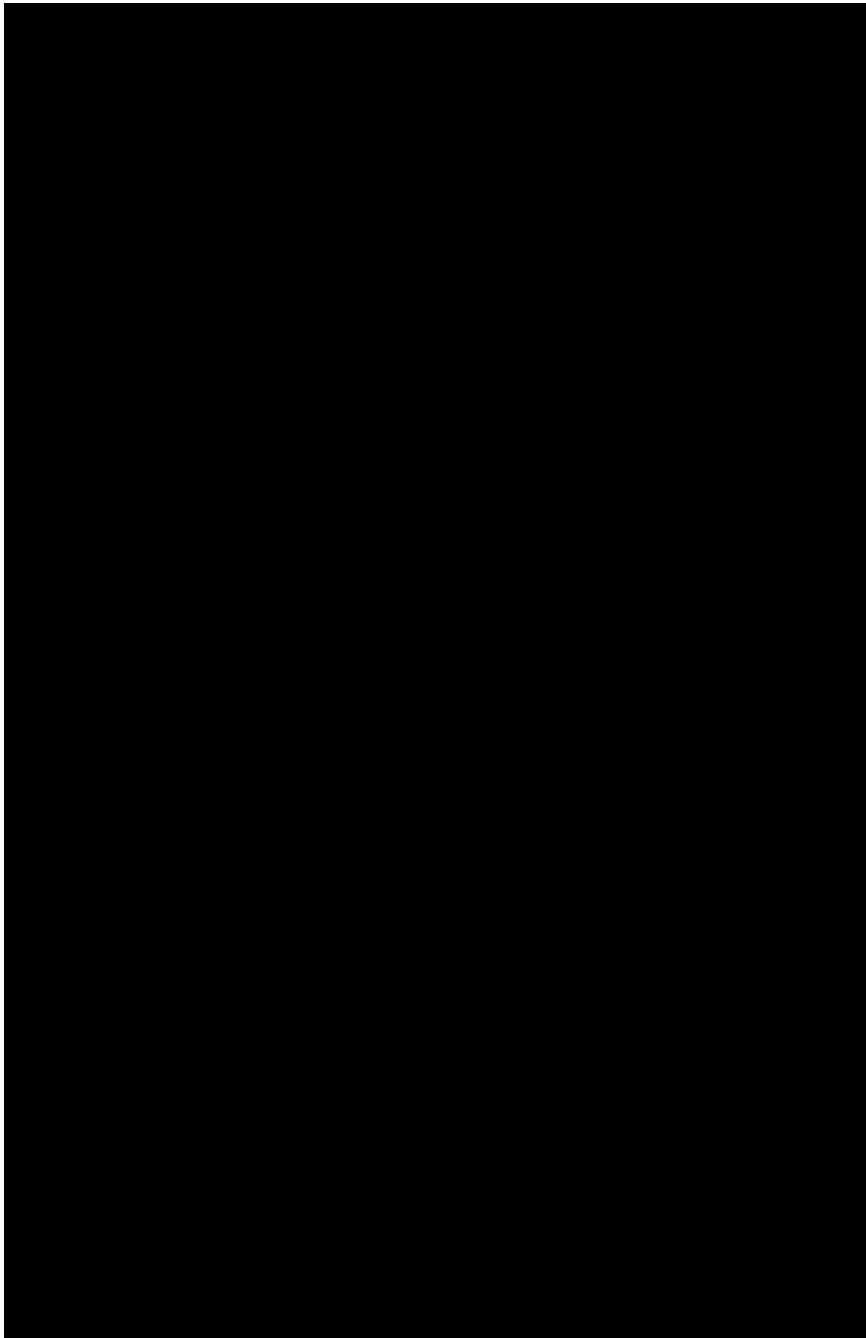


Fig. 8. Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 59 (T.2.17), f.6v.

Chapter 4. John Gower

In a memorable instance of John Gower's careful authorial self-presentation, an unusual author-portrait is included in several early copies of his Latin satire *Vox clamantis*.¹ Gower, with his distinctive forked beard, is depicted as an archer, launching an arrow at a tripartite orb (fig.8). The illustration is accompanied by four lines of Latin verse likely to have been composed by Gower himself:

Ad mundum mitto mea iacula, dumque sagitto;
At vbi iustus erit, nulla sagitta ferit.
Sed male viuentes hos vulnero transgredientes;
Consciis ergo sibi se speculetur ibi.²

[I cast my darts at the world, and at the same time shoot my arrows [lit. 'I arrow it']; but where the just man is, the arrow will not strike. But I wound these evil-living transgressors, so the guilty man watches out for himself there.]

To the best of my knowledge, it has never been observed that these lines are a loose imitation of Jean de Meun's infamous apology for the antifraternal satire he had deployed in his 'chapistre [...] de Faus Samblant' (15216–7):³

ainz pris mon arc et l'antesoie,
quex que pechierres que je soie,
si fis ma saiete voler
generaument por affoler
[...]
car je ne puis nullui ferir
qui du cop se veille garder
s'il set son estat regarder
(15227–30; 15254–6)

[I take my bow and bend it, no matter how great a sinner I might be; thus I make my arrow fly generally to harm grievously [...] for I can by no means strike he who wishes to protect himself if he knows how to look to his own behaviour.]

Even if, in future, the notion of the satirist as archer is identified in some classical or medieval antecedent, the sheer ubiquity of the *Rose* makes it seem likely that Gower is recalling Jean's

¹ The picture and verses appear together in following copies of the *Vox*, all produced in Gower's lifetime: London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iv (s.xiv ex.); San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 150 (s.xiv ex.); Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 59 (T.2.17) (c.1400). The dates of these manuscripts are given in Pearsall, 'Manuscripts and Illustrations', 78.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Gower quotations are from Macaulay (ed.), *Works*. Macaulay prints these lines at 4:19.

³ The verses of Gower's are discussed by Fisher, *John Gower*, 145; Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', 475.

text in these lines.⁴ It may even be a deliberate allusion directed at the circle of early metropolitan readers of the *Vox* who seem to have been closely connected to Gower.⁵ Jean de Meun would have been a compelling model for the satirist, and not just because of the antifraternal material in the *Rose*. The *Testament* (attributed, perhaps erroneously, to Jean) circulated widely in fourteenth-century *Rose* manuscripts, and it blends the genres of estates satire and penitential manual.⁶ As such it presents some interesting analogues to the *Vox* and, especially, Gower's *Mirour de l'omme*.⁷ But, while I will have call to return to the *Vox* at a later point, these suggestive connections will not fall directly into my investigation in this chapter, if only because, just as Jean de Meun's radically plural authorial stance cannot be reduced to the pious palinodic voice of the *Testament*, Gower's self-proclaimed role as satirist is only one among many he adopts in his rich literary career. In this chapter I will primarily examine Gower's relationship with the *Rose* by looking at how he presents and plays with meaning in his most complex work, the *Confessio Amantis*, before exploring how this attitude to meaning is related to Gower's own self-perception as a writer. But first I will briefly review Gower's relationship with continental literature, and re-state his curiously underestimated debt to the *Rose*.

⁴ Perhaps the association of the archery and the satirist was suggested by the false etymology of *satira* from *satyr*. For some typical comments see Isidore, *Etymologies*, VIII.vii.8, where the term is related to (among other things) the 'satyr play' or *satyrus*.

⁵ See M.B. Parkes, 'Patterns of Scribal Activity', 98.

⁶ The distribution of *Rose* manuscripts accompanied by the *Testament* is discussed by Buzzetti Gallarati, 'Nota bibliografica'. Only one of the manuscripts of the *Rose* that I traced to England in ch.2 includes the *Testament*: it is a fifteenth-century copy (item 6).

⁷ The palinode of the *Testament*'s narrator at lines 5–8 can be usefully compared to *Mirour* 27337–48. The *Mirour* also seems to parody the *Rose* by situating the courtship of the Seven Deadly Sins with the World in a springtime *locus amoenus* (939ff). There are a number of general satirical commonplaces shared by the *Vox* and the *Testament*, but the Latin poem also reveals a debt to the *Rose* itself, not least by beginning with a dream vision that occurs after the narrator wanders through a spring garden; see Galloway 'Gower's Dream Visions', 294–5. The *Vox* also features a particularly sexualised version of the 'Chartrian' Genius who must owe something to Jean's figure; see Irvin, 'Genius and Sensual Reading'.

GOWER AND FRENCH LITERATURE

Uniquely among the authors looked at in this thesis, Gower was a substantial francophone author, producing what has been called the ‘swan-song of Anglo-Norman literature’.⁸ Scholars have long recognised that Gower had a close relationship with continental literature, and a renewed focus on his lyrics, in particular, has revealed a poet embedded in a literary culture that stretches beyond the bounds of the English kingdom.⁹ The *Confessio Amantis*, likewise, is generally understood to be a work responding to or building on a tradition that began in continental French verse — particularly the *Rose*. The two texts’ broad similarities are announced not just through the *Confessio*’s figure of Genius — familiar from the *Rose* and Alain’s *De planctu*¹⁰ — but also through their status as love narratives that combine encyclopaedic (or anti-encyclopaedic) discussions of myth, history, and philosophy.¹¹ The *Confessio*’s debt to the *Rose* was given its classic statement in Lewis’s *Allegory of Love*,¹² and commentators have often returned to this relationship, deepening its implications by examining it alongside Gower’s imitation of later continental writers, Gower’s codicological strategies, and in relation to a Latin tradition that stretches back through the *Rose* to Alain de Lille.¹³ But some commentators have resisted the association of the *Confessio* with the double-authored French poem; R.F. Yeager has been most explicit in this respect, arguing that Gower would no doubt have sided with Jean Gerson in the *Querelle de la Rose*. Commenting

⁸ M. Dominica Legge, in reference to the *Mirour de l’omme*, in *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 220.

⁹ See especially, a series of studies by Ardis Butterfield: French Culture and the Ricardian Court’, 107–20; *Familiar Enemy*, 234–65.

¹⁰ For Gower’s debt to Jean and Alain in his presentation of Genius, see Baker, ‘Priesthood of Genius’; Economou, ‘The Character Genius’; Jane Chance Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure*, 125–30. See also the comments in Simpson, ‘Ironic Incongruence’, 626–7.

¹¹ Kay has called the *Rose* an ‘anti-encyclopaedia’, *Romance of the Rose*, 71; the *Rose*’s encyclopaedic elements have also been explored by Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World*, 183–214, 280–6. Lewis suggests that Gower’s motivation in producing a work that is ‘moral, yet also encyclopedic’ is a direct response to the *Rose*, in *Allegory of Love*, 198.

¹² Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 198–222, esp. 198–200.

¹³ For studies of the *Confessio* in relation to the *Rose* and other continental works, see Butterfield, ‘*Confessio Amantis* and the French Tradition’; Calin, *French Tradition*, 385–98; Zeeman, ‘Verse of Courtly Love’. Butterfield examines the codicological practices of the *Confessio* alongside continental analogues, ‘Articulating the Author’. Wetherbee sees the *Rose* as part of the *Confessio*’s Latin inheritance, ‘Classical and Boethian Tradition’. The *Confessio* is similarly examined alongside the *Rose* and earlier Latin works in Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, 163–98; White, *Nature, Sex and Goodness*, 174–219. See also James Dean, ‘Gather Ye Rosebuds’ for the argument that Gower’s Amans is ironically distanced from the successful lover of the *Rose*, 25.

on what Yeager calls the ‘tradition’ of the *Rose*, he states that ‘[p]robably, in fact, Gower saw in this tradition an active threat to his society’.¹⁴ Already we can see the strange enduring power of the *Rose* to generate controversy, and the widespread assumption that medieval authors had a unified and coherent attitude to the text that came down to the single issue of its moral probity.

Yeager goes further than most in articulating Gower’s supposed hostility to Guillaume’s and Jean’s text. But a number of studies, without making any claim for Gower’s antagonism towards the *Rose*, have sought to shift the emphasis away from the thirteenth century towards the *dits amoureux* of the fourteenth. Peter Nicholson, most recently, has built upon an important article by John Burrow to argue for Gower’s closer affinity to Machaut.¹⁵ Nicholson draws on Douglas Kelly’s analysis of Machaut’s representation of Desire giving way to Hope to suggest that Gower presents a species of love that is quieter, less urgent, and less destructive than that presented in the *Rose*.¹⁶ I will have call to revisit this notion, and how it might relate to Gower’s reading of the *Rose*, when I come to think about how meaning is sought after by Amans and the reader in the *Confessio*.

In turning to examine Gower’s relationship with the *Rose* in this chapter, I have no interest in discrediting the importance of Machaut or Froissart for Gower’s literary activity. It is central to the kinds of intertextuality I wish to explore that no text can be considered in isolation: Gower’s reading of Machaut was on some level a re-engagement with the *Rose*, while any reading of the *Rose* would be inflected by his knowledge of the later *dits amoureux* that it generated. However, it seems that scholars have understated Gower’s debt to the *Rose* in some cases. While Burrow is no doubt right to emphasise the fact that Gower’s narrator, Amans, owes a great deal to the narrators of the *dits* of Machaut and Froissart,¹⁷ it has not to my knowledge been observed that Gower’s celebrated depiction of Amans in Book 4 is

¹⁴ R.F. Yeager, *New Arion*, 71, 261

¹⁵ John Burrow, ‘Portrayal of Amans’, 6; Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 9–30, esp. 13, 29–30. Several of the studies already mentioned explore Gower’s debt to the *Rose* alongside his relationship with Machaut and Froissart without arguing for the priority of either: Calin, *French Tradition*, 385–98, esp. 388; Butterfield, ‘*Confessio Amantis* and the French Tradition’; Zeeman, ‘Verse of Courtly Love’.

¹⁶ Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 30; see also Kelly, *Medieval Imagination*, 132–3.

¹⁷ Burrow, ‘Portrayal of Amans’, 6; see also Nicholson, 9–30; Zeeman, 224–8.

closely derived from the God of Love's description of the life of a lover in his service in Guillaume's *Rose*.¹⁸ This is not to argue for the *Rose*'s superordinate position in Gower's imagination, but simply to point out that its importance can be downplayed, and that if Gower turned to it more frequently than we think as a source of narrative materials, he may also have been more profoundly affected by its instabilities and subversiveness than we tend to acknowledge. But this unnoticed parallel also suggests that the vastness of the *Rose* and the depth of its impact on English literature mean that the possibility of its influence should be considered with particular care, even in cases where the parallels are less clear. One of the questions that continues to haunt study of the *Confessio* is how far the poem's codes of love-behaviour can be reconciled with the codes of Christian morality expounded alongside them. There is clearly an interesting analogue between the God of Love's ten commandments (which include the prohibition of pride and avarice) and Genius's capital sins. The *Rose* might thus offer some new ways of examining the problems of Gower's poem. Rather than arguing that the *Confessio* presents two polarised and incommensurable forces (*cupiditas* and *caritas*),¹⁹ or that its ethical and its courtly-erotic commitments are simply identical,²⁰ perhaps it can be more fruitfully thought of as a work in which regulations and constraints from two distinct but not unrelated discourses are brought to bear against a shifting and unstable desire that powerfully shapes the *Confessio*'s meaning. My attempt at such a reading will emerge

¹⁸ As Lecoy points, many of these 'effets de l'amour' are loosely based on ideas that occur in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and the *Amores* (*RR*, 2253–66n). But several ideas occur only in the *Rose*, not in Ovid. The God of Love says that a lover in his service will send out his heart to where his eyes cannot see (2289–96); Amans, likewise, sends out his disembodied heart (4.2884–8). Amans's descriptions of his attempts to 'fiele' his lady's body with his heart in the same passage also echo the God of Love's description of the lover holding his lady naked in his thoughts (2435–7). Both the God of Love's imagined lover and Amans make up absurd excuses to return to where they last saw their ladies (2365–71; 4.2826–30). Both lovers forget what they want to tell their ladies through fearfulness (2382–90; 4.567–72). Finally, the God of Love quotes the direct speech of the imagined lover as he lies miserably in bed, urging the night to hasten so he can visit his lady again (2483–90). Gower extends this into an ironically inverted *alba* (perhaps also parodying Criseyde's address to the night in *TC*, 3.1429ff), in which Amans quotes his own direct speech in cursing the night and urging it to hasten so he can call on his lady again in the morning (4.2840–62).

¹⁹ Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, 13–4.

²⁰ This notion was given its original statement by Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 199. It was influentially repeated by J.A.W. Bennett, "Honneste Love", 61. See also Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 72; Burrow 'Sinning Against Love', 218.

later in this chapter, but first I will try to sketch out how Gower's complex attitude to the meaning of his work reveals the imprint of the *Rose*.

EXEMPLARY MEANING

The *Confessio Amantis* presents itself as trying to negotiate between splits and fractures: the 'lust' and 'lore' of the prologue (Pr.17–19); Genius's dual loyalties as both priest and agent of Venus (1.242–52); Amans's psychomachic struggle between reason and will (3.1150–79). The exemplary morals that Genius draws from his stories at times seem to jostle against the details of the narratives themselves, while the Latin prose summaries that emphasise these morals sometimes deviate from or even contradict the English text.²¹ The Latin head-verses, meanwhile, shift through a number of distinct subjective and attitudinal positions. In response to these apparent inconsistencies, there has been a strong and continuous critical movement arguing for the overall unity and coherence of the poem.²² The most committed and detailed of these approaches is that of James Simpson, who, having produced a strong early argument for the poem's incongruence, went on to suggest that a recognition of the poem's formal disunity was the key to grasping its higher and fuller formal unity.²³ Against this tendency, some scholars have argued that Gower's poem contains an irremediable dividedness that inheres in the contradictory discourses he deploys, something that is beyond the author's control or below his consciousness.²⁴ Thirdly, there are those commentators who see Gower

²¹ The only example of direct contradiction between commentary and text is the gloss 'Non quia sit se habet veritas, set opinio Amantium', which appears beside the lines, 'Love is an occupacion / Which forto kepe hise lustes save / Schole every gentil herte have' (4.1452–4). Bennett finds it hard to believe that the note is authorial, "'Honneste Love'", 57, n.1. Minnis suggests that this gloss merely anticipates what the text will later make explicit; like the other Latin proses, 'There is *interpretive distance* (to coin a phrase) between text and gloss, and on occasion they are quite far apart, but certainly they are not at opposite poles', 'Authors in Love', 176. While I think that Minnis is right to not to overstate the disjunction between Latin and vernacular, I will argue below that this 'interpretive distance' remains problematic for the reader.

²² Important claims for the poem's unity include Bennett, "'Honneste Love'"; Baker, 'Priesthood of Genius'; Minnis, 'Sapiens in Ethics and Politics'; Minnis, 'De Vulgari Auctoritate'; Yeager, *New Arion*; Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*; Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*.

²³ James Simpson, 'Ironic Incongruence'; *Sciences and the Self*.

²⁴ Pearsall claims that Gower's Latin comments 'aim to encase the potentially volatile nature of the English', going so far as to argue that they show Gower's 'misappropriation' of his own work, 'Gower's Latin', 22, 25. Aers argues that Gower's 'paratactic' style allows him to 'escape the consequences of contradictions', and that the poet has no intention to cultivate dialogue or plurality; 'Reflections on Gower', 201.

either as consciously acknowledging the failure of his project to reconcile contraries, or else as a deliberately subversive poet, a writer who exploits the contradictions of different discourses, languages, and meanings to produce a destabilising effect.²⁵ Winthrop Wetherbee presents a particularly interesting inflection of this last approach by suggesting that Gower inherits and participates in a tradition of Latin poetry, transmitted in part by the *Rose*, that is already normatively self-questioning and plural.²⁶ A final and original approach is that of J. Allen Mitchell, who sees the ‘incoherence’ of the *Confessio* as a necessary symptom of its pragmatic attempt to present a ‘casuistic’ and inclusive approach to moral action.²⁷

These questions of the *Confessio*’s consistency are clearly central to any analysis of its relationship to the maddeningly plural *Rose*, but they also raise more fundamental queries about the interpretation of medieval literature. In his most recent monograph, A.C. Spearing made the provocative claim that academic literary criticism today places too great an emphasis on the discovery of higher levels of unity and coherence in texts that seem superficially incoherent and disunified.²⁸ Although it is not his explicit target, Spearing’s critique presumably also includes those studies that locate a text’s unity in the notion of ambiguity or subversion as an authorially pursued aesthetic principle.²⁹ Spearing’s call to abandon externally imposed interpretative absolutisms is extremely difficult to answer, and it would perhaps be a step backwards for the discipline if it became a new and easy critical reflex to assume that all problems and difficulties should be met with resignation. But in reading the *Confessio*, I find that I am struck by difficulty and dissonance, particularly by the friction between the exemplary penitential frame and the proliferation of possible readings that the embedded narratives generate. There is perhaps an analogy here between the grid of vices and virtues presented in the septenary-style penitential manuals that Gower drew on for his confession and the lived experience of sin. Whether the often disorientating effect of

²⁵ White, ‘Division and Failure’; Echard, ‘With Carmen’s Help’, esp. 14; Watt, *Amoral Gower*.

²⁶ Wetherbee, ‘Genius and Interpretation’, 196. See also Wetherbee, ‘Classical and Boethian Tradition’, 182.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, 43–52.

²⁸ Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*, 99–127, esp. 113, 120.

²⁹ ‘a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination [...] A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented.’ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

reading the *Confessio* is the result of a deliberate authorial scheme, or whether it is something inherent in the relationship between, say, knowledge and narrativity, is a more difficult, perhaps insoluble, question. In what follows I will try to avoid resolving the *Confessio*'s interpretative difficulties and incoherences (thereby claiming that they are illusory). In what may be a capitulation, but at least a Gowerian capitulation, I will try to steer a middle way between the possibility that Gower consciously exploited these interpretative difficulties and the possibility that his text reflects a deeper tension not fully within his control. I will argue that Gower was a deeply ironic and playful poet, but I will also argue that there were boundaries that he was unwilling to cross; the *Confessio* reveals Gower imitating the self-questioning play with meaning that he encountered in the *Rose*, but it is also reveals him finally refusing some aspects of what he found in that text, a refusal that may not have been wholly conscious, and that can be sensed in the *Confessio*'s tensions, anxieties, and silences.

The key site for an exploration of Gower's attitude to meaning is his presentation of the embedded narratives in the *Confessio*. In general, the *Confessio* tends towards the literal,³⁰ and just as Gower's use of allegory in the confession-frame is only fleeting,³¹ his treatment of the tales told by Genius eschews allegoresis — even when, as can be shown in Gower's use of Ovidian material, he was drawing from allegorised sources.³² Instead of allegory, it is the exemplum that offers a model for Gower, and that allows him to redirect the meanings of his narratives or perhaps to reflect upon the limitations of these attempts at redirection.³³ The distinction between allegory and exemplum was not always entirely clear-cut in medieval

³⁰ This is related, perhaps, to what Burrow sees as the widespread literalism of 'Ricardian poetry', *Ricardian Poetry*, 80. See also Robert R. Edwards, 'Gower's Poetics of Literal'.

³¹ Amans confesses, for example, to the desire to murder, but the man he wants to murder is his lady's Dangier (3.1336). As Burrow points out, these fleeting moments of partial allegory align Gower's poem with the fourteenth-century *dits*; 'Portrayal of Amans', 6. See also Elliot Kendall's fascinating analysis of Gower's transformation of Dangier from a peasant to a household chamberlain, *Lordship and Literature*, 75–98.

³² Conrad Mainzer, 'Gower's Use of the "Mediaeval Ovid"'.

³³ Several studies in recent decades have illuminated Gower's use of the exemplum more generally. Scanlon offers a political definition of the form: 'a narrative enactment of cultural authority', *Narrative, Authority and Power*, 34. See also the interesting discussion throughout J. Allen Mitchell, *Exemplary Ethics*.

discussions.³⁴ In the context of preaching, a contrast was sometimes presented between the supposed intellectual sophistication of allegory and the wide appeal of the *exemplum*,³⁵ but Gower's exemplarity does not seem to be related in any straightforward way to the sense that the *Confessio* is 'public poetry' for a broadly conceived readership.³⁶ The clearest distinction between allegory and *exemplum* lies in how they deal with meaning, and this can be well illustrated by a brief comparison of Gower's practice to that of the *Ovide moralisé*.

Gower's first embedded story in the *Confessio* is the tale of Acteon, and the *Ovide moralisé* likewise treats this story from the *Metamorphoses*. The author of the *Ovide moralisé* reveals it to have 'Double signification' (3.571): on one level it represents the dangers of fraternising with the 'oiseuse mesnie' (3.593, 'idle company') signified by Acteon's hunting dogs; on a higher level it represents the unmediated sight that Christ (Acteon) has of God the Father (Diana), 'Nue, sans humaine nature' (3.367).³⁷ In the *Confessio*, Acteon is introduced by Genius as an example of the 'sins of the senses', a demonstration of the dangers of disordered looking: 'Ovide telleth in his bok / Ensample touchende of mislok' (1.333–4). After relating the story, Genius's moral is brief: 'Lo now, my Sone, what it is / A man to caste his yhe amis' (1.379–80). The Latin prose that accompanies this narrative summarises it faithfully, and agrees with Genius's conclusion (1.333). The essential difference between the treatments of the Acteon story in Gower and the *Ovide moralisé* lies in the different qualities of interpretative violence that they inflict upon their literal narratives. The allegoresis of the *Ovide moralisé* suggests that the Acteon story means something or several things other than (or in addition to) what it seems to mean. The exemplarity of the *Confessio* works by analogy rather than figurative substitution: the tale means only what it seems to mean, but that meaning is then revealed to be subordinate to its instrumentalised purpose: to demonstrate how a transgression is met with evil consequences. Nicholson refers to these as 'sin-and-

³⁴ For a survey of classical, medieval, and modern definitions of the *exemplum*, see Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff et al., *L'Exemplum*, 27–38.

³⁵ As in the *ars praedicandi* quoted by Olsson, 'Gower and the Late Medieval *Exemplum*', 185. Chaucer's Pardoner also seems to associate 'essamples' with 'lewed peple' (*CT*, VI.435–7).

³⁶ Middleton, 'Public Poetry'.

³⁷ Quotations are from C. de Boer (ed.), *Ovide moralisé*.

punishment' exempla.³⁸ The dynamics of the exemplum radically isolate the narrative from its Ovidian context, where, as Wetherbee points out, the emphasis is very much on Diana's excessive rage in unjustly punishing an accidental trespass;³⁹ this disjunction is one of the features that led Wetherbee to characterise the moral conclusions as 'calculated ineptitudes'.⁴⁰ But the exemplary moral also asks the reader to isolate the story from its context in the *Confessio*. By focusing the reader's attention on a single transaction of narrative cause and effect, the moral of the story works against the possibility of reading more associatively. What are we to make of Acteon walking into a 'plein' (1.357) in a forest when Amans has already performed the very same action, walking into a 'plein' (1.113) to begin his complaint to Cupid? Like Acteon, Amans is granted a vision of a classical goddess — a troubling suggestion that Amans might already have demonstrated a form of culpability that met with devastating consequences. Although they do not undermine the moral, these resonances within the *Confessio* do interfere with it, and as the poem continues they become more insistent.

In presenting Ovidian myth as an unallegorised narrative with an exemplary moral, Gower's model is almost certainly the *Rose* — a fact rarely observed.⁴¹ Even though Jean does play with the possibility of a deeper meaning hidden under the integument of Saturn's *coilles*, both authors of the *Rose* also present Ovidian exempla that play with the disjunction between the particularity of the narrative and its imposed moral application. In Guillaume's *Rose*, the story of Narcissus concludes with an exemplary moralisation that is radically disjunct from the text that precedes it. Guillaume's Amant encounters Narcissus's fountain in the Garden of Deduit. The fountain bears an inscription that relates the story of Narcissus, and it is implied that the whole narrative and its moral are inscribed upon it:

Dames, cest essample aprenez,
qui vers vos amis mesprenez;
car se vos les lessiez morir,
Dex le vos savra bien merir.

³⁸ Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 82.

³⁹ Wetherbee, 'Classical and Boethian Tradition', 191.

⁴⁰ Wetherbee, 'Genius and Interpretation', 244.

⁴¹ Minnis compares their literalism in "'Moral Gower'", 69.

(1505–8)

[Take note of this example, you ladies who mistreat your lovers; for if you let them die, God will know how to properly reward you.]

The moral of Guillaume's 'essample' is bizarre. To use Nicholson's terminology, it presents itself as a 'sin-and-punishment' exemplum, but the behaviour that it condemns is not undertaken by any actor in the story. Rather than criticising Narcissus for his pride or self-delusion, the moral criticises the image in the mirror, who, by failing to respond to Narcissus's requests, allows him to die. The behaviour that the moral tells us to avoid is that of an unreal image whose actions are outside the realm of choice. By addressing specifically 'Dames', the moral positions the text's female readers inside the mirror, even when the narrative tells us specifically that Narcissus desires 'son ombre' (1492). In its very confusion of image and woman, the moral seems to emphasise what Agamben reads in this part of Guillaume's *Rose*: that the object of desire of *fin amor* is an internal phantasm generated by the imagination.⁴² The narrative tells the story of a man who desires himself; the moral suggests that this inaccessible image is one of the 'dames' who might read the text.

This is not the only instance of the exemplary treatment of Ovidian narrative in the *Rose*. Jean 'answers' Guillaume's story of Narcissus in two ways: most memorably with the tale of Pygmalion, but also with the closely related story of Venus and Adonis.⁴³ Like the Narcissus episode, this tale concludes with an explicit exemplary moral, balancing Guillaume's address to 'Dames' with an address to male readers:

Biau seigneur, que qu'il vos aviegne,
de cest exemple vos souviene.
Vos qui ne creez voz amies,
sachiez mout fetes granz folies;
bien les deüssiez toutes croire,
car leur diz sunt voirs comme estoire.
S'el jurent : 'Toutes somes vostres',
creez les conme paternostre;
ja d'aus croire ne recreez.
Se Reson vient, point n'an creez;
s'el vos aporloit croicefis,

⁴² Agamben, *Stanzas*, 73–89. Peck suggests that the Amans of the *Confessio* can be read as desiring an internal product of his imagination; *Kingship and Common Profit*, 165.

⁴³ Adonis is Pygmalion's grandson. The story of both these figures is sung by Orpheus in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*.

n'an creez point ne quel je fis.
 Se cist s'amie eüst creüe,
 mout eüst sa vie creüe.
 (15721–34)

[Handsome lords, whatever happens to you remember this example. You who do not believe your girlfriends, know that you are committing a great folly; you should entirely believe them, for their words are as true as a history-book. If they swear, 'We are entirely yours', believe them like the paternoster; now believe them and never stop believing in them. If Reason comes, don't believe her at all; if she brings you a crucifix, don't believe her any more than I do. If he [Adonis] had believed his girlfriend his life would have extended a great deal.]

Venus had advised Adonis only to hunt harmless animals, and to steer clear of more dangerous prey; he ignores her advice and is killed when a boar gores him through the groin (15720). While this moral does not seem to inflict quite the same violence on the narrative as the moral inscribed on Narcissus's fountain, there is a clear irony — not least due to the obvious tendentiousness of the moralising voice (in this instance the narrator). There is also an inherent absurdity in the very idea of drawing everyday advice for lovers from the rich personal dramas of the ancient gods.

The *Rose*, it seems, offers a particularly fruitful point of comparison for the Ovidian exemplarity of the *Confessio*. While my first chapter focused primarily on the *Rose*'s status as allegory, as 'other-speaking', the comparison with Gower helps reveal other dynamics at work, its play with the gap that opens between an imposed instructional model and the narrative which it claims to distill or supplant. Gower's response to these problems can be seen most clearly in his use of the two exemplary Ovidian narratives that appear in the *Rose*, and which he may have been directly imitating at points when he composed his own versions. These two tales reveal Gower exploring how far an author can control the interpretation of his texts, and how far exemplary morals might problematise, rather than constrain, meaning. But they also examine the troubling position of desire in the human mind, and this focus on desire begins to call into question how far any strictures can be placed on the proliferation of plural — perhaps unwelcome — meanings.

CONTROLLING MEANING: NARCISSUS AND PYGMALION

It has been observed several times that in Gower's version of the Narcissus story, the young man does not see a male figure in the reflective water of the 'welle' (1.2306). Where Guillaume de Lorris tells us that Narcissus desired 'son ombre', Gower is clear that the young man mistakenly believes himself to be looking at a woman:

He sih the like of his visage,
 And wende ther were an ymage
 Of such a Nimphe as tho was faie,
 Wherof that love his herte assaie
 Began, as it was after sene,
 Of his sotie and made him wene
 It were a womman that he syh.
 (1.2315–21)

Gower seems to silence the possibility — explicit in Ovid and implicit in the *Rose* — that Narcissus's desire has a homo- or auto-erotic aspect. Perhaps this would distract from the exemplary moral, similar to that of Book I of the *Troilus*: that a man 'which love hadde in desdeign' (*CA*, 1.2359) is brought low for his excessive pride. Diane Watt points out that Gower seems generally unwilling to countenance the possibility of male same-sex desire.⁴⁴ And yet there are hints that the homoeroticism of Narcissus' desire is hovering at the edges of Gower's narrative. In a sixteen-line addition that Gower makes only in his third recension, the funeral of Narcissus is described. When the nymphs bury him, a flower sprouts from his tomb:

For in the wynter freysshe and faire
 The floures ben, which is contraire
 To kynde, and so was the folie
 Which fell of his Surquiderie.
 (1.2355–8)

There is a rich ambiguity in Gower's 'folie', the consequence of Narcissus's pride. Does it refer to his refusal (like the young *Troilus*) to love, or to his desire for an image of himself? Both are, in their different ways, 'contraire / To kynde'; but the latter species of unnatural behaviour is much more problematic, and much closer to a kind of desire that was vehemently prohibited.

⁴⁴ Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 77–8.

Gower's Latin prose, which usually restates the exemplary narrative and its moral, is strangely unhelpful here. As several commentators have noted, the prose does not fully corroborate the claim that Narcissus thinks he sees 'a woman' in the fountain; it states, more specifically, that he saw 'illam Nimpham, quam Poete Ekko vocant'. The detail is strange, not merely because it reveals an unusual tendency for Gower to point to the wider narrative context from which his Ovidian stories are drawn, but also because it misrepresents that wider context. In Ovid, and in the *Rose*, the vengeful prayers of Echo are the direct cause of Narcissus's punishment; by naming her as the object of his desire, Gower's gloss emphasises that Narcissus was in a way not guilty of the crime that the moral claims for him (i.e., he did not disdain love, he loved a figure he believed to be Echo). There is also an ambiguity in the language of the Latin prose as it introduces the moral thrust of the story:

Hic in speciali tractat Confessor cum Amante contra illos, qui de propria formositate presumentes amorem mulieris dedignantur.

[Here in particular the Confessor tells Amans about those presumptuous ones who, due to their own beauty, disdain woman's love.]

In this instance the Latin seems more rather than less ambiguous than the English; what exactly is meant by this sin of 'disdaining woman's love'? Has Gower introduced the self-defeating suggestion that Narcissus loved a woman in his own reflection to avoid the implications of a wider understanding of those who disdain not just love, but *amorem mulieris*?

A further ambiguity arrives through another parallel with the *Rose*. Genius's account of Narcissus briefly echoes what was perhaps a well-known passage of the French text: as we will see, the *Cleanness*-poet cites and imitates these lines. In the *Rose*, Amis, as part of a passage that broadly echoes the *Ars amatoria*, suggests that Amant should deceitfully imitate the behaviour and moods of his lover. As Simon Gaunt has emphasised, the scenario is charged with potential homoeroticism as the (male) Amis advises the (male) lover how to seduce the (male) allegorical personification of his lady's 'fair welcome':⁴⁵

De Bel Acueill reprenez garde

⁴⁵ Gaunt, 'Improper Allegory'.

par quel semblant il vos regarde :
 comment qu'il soit ne de quel chiere,
 conformez vos a sa maniere.
 [...]
 s'il est liez, fetes chiere liee ;
 s'il est corrociez, corrociee;
 s'il rit, riez; plorez, s'il pleure.
 (7689–701)

[Pay particular attention to Bel Acueil, and with what expression he looks at you: no matter what expression he should have, conform yourself to his manner [...] if he is happy, put on a happy face; if he is angry, an angry one; if he laughs, laugh; cry, if he cries.]

Gower seems to present a rather perverse echo of this advice for seduction in his description of Narcissus at his fountain:

The more he cam the welle nyh,
 The nerr cam sche to him ayein;
 So wiste he nevere what to sein;
 For whanne he wepte, he sih hire wepe,
 And whanne he cride, he tok good kepe,
 The same word sche cride also
 (1.2321–6)

Narcissus's reflection is the ideal seducer, following to the letter the injunction to deceitfully feign similarity to one's lover. When Genius delivers his moral about Pride, Amans insists that he is too unsuccessful in love to be guilty of that sin. But he wishes that he had had the good fortune of loving a woman who imitated him as closely as Narcissus's reflection:

In loves cause or wel or wo
 Yit pryded I me nevere so.
 Bot wolde god that grace sende,
 That toward me my lady wende
 As I towardes hire wene!
 (1.2371–5)

Just as the exemplary moral to Guillaume's version of the Narcissus story seems to reproduce Narcissus's category error by situating disdainful ladies in the position of the man's reflection, Amans wishes his lady was more like what Narcissus saw: a responsive, mimetic image. Amans aspires, in other words, to Narcissism. This is clearly a satire against Amans — but how far does it go? Has Amans failed to grasp the deeper and more problematic resonances of Narcissus's story beyond the territory staked out by Genius's exemplary

model? Or is Gower simply failing to successfully silence the ambiguities inherent in this archetypal narrative of disordered desire?

Unlike the *Rose*, the *Confessio* does not set up an explicit intratextual relationship between the stories of Narcissus and Pygmalion. But, although they appear in different books to illustrate different vices, the two stories have a number of resonances, no doubt suggested to Gower in part by his reading of the French text. In the first instance, and most importantly, both are stories about men who desire an ‘ymage’ (1.2316, 4.378). Pygmalion is introduced, as we might expect, as the great artificer:

He made an ymage of such entaile
Lich to a womman in semblance
Of feture and of contenance,
So fair yit nevere was figure.
(4.378–81)

Gower’s presentation of Pygmalion seems to stress that there is something self-regarding in his desire for the statue, again evoking resonances with the story of Narcissus. Gower makes it clear that Pygmalion is seduced by a product of his own agency, not by an external force, and that it is perhaps his failure to recognise ‘himself’ that is the root of his obsessive and disordered lusts:

He hath hire wrought of such delit,
That sche was rody on the cheke
And red on bothe hire lippes eke;
Wherof that he *himself* beguileth.
(4.384–7, my emphasis)

As in the *Rose*, the miraculous transformation of Pygmalion’s statue is brought about by his use of language, not his material artistry. The crux of the narrative is Pygmalion’s prayer to Venus, a speech-act that is ‘underfonge’ (4.418) by the goddess.⁴⁶ It is a remarkably grand example for Genius to use to illustrate his exhortation to Amans to not be slow in speaking to his lady, but he expresses his moral in such a way as to suggest that this story has implications beyond Amans’s immediate situation:

⁴⁶ For Gower’s portrayal of the power of language in the Pygmalion story, see María Bullón-Fernández, ‘Gower and Ovid’.

Be this ensample thou miht finde
 That word mai worche above kinde.
 (4.338–9)

Here and elsewhere in the *Confessio*, Gower expresses a peculiar faith in the power of language; his account of the arts in Book 7 famously places rhetoric above both grammar and logic (7.1523–9). The same passage gives a forceful statement of language’s ability to change the world for both good and ill:

In Ston and gras vertu ther is,
 Bot yit the bokes tellen this,
 That word above alle erthli thinges
 Is vertuous in his doinges,
 Wher so it be to evele or goode.
 (7.1545–9)

Pygmalion’s prayer can be read as another example of Gower’s faith in language; ‘word mai worche above kinde’ in transforming an inanimate statue into a living being, with whom, as Gower’s narrative makes clear, licit, generative sexual activity can take place: ‘For er thei wente thanne atwo, / A knave child between hem two / Thei gete’ (4.431–3). But if Gower’s whole poem is shaped around the ideal of a transformative language that can heal social and individual division, the structures that his poem presents sometimes seem at risk of collapse. For while Gower, like Jean de Meun, follows Ovid in telling the reader a little about the descendants of Pygmalion, he stops abruptly where Jean continues:

A knave child between hem two
 Thei gete, which was after hote
 Paphus, of whom yit hath the note
 A certain yle, which Paphos
 Men clepe, and of his name it ros.
 Be this ensample thou miht finde
 That word mai worche above kinde.
 (4.432–6)

Tant ont joué qu’ele est anceinte
 de Paphus, don dit Renomee
 que l’ille an fu Paphos nomee,
 don li rais Cynaras nasqui,
 preudon, fors en un seul cas, qui
 touz bon eürs eüst eüz,
 s’il n’eüst esté deceüz
 par Mirra, sa fille, la blonde,
 que la vielle, que Dex confonde,
 qui de pechié doutance n’a,

par nuit en son lit li mena.
(21154–64)

[They played together until she became pregnant with Paphus, for whose fame the island of Paphos was named, of whom the king Cynaras was born, a noble man, except for one single case, who would have been always have had worthy hours in his life if he had not been deceived by Mirra, his daughter, the blonde, whom the old woman (may God confound her) who had no fear of sin, led into his bed at night.]

While the linguistic parallels suggest that Gower might even be partly working from Jean's version (compare the rhyme words 'hote' and 'note' to 'nomee' and 'renomee'),⁴⁷ he abruptly draws the curtain of his moral across the narrative where Jean, like Ovid, extends the tale down through the generations to the story of Mirra's incest. Incest, of course, will be the main concern of Gower's final book.⁴⁸ Is Gower encouraging his readers to leap beyond the artificial boundary of Genius's moralising intervention to ask very unsettling questions about the value of literature ('evele or goode')? Or is he trying to produce a structure that can contain the dangerous proliferation of meanings embraced by Ovid and Jean? One way to approach this very difficult question is to think about another figure from Ovid and the *Rose*, who is conspicuously absent in Gower's *Confessio*, even though he is perhaps the most famous example of a poet whose language can 'worche above kinde'. This figure will not only continue to reveal Gower's relationship with the *Rose*, he will also demonstrate the imbrication of Gower's presentation of the attempt to control meaning with his exploration of the attempt to control desire.

CONTROLLING DESIRE: ARION AND ORPHEUS

At the end of the Prologue to the *Confessio*, before the introduction of the framing conceit of the confession of Amans to Genius, the narrating voice expresses its wish that there were, today, a poet like Arion, who could create harmony and unity throughout the world with the force of his magical song:

Bot wolde god that now were on
An other such as Arion,
Which hadde an harpe of such temprure,
And thereto of so good mesure

⁴⁷ cf. *MED*, s.v., *note* (n.3), 3(b), although this passage from Gower is cited as an example of sense 5(b)

⁴⁸ For Gower and incest more generally, see Scanlon, 'Riddle of Incest'.

He song, that he the bestes wilde
 Made of his note tame and milde,
 The Hinde in pes with the Leoun,
 The Wolf in pes with the Moltoun,
 The Hare in pees stod with the Hound;
 And every man upon this ground
 Which Arion that time herde,
 Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
 He broghte hem alle in good acord
 (Pr.1053–54)

While Yeager follows Peck in suggesting that Gower is insinuating himself as a candidate for the ‘new Arion’,⁴⁹ Nicholson argues that this mythological figure is distinct from the author-narrator; he suggests that Arion is a hopeful gesture towards the peace-making powers of a king, in this case Richard II.⁵⁰ The reference is ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so — Gower might wish that he himself, as a writer, will be an unprecedented force for good, but this position can also be occupied by a reader like Richard II (or indeed Henry Bolingbroke). But before examining who Arion might represent, perhaps a more fundamental question is that asked by Yeager, ‘What drew Gower to build so much around so recondite a personage?’⁵¹ Why Arion?

Yeager offers a useful biography of Arion derived from Herodotus,⁵² but it is almost certain that Arion was most familiar to Gower and his readers from his brief appearance in Book 2 of Ovid’s *Fasti* — a text that Gower drew on frequently in his *Vox Clamantis*:⁵³

quod mare non novit, quae nescit Ariona tellus?
 carmine currentes ille tenebat aquas.
 saepe sequens agnam lupus est a voce retentus,
 saepe avidum fugiens restitit agna lupum;
 saepe canes leporesque umbra iacuere sub una,
 et stetit in saxo proxima cerva leae
 (2.83–8)⁵⁴

[What sea, what land knows not Arion? By his song he used to stay the running waters. Often at his voice the wolf in pursuit of the lamb stood still, often the lamb

⁴⁹ Yeager, *New Arion*, 238; Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, 22.

⁵⁰ Nicholson, 122.

⁵¹ Yeager, 239.

⁵² *ibid.*, 238.

⁵³ Fisher shows that Gower imitates nearly as many lines from the *Fasti* as the *Metamorphoses* in the *Vox clamantis*; see *John Gower*, 147–50.

⁵⁴ All quotations and translations from Frazer (ed. and tr.), *Fasti*.

halted in fleeing from the ravening wolf; often hounds and hares have couched in the
 same covert, and the hind upon the rock has stood beside the lioness]
 (63)

Ovid goes on to recount how Arion, beset by murderous sailors on a voyage, played his harp and summoned a dolphin, upon whose back he escaped. This passage was likely to be the primary source of information on the ‘famous’ Arion in the Middle Ages, although the story is mentioned by Augustine in *City of God* as an example of a pagan tale inferior to the Old Testament story of Jonah, and Arion is also mentioned in the list of harpists on the exterior of Chaucer’s House of Fame.⁵⁵

But even if Gower’s readers did not know Ovid’s *Fasti*, they may still have found something familiar in this description of Arion. The passage generally recalls Isaiah 11, to be sure, but Gower’s evocation of Arion is also closely reminiscent of a piece of verse much more famous than the *Fasti* in the Middle Ages — the description of Orpheus in the final metrum of Book 3 of the *Consolatio*:

Postquam flebilibus modis
 Silvas currere mobiles,
 Amnes stare coegerat,
 Iunxitque intrepidum latus
 Saevis cerva leonibus,
 Nec visum timuit lepus,
 Iam canctu placidum canem
 (3.m12.7–13)

[He who before had made the woods so nimbly run
 And rivers stand
 With his weeping measures,
 And the hind’s fearless flank
 Lay beside savage lions,
 Nor was the hare afraid to look upon
 The hound, made peaceful by his song]
 (307)

There is great complexity in these overlapping literary echoes. Boethius’s own description of Orpheus is clearly borrowing from Ovid in two different ways, supplementing the account in the *Metamorphoses* of Orpheus’s supernatural ability to summon trees with the idea of the power to sow peace and harmony associated with Arion in the *Fasti*. For a medieval reader, I think it would be very difficult to read about the Ovidian Arion in terms of his harmonising

⁵⁵ *City of God*, 1:14; *House of Fame*, 1005.

music without conjuring not only the Biblical analogue in the Book of Isaiah, but also the spectral presence of the Boethian Orpheus. This Orphic spectre is also raised by a final piece of evidence. In an important article, James Simpson has drawn out some interesting parallels between Gower's prologue to the *Confessio* and the prologue to Robert Holcot's commentary on the Book of Wisdom. Both prologues, Simpson points out, are primarily philosophical discussions of the best way to govern the commonwealth. Both prologues appeal to a wise poet-figure who can heal social division. In Gower, as we have seen, this figure is Arion. But in Holcot, it is Orpheus.⁵⁶

It seems very likely, then, that although Gower had access to a number of texts that appealed to the magical power of Orpheus's song, he deliberately turned away from Orpheus to the 'recondite' figure of Arion. One possible reason for this, certainly, is that Ovid's Orpheus rejected women in favour of boys after the death of Eurydice. In the *De planctu* and Jean's *Rose*, Orpheus's music is presented not as unifying but as perverting, and Jean's Genius builds on a set of metaphors borrowed from Alain de Lille as he excommunicates all those who follow Orpheus in allowing 'excepcions anormales' (19620) to their rules. Gower's uneasiness towards male same-sex desire is no doubt part of his reason for replacing Orpheus with the safer figure of Arion. But this is not simply homophobic anxiety; I think Gower's misgivings are also more generally directed towards uncontrollable desire itself. And Orpheus, even outside the Ovidian tradition, was often presented in precisely those terms. The most famous example of this aspect of Orpheus is the metrum from Boethius quoted above. Philosophy recounts how Orpheus broke the rules established by the gods in looking back over his shoulder at Eurydice. Philosophy seems to recognise that desire overruns the structures and limitations that are imposed upon it; she even seems to imply, in a strangely self-questioning moment, that there is something inevitable about this failure of regulation and prohibition:

Quis legem det amantibus?
 Maior lex amor est sibi
 (3.m12.47–8)

⁵⁶ Simpson, 'Ironic Incongruence', 619.

[Who can give lovers laws?
Love is a greater law unto itself.]
(311)

Gower echoes this sentiment at several places in the *Confessio* ('loves law is out of reule', 1.18; 'To love is every lawe unwar', 6.1262), and as I mentioned earlier, the *Confessio* is in some ways a study of desire's interaction with restriction — both the 'courtly' and the ecclesiastical. Gower's exploration of desire throughout the *Confessio* might help us understand his troublesome suppression of Orpheus.

Much has been written about Gower's portrayal of the physical compulsions of human sexuality; particularly illuminating are those studies which examine his presentation of desire as natural law (a natural law often based upon the Ulpianic idea of the instinctual animal compulsion to reproduce).⁵⁷ There is no space here to rehearse all the evidence, but it is clear that, for Gower, humanity's natural concupiscence is a powerful force that overruns the prohibitions of human institutions. Incest, of course, is the famous example: Canace and Machaire's desire for each other is shown to be somehow a natural consequence of their co-habitation:

And after sche which is Maistresse
In kinde and techeth every lif
Withoute lawe positif,
Of which sche takth nomaner charge,
Bot kepth hire lawes al at large,
Nature, tok hem into lore
And tawht hem so
(3.170–6)

This story is immediately followed by the enforced gender reassignment of Tiresias as punishment for disturbing two copulating snakes (3.361–80), which shores up the suggestion that the coupling of Canace and Machaire is 'natural', and the primary wrongdoing lies with their father Eolus who (like Tiresias) interrupts this natural process. Critics have often recognised this as a difficult passage, but as Gower will later state explicitly, the Christian history of humankind necessitated the belief that incest was never 'unnatural': the offspring of

⁵⁷ Kurt Olsson, 'Natural Law'; Hugh White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*. See also, for a different perspective, J. Allan Mitchell, 'Natural Morality'. For Gower's presentation of sex and sexuality, see also Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 63–103.

Adam and Eve and then the descendants of Noah reproduced within their family groups to populate or repopulate the earth.⁵⁸ Gower obviously struggled with the fact that incest was technically ‘natural’. When he calls Antiochus’s rape of his daughter ‘unkinde’ (8.320) he gestures towards the sense of ‘unnatural’, but since this story is preceded by the direct statement that incest violates only positive, human laws, the word ‘unkinde’ seems to withdraw into its weaker meaning of ‘lacking natural affection or loyalty to one’s kin or offspring’.⁵⁹

More problematic depictions of ‘natural’ desire occur in two stories of same-sex attraction. The first of these is the story of the two young girls who fall in love, Iphis and Iante. The explanation of their desire for each other is strangely reminiscent of the explanation given for the growing attraction of Canace and Machaire. But if it is ‘natural’ for a brother and sister to desire each other, it is a much broader concept of the natural that causes sexual contact between these two girls:

Which Iante hihte, and ofte abedde
 These children leien, sche and sche,
 Whiche of on age bothe be.
 So that withinne time of yeeres,
 Togedre as thei ben pleiefieres,
 Liggende abedde upon a nyht,
 Nature, which doth every wiht
 Upon hire lawe forto muse,
 Constreigneth hem, so that thei use
 Thing which to hem was al unknowe
 (4.478–87)

Indeed, having attributed this attraction to nature, Gower’s Genius then contradicts himself to tell Amans that it was unnatural: Cupid intervenes to transform Iphis into a man,

For love hateth nothing more
 Than thing which stant ayein the lore
 Of that nature in kinde hath sett
 (4.493–5)

⁵⁸ Gower’s history of incest concludes by situating the current restrictions against incest in the realm of positive law: ‘For of the lawe canonized / The Pope hath bede to the men, / That none schal wedden of his ken’ (8.144–6). Olsson quotes a telling passage from John of La Rochelle, who states that incest has not always been culpable, and therefore is not against natural law, ‘Natural Law’, 252. See also Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, 355–6 for the changes in consanguinity prohibitions in the Fourth Lateran Council.

⁵⁹ *MED*, s.v., *unkinde* (adj.), 4a (a).

In a final instance, which represents a partial inversion of the Iphis and Iante story, Genius relates that Achilles, disguised as a girl, sleeps in bed beside Deidamia each night. Once again ‘Nature’ appears to draw them into a sexual desire seemingly beyond their control — but what understanding of nature allows for both Achilles to ‘naturally’ desire Deidamia and for Deidamia to ‘naturally’ desire Achilles as a woman?

Wher kinde wole himselve rihte,
 After the Philosophres sein,
 Ther mai no wiht be therayein:
 And that was thilke time seene.
 The long nyhtes hem betuene
 Nature, which mai noght forbere,
 Hath mad hem bothe forto stere
 (5.3053–63)

These passages lead me to agree largely with Hugh White’s conclusion in his *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*: Gower’s exploration of nature and sex ‘hints that at the bottom of the human psyche lies a naked, unconditioned, undifferentiating sexual impulse — and that suggests something morally anarchic at the bottom of the totality one calls Nature.’⁶⁰ Even when Gower states openly that humankind has the power to use reason to overcome their natural, animal compulsions, the substance of the narratives seems to work against this.⁶¹

Desire also seems to fracture Amans’s attempt to acquire knowledge in the *Confessio*. Amans admits that Genius’s discourse on Aristotelian political philosophy has been totally meaningless to him, since he has been too distracted by his own carnal (rather than intellectual) lust, and wishes for Genius to end his digression and return to addressing love directly:

The tales sounen in myn Ere,
 Bot yit myn herte is elleswhere,

⁶⁰ White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 193. I would only seek to add a further layer of nuance to White’s argument by pointing out the notion of ‘habit as a second nature’ that crops up in Gower, and that was current in Gower’s time in discussions of sodomy in commentaries on the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*. Gower uses the phrase ‘habit is another nature’ at 6.659–64, in both English and Latin. For the development of this notion in Pietro d’Abano’s early fourteenth-century commentary on the *Problemata*, see Joan Cadden, *Nothing Natural Is Shameful*, 73–105. For some suggestive comments on the role of custom and learning in Gower’s idea of the natural, see Mitchell, ‘Natural Morality and Vernacular Ethics’, 145.

⁶¹ The most direct statement of the power of reason to overcome animal lust (7.5372–81) appears after the story of Tobias and Sara; but this story depicts human desire so violent that only divine intervention, not reason, allows it to be brought under control (7.5357–61). See White, ‘Division and Failure’, 604–5.

I mai miselve nocht restreigne,
 That I nam evere in loves peine
 [...]
 Forthi, my goode fader diere,
 Lef al and speke of my matiere
 Touchende of love, as we begonne
 (7.5411–23)

Amans here is very much like the Lover of the *Rose*; everything that Raison puts in at one ear, Love shovels out at the other (*RR*, 4604–13).

So far I have examined Gower's attempts to control meaning, and Gower's depiction of various attempts to control desire. In the concluding paragraph of this section I would like to attempt to draw these strands more closely together. Hugh White has suggested that on some level Gower's attitude to human nature is pessimistic, and, again, largely, I would agree.⁶² Indeed, this notion of humanity's essential tendency to break its own self-imposed restrictions is already present, albeit qualified, in the Orpheus metre of Boethius's *Consolatio*. Earlier I mentioned that I differ from Nicholson's interpretation of how Gower presents desire. Nicholson argues that, like Machaut, Gower puts forward a vision of desire that is more domesticated than what appears in the *Rose*: something that can be constrained or productively re-directed by Hope.⁶³ Nicholson also argues that, by the end of the poem, Gower has successfully reconciled reason and sensuality.⁶⁴ But I feel that Gower's presentation of desire leans towards what was felt by Boethius's Orpheus, a *maior lex*, something that cannot be finally constrained. This is perhaps one reason why Genius makes his sudden and disorienting tack after he tells the tale of Apollonius in Book 8, when he unexpectedly effects a complete rejection of erotic desire. This moment has often been seen as essential to the overall meaning of the *Confessio*. I do not think that it represents a transformation in Genius's character, nor that Genius figures the lover's developing *ingenium* as the poem progresses.⁶⁵ Rather, I think that Genius's dual regulatory responsibilities — his role as priestly expounder of sin and his role as courtly preceptor of aristocratic codes of

⁶² White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 138; see also White, 'Division and Failure'. This view is opposed by Chance Nietszche, *Genius Figure*, 128–30 and Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 17, 194.

⁶³ Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 20, 30.

⁶⁴ Nicholson, 378.

⁶⁵ Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 185–6.

seduction and erotic deferral — have failed in their attempt to bring Amans's desire under control, and in the end his only available recourse is an austere rejection of desire altogether (something that violates the decorum of his roles as priest, agent of Venus, and god of generation). Like the 'diffinitive santance' of Jean's Genius (19474), Gower's Genius delivers a 'conclusion final' (8.2070) that is very difficult to accept in relation to the rest of the poem:

My Sone, and if thou have be so,
 Yit is it time to withdrawe,
 And set thyn herte under that lawe,
 The which of reson is governed
 And noght of will.
 (8.2132–6)

Although a resolution to Amans's painful desire allows him to have a moment of self-realisation, as we will see, this resolution is reached not through a process of internal development⁶⁶ — instead, it is externally imposed. His release from desire is a miraculous dispensation granted by Venus;⁶⁷ it is only after this point that he looks into her miraculous mirror and recognises his own old age, and his supposed unsuitability for love. The desire that Gower presents in the *Confessio* is perhaps a little more like the raw and dangerous force that appears in the *Rose*. But Gower is unwilling or unable, at last, to hand his poem over to it completely: the *Confessio* depicts a desire that ends only after it is miraculously eliminated. The implication seems to be that the sense of stability with which the poem concludes is also provisional, and that while it aspires towards both concrete certainty and political unity, these may be at last inaccessible in an irremediably divided world. These final scenes of self-realisation owe a huge amount to the *Rose*, and will form the focus of the next section of this chapter.

⁶⁶ This is Simpson's reading, *Sciences and the Self*, 194.

⁶⁷ See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 176; White, 'Division and Failure', 606; Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 103.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Many commentators have observed that, at the beginning of Book 1, where Gower's narrator announces his own direct experience of love, the Latin prose commentary deviates from the English text.⁶⁸ While the narrator claims that 'I myself am one of tho' who has experienced love, the prose insists that is in fact untrue.

Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distincionibus per singula scribere proponit.
(1.60)

[Here, as if in the persona of others, whom love binds, the author, feigning to be one who is loving, proposes to write about each of their various passions in the different sections of this book.]

With this disjunction between the *I* of the poem and the seemingly authoritative voice of the commentary, a split is announced between the narrator and the self who claims to produce or control that narratorial voice.

Later, this process will be reversed, as the identities seem to collapse back into each other. Amans, having been finally released from his disordered state of desire, names himself, revealing that he is in fact the historical author of the poem:

Sche axeth me what is mi name.
'Ma dame,' I seide, 'Johan Gower.'
(8.2321–2)

This revelation of identity is striking in contrast to the lines that appear in Book 1, when Amans, asked his identity by Venus, responds only with, 'A Caitif that lieth here' (1.161). The trajectory traced by the narrator from namelessness to proper namedness is often seen as mimetic of his gradual recovery of self-knowledge, and the poem ends, in Burrow's fine analysis, with Amans's withdrawal from love and Gower's withdrawal from love poetry in a 'subtle parallelism which unites the two figures in what seems almost a single act of abnegation.'⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See, for example Paul Strohm, 'Gower's Persona'; Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans'; Butterfield, 'French Tradition', 172–80; Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*, 39–42; Zeeman, 'Verse of Courtly Love', 232–3.

⁶⁹ Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', 22.

Even though Gower's Latin prose had already announced that Gower's narrator is somehow not himself, this doesn't preclude the conventional identification of narrator with author (at least by name) in fourteenth-century poetry. Indeed, Gower's earliest readers made this connection before the 'revelation' of Gower's identity in Book 8. Some scribes altered the narrator's Book 1 self-identification as 'a caitif' to read 'John Gower', while in the Middle English commentaries that replace the Latin in one manuscript, the activities of Amans are described as being carried out by 'Iohn Gower'.⁷⁰ As we've seen already with Deguileville, Machaut, and Langland, the identification by name of narrator with author was widespread. One of the most notable deviations from the pattern, in fact, was the *Rose*, where Jean's narrator is at times, and not unproblematically, presented as the narrator of Guillaume's poem — that is, a figure named 'Guillaume'. As Butterfield has pointed out, the apparent doubleness of Gower's narrator in the *Confessio* bears some striking similarities to Jean self-naming in the *Rose*: 'Both poets cast doubt on fictionality while also giving their fictions unusual reach: Jean de Meun breaks and distorts the barrier between the 'real' author and the literal narrator; Gower, likewise, shows Amans to be a construct that has more than one literal level.'⁷¹

There is no doubt that Gower's strategies in the *Confessio* owe much to Jean's in the *Rose*. But perhaps it is possible to build on Butterfield's analysis of these poets' respective explorations of truth and fiction. An interesting analogue to the *Confessio*'s 'quasi in persona aliorum' gloss occurs in a different piece of Latin prose, one that accompanies Gower's *Vox clamantis*.⁷²

⁷⁰ The variant of 'Iohn Gowere' for 'A caitif' at 1.161 occurs in BL MS Egerton 1991 and BodL, MS Bodley 294. These variants are mentioned by Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', 21, n.25, and Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*, 40. BodL, MS Ashmole 35 contains English instead of Latin proeses, which refer to the Amans of the fiction as 'Iohn Gower'; mentioned by Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*, 40, and Echard, 'With Carmen's Help', 37–9. These might be compared to those manuscripts like BodL, MS Bodl. 902, f.8r, where Amans is portrayed as an old man (perhaps John Gower?), anticipating the coming-together of narrator and author in Book 8; discussed in Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', 12,

⁷¹ Butterfield, '*Confessio Amantis* and the French Tradition', 175. See also Butterfield, 'Articulating the Author', 80, 83–4.

⁷² Discussed by Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*, 39–40.

Hic plangit secundem visionem sompni quasi in propria persona dolores illorum, qui in siluis et speluncis pre timore temporis illius latitando se munierunt.
(1, cap.16)

[According to the vision of his dream, here he laments, as if in his own person, for the sufferings of those who protected themselves by hiding in the woods and caves because of that fearful time.]
(79)⁷³

The same phrase, ‘quasi in propria persona’, appears also as the heading of the following chapter of the *Vox*. What is the difference between the ‘quasi in persona aliorum’ of the *Confessio* and the ‘quasi in propria persona’ of the *Vox*? How can this illuminate our understanding of how Gower attempts to relate himself to the meaning he produces in the *Confessio*?

The *Vox* is primarily an estates satire. The satirist comments on contemporary society, remaining outside it, and maintaining an undeveloping state of emotional outrage. But there is one part of the *Vox* that shifts away from this typically satirical stance. And it seems that it is this shift that causes a problematic rupture between narratorial voice and the author’s historical self that must be announced or controlled with the Latin prose comment, ‘quasi in propria persona’. In the *sompnia* that constitutes Book 1 of the *Vox*, the narrator observes but does not participate in the narrative: the monstrous beasts of the Peasants’ Revolt pass before the narrator’s eyes and are described. But in chapters 16 and 17, the narrator begins to participate in the action, to move through the dream landscape and experience and enact responses to emotions, fleeing into the woods and living on acorns in a twisted ironisation of the Ovidian Golden Age. Chapter 16 is also the most Boethian section of all of the *Vox*: the narrator is visited by the allegorical Sophia (1.1545); they debate, and she comforts him. This is the only dialogue that takes place in the poem — the only moment where there is anything other than the almost ekphrastic description of the ‘visionem sompni’. In a supremely Boethian mode, Sophia teaches the narrator how to recover from the self-alienation he has suffered:

Sicque diu pauidus pariter cum meate colorem
Perdideram, que fui sic nouus alter ego.

⁷³ Translations of the *Vox clamantis* are from Stockton (tr.), *Major Latin Works*.

(1.1489–90)

[And suffering just as long a time in mind, too, I lost my color, and so I was like
another self.]

(82)

These lines are a clear echo of Book 1 of the *Consolatio*, where Philosophia diagnoses the first-person narrator's malady 'Sui paulisper oblitus est' (1.pr2.13, 'he has for a moment forgotten himself). For Gower, it is as if the developmental Boethian trajectory of self-recognition demands a self who can be recognised. The conceit of psychological development requires to some extent a partially and temporarily identifiable self, a movement away from the unparticularised satirist. This self is the author's own: 'quasi in propria persona'.

I devote this space to the exploration of the *Vox Clamantis* because I think that Gower's comments on his narratorial voice offer us an important insight into his strategies in the *Confessio*. What I would like to emphasise is not the obvious distinction between these Latin phrases — *propria persona* versus *persona aliorum* — rather, I would like to stress their similarity: *quasi*. For by specifying his own relationship with his narrator with the word *quasi*, 'as if', Gower seems to place an unusual emphasis on the fictionality, the constructedness of this voice. Whether they represent himself or others, the narratorial personae of the *Confessio* and the *Vox* are equally *not* himself — they are produced by the narrative that requires a trajectory of self-recovery. Indeed, the very representation of a disordered fictional self who is alienated from the supposedly whole and ordered authorial self who creates it forces the question of whether undivided self-identity can ever be represented by language: must the restored figure who is shown at the end-point of a process of self-recovery also be *quasi*?

At the end of the *Confessio*, Venus makes Amans/John Gower gaze into a miraculous mirror; in it, he watches his face transform into that of an old man (8.2820–31). This can be read as the final step in Gower's recovery of self-knowledge; after the poem's voice has been prominently reissued with his proper name, his bodily appearance shifts to match that of the

author, an elderly and unwell man.⁷⁴ But of course Gower has merely shifted from using a persona that is *quasi in persona aliorum* to one that is *quasi in propria persona*: an old and sick narrator named John Gower is as much a product of the text as an apparently young and virile narrator referred to as Amans. Gower's promise to Venus that he will abandon love (and thus, implicitly, writing about love) in exchange for a life in which he will only 'bidde and preie' (8.2961) is strongly reminiscent of Will's promise in Passus 12 of the B Text that he would give up making if only he understood Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. But the claim made by 'John Gower' that he will abandon love to return to, as Venus says, 'ther vertu moral duelleth, / Wher ben thi bokes' (8.2925–6) is undermined by the existence of the *Confessio* itself. As a long poem structured by desire the *Confessio* operates by the conceit that the voice who recounts the beginning of a personal narrative at 1.98 ('This enderday, as I forthferde') is 'unaware' of the fact that he will later reject a number of activities which include, presumably, writing a text like the *Confessio*. Gower's poem traces a trajectory from self-division to self-knowledge even as it suggests that genuine self-knowledge leads to the rejection of the kinds of activities that have produced the poem we have just read.⁷⁵ In the *Rose*, Jean de Meun claims, impossibly, that he is writing an experience that was not his — that the fictive narrator he creates and the authorial self he gestures to from within the *Rose* are equally constructed by the text, vulnerable to untruth and misreading. In the *Confessio*, Gower seems to be painfully aware that there is an inherent fictiveness in both the narrator we call Amans and in his own claims to be something other than Amans, to be the 'John Gower' who is too old to be worrying about love. Gower is not blind to this paradox; indeed, his Latin glosses seem to manifest an unusually clear analytic understanding of the constructedness of representation. But Gower allows it to stand, indeed, needs it to stand, because he is trying to weave a wider and more elaborate fiction out of his own historical life, one that will perhaps earn him (with some important qualifications) the remorselessly persistent title 'moral

⁷⁴ Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', 14.

⁷⁵ This essential paradox in all Boethian poems can be seen as supporting Simpson's argument that the *Confessio* is not organised around the development of the narrator, but instead the 'enformacioun' of the reader; *Sciences and the Self*, 7, 15, 138. I differ from Simpson by being more skeptical towards this process's potential for success.

Gower'. One strategy that he pursues in this attempt to moralise himself as author constitutes a final re-engagement with the *Rose*.

IN BED WITH GOWER

A Latin colophon known as the 'Quia unusquisque' appears in various forms at the end of roughly half of the surviving complete manuscript copies of Gower's works.⁷⁶ The colophon lists his three major works in each of the three major languages of England, and presents his literary career as a unified didactic project: 'tres libros doctrine causa [...] composuit' (he composed three books for the purpose of doctrine).⁷⁷ It was this colophon that led Fisher to the influential conclusion that Gower's lifetime of literary activity was essentially a single unified project that culminated in the *Confessio Amantis*.⁷⁸ Several scholars have resisted this reading, however; Butterfield has observed that Gower's inclusion of the *Traitié pour essampler les amantz mariez* immediately after the *Confessio* in several manuscripts suggests that even in his great anglophone poem, English is not the 'last word'.⁷⁹ The close relationship between these English and French texts, the *Confessio* and the *Traitié*, is announced by a rubric that is likely to be authorial, as is much of the apparatus of early copies of Gower's works:

Puisqu'il ad dit ci devant en Englois par voie d'essample la sottie de celui qui par amours aime par especial, dirra ore apres en François a tout le monde en general un traitié selonc les auctours pour essampler les amantz marietz, au fin q' ils la foi de lour seintes espousailles pourront par fine loialté garder, et al honour de dieu salvement tenir.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Pearsall identifies the 'Quia unusquisque' colophon in 22 of the 49 complete or nearly complete manuscripts of the *Confessio* and 5 of the 11 manuscripts of the *Vox Clamantis*; 'Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', 7–8.

⁷⁷ Macaulay prints the colophon at 3.479–80. There are significant variations in this colophon across its three recensions; all three are usefully presented in Russell Peck (ed.), *Confessio Amantis*, 'The Colophons', 1:229–33.

⁷⁸ Fisher, *John Gower*, 137.

⁷⁹ Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 240. Gower seems to have exercised control over the copying of early manuscripts of his works. Scholars today no longer tend to agree with Fisher's hypothesis that Gower ran a 'scriptorium' at St Mary Overy's in Southwark (*John Gower*, 66, 116–7, 124–7, 303–6). But it is very likely that Gower retained 'definitive revised exemplars of his own works' which were copied through a network of independent bookmakers, perhaps contracted by Gower; see Doyle and Parkes, 'Production of Copies', 200.

⁸⁰ Macaulay prints these lines, *Works*, 1:379

[Because he has, in English, shown above by way of example the particular foolishness who love *par amour*,⁸¹ he will now address below, to all the world in general, in French, a treatise derived from the authors as an example for married lovers, for the purpose that they will loyally guard the faith of their holy matrimonial vows, and hold safely to the honour of God.]

But of course Butterfield's reading could go further, since each manuscript that contains the *Confessio* together with the *Traitié* also includes a number of Latin lyrics. These lyrics, printed after the *Traitié* by Macaulay, appear with remarkable consistency in the *Confessio* + *Traitié* manuscripts.⁸² It is difficult to assess how meaningfully they can be detached from each other, or indeed considered outside their position in a sequence that begins with the *Confessio* and passes through the Anglo-French ballades. They can also be read as part of wider structures, in that these manuscripts also contain further, subsequent Latin satires which return to the tone and stance of the Prologue to the *Confessio*. But it will be my contention that the poems I will look at here form something of a thematic unit. Following the guidance of Macaulay's lineation of the Latin verses in his edition, I shall consider them as three (perhaps inseparable) units, and shall refer to them as 'Quis sit vel qualis' (eight hexameters in rhyming couplets with a ninth pentameter line); 'Est amor' (fifteen pentameters followed by two elegiac couplets); 'Lex docet auctorum' (six rhyming hexameters followed by an elegiac couplet, also rhyming). In his editions and translations of Gower's minor works, Yeager edits and translates the 'Est amor' and the 'Lex docet' as a single text, but edits and translates the 'Quis sit vel qualis' as part of the *Traitié* — a good example of how difficult it

⁸¹ Yeager translates as 'in a courtly manner', *The French Balades*, 13.

⁸² Macaulay prints the lyrics at *Works*, 1:391–2. The *Traitié* is always followed by the 'Quis sit vel qualis' in all of the manuscripts known to Macaulay, and Yeager edits and translates it as part of that text, *French Balades*, 32–3. The *Traitié* appears alongside the *Confessio* in nine manuscripts (two of which — Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 5 and Yale, Beinecke Library, MS Osborne fa1) were unknown to Macaulay. The Princeton manuscript, and all seven of the *Confessio* + *Traitié* manuscripts known to Macaulay, link the English and French poems with the 'Puis qu'il ad dit' rubric, and then include, after the *Traitié* and the 'Quis sit vel qualis', the 'Est Amor' and 'Lex Docet' lyrics. I have been unable to consult the Yale manuscript. The Princeton manuscript and its contents are fully described in Skemer, *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, 1.411–5. Note that the *Traitié* occurs in three manuscripts without the *Confessio*, and one single-leaf fragment (BL, MS Arundel 364: the other contents of this MS are unknown). Of these three manuscripts of the *Traitié* without the *Confessio*, two contain the 'Est amor' and the 'Lex docet', but the Trentham manuscript contains only the 'Lex docet'. Note also that all of the manuscripts already mentioned contain various other, thematically unlinked Latin lyrics; one that occurs with particular frequency is 'Carmen super multiplici viciorum pestilentia'. Macaulay discusses the contents of the manuscripts he knew in *Works*, 1.472–3; see also Pearsall, 'Manuscripts and Illustrations', 78–9.

can be to impose boundaries between works that were not always intended to be considered in isolation.⁸³

One way of thinking about how these texts interact might be as a ‘sequence’, in the terms put forward by John Burrow: ‘a work in which separable items by a single author (lyrics, it may be, or short narratives) are held together in a fixed order within a single volume, so forming part of a larger whole.’⁸⁴ These *Confessio* manuscripts which include the *Traitié* and thematically linked Latin lyrics are certainly a weaker example of the ‘sequence’ than, say, Hoccleve’s *Series* or the works of Juan Ruiz, but, earlier, Burrow had already suggested that at least Gower’s linking of the *Confessio* and the *Traitié* can be considered in the same terms: ‘a definite step in the direction of larger composite forms’.⁸⁵ As we have seen, the link between the *Confessio* and the *Traitié* is made explicit in the manuscripts I am describing; in comparison, the connection between the *Traitié* and its pendant Latin lyrics might seem looser. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from considering these works as a sequence; they grant us an important perspective on John Gower’s literary activity — not because this sequence constitutes his ‘last word’, but because it offers one of a multitude of perspectives on how Gower might choose to inflect the meaning of his long English poem.

The closing elegiac couplet of the ‘Lex docet’ is a remarkable instance of Gower’s self-naming; it presents the author’s identity in terms that cast a troubling light over the works that the reader would have already encountered in its manuscripts:

Hinc vetus annorum Gower sub spe meritorum
Ordine sponsorum tutus adhibo thorum
(7–8)

John Fisher’s iconic study of Gower presents a translation of these lines that is astonishing in its deviation from their literal sense:

Thus I, Gower, prudent and aged in years, in hope of merit, undertake the ordinance of marriage.⁸⁶

⁸³ Yeager (ed.), *Minor Latin Works*, ‘Est amor’, 32–3; *French Balades*, 32–3.

⁸⁴ Burrow, ‘The Poet and the Book’, 230.

⁸⁵ Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*, 61.

⁸⁶ Fisher, *John Gower*, 86.

What has happened to Gower's *thorus* or *torus* — his marriage bed?⁸⁷ Yeager's translation is much closer to the original:

Thus, old in years, in the hope of deserved rewards, I, Gower, safely approach the marriage-couch in the order of husbands.

Fisher's book established the notion of Gower as a committed and consistent moralist who wrote about love in the *Confessio* from the ironically distanced perspective of an old and sick man losing his sight. Fisher doesn't seem to have been able to allow himself to read this late lyric for what it says: Gower, identifying himself by name, approaches a marital bed to fulfill the duties prescribed by the order of husbands, 'quasi regula' (5). This is certainly difficult to reconcile with the Amans/John Gower depicted at the end of the *Confessio*, withdrawing from love with his prayer beads which bear the motto 'por reposer'. The dissonance becomes even stronger when we take into account the poems interposed between the 'Lex docet' and the end of the *Confessio*. The *Traitié*, a discourse on marriage, makes it clear that the purpose of marriage is sexual reproduction: marriage 'emplit la terre de labour' ('fills up the world with its labour', 2.6). Equally striking is the lyric that occurs immediately before the 'Lex docet', the 'Est amor'. Having just used the *Traitié* and the 'Quis sit vel qualis' to insist upon marriage's ability to direct desire towards licit and productive ends, the 'Est amor' returns to the realm of the painful paradoxes of emotion experienced by Amans in the *Confessio*:

Est amor in glosa pax bellica, lis pietosa,
 Accio famosa, vaga sors, vis imperiosa,
 Pugna quietosa, victoria perniciososa,
 Regula viscosa, scola devia, lex capitosa,
 Cura molestosa, gravis ars, virtus viciosa,
 Gloria dampnosa, flens risus et ira iocosa,
 Musa dolorosa, mors leta, febris preciosa,
 Esca venenosa, fel dulce, fames animosa,
 Vitis acetosa, sitis ebria, mens furiosa,
 Flamma pruinosa, nox clara, dies tenebrosa,
 Res dedignosa, socialis et ambiciosa,
 Garrula, verbosa, secreta, silens, studiosa,
 Fabula formosa, sapiencia prestigiosa,
 Causa ruinosa, rota versa, quies operosa,
 Urticata rosa, spes stulta fidesque dolosa.
 ('Est Amor', 1–15)

⁸⁷ Lewis and Short, s.v., *torus*, -i, (IV). An even clearer meaning is given in early fourteenth-century Latin glossary edited by Grondeaux, *Anonymi Montepessulanensis Dictionarius*, s.v., *torus*, -i, 'Hic torus, tori est lectus sponsi et sponse'.

[In the glossaries love is a warlike peace, a loving litigation,
 Infamous lawsuit, wavering fate, unforceful force,
 A peaceful fight, a ruinous victory,
 A rule besmirched, an erroneous school, an irregular law,
 A troublesome cure, a grievous art, a vicious virtue,
 A damnable glory, a weeping laughter and a merry anger,
 A sorrowful muse, a joyful death, a precious fever,
 Poisoned food, sweet gall, life-giving hunger,
 Sour grapevine, drunken thirst, furious mind,
 A frosty flame, a bright night, a shadowy day,
 A scornful condition, collegial and ambitious,
 Prattling, wordy, secretive, silent, zealous,
 A beautiful fiction, a juggling wisdom,
 Cause catastrophic, revolving wheel, laborious rest,
 A stinging rose, a foolish hope and a faith that lies.]⁸⁸

I do not have space to give this fascinating lyric the attention it deserves, but I will note the obvious point that it is an imitation of the description of love given by Nature in the *De planctu* (9.1–34), a passage which is closely copied by Jean in the *Rose*, 4263–310, as his Raison advises the lover to withdraw from the painful instabilities of desire:

Amors, ce est pez haïneuse,
 Amors, c'est haïne amoureuse;
 c'est leautez la desleaus,
 c'est la desleautez leaus;
 c'est pour toute asseüree,
 esperence desesperee [...]
 (4263–4)

[Love is hateful peace, love is loving hate; it's disloyal loyalty, it's loyal disloyalty;
 it's reassured fear, hopeless hope [...]]

If we understand Gower's series of poems as a 'sequence' that asks to be read as a whole and associated with the 'Gower' who claims to control the voice throughout, then we get a very interesting picture of the poet. At the end of the *Confessio*, the narrator withdraws at 'a soft pas' to a life of contemplation free from the pains of desire. Although his vision of the companies of lovers reveals that there are plenty of old men who still are in the service of love, Venus thinks that Amans's old age makes him an unsuitable servant. In a passage that imitates Nature's complaint against the sodomites in the *De planctu* and the *Rose*, Venus

⁸⁸ Quotations and translations of the 'Est Amor' are from Yeager (ed.), *Minor Latin Works*. In line 2 Yeager renders *imperiosa* as 'unforceful', presumably to preserve the pattern of antitheses in these lines; the usual meaning is 'forceful' or 'tyrannical', see Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v., *imperiosus*, I, II.A.

strongly implies that she is Nature's servant and that the desire she advocates is generative (8.2337–44). As an impotent old man, Amans/John Gower has no place in her court. But Amans does not withdraw from love by an effort of will: it is only thanks to the magical intervention of a goddess who scorns his inability to reproduce. This seems to show us Gower as a poet of Arion rather than Orpheus: he explores a realm of meaning destabilised by desire, but then suggests that a desire that is not directed towards licit ends must be rejected. The *Traitié* reprises many of the biblical and mythological exempla from the *Confessio* to argue, like parts of Book 7, for the importance of marriage in regulating desire within a structure that allows for the continuation of the species. The 'Quis sit vel qualis' reiterates the power of marriage to restrain desire and the importance of the 'exemplo veteri' (3) of the *Traitié* in showing us how. The 'Est amor', however, seems to reintroduce the instabilities and paradoxes that the *Confessio* had rejected. Finally, the 'Lex docet' ends with Gower himself approaching his bed to fulfill, it is implied, his own sexual desire within the licit structure of marriage.

Gower married Agnes Groundolf in 1398; if we accept his suggested birth-date of c.1330, he would have been around 68 years of age.⁸⁹ The details surrounding this marriage, like much of what we know about Gower's later life, are extremely strange. With a special dispensation from the bishop, Gower and Groundolf were married in his own apartment; this apartment, furthermore, was inside or above the chapel at St Mary Overy.⁹⁰ Fisher suggested that Gower's marriage was the act of an ailing old man who sought companionship and physical care in what would be the last decade of his life (Gower died in 1407). Eve Salisbury, paying some long overdue attention to Groundolf herself, situates this marriage against the social history of Southwark to suggest that Groundolf could have been a reformed Flemish prostitute (many of whom lived in Southwark) and that Gower's arrangement with her was a pious act of Christian charity — a chaste marriage for the purposes of devotion.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Fisher, *John Gower*, 58.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 65.

⁹¹ Salisbury, 'Promiscuous Contexts', 225–8.

It is interesting that none of the studies of this episode of Gower's life seems to have taken into account the 'Lex docet' lyric. I am unable and unwilling to comment on the sex-life of John and Agnes Gower, but whether ironic or sincere, the strong implication of its final elegiac couplet — a couplet that even formally seems to lapse into an Ovidian erotic mode⁹² — is that Gower intends to fulfill the duties of a husband in bed. Certainly, it 'suggests feelings of groom for bride that would be surprising if Gower's relationship with Agnes was solely invalid and nurse'.⁹³ Perhaps this was a self-deprecating irony aimed at an intimate circle of readers who would recognise this as patently absurd. Fisher points out that while in the first recension version of the 'Quia unusquisque' colophon Gower thanks God for the gifts he has received from God 'intellectualiter', in later versions this appears as 'sensualiter'.⁹⁴ Fisher suggests that this was 'perhaps in recognition of the fortunate physical endowment which carried the poet through nearly eight decades'.⁹⁵ But, when read alongside the 'Lex docet' and the 'Est amor', this variant could well be read as the recognition of another manner of fortunate physical endowment. If the 'Lex docet' lyric must be seen as a self-deprecating joke, this scribal variation could be read equally as colluding in or misunderstanding that joke.

I have dwelt for so long on this passage not merely because it casts a usefully challenging light on the received idea of Gower's straight-faced piety (although there is nothing inherently impious about sexual activity in marriage), but also because it brings us to one final analogue between Gower's works and the *Rose*, and seems closely related to how Gower portrays his own relationship to the potentially unstable meanings he produces. The *Rose* concludes, notoriously, with an act of allegorical male ejaculation that is it at least potentially an act of insemination. As I argued in my first chapter, Jean thus seems to be

⁹² Ovid famously foregrounds the association of Cupid with elegiac couplets in *Amores* 1.1–30. Ziolkowski gathers evidence for the iamb being considered generally more unstable and potentially deviant than the dactyl; he argues that Alain de Lille's *De planctu* enacts a transition from disorder to rectitude as its iambic metres gradually give way to dactylic metres in the course of the poem; *Grammar of Sex*, 23–7.

⁹³ Yeager (ed.), *Minor Latin Works*, 'Est Amor', 1–15n.

⁹⁴ All three are printed in Peck (ed.), *Confessio*, vol.1, 'The Colophons', 229–33.

⁹⁵ Fisher, *John Gower*, 89. Peck (ed.) suggests that this might be Gower 'recording his gratitude for his increasing material wealth as he matured', *Confessio*, 'The Colophons', 231, n.5.

parodying a whole tradition of philosophical poems which conclude with an act of human participation in the divinely sanctioned process of natural generation. But the irony cuts both ways: Amant's final act of ejaculation also seems to suggest that there are higher purposes towards which desire may be directed, undermining the mendacity of Ovidian seduction. If we understand Gower's collocation of the *Confessio* with a number of related shorter works — the *Traitié*, 'Est Amor', 'Lex docet' — to be an attempt to generate new possible meanings in the interaction between these texts, then we are left with an interesting analogue. As a sequence, these poems, like the *Rose*, depict a desire that is powerful, destructive, perhaps overwhelming, that must be regulated to allow a morally licit process of human generation. Although Gower abandons the possibility of representing an Amans who is able to control his own desire in the *Confessio*, the *Traitié* shows marriage to be the legal and spiritual structure that might allow this desire to be controlled, directing human sexuality towards its licit goal. But the 'Est Amor' raises once again the possibility of a desire that is more Orphic, that threatens to overrun the boundaries placed upon it. Finally, in the 'Lex docet', we meet a 'Gower' who describes his anticipation as he approaches the consummation of the desire denied the 'Gower' of the *Confessio*. Safe (*tutus*) in the order of marriage, this sequence of texts ends with something like a moralised version of the penetration of the Rose. Participating in the high 'Chartrian' tradition, human reproduction (or at least its possibility) is dramatised as part of a literary sequence that begins with the *Confessio*, but like John de Hanville in the *Architrenius*, Gower makes room for marriage in his celebration of human generation.⁹⁶ On another level, the oscillation between the political, erotic, and devotional themes in this sequence plays out Ovid's fraught relationship with the tragic and elegiac muses in the *Amores*; like Ovid, Gower demonstrates a series of lapses and failures in his attempt to address the serious themes of tragedy as they give way to the pleasures of elegy.⁹⁷

Gower's implied final act of copulation, drawing together Ovidian and 'Chartrian' themes across the length of his single-author codex, is an impressive (if also humorous)

⁹⁶ Johannes de Hauvilla, *Architrenius*, 9.14.

⁹⁷ See Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 141–3 for an excellent analysis of the *Confessio* and the *Amores*.

move, and Gower's readers seem to have recognised it as such. If the Latin quatrain known as the 'Quam cinxere' that appears with the *Confessio* in some manuscripts is indeed 'a quodam philosopho transmissa', then it might be Gower, not Chaucer, who is the first English writer to be referred to by a contemporary as a *poeta*: 'Carminis Athleta, satirus [...] siue Poeta' ('athlete of song, satirist [...] or poet').⁹⁸ Jean de Meun presented himself as sixth in the company of six Latin authors, not, I have argued, to position himself in a poetic genealogy so much as to emphasise the absence of any direct, biological connection between these writers and himself. Jean shows their transformation from bodily beings with any claim to actual, biological productivity into textual abstractions and at worst simply *nomina* entirely given over to the realm of artifice. By naming himself in the 'Lex docet' in a context that draws upon the laws of the *auctores* ('Lex docet auctorum'), Gower seems to be suing for a different kind of poetic tradition, one that is not only figuratively (re)productive, but also morally licit according to the church's restrictions on sexual pleasure. Gower's historical marriage, late in life, enters into his poetry as a figure for the reconciliation of 'lust' and 'lore', 'deliz' and 'profiz'. This tendency of Gower's to reimagine literary tradition can be seen also at the very beginning of the *Confessio*, with the narrator's comments on how writing outlasts death:

Of hem that writen ous tofore
 The bokes duelle, and we therefore
 Ben tawht of that was write tho:
 Forthi good is that we also
 In oure tyme among ous hier
 Do wryte of newe som matiere,
 Essampled of these olde wyse
 So that it myhte in such a wyse,
 Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,

⁹⁸ The 'Quam cinxere' is edited by Macaulay in *Works*, 3:479. He suggests that the 'philosophus' might be 'the 'philosophical Strode' who is coupled with Gower in the dedication of the *Troilus*' (3:550). Pearsall identifies it in 29 manuscripts, 'Manuscripts and Illustrations', 74–6. The date of this lyric is very hard to ascertain; since it first appears with copies of the *Confessio*, and not the *Vox*, it is likely to have been written in the 1390s. But the dedicatory lyric 'Eneidos bucolis', which appears in manuscripts of the later *Cronica tripertita* (Macaulay, *Works*, 4:361) is also said to be sent by 'quidam Philosophus', and, unlike the 'Quam cinxere', specifically makes reference to the fact that Gower has written in French, Latin and English; the 'Quam cinxere', by contrast, mentions England but not English. Perhaps Gower had received the 'Quam cinxere' in praise of the *Vox* and had appended it to his *Confessio* manuscripts, just as the 'Eneidos bucolis', which praises the *Confessio*, seems to have been published by Gower alongside the *Cronica tripertita*. This opens the possibility of a date in the 1380s for the 'Quam cinxere'. Around the same time Thomas Usk calls Chaucer a 'noble philosophical poete' (*Testament of Love*, 3.4.249) — Usk composed this work between 1384 and 1387, and Strohm suggests 'for simplicity' the date 1385–1386; 'Politics and Poetics', 97–8, n.18.

Beleve to the wordles eere
 In tyme comende after this.
 (Pr.1–11)

The usefulness of writing lies, for Gower, in its ability to affect behaviour, for the record of what has happened to direct readers of the future towards (hopefully) virtuous action. The ‘newe [...] matiere’ of the *Confessio* is not the material culled from pre-existing sources, but the ‘confessional’ narrative of Amans’s or John Gower’s experience of and withdrawal from love. The ‘Lex docet’ lyric seems to be continuing and refining this process of leaving a literary *œuvre* that is also a record of his historical identity. This is not so much, in Huizinga’s unforgettable phrase, ‘choosing the text for the sermon of one’s life’ as choosing the narrative for the exemplary moral of one’s life.⁹⁹ But even as Gower insists upon his safety (*tutus*) in this sexual contact, the force of the ‘Est amor’ lyric has reintroduced the spectre of Orpheus: it is possible, after all, as Genius himself reminds us, to commit sins of lust within marriage.¹⁰⁰ In the end, Gower seems to suggest that desire can never be entirely renounced, and that even the sanctified structures of marriage offer only the possibility — not the certainty — of regulating it. Gower also attempts to regulate the meaning of texts, but like his own desires, the desires of his readers cannot always be finally and successfully restricted and encased by law. Gower does aspire, I think, to the healing social power of the poetry of Arion; but he also seems to recognise, like Jean de Meun, that Orpheus cannot be entirely banished.

⁹⁹ Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages*, 231; Middleton explores the fortuitous implications of this phrase in the context of authors revealing their names in texts in “‘Kynde Name’”, 24.

¹⁰⁰ 7.5366–71; see also Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 154–63; 508.

Chapter 5. The *Gawain*-Poet

One of the few things we know for certain about the author of the poems that survive uniquely in BL, MS Cotton Nero A.x is that he read the *Romance of the Rose*.¹ In the work known as *Cleanness* or *Purity* he cites not only the ‘Rose’ itself, but also one of its authors, ‘Clopynghel’, using the name Jean gives himself in his own poem (10535).² Remarkably, this is the only explicit reference in all of the *Gawain*-poet’s works to a text other than Scripture. It is a fascinating moment in literary history, and the earliest surviving reference to Jean de Meun by name in English poetry until, anywhere between a few decades and a few years later, Thomas Hoccleve mentions ‘Iohn de Meun’ (281) in his translation of Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours*.³ But while he names Jean de Meun, the *Gawain*-poet’s own works remain resolutely anonymous,⁴ and commentators have often used their interpretations of the poems to extrapolate the literary and social contexts in which their author lived and worked. But despite the many sensitive readings that find clerical, aristocratic, or mercantile ideologies running through the texts, the presence of any or all of these values may not at last tell us much about the identity of the poet himself.⁵ What was

¹ Although the possibility remains that the poems are the product not of one poet, but of a group of close imitators with similar attitudes and identical dialects, in this thesis I consider them to have been written by a single individual.

² The name is represented variously in the manuscripts as ‘Clopinel’, ‘Chopinell’, or ‘Copinel’. See Langlois (ed.), *Rose*, 10565tn.

³ Hoccleve gives the date of his translation as 1402 (*Letter of Cupid*, 476). The dating of the poems in MS Cotton Nero A.x is more difficult: the script is datable to the latter half of the fourteenth century; art-historical evidence (such as the clothing depicted in the miniatures, perhaps executed some time after the copying of the text) suggests a date at the end of fourteenth century, usually given as c.1400. The description of the Dead Sea in *Cleanness* has been shown to owe many details to the French version of *Mandeville’s Travels*, whose composition is dated to around 1357: this forms a *terminus post quem* for the composition of at least *Cleanness*. Commentators tend to prefer the later end of this hypothetical date-bracket (c.1390). For the manuscript and its dating, see A.S.G. Edwards, ‘The Manuscript’, 198–99. For the relationship with *Mandeville’s Travels*, see Carleton Brown, ‘The Author of *Pearl*’, 149–53.

⁴ Various attempts have been made to extract acronyms and cryptograms of the name ‘John of Massey’ from the poems and, indeed, from the manuscript (see Vantuono, ‘A Name in the Cotton MS’, also Vantuono (ed.), *The ‘Pearl’ Poems*, 1:xxii–iv). These attempts have been based largely on the assumption that the poet of the Cotton MS poems also wrote the alliterative poem *St Erkenwald*, in whose manuscript a truncated marginal note reads ‘Thomas Masse’. The attribution of *St Erkenwald* to the *Gawain*-poet has been dismissed by most commentators: see Malcolm Andrew, ‘Theories of Authorship’.

⁵ Putter, like many readers, suggests that the author is a minor cleric associated with an aristocratic household, *Introduction to the ‘Gawain’-Poet*, 14–23. The poet’s aristocratic fascinations are often stressed; see, for example, David Aers, ‘Christianity for Courtly Subjects’. Jill Mann and Helen Barr have drawn attention to the mercantile values they find expressed in the poems: Barr, ‘“The Jeweller’s

once considered to be a very secure assumption, that he lived and worked in the North-West midlands region to which his dialect can be localised, has been problematised by studies which emphasise the extent to which Cheshire had strong links with Richard II's court.⁶ Yet as Thorlac Turville-Petre has pointed out, 'there is no need to bring the *Pearl*-poet to London in order to make a Ricardian of him'; Turville-Petre emphasises instead the cultural interconnectedness of all the regions of late fourteenth-century England.⁷ A recent intervention has suggested that MS Cotton Nero A.x may have been produced in York, opening up the possibility of previously unconsidered centres of literary consumption and indeed production of the poem.⁸ Whether the networks of movement and exchange were courtly, clerical, mercantile, or some admixture of the three, it should not surprise us if a poet with a Cheshire dialect had interests that stretched beyond the boundaries of his dialect region. And indeed further: the poet's facility as a reader of Latin and French meant that his intellectual environment was fully European. Not only does he engage closely with both insular and continental francophone romances in *Sir Gawain*,⁹ his reference to the *Rose* shows him interacting with continental francophone poetry beyond the materials of chivalric adventure. He may have read his *Rose* in Cheshire, or somewhere else in England, or indeed on the continent.¹⁰ The narrator's complaint at the beginning of *Patience* that he might have to dash to Rome at any moment to fulfill an errand for his 'lege lord' (51–2) shows that at least the idea of European travel was not alien to him.¹¹ The echoes of Dante's *Purgatorio* in *Pearl*, meanwhile, perhaps suggest a more than imagined connection to Italy.¹² In this chapter I will

Tale"; Mann, 'Price and Value'. Barr does not extrapolate any conclusions about the author's identity from the presence of a particular sensitivity to the status of merchants in the poem. Although Mann does suggest the possibility of a mercantile background, in a later essay she will emphasise instead the courtly affiliations of the *Gawain*-poet — see Mann, 'Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics'.

⁶ See esp. John Bowers, *The Politics of 'Pearl'*.

⁷ Thorlac Turville-Petre, "'Fayre Regioun'", 294.

⁸ Joel Fredell, 'The *Pearl*-poet Manuscript in York',

⁹ See Ad Putter, '*Gawain* and French Arthurian Romance'.

¹⁰ The fact that 'Frere Johan de Nicole [Lincoln]' is identified as a former owner in the Riccardiana copy of the *Rose* (see ch.2) helps show that there would be nothing unusual in readers from the more northerly counties owning and reading continental codices.

¹¹ All quotations from the poems of MS Cotton Nero A.x are from Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (eds), *Works of the 'Gawain'-Poet*. These lines in *Patience* have been used to suggest that the poet was in the service of an aristocratic household as a minor cleric. See Putter, *Introduction*, 20–3.

¹² See below, n.63.

not attempt to use my interpretation of the poems to reverse-engineer a social-historical identity for their author. This is not because I believe such an activity to be impossible — on the contrary, I believe that the social realities inhabited by the poet would have left indelible impressions on his writings. But study of these impressions needs to be sensitive not only to nuance but also to deliberate subversion and unconscious transferral: these are muddy waters. This chapter will instead ask how aspects of the poet's close engagement with the *Rose* can be unearthed from his presentation of the relationship between the meaning of his works and his activities as a writer. I begin by examining in detail the reference to the *Rose* that occurs in *Cleanness*, an intertextual interaction that raises profound problems and ambiguities. The opacity of this passage raises the question of how meaning is presented more widely in *Cleanness*; I argue that the author's attitude to his own poem's intelligibility is closely linked to his ideas about human artifice. But *Cleanness* also associates artifice with more troubling activities — sodomy and idolatry — that heighten rather than resolve the difficulties of its reference to the *Rose*. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to *Pearl*, a very different text in which the poet uses the *Rose* to explore the nature of desire and the limitations that it places on the human subject.

THE 'CLENE ROSE'

Cleanness presents the most explicit interaction with the *Rose* in the *Gawain*-poet's works. As a poem in which a number of Old Testament narratives are recounted, arranged around a theme drawn from the Beatitude 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8), it is often referred to as homiletic in character. It has been argued that each scriptural text used in the poem is closely keyed to the designated readings for the mass around Advent — an interesting suggestion that leads to the perhaps reductive conclusion that '[t]he theme of the poem, therefore, is that of Advent'.¹³ No matter how prominent or unifying the homiletic elements of *Cleanness* may be (and I am inclined to notice its differences much more than its similarities to explicitly homiletic works in verse like the

¹³ Jane K. Lecklider, '*Cleanness*': *Structure and Meaning*, 6.

Northern Homily Cycle), it seems clear that a theme from the Gospels followed by a number of Old Testament exempla is at least analogous to the structure of a homily.¹⁴ But the mention of Jean de Meun and his poem is a strange moment that sits uncomfortably with the idea of *Cleanness* as a flatly instructive moral sermon.

Cleanness explores its theme ‘upon thrynne wyses’ (1805), through the narration of three linked biblical narratives, interrupted by occasional digressions into other scriptural sources or wider moral reflections. After some New Testament material, and a brief description of the rebellion of the angels and their fall, the main exempla get underway with three stories of spectacular destruction: the Flood, the annihilation of the Cities of the Plain, and Belshazzar’s Feast. The mention of Jean de Meun comes between the second and the third of these Old Testament stories. It thus appears after an account of the Flood which has emphasised the sexual misconduct of the antediluvian peoples, and an account of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which places predictable stress on the sodomy of their inhabitants. It is also positioned before a retelling of the story of Belshazzar’s feast that stresses the Chaldean King’s idolatry and the opulence with which he surrounds himself. In one reading, the *Rose* might be seen as an ideal intertext here, a way of exploring disordered desire, sexual transgression, and the idolatrous sterility of artifice. But the context in which the French text is mentioned is unexpected and extremely difficult to gloss. In what follows I will first examine this passage in *Cleanness* alongside its source in the *Rose*. I shall then explore what makes it such a troubling interaction: its context in the *Rose*, primarily, but also certain features of the English poem that should make us particularly alert to these difficulties.

The citation of the *Rose* occurs in support of the narrator’s claim that those who want to be closer to God should imitate his behaviour:

And if He loves clene layk that is our Lord riche,
 And to be couthe in His court thou coveytes thenne,
 To see that semely in sete and His swete face,
 Clerer counsel con I non bot that thou clene worthe.

¹⁴ See *The Northern Homily Cycle*, ed. Anne B. Thompson.

For Clopyngnel in the compas of his clene *Rose*,
 There he expounes a speche to him that spede wolde
 Of a lady to be loved: ‘Loke to her sone,
 Of wich beryng that ho be and wich ho best loves:

And be right in uch a burgh, of body and of dedes,
 And folw the fete of that fere that thou fre holdes;
 And if thou workes on this wyse, thagh ho wykke were,
 Her schal like that layk that lyknes her tille.’

If thou wil dele drury with the Dryhtyn thenne,
 And lelly lovy thy Lord and His lef worthe,
 Then confourme thee to Cryst, and thee clene make,
 That ever is polysed as playn as the perle selven.
 (1053–68)

The ambiguities begin at once with the phrase ‘the compas of his clene *Rose*’. The word ‘compas’ is used by the poet to designate various kinds of artifice, and this problematic term will be examined in more detail below. Even ‘expounes’ carries some problems, since it is used elsewhere in the poet’s writings to mean both ‘interpret’ and simply ‘describe’ or ‘depict’.¹⁵ But the most immediate difficulty is ‘clene’, a word that evokes the poem’s governing concern of *clannes* (cf. line 1) — a bodily and spiritual purity that suggests, by extension, ‘order, classification, sharp boundaries, enclosures.’¹⁶ Fleming mentions this passage from *Cleanness* to support his argument that Jean’s text contained nothing offensive to the sensibilities of a fourteenth-century reader when understood as an ironic fiction: ‘there is random evidence, suggestive and neglected, that moral traditionalists found it pleasing [...] The English alliterative poet who wrote *Cleanness* and other fine pieces of unchallenged orthodoxy makes an overt reference to Jean de Meun and his “clene Rose”, much to the confusion of the poem’s editor’.¹⁷

But a close inspection of the lines that the poet is here imitating from the *Rose* reveal difficulties that cannot be resolved as easily as Fleming suggests. Since the beginning of modern critical engagement with *Cleanness*, scholars have attempted to pin-point the cited

¹⁵ In *Cleanness*, the verb *expouen* is used to designate Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams (1606). In *Gawain*, it used to mean simply ‘describe’: ‘A spitous sparthe to expoun in spelle’ (209), ‘a grim battleaxe to describe in words’.

¹⁶ A.C. Spearing, ‘Purity and Danger’, in *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, 173–94: 184. Spearing is here drawing on Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

¹⁷ John Fleming, ‘Moral Reputation’, 434.

Rose passage. William Vantuono provides a useful summary of the various hypotheses that predate his edition, before adding his support to Oliver F. Emerson's unconvincing suggestion that the poet is referring to an episode in Guillaume's section.¹⁸ Twomey, however, argues compellingly against this in favour of the more widespread view, that this passage derives from the Lover's dialogue with Amis, part of Jean's continuation. While some editors have suggested that the *Cleanness*-poet is imitating a long passage of over a hundred lines (7689–764 in Lecoy's edition), Twomey points out that almost every line that finds an analogue in *Cleanness* can be isolated to a shorter passage.¹⁹ I have already glanced at these lines in my study of Gower's version of the Narcissus story, and I will quote them more fully here:

De Bel Acueill reprenez garde
 par quel semblant il vos regarde :
 comment qu'il soit ne de quel chiere,
 conformez vos a sa maniere.
 [...]
 s'il est liez, fetes chiere liee ;
 s'il est corrociez, corrociee;
 s'il rit, riez; plorez, s'il pleure.
 Ainsinc vos tenez chascune heure:
 ce qu'il amera, si amez;
 ce qu'il vodra blamer; blamez;
 et loez quan qu'il loera:
 mout plus en vos s'en fiera.
 (7689–706)

[Pay particular attention to Bel Acueil, and with what expression he looks at you: no matter what expression he might have, conform yourself to his manner [...] if he is happy, put on a happy face; if he is angry, an angry one; if he laughs, laugh; cry if he cries. Maintain this behaviour at all times: what he loves, you love; what he wants to blame, you blame; and praise whatever he will praise: he will then trust you much more].

Amis is here advising Amant, as the *Cleanness*-poet says, how to 'spede [...] of a lady to be loved'. But using a passage about love-deception as a metaphor for a kind of *imitatio Christi* is clearly problematic, with the advice 'conformez vos a sa maniere' becoming 'confourme thee to Cryst'. This is something more radical than the use of a spiritualised language of love

¹⁸ Vantuono (ed.), *The 'Pearl' Poems*, 1:325–6.

¹⁹ Twomey, 'Cleanness 1057–64 and the *Roman de la rose*', 170. Note that the new edition of *Cleanness* by Putter and Stokes (1059–67n) adduces parallels with a number of individual lines or phrases from Strubel's edition that correspond to the conventional identification of earlier editors like Andrew and Waldron (Strubel 7721–22, 7724, 7730, and 7791–4 correspond to the range Lecoy 7689–764).

to represent devotion to God, as the poet does in *Pearl* — there is, after all, nothing surprising or necessarily unorthodox about the use of an erotic register in a devotional context.²⁰ But the *Rose* itself calls attention to the ethical problems raised by the coolly pragmatic advice of Amis. Amant, in fact, explicitly condemns this advice:

Douz amis, qu'est ce que vous dites?
 Nus hom, s'i n'iert faus ypocrites,
 ne feroit ceste deable,
 n'onc ne fu greigneur estable.
 (7765–8)

[Dear friend, what are you saying? No man, unless he were a false hypocrite, would do this devilishness — a greater one has never been conceived]

Amant's particular distaste may stem from the possibility of having to ingratiate himself with the detested Dangier, but the suggestion of hypocrisy also causes him anxiety — although these reservations will evaporate later in the text. The accusation of hypocrisy is a grave one in the *Rose*, whose most frightening and most irredeemable figure is the self-confessed hypocrite Faux-Semblant, and this advisory episode anticipates the hypocritical friar's penetration into the Castle of Jealousy, acting out the Ovidian 'fallite fallentes' (*Ars amatoria*, 1.645). Amis has already imitated precisely this injunction: 'deceveors deçoivent' ('deceive deceivers', 7313).

In context, therefore, this passage in the *Rose* has some potentially highly problematic implications. But the text of *Cleanness* itself has several features that should encourage us to scrutinize the dissonances that this intertextual engagement provokes with particular sensitivity. First among these is the obscure meaning of the word 'wykke' that occurs within the *Cleanness*-poet's paraphrase of Amis's advice:

And if thou workes on this wyse, thagh ho wykke were,
 Her schal like that layk that lyknes her tille.
 (1063–4)

Putter and Stokes do not comment on line 1063, but their glossary makes clear their view that 'wykke' in this instance should be read as 'adverse, hostile'. In this they follow the example of previous editors: J.J. Anderson takes pains to justify the reading of 'hostile' as opposed to

²⁰ 'Come hider to me my lemman swete', *Pearl*, 763; cf. Song of Songs 4:7–8. See also Barbara Newman's *Medieval Crossover*, esp. ch.3, 'The Literary Traditions of Marguerite Porete'.

the more conventional meaning of ‘wicked’, while Andrew and Waldron suggest some association with ‘the Dangier of the *Rose*’.²¹ The *MED* records several usages of *wikke* in the sense of ‘causing harm or pain, harmful, destructive’, rather than the primary meaning of ‘morally perverse, iniquitous, bad’.²² And, certainly, it is one of the features of alliterative poetry that alliterating words often have recourse to an extended range of meanings. But despite that, a reader might pause over an adjective that has so recently been used in reference to the Sodomites (908). In the *Rose*, Amis encourages the lover to imitate even those aspects of Bel Acueil that are less than admirable: ‘s’il se contient nicement, / nicetement vos contenez [...] si’il est liez, fetes chiere liee; / s’il est corrociez, corrociee’ (7696–700, ‘if he holds himself foolishly, you hold yourself foolishly [...] if he is happy, make your expression happy; if he is angry, make it angry’). It seems that the syntax of the *Cleanness*-poet’s parenthetic phrase makes available two different possible readings. On the one hand, ‘thagh ho wykke were’ might belong to the result clause of the conditional sentence of lines 1063–4 (‘and if you behave in this manner, even if she is hostile she shall like that behaviour that is like hers’). But it can also be read as qualifying the primary clause (‘and if you behave in this manner — even if she should be wicked — she shall like that behaviour that is like hers’). It is thus plausible to read in these lines the *Cleanness*-poet’s suggestion, translated from Jean’s Amis, that a would-be lover should imitate even bad behaviour.

The second feature of *Cleanness* that should alert us to the more troubling aspects of these lines is its stated interest in hypocrisy. As we have seen, Amis is accused of hypocrisy by the Lover. *Cleanness*, meanwhile, begins with an attack on hypocritical clerics — those ‘renkes of relygioun that reden and syngen / And approchen to His presense and prestes are called’ (7–8):

Bot if thay counterfete craft and courtaysye wonte,
As be honest outwith and inwith all fylthes,
Then are thay synful hemself, and sulpen altogeder
Bothe God and His gere, and Him to greme cachene.
(13–6)

²¹ ‘The usual sense “wicked, evil” here shades into “hostile”’, Anderson (ed.), *Cleanness*, 1063n. See also Andrew and Waldron (eds.), *Cleanness*, 1062–4n, in *Poems of the ‘Pearl’ Manuscript*.

²² *MED*, s.v., *wikke*, adj, 3a, 1a.

The poet is here using the classic topos of medieval anticlericalism, Christ's attack against the hypocritical Pharisees in Matthew 23:27.²³ This is, as we have seen, the gospel chapter that Jean de Meun explicitly refers to in the speech of Faux-Semblant as he describes 'ypocrites' (11571–4), and the later description of Faux-Semblant as 'blanche dehors, dedenz nergie' (11983, 'white outside, blackened within) bears an interesting resemblance to the *Cleanness*-poet's characterisation of hypocrites as 'honest outwith and inwith all fylthes'. It seems natural for a poem on the subject of 'cleanness' to concern itself with hypocrisy, something figured in Scripture as disguised inner filth. But it is very strange indeed that, in what seems to be a sincere piece of moral didacticism, the poet should use a passage explicitly associated with hypocrisy in the *Rose*.

The third problem that haunts the *Cleanness*-poet's intertextual manoeuvre derives from his wider thematic concerns. In Jean's *Rose*, Amis is not telling the lover to imitate a woman, but instead to imitate an aspect of the lady's behaviour represented, in the allegory, as Bel Accueil. Romance-language allegory, as has already been noted, tends to match the gender of the allegorical figure to the grammatical gender of the noun: Bel Accueil is thus a man. Simon Gaunt has shown that since the *Rose* presents what is essentially a narrative in which a male lover attempts to persuade a male allegorical personification to love him, it opens up a plural and permissive space in which 'the *Rose*'s allegory of straight sex consistently invokes its homoerotic opposite.'²⁴ Gaunt's survey of manuscripts demonstrates that while some scribes and miniaturists attempt to 'straighten out' Amant's relationship with Bel Accueil, certain interventions can be also read as acknowledging the poem's potential for humorous play with gender-switching and the subliminal suggestion of homoeroticism.²⁵ At least one manuscript follows the text to the letter by depicting Bel Accueil's invitation to Amant to kiss the rose at 3455–62 with an image of two men embracing.²⁶ A good example of

²³ 'quia similes estis sepulchris dealbatis quae a foris parent hominibus speciosa, intus vero plena sunt ossibus mortuorum et omni spurcitia' (Matt. 23:27). For the morality of preachers more generally see Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 40–8.

²⁴ Gaunt, 'Improper Allegory', 91.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 74–84.

²⁶ BL, MS Egerton 881, f.23v; Gaunt, 'Improper Allegory', 83–4.

the kind of playful gender-bending that *Bel Acueil* evokes is, indeed, the passage quoted above from the dialogue with Amis, where the allegorical (male) *Bel Acueil*, who represents an aspect of the female object of desire, is represented insistently as masculine ('De *Bel Acueil* reprenez garde [...] s'il est liez [...] s'il est corociez'). The fact that *Cleanness* contains one of the most enthusiastic descriptions in a vernacular language of the divine punishment of the Sodomites renders particularly problematic the poet's translation of a passage in which a male figure is told to imitate the behaviour of a female figure in order to succeed with him sexually. It is clear that the *Cleanness*-poet has proceeded directly from the personification of a quality to the imagined woman, the 'lady' referred to consistently with the female pronoun of the poet's dialect, 'ho'. But we may wish to question how seamlessly this transition has been made. If the *Cleanness*-poet has reinscribed a normative gender relationship, is there any remnant of dissonance in the advice to male lovers to imitate women, when 'in the Lord's own language some of the Sodomites are ladylike, following the example of the women of Sodom'?²⁷ It is unclear whether the *Cleanness*-poet is trying to generate dissonance or to drown it out. Did he simply misread the text? Or is his attitude to citation and meaning simply different from our own? The answers to these questions are maddeningly elusive.

This great crux of later Middle English poetry has been repeatedly evaded by commentators. I have already mentioned Fleming, who argued in passing that the *Cleanness*-poet, a writer of 'unchallenged orthodoxy', would have simply read the *Rose* as an unproblematic replication of his own doctrinal stance. But when we consider the reference to the 'clene *Rose*' in context, this clearly cannot stand. Fleming's Robertsonian approach depends upon the idea that medieval readers approached the *Rose* with both an in-built immutable moral code and a highly developed sense of irony. Thus they would read the speech of Amis as a satire against the disordered and morally vacuous desire of young men who are happy to resort to any kind of deceit and trick to achieve their ends. But if this was the only available reading to the 'moral traditionalist' behind *Cleanness*, then problems immediately arise. How can this piece of supposed satirical invective, whose target is the

²⁷ Allen J. Frantzen, 'Disclosure of Sodomy', 460.

persona who utters it (Amis), be translated into a realm of moral didacticism as if it was a simply a piece of good advice? Lecklider argues, similarly, that the *Rose* could have been read as a work more didactic than secular, but she does not expound such a reading in the passage itself.²⁸ Twomey suggests that the *Cleanness*-poet might be following Deguileville's example in offering a 'spiritual revision of the *Rose*', but again he does not interrogate in detail how this revision might be effected in the quoted passage. He also suggests that the *Cleanness*-poet may have read these lines from the *Rose* in a bowdlerised remaniement or a florilegium, and that he was thus unaware of its wider and more problematic context.²⁹ As will be clear when I come to analyse *Pearl*, there is every reason to believe that the poet has read the entirety of the *Rose* with great attention; but even if we confine our analysis to *Cleanness*, the reference to 'Clopynghel' suggests that the poet has read at least as far as line 10535 in a manuscript that contains Jean's self-naming in his imitation of the *Amores*. The 'florilegium' that Twomey mentions is Arras, Bibl. Mun. MS 845, a manuscript containing works by Deguileville along with a number of extracts from the *Rose* — a fascinating and exceptional codex that perhaps tells us more about the reception of Deguileville than about widespread patterns of consumption of the *Rose*.³⁰ And, for what it's worth, the extracts from the *Rose* gathered here do not include the imitation of the *Amores* in which Jean names himself as 'Clopinel' or 'Chopinell'.³¹ Finally, we have to ask whether the poet would bother offering the sole citation of a non-scriptural text in his surviving *oeuvre* if he had only encountered the work in a fragmentary state. One final and interesting attempt to deal with the citation comes from Elizabeth B. Keiser, although she dampens the difficulties of the issue; her interest is to demonstrate that the poem's feminisation of Christ allows for an ennobled depiction of heterosexual erotic experience:

Cleanness obviously alters the significance of the Friend's misogynistic advice by placing it in a context where readers must view through the rose-colored lens of romance the process of pleasing Christ as one would please a deserving and truly discerning woman. That Jean's *Roman* is cited here, and specifically referred to as the

²⁸ Lecklider, 'Cleanness': *Structure and Meaning*, 164

²⁹ Twomey, 'Cleanness 1057–64', 183.

³⁰ cf. Huot, 'Romance of the Rose', 231–8.

³¹ Langlois lists the lines from the *Rose* included in these extracts, *Manuscripts*, 108–9.

‘clene Rose,’ underscores the ironic contrast between the jaded advice given by the ostensible guide and the virtual sacramentality of heterosexual attraction in *Cleanness*.³²

Although attempting to read the relationship between the *Rose* and *Cleanness* through the lens of misogyny rather than propriety — a useful approach — the irony that Keiser identifies in the quotation of Amis’s advice depends upon a very optimistic reading of the *Cleanness*-poet’s attitude to women and to sex that I do not find at last convincing.

None of these multiple and divergent interpretations really get to grips, I feel, with the difficulty and the strangeness of the *Cleanness*-poet’s use of the *Rose* in his work. To give the allegorically gender-bending advice of a hypocrite to those who want to enter God’s court produces an extremely destabilising effect. The question remains: does the *Cleanness*-poet want to welcome a wildly problematic series of ironies and insecure meanings into his text, or does he simply want to demonstrate the force of his own monologism by de-ironising the *Rose*, by embedding in his poem a moral structure so secure that it can absorb and diffuse all the potential difficulties and instabilities that using such a quotation in such a context might offer? To begin to suggest an answer to this question, I will look at how meaning is presented elsewhere in *Cleanness* and the *Gawain*-poet’s works, and examine how it relates to the related themes of artifice and sodomy explored so extensively in *Cleanness*, before suggesting what this might tell us about this poet’s interaction with the *Rose*.

CLEAN MEANING?

The *Gawain*-poet cites the *Rose* in the context of a brief moral allegory that encourages the reader to win God’s or Christ’s favour by imitating his good behaviour. But the quotation from Jean de Meun may not be the only occurrence of this idea in his works. As Mabel Day first suggested, a flicker of the same notion appears at the beginning of *Patience*, when the narrator presents the eight Beatitudes as allegorical ladies whose approval will be gained by the imitation of their qualities — ‘lyknyng of thewes’.³³

³² Elizabeth B. Keiser, *Courtly Desire*, 172–3.

³³ See Mabel Day, ‘Two Notes on *Pearl*’, 242. The suggestion is repeated in Anderson (ed.), *Patience*, 30n. Twomey finds the possibility of an allusion to the same passage cited in *Cleanness* ‘quite

These are the happes all aght that us bihyght were,
 If we these ladies wolde lovy in lyknyng of thewes:
 Dame Poverté, dame Pyty, dame Penance the thridde,
 Dame Mekenesse, dame Mercy, and mery Clannesse, —

And then dame Pese and Pacience put in thereafter.

(29–32)

Whether this is intended to evoke the passage from the *Rose* explicitly cited in *Cleanness*, or whether this is simply the author returning to a partially remembered metaphor he had already used in an earlier poem, it is clear that this part of *Patience* carries nothing like the interpretative problems found in *Cleanness*. It has ceased to be an overtly intertextual moment, and we are left with a less complex and more orderly metaphor: love and praise the Beatitudes (momentarily represented as allegorical ladies) by imitating their good qualities. It seems, then, that it is the citation of the *Rose*, the very fact of the intertextual manoeuvre, that introduces a troubling dissonance into *Cleanness*. In what follows I will attempt to examine the causes of this destabilising effect and how it relates to the question of meaning in *Cleanness* more widely.

It is often remarked that when narrating Old Testament stories in *Cleanness* or *Patience*, the poet tends to avoid allegorical or typological interpretations. At times, indeed, he manifests an interest in extrapolating minute imagined details from his Biblical sources, perhaps a symptom of what has been called his ‘realising imagination’, or the wider ‘literalism’ of Ricardian poetry.³⁴ Like Genius’s exempla in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, the Biblical narratives of *Cleanness* offer instruction not by representing a symbolic meaning outside themselves, but through the behaviour of the human figures within them and the consequences of their actions. One of the very few moments of explicit allegoresis in the poet’s works occurs towards the beginning of *Cleanness*. The narrator tells the story of

unlikely’, *Cleanness* 1057–64’, 168, n.2. Spearing, however, believes that ‘The parallel between this line and *Cleanness* 1057–68 seems to me obvious and undeniable; it might indeed be taken to indicate that *Patience*, which alludes to Ami’s argument only in passing, was written later than *Cleanness*, where the argument is translated at length, its source specified, and an explicit analogy is drawn with gaining God’s love by imitating his purity’; ‘Subtext of *Patience*’, 296. In their commentary, Putter and Stokes support the view of Day, Anderson and Spearing (30n).

³⁴ The phrase ‘realising imagination’ is A.C. Spearing’s, *The ‘Gawain’-Poet*, 60. Malcolm Andrew develops Spearing’s idea in relation to *Patience* and other works in ‘The Realizing Imagination’; see also Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*, 80.

Christ's parable of the wedding feast, attributing it to 'Mathew' (51), but in fact synthesising elements from both Matthew 22:1–14 and Luke 14:16–26. Despite its double source, the climax and key element of this narrative in *Cleanness* is a detail unique to Matthew, and concerns the guest who arrives at the feast in soiled clothes. The host orders this guest to be cast 'depe in my doungeoun' (158), which with its gnashing of teeth (the 'gryspytyng harde / Of tethe tenfully togeder', 159–60) is a clear figure for Hell in both the Gospel and *Cleanness*. The Middle English follows Matthew by showing that Christ himself presents the story figuratively: 'Thus comparisouns Cryst the kyndom of heven / To this frelyche fest that fele are to called' (161–2). But the narrator then goes on to offer a further allegorical interpretation that does not occur in the Gospel; this concerns the meaning of clothing in the parable, the coverings that please the lord when proper and offend him when improper:

Wich are then thy wedes thou wrappes thee inne,
 That schal schewe hem so schene, schrowde of the beste?
 Hit are thy werkes, wyterly, that thou wrought haves,
 And lyned with the lykyng that lay in thyn herte

That tho be frely and fresch founde in thy lyve,
 And fetyse of a fayre forme, to fote and to hand,
 And sithen all other lymmes lapped ful clene:
 Then may thou see thy Saviour and His sete riche.
 (169–76)

In a metaphor highly reminiscent of the stained cloak of Haukyn in the B-text of *Piers Plowman*, the poet likens the clothing of the wedding guests to their moral status. But while Haukyn's cloak represents his soul — 'moled in many places with manye sondry plottes' (B.13.274) — stained by the everyday experience of being in the world (with the strong implication that no-one can escape such soiling), the *Cleanness*-poet presents something rather different. Most striking is his apparent confidence in the possibility that the metaphorical clothes will in fact 'schewe hem so schene', appear so bright and clean. But his gloss on the 'weddes' of the guests is also interesting because of the bivalence of the metaphor: they represent not only the 'werkes', but also, through their lining,³⁵ the intentions and the inner life of the addressee, 'the lykyng that lay in thyn herte'. It is extremely interesting to

³⁵ *lyned* (172) is indistinguishable in the scribe's hand from *lyued* ('lived'). I follow Putter and Stokes in preferring the former reading.

observe the slippage between the metaphor for the hypocrites earlier in *Cleanness*, those who are ‘honest outwith and inwith all fylthes’ (14), and this later example, where clothing or covering becomes a metaphor for both the external deeds (‘werkes’) and the internal desires (‘lykyng’). This transition from a conventional metaphor for the hypocrite (filth covered in cleanness) to a strange metaphor for the pure in heart (an externalised vision of both inner and outer purity), demonstrates, I think, part of the poet’s fascination with the exterior, the visual, and the spectacular.³⁶ At times it seems that, for him, the outside *is* the inside — as Jill Mann observes in her study of *Sir Gawain*, it is possible to trace a movement ‘not only from outward adornment [...] to inner virtue [...] but also back again’.³⁷

In the *Cleanness*-poet’s brief allegorical gloss on the parable of the wedding feast, the Sixth Beatitude is once again alluded to as he claims that the addressee will ‘see thy Saviour’ if his works and intentions are found to be ‘fetyse of a fayre forme’. Again the poet’s externalisation of inner life is interesting — the ‘pure in heart’ are depicted through a metaphor of exteriority, externally pure with a ‘fayre forme’. The phrase is striking in its similarity to the opening lines of *Cleanness*:

Clannes whoso kyndely couthe commende,
 And rekken up all the resouns that ho by right askes,
Fayre formes myght he fynde in forthering his speche,
 And in the contrary kark and combraunce huge.
 (1–4, my emphasis)

Monica Brzezinski Potkay suggests that ‘these lines imply that proper use of language is an important component of moral purity.’³⁸ This idea is particularly convincing when read alongside the allegorical gloss on Matthew quoted above: the external (or metaphorically external) ‘fayre forme’ that characterises the pure in heart is somehow analogous to the ‘fayre formes’ of language that will be found by the writer praising ‘Clannes’ or purity. The writer who attempts ‘the contrary’ — something glossed variously by editors and translators as the ‘reverse’ of commending cleanness, as ‘denigrating cleanness’, as presenting ‘the contrasting

³⁶ For this aspect of his writing, see Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the ‘Gawain’-Poet*, and, more recently, Hsin-yu Hu, ‘Delineating the *Gawain*-Poet’.

³⁷ Mann, ‘Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics’, 249.

³⁸ Monica Brzezinski Potkay, ‘Fecund and Barren Speech Acts’, 99.

themes [about uncleanness]', and as 'praise of Impurity'³⁹ — will find great trouble, difficulty, or adversity. This notion seems to go against Jean's doctrine of 'contreres choses': where Jean says that by both describing and experiencing the bad he knows the good, the *Cleanness*-poet seems to suggest that the 'contrary' is not to be directly addressed. Brzezinski Potkay goes on to analyse *Cleanness* through the lens of patristic discussions of sterile and fruitful preaching, eventually suggesting that 'the traditional link Gregory draws between cleanness and efficacious preaching points to our author's own intentions in this work: he presents *Cleanness* as a clean sermon which possesses the virtue of efficacious speech.'⁴⁰ From such a perspective, the beautiful eloquence of *Cleanness*, the 'fayre formes' the author finds in furthering his speech, reflect the inner cleanness of the pure in heart, just as the 'weddes' of those at the wedding feast represent both their 'werkes' and their 'lykyng', 'fetyse of a fayre forme'. But Brzezinski Potkay does not examine the opposite implication of her analysis. For even as the *Cleanness*-poet acknowledges the possibility of clean, fruitful writing, he raises the possibility of 'the contrary', another kind of writing that is sterile and self-regarding. The threat that his own work might fall into the latter category lurks in the background of *Cleanness*.

SODOMY, ARTIFICE, IDOLATRY

How can the *Cleanness*-poet stake a claim for the value and validity of his activity as the creator of highly artificial poetry? The answer might lie in his unique fascination with exteriority and artifice: his works depict the artificial blending with the natural in a way that either redeems the former, or threatens to implicate both in an extremely problematic sterility. The poem's most memorable description of a sterile activity is what takes place in Sodom, but a similar preoccupation occurs in the earlier description of the activities of the antediluvian peoples whose moral iniquity prompts God to bring about the Flood:

And then founden thay fylthe in fleschlyche dedes,

³⁹ The suggestions, respectively, of Andrew and Waldron (eds), 1–4n; Anderson (ed.), 1–4n; Vantuono (ed. and tr.), 1:83; Menner (ed.), 1–4n. Brzezinski Potkay, 'Fecund and Barren Speech Acts', 101, n.3, prefers Menner's gloss. Putter and Stokes suggest 'the contrary theme', p.95.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski Potkay, 'Fecund and Barren Speech Acts', 108.

And controeved agayns kynde contrary werkes,
 And used hem unthryftyly uchone on other,
 And als wymmen with other wylsfully, upon a wronge wyse.

So ferly fouled her flesch that the fende loked
 How the deghter of the douth were derely fayre,
 And fallen in felawshyp with hem on folkene wyse,
 And engendered on hem jeauntes wyth her japes ille.
 (265–72)

A.V.C. Schmidt was the first to argue that the sin of the ante-diluvian races is presented in *Cleanness* as ‘not just sexual vice but specifically as sodomy’.⁴¹ While Schmidt is certainly right to stress that the sex-acts of the ante-diluvians are ungenerative (they ‘used hem unthryftyly [unprofitably] uchone on other’),⁴² the poet is not simply targeting male–male sexual intercourse here. The phrase ‘wymmen with other’, coming after the more explicitly self-reflexive ‘uchone on other’ strongly suggests female homosexuality. But something quite different is implied by the poet’s reference to the copulation of human women with *incubi*, and the monstrous offspring they produced.⁴³ This sexual activity is generative, but perversely so, and perhaps the ‘jeauntes’ represent for the poet the evil consequences of illicit sexual activity. What interests me particularly about this passage is its emphasis on the ingenious artifice of the ante-diluvians in imagining unnatural sex-acts. They ‘founden [...] fylthe in fleschlyche dedes’, we are told. Whether the form ‘founden’ reflects the Middle English *founden* from Old French *fonder* and Latin *fundāre*, or the Middle English *finden* from Old English *findan*, the two terms overlap to accommodate the sense clearly meant here, ‘to devise or invent’⁴⁴ or to ‘devise, fabricate or concoct’.⁴⁵ This idea is emphasised in the following line, where we are told that they ‘controeved agayns kynde contrary werkes’. Echoing the suggestion of the poem’s opening lines that the ‘contrary’ is all that is against the

⁴¹ Schmidt, ‘*Kynde Craft*’, 112; see also Keiser, *Courtly Desire*, 47.

⁴² Schmidt, ‘*Kynde Craft*’, 112.

⁴³ Twomey shows that the reference to giants stems from an unusual reading of Genesis most likely to have been transmitted via Peter Comestor’s *Historia scholastica*, Twomey, ‘Peter Comestor’.

⁴⁴ *MED*, s.v., *founden*, v.(2), 4.

⁴⁵ *MED*, s.v., *finden*, v., 23(b).

poem's theme of purity, here the term is extended to include all that is against nature (*kynde*). But 'natural' sexuality is violated through human artifice: these sins are 'controevd'.⁴⁶

In a poem that seeks to demonstrate, among other things, the sexual sinfulness of the people of Sodom and the brutal punishment they receive from God, the metaphor of artifice is perhaps an effective way for the poet to present illicit sex as a willful deviation from God's order. It bears similarities to Langland's vision of a created world in which only mankind is deviant, failing to follow the 'Reson' of the natural law. But when the poet comes later to describe the activities of the Sodomites themselves, the terms of his metaphor have shifted, and figurative presentations of artifice are used in two markedly contrasting ways. This passage has attracted a great deal of critical attention, and deserves to be quoted at length:⁴⁷

'Thay had lerned a lyst that likes me ille,
That thay haf founden in her flesch of fautes the worste:
Uch male mas his mach a man as himselven,
And fylter folyly in fere on femmales wyse.

'I compast hem a kynde craft and kenned it hem derne,
And amed hit in my ordenaunce oddely dere,
And dight drury thereinne, dole altherswetttest;
And the play of paramores I portrayed myselven, —

'And made thereto a maner meriest of other:
When two true togeder had tyed hemselven,
Bitwene a male and his make such mirthe schuld come,
Wel negh pure Paradise myght preve no better,

'Elles thay myght honestly ayther other welde:
At a still stollen steven unstered with sighte,
Luf-lowe hem bitwene lasched so hote
That all the meschefes on mold myght hit not sleke

'Now have thay skyfted my skylle and scorned nature,
And hentes hem in hethyng an usage unclene.
Hem to smyte for that smod smartly I thenke,
That wyes schal be by hem ware, world withoute ende.'

(693–712)

These words are spoken to Abraham by God, who, as in Genesis, has paid a visit to the old man in a mysteriously triune form. God's behaviour as a 'character' in *Cleanness* is strange; often 'human', sometimes even irritable and short-tempered, the very unpredictability of his

⁴⁶ Schmidt, '*Kynde Crafte*', 110.

⁴⁷ Schmidt, '*Kynde Craft*', 116–9; Allen Frantzen, 'Disclosure of Sodomy', 456–7; Keiser, *Courtly Desire*, 138.

behaviour may be designed to emphasise his fundamental ineffability.⁴⁸ As is clear, the description of the sexual activities of the Sodomites bears some important resemblances to the description of the ante-diluvians. Like the earlier unnatural activity that angered God, the Sodomites practise something that according to God is ‘lernerd’ rather than instinctive. The verb ‘founden’ recurs to suggest the artifice, the unnaturalness, of what takes place in Sodom. But God then goes on to describe heterosexual sex in highly elevated terms, in a passage that some commentators have read as evidence of the poet’s ennobling attitude to (heterosexual) human sexual activity.⁴⁹ However, the natural sexual activity that God has designed is itself expressed with a cluster of terms drawn from human artifice: ‘compast’; ‘craft’; ‘ordenaunce’; ‘dight’; ‘portrayed’; ‘made’. The phrase ‘kynde craft’, is something of an oxymoron in Middle English, with *kynde*, ‘nature’ often used in contradistinction to *craft*, ‘artifice’.⁵⁰ This is part of the wider paradox in the allegorical representation of nature. Nature is often expressed in terms of the artificial human institutions that are expressly *unlike* what they represent: Nature working as a blacksmith in the *De planctu* and the *Rose*; Genius’s pen in the *De planctu*; Nature’s parliament with its positive (hence non-natural) laws in the *Parliament of Fowls*.⁵¹ But the emphasis in this context, where the sinful sexual artifice of the Sodomites is held up alongside the joyful sexual artifice of God, is striking. Of course, part of the point is that God’s artifice is *not* artificial: the difference between good and bad artifice is simply the difference between divine and human activity. But elsewhere in *Cleanness* the poet’s attitude to the artificial cannot be so easily resolved.⁵²

⁴⁸ As argued by David Wallace, ‘Terms of Terror’, 96.

⁴⁹ See especially Keiser, *Courtly Desire*, and Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*. Rhodes sees the passage in question as ‘interested in redeeming erotic love as such’, 100. God’s praise of sex is striking, but it is worth emphasising that what he praises is a constrained and conservative view of licit sexual activity. Some of his comments, particularly the fact that sex should take place ‘unstered of sight’, perhaps reflect restrictions on sexual activity that date back to early medieval penitential writings. See Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 161, where he observes out that the penitentials recommend sex at night, and one even states that a husband should never see his wife naked. But cf. the different interpretation of Schmidt, ‘*Kynde Crafte*’, 118.

⁵⁰ cf. *House of Fame*, 1213, ‘as craft countrefeteth kynde’.

⁵¹ See Morton, ‘Ingenious Genius’.

⁵² Hsin-yu Hu discusses *Cleanness* in relation to a tradition of representations of God as an artificer, with human artifice thus subordinated as a kind ‘counterfeiting’; ‘Delineating the *Gawain*-Poet’, 147–56.

If artifice is linked to sodomy in *Cleanness*, another medieval tradition links sodomy to idolatry.⁵³ Scholars have argued that it is the relationship between sodomy and idolatry that unites the final Old Testament story of *Cleanness* — Belshazzar’s Feast — to the earlier narratives describing divine punishment for sexual misconduct.⁵⁴ Belshazzar’s idolatry is certainly presented in terms that emphasise the worldly artifice (the human ‘handes’) that lies behind the mute objects that he worships:

Bot honoured he not Him that in heven wones, —
 Bot false fantummes of fendes, formed with handes,
 With tole out of hard tre, and telded on lofte;
 And of stokkes and stones he stoute goddes calles,
 When thay are gilde all with gold and gered with sylver.
 (1340–4)

This is clearly a very problematic kind of human artifice, and Belshazzar’s idolatry casts a shadow over the elaborate decoration and ornament with which he delights in surrounding himself. We see this in the description of his feast, which is perhaps presented as a perversion of the parable of the wedding feast that appears towards the beginning of *Cleanness*. All the decorations and table vessels that Belshazzar ordains for his feast are masterfully ornate:

Burnes berande the bredes upon brode skeles
 That were of sylveren sight, and sewes therewith
 (Lyfte logges thereover, and on loft corven,
 Pared out of paper, and poynted of golde),
 Brothe baboynes above, bestes anunder,
 Fowles in foler flakerande bitwene;
 And all in asure and ynde enaumayld riche;
 (1405–10)

The ‘skeles’ (platters) of roasted meats and sauces (‘bredes’ and ‘sewes’) are brought into the hall, decorated with little paper cut-outs of buildings (‘logges’),⁵⁵ along with ‘baboynes’ (baboons, or perhaps grotesques), among other beasts and birds fluttering through foliage. It

⁵³ The connection is perhaps suggested by Romans, 1:23–7.

⁵⁴ See Charlotte C. Morse, ‘The Image of the Vessel in *Cleanness*’; Monica Brzezinski Potkay, ‘*Cleanness* on the Question of Images’. Brzezinski Potkay’s article is useful for highlighting how the *Cleanness*-poet charts a careful course through contemporary controversies on the subject of idolatry. See also Hsin-yu Hu, ‘Delineating the *Gawain*-Poet’, 175–87.

⁵⁵ Various editors have pointed out that paper decorations really were used in fourteenth-century banquets. See, e.g., Andrew and Waldron 1407–13n.

seems likely that Belshazzar's love of artifice is designed to intensify our perception of him as a damnable idolator.

A problem arises, however, a few lines later, when Belshazzar exuberantly orders the vessels stolen from the Hebrew temple by his father Nebuchadnezzar to be brought to the table and filled with wine. These holy vessels were made by Solomon, as the poet says (1453), and in his enthusiastically detailed description of them they are shown to be equally artificial, and in some details remarkably similar:⁵⁶

Salomon set him seven yere and a sythe more,
 With all the syence that him send the soverayn Lorde,
 For to compas and cast to have hem clene wrought.
 For there was bassynes ful bryght of brende gold clere,

Enaumayld with asure, and eweres of sute;
 Covered cuppes ful clene as casteles arayed,
 Enbanded under batelment with banteles quoynte,
 And fyled out of figures of ferlyly schappes, —

The coprounes of the covacles that on the cuppe reres
 Were fetysely formed out in fylyoles longe,
 Pinacles pyght there apert that profert bitwene;
 And all bolled above with braunces and leves, —

Pyes and papjays portrayed withinnie
 (1453–65)

Belshazzar's vessels are decorated with paper 'logges' (buildings), and images of birds and beasts in foliage; the holy vessels, whose full description takes up thirty-six lines, are decorated with battlements, branches and leaves, various bird species, and 'mony a borlych best all of brende golde' (1488). Both are 'Enaumayld in asure' (1410, 1457). Ignoring for a moment the fact that Solomon was divinely inspired to create his vessels while Belshazzar was not, the difference between the idolator's and the monotheist's vessels seems to be not a matter of quality but simply of intensity of opulence. Whereas a clear distinction can be drawn between the 'artificial' sexuality of the ante-diluvians or Sodomites and the metaphorical 'artifice' of God in establishing a natural sexual order, it is less easy to distinguish between the idolatrous artifice of Belshazzar and the licit artifice of Solomon.

⁵⁶ In my reading of this scene I differ fundamentally from Stanbury, who argues that the nature of the descriptions of the Hebrew vessels versus Belshazzar's vessels is designed to emphasise the essential difference of these two categories of object, *Seeing the 'Gawain'-Poet*, 64.

Even if inspired by God, Solomon's artifice remains artifice, not nature, and the delight that the poet seems to take in describing these beautifully ornate objects asks the interesting question of how far he manages to sustain his condemnation of Belshazzar's feast. There is a suggestion that the poet is irresistibly fascinated by the external beauty of his own imagined idolatrous court.

Nicholas Watson has argued that the works of the *Gawain*-poet re-frame the traditional Christian ideal of purity in aristocratic terms:

the idea of purity itself is redefined, so that concept which had long been associated (on the level of the body) with virginity and (on that of the soul) with an attitude of abject humility comes to signify, at least in part, a set of rules for decorous conduct, which fuse Christian and courtly into a self-consistent code whose manifestations are public, not private, and which is designed for socially and sexually active laypeople.⁵⁷

As I stated earlier, I do not feel able to weigh in to the debate about what social position the *Gawain*-poet actually occupied, but whether he observed courtly values from within or without, there does seem to be a fascination with ostentatious display in his works that at times suggests an unusual confidence, for a medieval thinker, in the 'fayre formes' of external ornamentation, and, perhaps, the 'fayre formes' of his own writings: his blurring of the boundaries between internal value and external display, noted by Jill Mann, must be seen as part of the same tendency.⁵⁸

INTELLIGIBLE ACTS

Having investigated the *Gawain*-poet's complex and shifting attitude to meaning and artifice as expressed in *Cleanness*, I return at last to his citation of the 'clene *Rose*' that lies between the narratives of the Cities of the Plain and Belshazzar's Feast:

For Clopyngnel in the compas of his clene *Rose*,
There he expounes a speche to him that spede wolde
Of a lady to be loved:
(1057–9)

As we have seen, *compas* and its related forms occur in two other places in *Cleanness*, both in relation to artifice. In each instance these are 'positive' versions of artifice: God's

⁵⁷ Nicholas Watson, 'The *Gawain*-Poet as a Vernacular Theologian', 297.

⁵⁸ Mann, 'Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics', 249.

‘compassing’ of the natural activity of heterosexual reproduction (697), or Solomon’s ‘compassing’ of the ‘clene’ vessels (1455). Perhaps this word, with its suggestion of ‘circumscription’, had particularly beneficent connotations for a poet who, in A.C. Spearing’s wonderful anthropological reading, was so preoccupied with order, enclosure, and separation.⁵⁹ But, then again, it may be wrong to place too much weight on one particular synonym associated with the semantic field of artifice, particularly in alliterative poetry, where the re-expression of a particular meaning will draw on various synonyms partly governed by the other alliterating words that appear in the line. The question then remains, what manner of artifice is the *Rose*? Is it — bluntly — good artifice or bad artifice, an idolator’s vessel or a vessel of the temple?

I have already described in some detail the destabilising implications of a fully intertextual reading of the *Cleanness*-poet’s use of the speech of Amis in the context of a didactic moral relating to the imitation of Christ. I will briefly restate these problems. Firstly, in the advice paraphrased by the *Cleanness*-poet, Amis suggests that a lover should imitate even the bad behaviour of a woman in order to succeed with her sexually. This notion may have been carried across into the Middle English by the word ‘wykke’. Secondly, the speech of Amis is explicitly identified in the *Rose* as an example of the internally impure hypocrisy that the *Cleanness*-poet himself rails against. Finally, perhaps most tellingly, by referring to the male allegorical figure of Bel Acueil, the Amis of the *Rose* is encouraging Amant to imitate a male allegorical personification which represents one aspect of a woman. Whether this is read literally (a man advising a man how to seduce a man) or allegorically (a man advising a man to behave like a woman), this is clearly problematic for a poet who violently attacks the Sodomites who take men as their mates ‘on femmales wyse’. Now, although I have suggested that the *Cleanness*-poet is peculiarly unable to sustain his skepticism towards human artifice throughout the poem (an idea I will return to), I would like to present, hypothetically and momentarily, a possible extreme reading of the reference to Jean de Meun in light of my prior comments on artifice and sodomy. A love of human artifice, when

⁵⁹ Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, 191.

detached from divine sanction, is sterile, idolatrous, and by extension sexually illicit. By the very fact of being ‘compassed’, a product of human artifice, the ‘clene *Rose*’ is far from being clean, and is in fact a deeply compromised and warped human creation, which comes freighted with a particularly problematic attitude to human desire and even suggests the possibility of homosexual attraction within the passage cited. The poet’s reference to it is ironic, an attempt to show the enormous inadequacy of human fiction to communicate anything meaningful about God. *Cleanness* itself, by extension, is equally flawed, its ‘fayre formes’ are doomed to fail in their efforts to represent virtue, and as such it is a completely self-destructive text that only becomes meaningful when it is rejected. This is an extremely coherent reading of *Cleanness*, but it imputes a perhaps impossible level of monolithic self-consistency to the poet’s ethical and aesthetic values, and it is ultimately, I feel, an *unacceptable* reading

My use of the term *unacceptable* to describe a possible interpretation of *Cleanness* is borrowed from an arresting note that appears in the commentary to the Tolkien and Gordon edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (first published 1925). Passing what might be some of the last days of his life at leisure in the Castle of Hautdesert, before continuing his quest to uphold his end of a grisly bargain with the Green Knight, Sir Gawain agrees to participate in another bargain, another ritual of exchange. Each evening, Gawain and the lord of the household, Bertilak, will give each other whatever they have won that day. While Bertilak gets up early and goes out hunting, Gawain stays in bed, where he is approached by the lady of the household. As Bertilak gives Gawain the spoils of each day’s hunt, culminating with some bathos in a meagre fox-pelt, Gawain passes on to Bertilak first the one, then the two, then the three kisses he has received from his lady. Tolkien and Gordon offer this note to the first of the hunting scenes:

The noise, confusion, and slaughter of this scene, and the terror of the mass of hunted animals, make unacceptable any suggestion of a symbolic parallel between it and the simultaneous quiet pursuit in the bedroom.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Tolkien and Gordon (eds), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 1158n.

I must admit that I agree with Tolkien and Gordon, that the full implications of their ‘unacceptable’ reading cannot be sustained in the imaginative world the poem creates. But in a wonderfully Derridean manner, they summon the ghost of the idea they attempt to exorcise.⁶¹ What if the poet does intend a scene in which female animals are hunted down and killed by a group of men before being expertly dismembered to directly parallel a bedroom scene in which a woman sexually pursues a man before kissing him? What might such a reading tell us about the author’s attitude to violence, desire, gender, and, importantly, sexuality? We will soon learn that Lady Bertilak is acting under her husband’s orders, and it is, after all, Bertilak himself who will receive and enjoy the kisses from Gawain that his own machinations have brought about. Might Bertilak’s skill as a huntsman represent on some level his sexual aggression towards Gawain? These potentially destabilising aspects of *Sir Gawain* have been illuminated by a series of readings by Carolyn Dinshaw. Drawing on, amongst other things, Judith Butler’s study of sexuality and normativity, Dinshaw suggests that it is not so much that the *Gawain*-poet labours to suppress a homoerotic interpretation of the exchange bargain. Instead, he simply renders such an interpretation ‘unintelligible’:

Homosexual sex is thus one hypothetical fulfillment — in fact we might say *the* logical end of the interlocking plots the lady and Bertilak play out — but it is a forbidden end. Or rather, not forbidden, but *unintelligible* within the heterosexual world of this poem [...] The narrative, that is, produces the possibility of homosexual relations only to — in order to — preclude it, in order to establish heterosexuality as not just the only sexual legitimacy but a principle of intelligibility itself. So that those kisses can and must mean nothing — or, truer and worse, their threat to a crucial principle of signification is neutralized.⁶²

Dinshaw’s intervention, with its focus on *intelligibility*, might offer a productive way of framing the *Cleanness*-poet’s use of the *Rose*. The kinds of self-destructively unstable meanings that the poet’s reference to the ‘clene *Rose*’ opens up, in the extreme reading I presented above, simply cannot be tolerated within the imaginative world that the poet

⁶¹ See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, and Swift’s application of *hantologie* to literary studies in *Gender, Writing, and Performance*, 34–9.

⁶² Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘A Kiss is Just a Kiss’, 206. This article is extended and folded into Dinshaw’s ‘Getting Medieval: *Pulp Fiction*, Gawain, Foucault’. For the purposes of this study, I have used Dinshaw’s earlier version, with its particular focus on this idea of ‘intelligibility’. In her rewriting of the article, Dinshaw shifts this emphasis to accommodate *Gawain* more closely to her reading of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*.

creates. This is not only, as in Dinshaw's understandably narrower focus, a 'heterosexual world', though attitudes to gender and sexuality are bound up in it. Instead this is a system of values that encompasses attitudes to meaning, language, artifice, social and religious ritual, gender, sexuality, and a host of other phenomena. In Dinshaw's reading, the kisses of Gawain and Bertilak — or the agreement between them that institutes the structure in which those kisses take place — simply shores up a heterosexual norm in which the very suggestion of homoeroticism is meaningless. In a similar way, the reference to the 'clene *Rose*' produces the possibility of a radically unstable, self-destructive and morally and sexually ambiguous kind of textuality, but seems not so much to banish that possible reading as simply afford it no space in which to be meaningful. At moments the poet suggests an understanding of human artifice that threatens to question the very basis of his activity as a writer, but in the end his interest and his focus remains on the 'fayre formes', the beautiful exteriors, of his own poem and his sources. That shadowy thing mentioned at the beginning of the poem, 'the contrary', is often acknowledged but never allowed to enter into the poet's self-conception.

If we accept that a radically unstable and self-destructive reading of *Cleanness*, instigated by its citation of the *Rose*, is unintelligible within the structure that the poem creates, the final and most difficult question remains: what did the *Cleanness*-author think of the *Rose*? One of the great flaws of studies of the reception of the *Rose*, seen as they often are through the lens of the formalised literary debate that is the *Querelle*, is that each reader must be seen to have a unified opinion or attitude, usually related to the text's moral worth. But it is of course conceivable that a reader — and an author — has multiple attitudes to different aspects of a text, attitudes that are expressed as that text is used or deployed in different ways and in different contexts. To read the *Rose* as simply an *Ars amatoria*, dispensing advice to lovers without offering any critique on that advice, might seem like an unconscionably blunt and unsophisticated reading to attribute to the author of *Sir Gawain*. But we don't have to imagine this as the poet's only understanding of the *Rose*: it may merely be one use, one vector of meaning that emerges as the text is employed in a particular context. Certainly, to see the *Rose* as an unironic mirror for lovers belies John Fleming's suggestion that the

Cleanness-poet read it as a source of doctrinal orthodoxy: such a reading of the *Rose* does not vitiate heterosexual desire, but values it.

In the hands of a writer like Chaucer, as we will see, the *Rose* becomes almost a shorthand for interpretative indeterminacy. Within *Cleanness*, the threat of that indeterminacy is, I think, simply unintelligible. Yet it is difficult to imagine that the *Cleanness*-poet was blind to the problems and instabilities that the *Rose* presented. It seems to me impossible to claim that he was able to assimilate the entirety of the *Rose* to a single doctrinally orthodox ethic: as my analysis has attempted to stress, his reference to the *Rose* is deeply problematic and dissonant from whatever perspective it is examined. What is striking is his apparent confidence that an orderly meaning can be recuperated at all from the ‘clene *Rose*’. He doesn’t actually tell us what this meaning is, and perhaps it was something he was unable to articulate. Yet his confidence in the ‘fayre formes’ of language to adequately transmit their meaning is such that the implications of a different way of reading and being — something perhaps unconsciously acknowledged as the ‘contrary’ — are, if not quite silenced, rendered unintelligible.

DESIRE AND FAILURE: *PEARL*

One of the striking things about the reference to the *Rose* in *Cleanness*, of course, is its evocation, by name, of the poem’s author, Jean de Meun. Although the anonymity of the *Gawain*-poet may simply be an accident of the transmission of the single manuscript in which his works survive, the fact that every other author examined in this thesis names themselves within their texts makes it all the more remarkable that the *Gawain*-poet should reveal his familiarity with Jean de Meun’s dislocating self-naming even as he himself remains anonymous. Our surprise might be intensified if we consider the fact that another of his poems, *Pearl*, might reveal his familiarity with another hugely important moment of self-naming, the revelation of the author’s identity at the end of Dante’s *Purgatorio*.⁶³

⁶³ Several scholars feel that the *Gawain*-poet’s knowledge of Dante remains a strong possibility: Spearing *The ‘Gawain’-Poet*, 17; Putter, *Introduction to the ‘Gawain’-Poet*, 5. See also Shoaf, ‘*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*’; Shoaf, “Noon English Digne”, 190–7. Sister Mary Hillman, although she does not claim direct influence, adduces *Paradiso* 10.91–3 and 12.19–20 to support her claim that the

David Aers's memorable characterisation of the Dreamer of *Pearl* could function equally well as a description of the lover of the *Rose*: 'His longing is to terminate desire in the full possession of its (fantasy) object, a possession that dispenses with all mediations, all negotiations, and all language.'⁶⁴ After falling asleep in an 'erber', at the very spot where his much-missed 'perle' sank into the ground, the Dreamer dreams that he walks through a paradisaal landscape before seeing the object of his desire on the other side of a river filled with sparkling gemstones. This pearl, it is strongly suggested, is his deceased daughter,⁶⁵ buried in the garden where he fell asleep, and she lectures him on various aspects of doctrine with particular reference to salvation. After a vision of the New Jerusalem, he plunges into the river to try to reach her (the moment described by Aers in the quotation above), before waking.

Pearl is a poem about desire and the disordered behaviour it instigates. While its focus is the paternal (though not un-erotic)⁶⁶ desire of a bereaved father rather than the desire of a lover, it is interesting to see how far the *Pearl*-poet saw the *Rose* as a useful intertext, as a way of exploring the nature of human lack and the urge to fulfill that lack. *Pearl* is, in Spearing's phrase, 'inhabited by the ghosts of the personifications who enact the story of the rose'.⁶⁷ Capitalising the abstract nouns that appear in E.V. Gordon's edition, Spearing demonstrates how allegorical figures appear momentarily in the Dreamer's consciousness, if not in the fictional world around him:

To calle hyr Lyst con me enchace
Bot Baysment get myn hert a brunt⁶⁸

Further examples of these remnants of the poet's reading of the *Rose* can easily be adduced:

Thagh Resoun set myselfen saght,

'garlande' of *Pearl* 1186 refers to a heavenly company like the *ghirlanda* that encircles Beatrice; See Hillman, 'Some Debatable Words in *Pearl*', 13. For Dante in fourteenth-century England more generally see Havely, *Dante's British Public*, ch.1.

⁶⁴ David Aers, 'The Self Mourning', 68.

⁶⁵ Although there is some debate over whether the narrator's claim that the Pearl-maiden is 'nerre then aunt or nece' (233) indicates that she is his daughter, it has been shown that in his parting benediction (1207–8), the dreamer uses a formula associated with parents' blessings to their children. See Norman Davis, 'A Note on *Pearl*'.

⁶⁶ See Shoaf, '*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*', 153.

⁶⁷ Spearing, *The 'Gawain'-Poet*, 16.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, quoting *Pearl*, 173–4.

I playned my perle that there was penned
(52–3, my capitalisation)

Hsin-yu Hu has drawn together the evidence for some striking parallels between depictions of the Lover at Narcissus's fountain in *Rose* manuscripts, and the depiction of the Dreamer in the illustrations of MS Cotton Nero A.x, suggesting that the producer of the manuscript understood *Pearl* to occupy the same imaginative terrain as the *Rose*.⁶⁹ The two poems have general structural affinities,⁷⁰ and *Pearl* also contains some direct verbal echoes of the French text. One striking instance occurs when the Dreamer asserts the indescribability of the maiden in terms that echo Jean's narrator's claim that no human activity, whether it was by 'Platons ou Aristotes [...] ne Pigmalion' (16140–7) could depict Nature:

'O mascelles perle, in perles pure,
That beres,' quoth I, 'the perle of pris,
Who formed thee thy fayr figure?
That wroght thy wede, he was ful wyse.
Thy beaute com never of nature;
Pymalyon paynted never thy vys,
Ne Arystotel nauther by his lettrure
Of karped the kynde these propretres;
(745–52)

In his detailed analysis of the relationship between *Pearl* and the *Rose*, Herbert Pilch argues that this passage is one of the less compelling pieces of evidence of the interaction between the two texts. Since the passage in Jean's *Rose* concerns Nature, and the Pearl-maiden's beauty 'com never of nature', then if the poet 'alludes to the *Roman de la Rose* at all, he does so rather with respect to the image of Raison [Reason], who is so well proportioned that not even Nature could have created her'.⁷¹ Pilch thus prefers a passage from Guillaume's section of the *Rose*, where the narrator says of Reason that 'Nature ne seüst pas / ovre fere de tel compas' (2971–2). Pilch's quibble does not seem particularly relevant: it is entirely possible that the *Pearl*-poet is synthesising two remembered ideas from different parts of the *Rose*.

⁶⁹ Hsin-yu Hu, 'Delineating the *Gawain*-Poet', 87–145.

⁷⁰ See Julie Fiefski, 'Two *Loci Amoeni* in *Pearl*'. Fiefski sees an analogy between the Garden of Deduit and the Park of the Lamb in the *Rose* and the earthly paradise and the New Jerusalem in *Pearl*.

⁷¹ Herbert Pilch, 'Middle English *Pearl*', 167. Hsin-yu Hu also discusses this interaction between *Pearl* and the *Rose* in 'Delineating the *Gawain*-Poet', 122–5.

More important are Pilch's other interventions, which lead him to the striking statement, 'If I were not loathe to exaggerate, I should call *Pearl* an anti-*Roman de la rose*.'⁷²

Pilch's comment relates to his reading of the way in which *Pearl* frames the Dreamer's worldly loss as a 'rose'. This moment occurs when the Dreamer confronts the Pearl-maiden with the grief he has experienced at losing her. He uses the language of erotic desire and erotic suffering at the hands of 'daunger' — an allegorical figure disseminated by the *Rose* itself. This is perhaps part of what Aers characterises as 'the courtly dynamics of masculine identity and desire' with which the narrator's mourning 'is inextricably bound up':⁷³

Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned, —
 And thou in a lif of lykyng lyght,
 In Paradise erde, of stryf unstrayned.
 What wyrde has hider my juel wayned
 And done me in this doel and gret daunger?
 (246–50)

The Pearl-maiden's corrective to the Dreamer's emotion is to reassure him that he has lost nothing more than a worldly and ephemeral thing:

For that thou lestes was bot a rose,
 That flowred and fayled as kynde hit gef.
 Now, thurgh kynde of the kyst that hit con close,
 To a perle of pris hit is put in pref
 (269–72)

Through death, through the nature of the 'kyst' (both a coffin and a jewellery box) that enclosed her body, the ephemeral 'rose' that the Dreamer loved has been translated into a pure and eternal pearl. But, as Pilch points out, the Dreamer does not quite learn the lesson that the Pearl-maiden tries to teach him, slipping back into a conception of her as an organic, earthly thing: a rose. Even as he emphasises his awareness of his own earth-bound inadequacy, he demonstrates that he has not mastered it, failing to relinquish the symbols through which he conceives of his desires:⁷⁴

I am bot mokke and mul amonk,

⁷² Pilch, 'Middle English *Pearl*', 180.

⁷³ Aers, 'Reflections on *Pearl*', 57.

⁷⁴ Pilch, 'Middle English *Pearl*', 171. Note that Shoaf reads this differently: for him this stanza indicates the Dreamer's spiritual development, '*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*', 162.

And thou so rich a reken rose
(905–6)

Later I will return to Pilch's suggestion that *Pearl* might be an 'anti-Roman de la Rose', and how this relates more widely to the poet's interaction with the French text. Yet leaving aside for the moment any suggestion of value-judgement, Pilch's insight that 'The *Pearl* poet confronts the symbol of the rose with the symbol of the pearl' is a useful one.⁷⁵ The desire of the Dreamer for the maiden is figured in terms very reminiscent of Amant's desire for the Rose, and the Dreamer's recursive lapses into this way of imagining his desire betray his failure to fully internalise the spiritual lessons of the Pearl-maiden. Thus it is that towards the beginning of the poem, the Dreamer uses the markedly erotic term 'luf-daungere' to describe his own emotional state at his separation from the object of his desires: 'I dewyne, fordolke of luf-daungere' (11).⁷⁶ But at the very end of the poem, a strikingly similar phrase occurs at the end of Section XIX, just before the Dreamer plunges into the stream that separates him from the vision of the New Jerusalem:

That sight me gart to thenk to wade,
For luf-longing, in gret delit.
XX
Delit me drof in iye and ere;
My manes mynde to maddyng malt
(1151–4)

The Dreamer's excessive 'delit' undercuts his ability to profit from his vision. His lapse back into the language and habits of a desiring subject in the style of Amant shows that, even after an elevated vision of the New Jerusalem, he remains controlled by a human fallenness that expresses itself with particular intensity through the disorder of his erotic compulsions. This human failure is made explicit: it is the Dreamer's 'manes mynde' that fails. But it is not the ecstasy of being afforded a vision of Christ as Lamb that so overloads the Dreamer's senses. It is in fact the renewal of his vision of his Pearl: while looking at the host of one hundred and forty-four virgins who surround the Lamb, he suddenly catches a glimpse of a particular face,

⁷⁵ Pilch, 'Middle English *Pearl*', 170.

⁷⁶ For an excellent study of this term and its range of meanings a number of medieval texts, see W.R.J. Barron, 'Luf-Daungere'.

a single identity within the collective mass of virgins, and it is this sight that proves too much for him:

I loked among His meyny schene,
 How thay with lif were laste and lade.
 Then saw I there my little quene,
 That I wende had standen by me in slade.
 (1145–8)

The Dreamer's disordered desire becomes the hallmark of his human fallenness, and this desire is presented always in the terms of an erotic, courtly love that borrows the language of the *Rose*. Indeed, the Dreamer's constant misreading of his own vision seems to be shown in part through his recurrent lapses into the imaginative world of the *Rose*, and this association of the French text with a kind of interpretive failure can be felt reverberating throughout *Pearl*. Thus, he demonstrates his failure to understand the heavenly hierarchy in which all have an equal oneness with God (something expounded at some length by the Pearl-maiden at lines 445–56), by re-focusing his 'luf-longing' on the particular and individual figure he identifies within God's 'meyny schene'. Similarly, at the beginning of the poem, the Dreamer seems to understand his dream landscape as if it were the allegorical dream-space of the *Rose*, rather than being a 'verray avisioun' (1184) of the spiritual realm described in the Book of Revelations. It has long been recognised that the beautiful spring landscape at the beginning of *Pearl* is reminiscent of the *locus amoenus* of Guillaume's *Rose*. But the reference may be even more explicit than that. Mabel Day has argued in favour of an editorial emendation first by made Gollancz but then rejected by Gordon.⁷⁷ I offer first the text as given in Putter and Stokes, who, like Gordon, follow the manuscript reading at this point, and then Gollancz's emendations:

I hoped the water were a devise
 Bitwene mirthes by meres made
 (139–40)

I hope[d] þe water were a deuyse
 By-twene [mereʒ] by [Myrþe] made⁷⁸
 (139–40)

⁷⁷ Day, 'Two Notes on *Pearl*', 241.

⁷⁸ Israel Gollancz (ed.), *Pearl*.

As Day expounds in some detail, Gollancz's emendation supposes that the scribe has mistakenly swapped the position of two alliterating words, something that certainly happens elsewhere in the manuscript, and in other alliterative poems.⁷⁹ In Gollancz's and Day's reading, these lines are seen to be a direct allusion to the *Rose*. The waters that the Dreamer encounters are imagined, briefly, to be an artificial ornament created by 'Myrþe', the allegorical Deduit of Guillaume's *Rose*.⁸⁰ The corresponding lines in the French text are instructive:

Par petiz ruisiaus, que Deduiz
 i ot fet fere par conduiz,
 si en aloit l'eve fesant
 une noise douce et plessant.
 (1385–8)

[By little streams, that Deduit had made there with conduits, through the water went making a sweet and pleasant sound]

The emendation to the manuscript reading is an attractive hypothesis: the Dreamer's belief that he has found himself in the artificial Garden of Deduit, a place where courtly desire is pursued and eventually satisfied, is another signal of his warped nature: he has misread the landscape of his dream.

From this perspective, I would like to return to Pilch's suggestion that *Pearl* might constitute an 'anti-Roman de la Rose'. Part of my problem with Pilch's interpretation of the *Pearl*-poet's reading of the *Rose* is that it presupposes, like so many studies of the reception of the *Rose*, authors with stable and fully-formed attitudes towards the work that are somehow external to their experience of reading it or reworking it. If the *Pearl*-poet uses the *Rose* as an intertextual trigger, a way of marking the fallen desire of his Dreamer and exposing the limitations it places on his spiritual experience, then the poem does not so much present an 'opposition' to the *Rose* as an affinity with one particular reading of it. This reading, in fact, is much more like the understanding of perfect 'orthodoxy' that Fleming attributed to the poet's use of the *Rose* in *Cleanness*: here, in *Pearl*, the *Rose* seems to have

⁷⁹ Day, 'Two Notes on *Pearl*', 241.

⁸⁰ As Day points out, ('Two Notes on *Pearl*', 241), the Middle English translation of these lines bears some remarkable lexical similarities to what appears in *Pearl*: 'But I ne can the nombre telle / Of strems smale, that by devys / Mirthe had don com through condys' (1412–4).

been understood as a satire — though perhaps not an unsympathetic satire — on the cognitive limitations that are a consequence of erotic longing. But this need not represent the final attitude of the *Pearl*-poet on this text, any more than the use of it in *Cleanness* as what seems to be an unproblematically transferrable handbook of courtly behaviour constitutes his final view. The *Rose* was a plural text, but it could also be used in plural ways, and the works of the *Gawain*-poet show how his attitudes to the poem emerge in the process of his pragmatic deployment of this French intertext in different places and with different goals.

It does seem clear, however, that *Pearl* presents a much greater skepticism about the possibility of the human subject acquiring knowledge than his other works: this is also the work in which erotic desire is welcomed into the voice of the narrator and allowed to shape the text that is produced. Both *Cleanness* and *Pearl* use sexual desire to explore human nature and its place in a wider divine order; but the two poems present remarkably divergent attitudes. In *Cleanness*, licit sexuality is naturally inherent in humankind. Acts of illicit desire are produced by creative artificiality that deviates from the divine order. But already, as I have tried to suggest, the poem is straining under the pressure of sustaining this vision of a beneficent creator whose creatures will themselves away from his laws. If these problems are sensed in the background of *Cleanness*, they are addressed more directly in *Pearl*, where erotic desire becomes almost a shorthand for the alienation of human nature from the divine. But despite these suggestions of human limitation in *Pearl*, the *Gawain*-poet remains largely confident about his own ability to transmit meaning to his readers. Through a strange paradox, the anonymity of his works might actually be a sign that he had an unusual faith in the stability of the relationship between his own authorial self and the meaning he produced. As we have seen in the *Rose*, self-naming within a narrative, implanting one's historical identity in the 'I' of a text, need not be seen as the attempt to establish a controlling ownership of its meaning. For many writers, self-naming within a fiction places the historical self in a realm of contingency and absence. The *Gawain*-poet's anonymity may well be a concrete sign of his own confidence — consciously acknowledged or unconsciously felt — in

the stability of his social identity and his own self-expression in the beautiful 'fayre formes' of his poetry.

Chapter 6. Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer's intellectual and artistic engagement with the *Romance of the Rose* was a defining preoccupation of his career from beginning to end, and much of his life was spent moving through or around a society that placed an enormous cultural value on the poem.¹ To say this is not to ignore the indelible imprint of other Latin and vernacular literatures on Chaucer's work; instead, what I would like to argue here is that the *Rose* furnished Chaucer with a way of thinking about and approaching textuality itself. By thematising the desire for interpretative closure and exploring with unique complexity the relationship of an author to his or her own meaning, the *Rose* brought into focus for Chaucer the most integral problems of reading and writing.

Chaucer, perhaps more than any other Middle English writer, inhabited a remarkably plural intellectual world of texts, and the attempt to trace the influence of any one work or author through his career is complex and difficult. Nevertheless, I will argue in this chapter that the *Rose* constitutes a continuous and particularly profound influence on Chaucer's writings — it is a work that Chaucer continuously positions in relation to other texts and ideas that he encounters. This can be illustrated neatly in a brief echo of the *Rose* that occurs in the latter part of Chaucer's career and that has received little attention.² The Second Nun's Prologue begins with these high-style stanzas:

The ministre and the norice unto vices,
Which that men clepe in Englissh Ydelnesse,
That porter of the gate is of delices,
To eschue, and by hire contrarie hire oppresse —
That is to seyn, by leveful bisynesse —

¹ Aside from Chaucer's association with the courts of two generations of monarchs who can be shown to have owned a copy of the *Rose* (see ch.2, item 9), we also know that Chaucer's friend Richard Stury owned a copy (ch.2, item 2), and that William Montagu, his fellow witness in the Scrope–Grosvenor case, was sent one by Charles V (ch. 2, item 8). As Clerk of the King's Works, Chaucer was granted responsibility for repairs to St George's Chapel in 1390, whose library, as we have seen, contained a copy of the *Rose* (ch.2, item 10); see Pearsall, *Life of Chaucer*, 211–2. My point is not that Chaucer may have accessed this or that particular copy, but rather that he moved in circles in which ownership of this text was *de rigueur*. See also below, n.10, for *Rose* manuscripts in Italy.

² Cipriani, 'Influence of the *Romance of the Rose*' and Fansler, *Chaucer and the 'Roman de la Rose'*, do not list this passage amongst their analogues. The mention of 'Ydelnesse' prompts the *Riverside* editors to give a cross-reference, without comment, to the *Romaunt of the Rose*, 593. Sherry Reames mentions neither the *Rose* nor Deguileville in her analysis of The Physician's Tale's sources in Correale and Hamel (ed.), *Sources and Analogues*, 491–9; but see Fyler's interesting comments, *Language and the Declining World*, 158.

Wel oughten we to doon al oure entente,
Lest that the fend thurgh ydelnesse us hente.

For he that with his thousand cordes slye
Continuelly us waiteth to biclappe,
What he may man in ydelnesse espye,
He kan so lightly cache hym in his trappe,
Til that a man be hent right by the lappe,
He nys war the feend hath hym in honde.
Wel oghte us werche and ydelnesse withstonde.

And though men dradden nevere for to dye,
Yet seen men wel by resoun, doutelees,
That ydelnesse is roten slogardy, e,
Of which ther nevere comth no good n'encres;
And syn that slouthe hire holdeth in a lees
Only to slepe, and for to ete and drynke,
And to devouren al that othere swynke
(VIII.1–21)

'Ydelnesse', who guards the gate through which people enter into a realm of threateningly carnal 'delices', is clearly a refraction of Oiseuse, the 'pucele' who opens the gate to the Garden of Deduit in Guillaume's *Rose* (Lecoy, 522ff.).³ Chaucer is presenting, however briefly, a moralised version of the *Rose*, in which the beautiful gatekeeper opens a route into a realm of sin rather than aristocratic diversion. The fact that Chaucer puts a strange emphasis on the language in which he is referring to this figure — 'that men clepe *in English* Ydelnesse' — evokes its French equivalent, driving home the comparison to Oiseuse. This appropriation of the imaginary universe of the *Rose* for a penitential purpose seems like a Deguilevillean manoeuvre, and indeed these stanzas are filled with allusions to Deguileville's *PVH*. The Oiseuse of Guillaume's *Rose* has become mingled with 'Peresce la gouteuse' (7165, 'gouty Sloth') of the *PVH*, the personification of the sin of sloth and the first of the vices that the pilgrim meets along his way. The pilgrim is 'enlaciez' (7039) by the 'cordes et las' (7037) of Paresce, who then leads him to be tortured by her six sisters. In this respect Deguileville's Paresce is indeed the 'ministre and the norice unto vices', and she is also evoked by the 'thousand cordes slye' that Chaucer associates with the 'feend' (the association

³ Robertson identifies some instances of Chaucer using Ydelnesse as a moralising image ultimately drawn from Guillaume's *Rose*, adducing *CT*, X.713 and I.1940; *Preface to Chaucer*, 92, n.69. For some first steps towards a history of the idea of idleness in the Middle Ages, see Simpson, 'Economy of Involutum'.

of the devil with the cords and traps of Paresce was already suggested by Deguileville — towards the end of his pilgrimage the pilgrim sees Satan fishing in the sea of the world with ‘cordes’ and ‘las’, 11717–8). If these particular echoes of francophone literature are rarely noted in the prologue to the Second Nun’s Tale, this is perhaps because they share their site with a much a more famous piece of Chaucerian intertextuality: the close translation of St Bernard’s prayer to the Virgin from the final cantos of the *Paradiso* that immediately follows the stanzas quoted above (VIII.35–56). It is fascinating to find an allusion to and imitation of the *Rose*, Deguileville, and Dante in a single brief passage of Chaucer; yet it is also fascinating to see how Chaucer can isolate one possible interpretation of the *Rose* (a version of a Deguilevillean perspective that sees it as, potentially, a window onto a world of sinful desire), and use it to demystify or render accessible the heights of Dantean sublimity. This brief example helps demonstrate the extent to which Chaucer’s interactions with the *Rose* must be considered in relation to a much wider field of allusion and echo; this is perhaps in itself a response to the way the *Rose* generates meaning from its intertexts.

The old narrative of Chaucer’s development as an author has him progress from imitations of continental francophone poetry to an ‘Italian’ period, culminating in the essentially ‘English’ work of the *Canterbury Tales*. This reductive scheme of Chaucer’s literary career, which mimes in miniature the idea of a more general ‘Triumph of English’, has proven strangely persistent; recently, James Simpson was happy to confirm this ‘indisputable’ pattern.⁴ But this schematisation of Chaucer’s work is reductive and curiously circular: we suppose that Chaucer had an early French period because a number of imitations and translations from French sources tend to be dated to the beginning of his career, but one of main arguments for this uncertain dating is an appeal to these works’ Frenchness and Chaucer’s supposed early dependence on French models.⁵ Although at some point Chaucer’s works begin to reveal the influence of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, this does not mean that

⁴ ‘The standard narrative of Chaucer’s poetic engagement with European poetic making defines a French period as a kind of apprenticeship, followed by a profound engagement with Italian poetry. This narrative is indisputable, and in good part I confirm it here.’ James Simpson, ‘Chaucer as a European Writer’, 60.

⁵ For the difficulties associated with dating Chaucer’s works, see Kathryn Lynch, ‘Dating Chaucer’.

Chaucer ceased to engage with francophone literature. If his last long work, the *Canterbury Tales*, does indeed owe its general structure to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's poem presents such a profusion of forms, genres and literary traditions (epic, fabliau, saint's life, *dit amoureux*, prose allegorical didactic treatise, romance, sermon exemplum, penitential treatise) that an attempt to associate this work with the literary culture of a single nation or tradition is essentially meaningless.⁶ And although Chaucer's 'discovery' of the *trecento* poets was of huge importance to his career, it is important to remember that these Italian works were themselves responding to French literature. Despite the old and strangely persistent idea that Chaucer 'medievalised' something radically new or 'Renaissance' in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* when he adapted it to produce *Troilus and Criseyde*,⁷ it is important to remember that what was new or exciting about Boccaccio for Chaucer was almost certainly measured against the Italian's use of familiar — and francophone — literary material.⁸ Crucially, for my purposes, Chaucer would surely have associated the elements of love allegory that appear in both Boccaccio and Dante in different forms with a tradition stemming from the *Rose*, something emphasised by David Wallace.⁹ As twenty-first-century readers of Chaucer we remain fascinated by the 'French' and the 'Italian' aspects of his works, yet both of these terms correspond only intermittently to fourteenth-century categories. As Chaucer's interest in Tuscan literature develops alongside his continued fascination with northern

⁶ For various story collections that are to some extent analogous to the *Canterbury Tales*, see Helen Cooper, *Structure of the 'Canterbury Tales'*, esp. ch.1.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, 'What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*', 56. Simpson argues that this is in a way true, 'For what he means, more broadly, by 'medievalizing' is that Chaucer roughened the smooth surface of the *Filostrato*, both rhetorically and philosophically', 'Chaucer as a European Writer', 73. Spearing, meanwhile, places an emphasis on Chaucer's encounter with something radically new and 'Renaissance' in *trecento* Italian poetry, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 21.

⁸ For Boccaccio and the *romans antiques* as received by Chaucer, see Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 119–97; Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 125. But note that David Wallace points out that there is little evidence of Boccaccio's direct use of any individual narrative source for the *Filostrato*, in *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, 74. Other works of Boccaccio's would have seemed familiar to Chaucer: Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione* is essentially a *dit amoureux* in the tradition of the *Rose* and its fourteenth-century French imitators: Boitani presents some suggestive analogues between the *Amorosa Visione* and Chaucer's *House of Fame* in *World of Fame*, 94–5. Wallace adds to these suggestions, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, 5–22. For the political implications of the relationship between Boccaccio and francophone literature, see Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 180–1.

⁹ 'Chaucer and the European *Rose*'; for general relations between the *Rose* and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian literature, see Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, 8–13; Richards, *Dante and the 'Roman de la Rose'*; Benedetto, *Il 'Roman de la Rose'*.

continental francophone poetry, we do not find a cultural competition in which one supplants the other, but rather a deepening awareness of their inter-connection. Chaucer's reading of the Florentine poets was surely something complex, plural, and exciting: I will not flatly characterise it here. However, there is no doubt that as a reader of Boccaccio and Dante, in particular, Chaucer would have been in part a close reader of their interaction with thirteenth-century francophone poetry – above all, the *Rose*.¹⁰

This chapter is not a study of Chaucer's relationship with the *trecento* poets: it is an analysis of his detailed intellectual and artistic engagement with the *Rose*, and how this engagement affected his exploration of the hermeneutic activities of the reader and his own creative activities as author. But the point of this excursion into Chaucer's 'Italian inheritance' has been to show, once again, what I have attempted to insist upon throughout this thesis, and what is brought into sharp focus by the passage from the Second Nun's Prologue with which I began. Literary influence cannot be understood as a unilateral interaction between originator and imitator: it is something inherently rhizomatic, developing in all directions. It is with this in mind that I will try to analyse how, for Chaucer, the *Rose* in particular constituted a way of thinking about or interacting *with* texts as much as being a text in itself.

Where does one begin to talk about Chaucer and the *Rose*? In the first dedicated effort to list parallel passages in Chaucer's works and the *Rose*, Lisi Cipriani stated that the very attempt was only made possible for her by 'peculiarly favorable circumstances — a period of illness which allowed me to work exclusively on this subject without interruptions

¹⁰ It useful to remember that Chaucer's visits to Italy would have constituted not only an exposure to Italian texts, but also a re-exposure to francophone literature. Chaucer's 1378 trip included an official visit to Bernabó Visconti in Milan; while no records of Bernabó's books survive, the book collection of his brother Galeazzo, held then at Pavia, was inventoried in 1426, after it had passed to and been expanded by Gian Galeazzo. This inventory lists a 'pulcherrimus' copy of the *Rose* that may well have entered the collection in Galeazzo's time; see G. D'Adda, *Indagini storiche*, 1:82, item 900. This Italian manuscript is not mentioned by Langlois in his list of documentary references to *Rose* manuscripts, *Manuscripts*, 199–212. There is reason to believe that Chaucer may have had access to the Pavia library in his visit to Lombardy; see Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Visconti Libraries'; Coleman, 'Visconti Library at Pavia'. For manuscripts of francophone literature in Italy (excluding the *Rose*), see Busby, *Codex and Context*, 766–97.

of any sort.¹¹ Chaucer's interaction with the *Rose* is so detailed and so deep that systematic attempts to identify quotations, citations, analogues, echoes, and intellectual affinities (attempts that have been ongoing for more than a century) have been far from comprehensive.¹² One more recent and productive approach, that would repay further scrutiny, has been to focus on the philosophical implications of the *Rose* as a text that offered Chaucer a model for the exploration of intellectual problems.¹³ As Dean Fansler confessed at the end of his list of parallel passages, the most comprehensive to date, the nature of the connection between Chaucer and the *Rose* — and especially between Chaucer and Jean de Meun — can probably never be expressed through something so atomising as a list of analogues.¹⁴ Aside from the huge evidence of the *Rose* as an influence in all of Chaucer's narrative poems, we know that he used Jean de Meun's *Livres de confort* in his own translation of Boethius.¹⁵ Jean's vernacular *Consolatio*, a counterpart to his playful ironisations of this text in the *Rose*, thus formed a model for Chaucer's own recalibrations of Boethius throughout his career. Chaucer may have mined the *Testament* for the *Canterbury Tales*,¹⁶ and as a penitential treatise-cum-palinode rejecting the erotic poetry of his youth, the *Testament* seems to offer a suggestive analogue for the *Parson's Tale* and the *Retractions*

¹¹ Lisi Cipriani, 'Influence of the *Romance of the Rose*', 553.

¹² Skeat lists many analogues and quotations in his explanatory notes to the *Complete Works*, but the first study to attempt a comprehensive list of verbal echoes (focusing mainly on works that pre-date the *Canterbury Tales*) was Cipriani, 'Influence of the *Romance of the Rose*'. Cipriani's work was developed by Dean Fansler in what remains the fullest listing of direct echoes and analogues, *Chaucer and the 'Roman de la rose'*. Countless studies of close analogues and vaguer affinities followed in the twentieth century, of which the most influential were certainly Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, and Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*. For an annotated bibliography which details further studies of Chaucer's debt to the *Rose* (up to 1985) see Russell Peck, *Chaucer's 'Romaunt of the Rose'* 36–75. Studies of Chaucer and the *Roman de la rose* that post-date 1985 will be detailed in the course of this chapter. For a very full (but not exhaustive) list of analogues between the *Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*, see the index references to the *Roman de la Rose* in Correale and Hamel (eds), *Sources and Analogues*, 1:620, 2:816.

¹³ Such studies include Mark Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer*; John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*; Peter W. Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer*; Nicolette Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts'.

¹⁴ Fansler, *Chaucer and the 'Roman de la rose'*, 234.

¹⁵ See Machan's useful reconstruction of Chaucer's likely source text of Jean de Meun's translation in *Sources of the 'Boece'*.

¹⁶ Skeat suggests that Chaucer's reference to the Monk's absence from his monastery, and the rhyme of 'cloystre' with 'oystre' (I.181–2) is borrowed from the *Testament*, 1166, where the same rhyme is found in a similar context. Although the phrase could be proverbial in both instances, the analogue is striking. See Skeat (ed.), *Canterbury Tales (Works, vols 4–5)*, 179–81n.

which concludes Chaucer's final work.¹⁷ Finally, whatever the status of the text that is known today as the *Romaunt of the Rose*, there can be no doubt that Chaucer did in fact translate the *Rose* in some form before the composition of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

The most influential studies of Chaucer's relationship with the *Rose* have positioned Chaucer and Jean de Meun at different points on a historical trajectory or as different inflections of a transhistorical phenomenon.¹⁸ In this chapter I hope to focus instead on how Chaucer uses his writings to stage a number of different responses to the *Rose* that cannot be easily reduced to a single unifying schema. As with my other chapters, my main purpose will be to explore how Chaucer uses the *Rose* to articulate his attitudes to interpretation, and his authorial ownership of his texts. Faced with the sheer wealth of possible approaches to this interaction, I will make no attempt at comprehensiveness; instead I will present four interconnected readings of different moments in Chaucer's career. Since a great deal has been written on Chaucer's more celebrated transformations of parts of Jean's *Rose* — particularly the figures of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner¹⁹ — I will focus on less well-known interactions. I begin by looking at two moments that seem to display a particular sensitivity to the ways in which Jean de Meun thematises the transmission of meaning: the *Boece* and the Physician's Tale. In both instances, metaphors of dismemberment that stem ultimately from the *Rose* prove to be a productive way for Chaucer to frame his exploration of the processes of interpretation. I will then turn to look at two works in which Chaucer's authorial self-presentation — something inextricably linked to his attitudes to meaning — seems to come into particularly close contact with the strategies of the *Rose*: the *House of Fame*, and the

¹⁷ This observation is made by Crépin, 'La Querelle anticipée par Chaucer', 39.

¹⁸ For Lewis, in *Allegory of Love*, Guillaume's *Rose* is the archetypal love-allegory: his concern is to show the 'emergence' of the representation of a subjective interiority through allegorical writing. Muscatine positions the *Rose* among a number of other thirteenth-century French works; he wants to show how the *Rose* balances the conventional ('courtly') and the realist ('bourgeois'). Muscatine's suggestion that human experience can be reduced, transhistorically, to the 'gradation from idealism to phenomenism' is interesting, yet insufficient to describe the vast plurality of literary and philosophical approaches and configurations that can be seen in merely the *Rose* itself. See Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 3. For more on Muscatine's philosophy of history, see Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, 22–6.

¹⁹ Chaucer's transformation of La Vieille into the Wife of Bath has been examined by many scholars; for some typical comments see Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 204–13; Calin, *French Tradition*, 326–46; Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 295–307; Patterson, "For the Wyves Love of Bathe". For the relationship between the Pardoner and Faux-Semblant see below, n.38.

prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. Since this last work is the one in which Chaucer stakes his claim as a translator of the *Rose*, I will consider the position of that translation in his career. But the text of the *Romaunt of the Rose* itself, as we will see, is best addressed in my final chapter.

MEANING AND DISMEMBERMENT (I): ‘THAT IS TO SEYN’: *BOECE*

When Chaucer’s dreamer finds himself in a marvellous chamber in the *Book of the Duchess*, he sees painted on the walls ‘bothe text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose’ (332–4). Although several suggestions have been made for what this ‘glose’ might be, the word has proven strangely resistant to interpretation.²⁰ After all, a ‘glose’ is precisely what we don’t find in the *Rose*: it is something promised but never delivered by both Guillaume and Jean.²¹ In contemplating this ‘text and glose’, therefore, the dreamer seems to see an impossible object, an expounded copy of the *Rose* in which a final meaning has been provided. The reference to this impossible gloss, at an early point in his career, shows how Chaucer could turn to the *Rose* as a way of thinking about and presenting meaning — the *Book of the Duchess*, is, after all, a poem which centres upon a crisis of meaning, and that narrates, at last, the failure of poetry to successfully communicate emotion.²² Chaucer’s attitudes to interpretation are not fixed or stable: different kinds of texts call for different ways of presenting knowledge and different ways of exploring its limits. I will begin this analysis by looking at one of Chaucer’s less typical works: the *Boece*. This text is important for an understanding of the reception of the *Rose* in England because it demonstrates Chaucer’s intimate knowledge of a work by Jean de Meun beyond the *Rose*: Jean’s own translation of Boethius, the *Livres de confort*. A full exploration of the relationship between these works is beyond the possibilities of this thesis; I will focus instead on a single moment.

²⁰ Fleming suggests that the ‘glose’ must refer to painted miniatures, ‘textual illustrations as a gloss’, *Roman de la Rose*, 9.

²¹ See, e.g., *RR*, 15118–20.

²² This is emphasised by the Black Knight’s thrice-repeated refrain, ‘Thou woste ful lytel what thou menyst: / I have lost more than thou wenyst (743–4; see also 1137–8, 1305–6).

Jean's translation of Boethius, undertaken at some point after the *Rose*, is an attempt to supply a direct and for the most part literal translation of the *Consolatio*. It begins with a prologue in which Jean dedicates the translation to Philippe le Bel and explains the importance of Boethius's text: it helps people understand how their imperfect and disordered desires draw them towards sensual pleasure rather than intellectual or spiritual goods.²³ Jean apologises for the supposed looseness of his translation, claiming that a purely literal rendering of the Latin would have been difficult to understand:

Car se je eusse epons mot a mot le latin par le françois, li livres en fust trop occurs
(16–7)²⁴

[For if I had expounded the Latin word-by-word with the French, the book would have been too obscure]

But the word 'epons' also implies that his translation will act as a kind of explication — a gloss. *Epondre* is precisely the verb Jean uses in the *Rose* to designate his ever-deferred act of interpretation (*RR*, 15117). Moreover, a significant number of *Livres de Confort* manuscripts circulated in a composite format alongside the *Consolatio* and Nicholas Trevet's commentary; the *Consolatio* and Jean's translation are positioned in parallel, with Trevet's text in a smaller format underneath or around.²⁵ The commentary and the translation are clearly presented as different in function, but their layout makes them seem in some ways analogous. In other words, Jean is presenting his translation as a kind of interpretation, something that participates in the generation of the meaning of Boethius's text. The notion seems to have been relatively widespread: 'Translatio est expositio sentencie per aliam linguam'.²⁶ It is significant, in this regard, that Jean claims that his prologue is not just for those who don't understand Latin, but also for those who exist in a painful state of disordered desire, as if his translation was not designed to merely cross a linguistic barrier, but also to render legible the transcendent possibilities of the *Consolatio* for those who need it, even if

²³ Jean's prologue for the most part closely translates an earlier 'Aristotelian' prologue by William of Aragon; see Roberto Crespo, 'Il Prologo'.

²⁴ All citations are from Jean de Meun, 'Boethius's *De Consolatione*' [= *Livres de confort*], ed. Dédick-Héry.

²⁵ Five manuscripts have this layout. See Dédick-Héry (ed.), 'Boethius' *De Consolatione*', 166–7.

²⁶ The phrase is given by both Hugutio of Pisa and John of Genoa as part of their definition of *glossa*; quoted in Minnis "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thyng'", 106–7.

they are Latin-literate.²⁷ The implication seems to be that the complexities of the Latin might be missed by a mind which is always in movement and never whole. Exactly how Jean intervenes in the *Consolatio* to render it particularly useful for those who suffer from disordered desire remains to be seen, but there is at least the suggestion that Jean saw his translation as undertaking some kind of interpretative work.

Studies of Chaucer's translation of the *Consolatio* have highlighted the extent to which Chaucer synthesised several texts. Tim William Machan has argued that, in translating Boethius, 'Chaucer in effect created his source' — a virtual combination of the 'Vulgate' version of the Latin *Consolatio*, Nicholas Trevet's commentary, a smattering of glosses stemming from Remigius of Auxerre, and the translation of Jean de Meun.²⁸ Chaucer allows all of these different perspectives on the text of the *Consolatio* to contribute to the total meaning of his translation. Often, he will use a doublet to communicate the meanings of both his Latin and French sources.²⁹ An interesting feature of Chaucer's translation is that he usually marks the glosses and comments that are not integral to the original Latin text. Some of these may at first have been marginal in Chaucer's translation before being incorporated by scribes into the main text, but many seem to have been intended to appear within the body of the translation, and are introduced by phrases like 'That is to seyn', or 'As who seyn'.³⁰ The *Riverside* editors render in italics all such material that finds no direct parallel in either the

²⁷ 'Car il sont demenés et deboutéz par les biens sensibles es quiex nule chose n'est joieuse sens tristesse n'il ne demeurent pas touz jours uns, meismes comme leur bonté soit continuellement en mouvement. A telz gens est doncques profitable la translacion de cest livre et meismement a celuz qui n'entendent pas le langage des Latins.' (75–9, 'For they are maddened and pursued by the sensual goods in which nothing is joyful without sadness neither do they remain always one, just as their happiness is continuously in movement. This translation is thus profitable to such people and also to those who don't understand the language of the Latins').

²⁸ Tim William Machan, 'Scribal Role', 155. For the most detailed account of the sources, see Machan, *Sources of the 'Boece'*. Machan outlines the various possibilities for the manuscript or manuscripts that Chaucer may have used, *Sources of the 'Boece'*, 11–2. Hannah and Lawlor suggest that Chaucer may even have used a single manuscript containing Jean's translation, the Latin original, Trevet's commentary, and a handful of isolated glosses from other commentators, especially Remigius of Auxerre but also William of Conches, *Riverside*, 1004. For more on Chaucer's use of glosses, see Minnis, "'Glosynge is a glorious thyng'". See also Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 142–50.

²⁹ See the description of this phenomenon in the explanatory notes by Hanna and Lawlor in *Riverside Chaucer*, 1004.

³⁰ Minnis examines the sources for these glosses, "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thing'".

original Latin or Jean's French.³¹ While very helpful for demonstrating the extent to which Chaucer's *Boece* is a composite text, this practice does have the effect of causing Jean's own interpolations in his *Livres de confort* — interpolations that seem to have been recognised as such by Chaucer — to recede into the background.

The passage of the *Boece* that I will focus on is Metrum 6 of Book 2, in which Philosophy describes the evil life of Nero. This passage is of particular interest because Jean had already imitated it in *Rose*, where Raison uses the emperor as part of her discourse against the goods of Fortune.³² As will be seen, when Chaucer narrates the life of Nero in the Monk's Tale (VII.2463–550), he shows his awareness of this story's existence in Boethius, in Jean's translation, in the *Rose* itself, and perhaps even in his own Middle English *Boece*. These intersecting lines of interaction make it a useful way of exploring how meaning is generated by the relationships between texts.

It is important to recognise, first of all, that Jean, like Chaucer, adds material to his translation of the *Consolatio* to elucidate or amplify its meaning. This can be seen clearly in his translation of 2.m6:

Nouimus quantas dederit ruinas
 urbe flammata patribusque caesis
 fratre qui quondam ferus interempto
 matris effuso maduit cruore
 corpus et uisu gelidum pererrans
 ora non tinxit lacrimis, sed esse
 Censor extincti potuir decoris
 (2.m6.1–7)

[We know what great devastation that man caused
 The city blazing, Senators killed,
 His brother murdered, and his savage hand
 Wet with the blood that from his mother flowed —
 He could gaze on her cold corpse
 And not shed tears
 But coolly criticize her beauty dead.]
 (215)

³¹ See *Riverside*, 1005.

³² The imitation of Boethius is at 6153–220; Nero's death is narrated at 6397–434, and is drawn from Suetonius.

Nous avons bien cogneu com grans domagez *et com grans agraventeurez* fist l'*empereur Neron*. Il fist ardoir la cité de Romme et fist ocirre les senateurs et fist ocirre son frere et *despecier* fist sa mere *par membrez et la fist ouvrir pour veoir le lieu ou il avoit esté conceus* et regarda de toutez pars dehors et dedans le corps tout froit ne onques ne pleura
(2.m6.1–5)

[We knew well what great shames and *what great destructions* the *Emperor Nero* wrought. He had the city of Rome burnt and had the senators killed and had his brother killed and had his mother *torn limb from limb and had her opened so that he could see the place where he had been conceived* and looked all over and inside the body entirely coldly and never cried]

Dedick-Héry's edition of the *Livres de confort*, as can be seen in the quotation above, helpfully italicises those phrases that do not appear in the 'Vulgate' Boethius, a practice I have mirrored in my translation. Minnis has analysed several commentaries on the *Consolatio*, concluding that Nero's desire to view the place of his conception finds analogues in the commentaries of both William of Conches and (perhaps closer) William of Aragon, although elsewhere Jean seems to have relied only on details from William of Conches.³³

Chaucer, we see, largely follows Jean's prose for his own rendering of this metrum:

We han wel knowen how many grete harmes and destrucciouns weren idoon by the emperour Nero. He leet brennen the cite of Rome, and made sleen the senatours; and he cruel whilom sloughe his brothir, and he was made moyst with the blood of his modir (that is to seyn, he leet sleen and slitten the body of his modir to seen wher he was conceived)
(2.m6.1–9)

Since all of Chaucer's material here occurs in either the Vulgate Boethius or in Jean's French, nothing is italicised by the *Riverside* editors to mark it as extrinsic. Yet we see quite clearly where Chaucer is carrying across phrases that are unique to Jean's translation. Like Jean, he specifies 'the emperour Nero' in the first line, and, more importantly, he adds a long phrase explaining why Nero dismembered his mother — to see the place where he was conceived. Crucially, Chaucer seems to have recognised this phrase as something that did not belong to the original Boethian text, because he marks it with his conventional tag for glosses and interpolations, 'that is to seyn'.³⁴

³³ Minnis, 'French and English Traditions', 319–20.

³⁴ Note that the commentary by Nicholas Trevet (a resource drawn upon extensively by Chaucer in the creation of his translation) includes a gloss on these lines. The meaning is similar to Jean's, but the phrasing is different: 'matrem suam occidi fecit ut videret in quo loco in ventre eius iacuit' (*Sources of*

Although Minnis has found analogues for Jean's comments on Nero in twelfth- and thirteenth-century commentaries on the *Consolatio*, and I would not seek to deny that these may be in the background, I would also like to argue that a more proximate source of the long phrase that Dedick-Héry renders in italics in his edition is, in fact, none other than the *Rose*:

comment il mist les feus a Rome
 et fist les senateurs occierre;
 si rot bien quer plus dur que pierre
 quant il fist occierre son frere,
 quant il fist desmembrer sa mere
 por ce que par lui fust veüz
 li leus ou il fu conceüz;
 et puis qu'il la vit desmenbree,
 selonc l'estoire remenbree,
 la beauté des membres juja
 (6160–9)

[how he set fire to Rome and had the senators killed; he once again had a heart much harder than stone when he had his brother killed, when he had his mother dismembered, because he wanted to see in her the place where he was conceived; and then when he saw her dismembered, as the history records, he judged the beauty of her members]

Indeed, Jean's translation of this passage in the *Livres de confort* almost seems to be consciously echoing his own earlier octosyllabic version. The strikingly repetitious syntax of the prose ('fist ocirre [...] fist ocirre [...] despecier fist') recalls the cluster of lexical echoes and the anaphora of his verses ('fist les senateurs occierre [...] quant il fist occierre [...] quant il fist desmembrer'), and the rhyme words 'veüz' and 'conceüz' reappear in the prose version. This passage taps into a fundamental theme in the *Rose*, as Nero comes to represent yet another example of a perverse desire for knowledge that echoes, alarmingly, the scenes of undressing that run through the text as a metaphor for integumental hermeneutics.³⁵

The fact that Chaucer incorporates this line about Nero's desire to see the place of his conception in terms that clearly echo Jean's language led Cipriani to suggest that Chaucer's *Boece* contains echoes of the *Rose*.³⁶ Fansler discounted this suggestion, pointing out that a great deal of Cipriani's possible parallels are merely conventional phrases, or, as in the

the 'Boece', 2.m6.4n, 'he had his mother killed to see in what place in her stomach he had lain'). The linguistic similarities between the French and English are more compelling to my eyes than the looser correspondence in sense found in Trevet's gloss. See Machan, *Sources of the 'Boece'*, 11–2.

³⁵ See Hult, 'Language and Dismemberment', 126.

³⁶ Cipriani, 'Influence of the *Roman de la Rose*', 564–8.

current instance, have their source in Jean's *Livres de confort*; the 'dubiousness' of Cipriani's suggestion was again pointed out by Robinson in his edition.³⁷ However, in an important way, the phrase under consideration here — 'pour veoir le lieu ou il avoit esté conceus' — is from the *Rose*, even if it was derived from a distant analogue in an anterior commentary, and even if it was mediated via Jean's *Confort*. In his *Boece*, Chaucer seems to have recognised it as distinct from the main text, marking it with his 'that is to seyn', while also welcoming it into the range of possible meanings that his translation could accommodate. And when, in the *Monk's Tale*, Chaucer comes to imitate the passage on Nero from the *Rose*, he seems to synthesise the *Rose* with his own vernacular version of Jean's locution from the *Boece*:

He Rome brende for his delicacie;
 The senatours he slow upon a day
 To heere how that men wolde wepe and crie;
 And slow his brother, and by his suster lay.
 His mooder made he in pitous array,
 For he hire wombe slitte to biholde
 Where he conceyved was — so weilaway
 That he so litel of his mooder tolde!
 (VII.2479–86)

While the stanza in the *Monk's Tale* closely follows the *Rose*, it includes details, such as Nero's incest, that do not appear in Jean's poem. Yet Chaucer's use of the verb *slitten* to render 'desmembrer' echoes, more than anything else, the 'slitten' of his own *Boece*, a sense not paralleled in any French or Latin source.

I think that there are two broad conclusions that can be drawn from this complex of intertextual connections. First of all, it reveals something general about medieval textuality, at least as participated in by Jean and Chaucer. While Chaucer's *Boece* distinguishes relatively consistently between authorial and commentarial text with the phrase 'that is to seyn', the very inclusion of diverse glosses suggest that the commentators (and translators) can take a role in the generation of meaning analogous to, perhaps even equal to, that of the author — even when such commentators or translators are drawing from very deeply complex and ironic literary works like the *Rose*. What Chaucer seems to be showing here is his awareness

³⁷ Fansler, *Chaucer and the 'Roman de la Rose'*, 180–2. See also Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 797.

that the meaning of a work is extended through a long tradition of commentary, translation, and imitation. Chaucer's translation of the *Consolatio* is not attempting to recuperate a single original meaning situated in the reconstructed mind of Boethius — although he does seem to have recognised which parts of his sources did not stem from a Boethian original. Rather, the *Boece* suggests Chaucer's perspective on meaning in action, generated by successive and perhaps equally valid agents. The second important conclusion is more specific and more elusive. By incorporating a reference to Nero dismembering his mother in his otherwise 'straight' translation of Boethius, Jean allows, momentarily, the intrusion of a whole series of associations that stem from his *Rose*: the desire for knowledge as a potentially illicit and threatening phenomenon; Nero's dismemberment of his mother as a perversion of the integumental reading that suggests the kinds of intellectual–sexual violence that Philosophy laments at the beginning of Boethius's *Consolatio*. So even in a serious work that presents itself as a devotional project, Jean's translation can still veer momentarily towards a more unstable kind of text, his own *Rose*, that asks much more difficult questions about human desire and how that desire might relate figuratively to the transmission of knowledge. When Chaucer reaches the equivalent point of his translation, he is willing to incorporate the same destabilising notion: that certain kinds of reading, even the very reading we are engaged in with the *Consolatio*, might themselves be a kind of rapacious dismemberment of the text. As the Monk's Tale shows, Chaucer was later able to use Nero's 'slitting' of his mother to evoke precisely this libidinous desire for knowledge that haunts Jean's *Rose*. In this instance, Chaucer places an emphasis on morbid curiosity with a comment that seems to be unique to him: Nero had his senators killed 'To heere how that men wolde wepe and crie' (VII.2481). In the story of Nero's death as told by Suetonius and transmitted by Jean and Chaucer, Nero convinces two peasants to decapitate him rather than face the indignity of having the enraged public desecrate his identifiable body. This curious emphasis on dismemberment — Nero's dismemberment of his mother, his own dismemberment — falls into place alongside another account of decapitation from Roman history; together, these episodes seem to figure Nero's destructive desire to understand his own point of origin together with the reader's desire to

break the self-consistency of a text through a process of hermeneutic extraction that may also be, it is implied, a kind of violent imposition.

MEANING AND DISMEMBERMENT (II): THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE

This second account of an ancient Roman dismemberment occurs in the *Canterbury Tales*. But before turning to the Physician's Tale itself, something must be said about the tale that appears adjacent to it, the Pardoner's Tale. Together these two texts make up Fragment VI, the 'floating fragment' that is not explicitly linked to other tales at its beginning or end (itself a dismemberable unit). The Pardoner's Tale also draws from the *Rose*, and it, too, is concerned with literal and figurative dismemberment. The most obvious connection between the Pardoner's Tale and the *Rose*, as has been observed many times, is the Pardoner himself, who owes much to Jean's Faux-Semblant.³⁸ Although, as friar-confessor, Faux-Semblant offers an anti-clerical satire that is different in inflection from the relic-bearing Pardoner and preacher, their fundamental similarity consists of their disorientating truthfulness about their own deceitfulness. Both are hypocrites who hide their true nature: the Pardoner spits out 'venym under hewe / Of hoolynesse' (VII.421–2), while Faux-Semblant similarly uses metaphors of covering and containment for his own mendacious practice, derived ultimately from the description of the *ypocrita* in Matthew's Gospel. When told that he seems to be a 'sainz hermites', Faux-Semblant replies, 'C'est voirs, mes je suis ypocrites' (11202, 'that is true, but I am a hypocrite'). For both Faux-Semblant and the Pardoner, what is most disorientating is the fact that they reveal their own wrongdoing with extraordinary candidness; they behave in a manner that is precisely unlike what we might expect from a hypocrite. In this respect, both characters embody to some extent the Cretan liar's paradox, and may reflect the late-medieval scholastic taste for impossible logic puzzles, or *insolubilia*.³⁹ Yet the fundamental similarity of Faux-Semblant and the Pardoner signals,

³⁸ See P.M. Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, 2:96-108; Calin, *French Tradition*, 337–46; Jane Chance, "Disfigured Is Thy Face"; Pelen, 'Murder and Immortality'; Marijane Osborn, 'Transgressive Word and Image'.

³⁹ For some suggestive comments on the *insolubilia* (a sub-category of the *sophismata*), see Travis, *Disseminial Chaucer*, 305–6. See also Paul Vincent Spade, *The Medieval Liar*.

perhaps, a deeper affinity between the Pardoner of the *Canterbury Tales* and Jean's *Rose*. When the Host complains to the Pardoner that he wishes he 'had thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of relikes' (VI.952–3), Chaucer suggests both the slippage of meaning between the words *coilles* and *reliques* described by Jean de Meun's *Raison*, but also his awareness of the wider thematic importance of castration in Jean's *Rose*.⁴⁰ In her study of the Pardoner, Carolyn Dinshaw coined the phrase 'eunuch hermeneutics' to describe the kinds of meaning suggested by a 'geldyng or a mare' (I.691) who violates conventional gender categories and in some ways embodies indeterminacy.⁴¹ David Hult picked up on Dinshaw's phrase in his own study of castration and dismemberment in the *Rose*, suggesting that the *Rose* reveals a 'poetics of dismemberment'. This notion offers a compelling way of illuminating not only Chaucer's Pardoner, but also the tale that immediately precedes it, the more rarely examined Physician's Tale.⁴²

Hult's remarkable analysis draws connections between a number of scenes of castration or dismemberment that run through the *Rose*. Jean's preoccupation with castration can be seen not only in the story of Saturn's *coilles*, but also the accounts of the castration of Abelard and Origen, the decapitation of Nero, and, as Hult suggests, the decapitation of Virginia.⁴³ We have already looked at Nero's disordered desire to see his own point of origin and dismember his mother; the story of Virginius decapitating his daughter, as we will see, is what Chaucer uses as his 'source' in the Physician's Tale.⁴⁴ Hult relates these recurrent scenes of castration and dismemberment to the wider question of obscenity and language in the *Rose*, the relation of proper, direct signification to 'improper', figurative representation:

Obliquely, Jean de Meun's writing can be qualified as a poetics of dismemberment, allowing at once for the free play of words in their material sense and, correspondingly, for the assimilation of concrete objects — the very basis of metaphor. The dismemberment of language is only to be regretted when measured

⁴⁰ See Dinshaw, *Sexual Poetics*, 168–70. For a discussion of this passage in relation to the medieval discourse of hermaphroditism, see David Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 226–34.

⁴¹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 156–84.

⁴² For a survey of critical attitudes to the Physician's Tale, see Helen Storm Corsa (ed.), *The Physician's Tale*, 28–41.

⁴³ Hult, 'Language and Dismemberment', 121.

⁴⁴ For the Physician's Tale and the *Rose*, see Kenneth Bleeth, 'The Physician's Tale and Remembered Texts'; Bleeth, 'The Physician's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues*, 535–9; Lee Ramsey, 'The Sentence of It Sooth Is', 165–8; Marc Pelen, 'Murder and Immortality', 9.

against the fullness of an originary language that would have respected semiotic propriety. The resultant release is itself positive insofar as it makes possible figuration in all its forms.⁴⁵

The Tale of Virginia, as it appears in the *Rose*, seems to be a particularly important way of thinking about Hult's 'poetics of dismemberment', because in this narrative Jean alters his source, Livy, to claim that Virginia was decapitated: the Latin history states instead that Virginius plunges the knife into her body.⁴⁶ And it is worth noting that Chaucer, although claiming that the tale is derived from 'Titus Livius' (VI.1), seems to be drawing exclusively from the *Rose*: this should surprise us, especially since Pierre Bersuire's early fourteenth-century translation of the *History of Rome* was an enormously successful work, surviving in over eighty manuscripts.⁴⁷ Yet while Bersuire follows Livy's text to the letter, even his work seems to be caught in the shadow of Jean's poem; in BnF, MS fr. 264, f.91v, the Virginia narrative is introduced by an image of a woman being beheaded, despite Bersuire's text faithfully rendering, a few leaves later, Livy's sense of 'il ficha le coustel parmi le corps de la uierge' (BnF, MS fr. 264, f.93v, 'he plunged the knife into the body of the virgin', fig.9). Once again we see how the influence of Jean's poem can extend in unexpected directions, infiltrating even the texts of classical antiquity with ideas unique to the *Rose*. But it also suggests how Chaucer's choice of 'source' might be a deliberate attempt to explore a set of concerns raised more urgently by Jean's version of Livy than by Livy himself.

⁴⁵ Hult, 'Language and Dismemberment', 122.

⁴⁶ Langlois saw this as an error: 'Il est probable que cette imitation est faite de mémoire, car Jean commet une inexactitude, en disant que Virginius a coupé la tête à sa fille', *Origines et sources*, 118. See Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, 3:48.1 : 'data venia seducit filiam ac nutricem prope Cloacinae ad tabernas quibus nunc novis est nomen atque ibi ab lanio cultro arrepto, "hoc te uno quo possum" ait "modo, filia, in libertatem vindico." pectus deinde puellae transfigit respectansque ad tribunal "te" inquit, "Appi, tuumque caput sanguine hoc consecro."'

⁴⁷ K.V. Sinclair, *The Melbourne Livy*, 16, n.14. There is no edition of Bersuire's Livy.

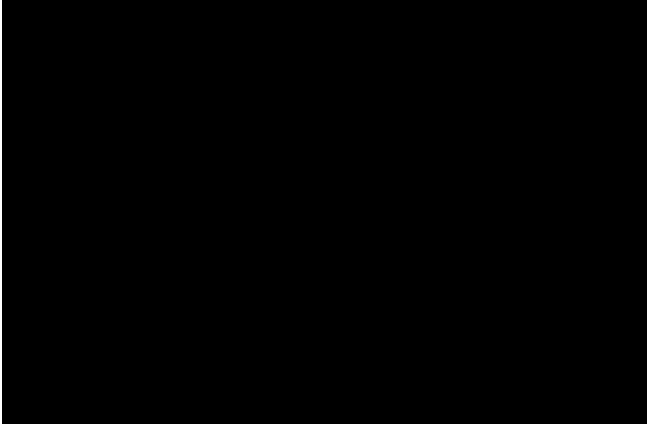


Fig. 9. BnF, MS fr. 264, f.91v.

While I do not agree with all of the details of Hult's groundbreaking essay, his piece identifies something absolutely essential to the mechanics of the *Rose*. The poem can be understood, from one perspective, as the Lover's quest to dismember the *rosier*, to pluck the object of his desire, the *bouton*.⁴⁸ Taking the beloved lady's virginity is thus figured in both Guillaume's and Jean's allegories as an act of removal or depletion. Part of Jean's parody of the figurative conventions of Guillaume's erotic poetry is that when he presents the Lover's consummation at the end of the poem, the literal implications of taking the lady's maidenhead, plucking the rose, are rendered explicit in his brutally bodily depiction of penetrating the hymen.⁴⁹

Se bohourder m'i veïssiez,
 por quoi bien garde i preïssiez,
 d'Herculés vos peüst mambrer
 quant il vous Cacus desmambrer:
 .III. foiz a sa porte asailli,
 .III. foiz hurta, .III. foiz failli,
 .III. foiz s'asist en la valee,
 tous las, por ravoïr s'alenee,
 tant ot souffert peine et travaill.
 (21589–97)

[Should you have seen me jousting there, for which you would have to pay close attention, you would have been able to remember Hercules when he wanted to dismember Cacus: three times he assaulted the door, three times launched himself, three times failed, three times sat down in the valley, completely exhausted, to get his breath back, he had suffered such great pain and hard work.]

⁴⁸ Hult, 'Poetics of Dismemberment', 119.

⁴⁹ For the confused medieval ideas about the intact hymen and other supposed signs of virginity, see Kathleen Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, esp. 17–39.

To figure the act of penetrating a virginal vagina in the language of the heroic violence of Hercules in the *Aeneid* is as absurd as it is alarming,⁵⁰ and no doubt ironises the Lover's high seriousness in his quest; but it also makes available the reading that this *deflowering* is an act of dismemberment — destructive, violent, and in the full sense rapacious.⁵¹ Chaucer, in the Parson's Tale, will later show that he makes the imaginative association between the loss of the maidenhead and the dismemberment of the body.⁵² For Jean, erotic desire and its literature seem to have been inextricably bound up with this idea of dismemberment. No doubt the clearest example of this is his presentation of the castration of Saturn as the birth of Venus (the birth of desire itself).⁵³ But also, more widely, desire seems to be presented as a lack that leads, through the plucking of the rose, to a further lack; erotic poetry is fixated on an ultimate act of dismembering, but also itself dismembered, lame and incomplete. The same idea crops up at the beginning of the *Amores*, where Ovid figures the birth of his own elegiac couplets as an act of figurative dismemberment in which Cupid, the God of Love, steals away the final foot of Ovid's intended hexameters.⁵⁴

par erat inferior versus — rissime Cupido
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.
(1.3–4)

[The second verse was equal — but Cupid, they say, with a laugh stole away one foot.]

The entire Ovidian erotic enterprise, in one available reading, can be seen as dismembered writing, its relationship to epic hexameters one of loss. Naturally this is something that Jean was unable to imitate formally within the constraints of thirteenth-century French prosody, but I do think it informs his understanding of 'love poetry' in the broadest sense. This is perhaps one reason why Jean's poem seems to turn so often on our attempts as readers to undo its obscurities and ambiguities: we are reading a fundamentally warped text, and in so

⁵⁰ See *Aeneid*, 8.230–2.

⁵¹ Some argue that Jean de Meun is presenting an allegorical rape; see Cahoon, 'Raping the *Rose*'.

⁵² 'Another synne of Leccherie is to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede [...] For certes, namoore may maydenhede be restooored than an arm that is smyten fro the body may retourne agayn to wexe.' (*CT*, X.867–70)

⁵³ See Kay, 'The Birth of Venus'.

⁵⁴ Ziolkowski gathers a number of examples from classical and medieval Latin poetry of metaphorical transferences of the terms for various metrical feet, *Grammar of Sex*, 24, n.21.

doing, in pursuing our desire to undress it and ultimately pluck a final meaning from it, we are placed in the position of a warped reader, drawn into an act of violent hermeneutic dismembering. As we look for the promised but absent *glose* of the *Rose*, we find ourselves looking for a meaning that is somehow external to the text before us; in trying to provide that meaning we recognise, and in a sense create, the text's incompleteness. By attempting to provide what makes it whole, we dismember it. This is something like what Derrida seems to have meant by his notion of the *supplement*, or, less remotely, what Marie de France would call the *surplus*.⁵⁵

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, I do not believe that Chaucer had but a single idea of what the *Rose* was or could be, and who knows what slow processes of intellectual fermentation might lie between his reading of the text and his production of the Physician's Tale. But in the sequence of frame and narrative that makes up the Physician's Tale and its closely linked Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, the *Rose* is hugely prevalent: we find a narrative derived from Jean's text about a woman who is saved from deflowering by decapitation, followed by a long prologue by a possible eunuch who is clearly a direct imitation of Jean's Faux-Semblant. This merits close scrutiny. To understand what Chaucer is doing here we need some appreciation of what is going on in this episode of the *Canterbury Tales*, Fragment VI. As narratives, the tales told by the Physician and the Pardoner are generically very similar: they both constitute what we might broadly call 'sermon exempla'.⁵⁶ Both tales are explicitly associated with clerical practices; in praise of his tale the Host tells the Physician that he is 'lyk a prelat' (VI.310), while the Pardoner's claim that his favourite sermon theme is '*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*' (VI.426) is realised by his tale; the Pardoner goes further in suggesting that his sermons include 'ensamples many oon' because 'lewed people loven tales olde' (VI.435–7). Like all exempla, both tales conclude with a narrow and singular moral lesson that commits a violence on the possible meanings opened up by the

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 152–7; Marie de France, *Lais*, 'Prologue', 16.

⁵⁶ For a reading of the Pardoner's Tale in relation to the preaching tradition, see Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 118–35. Minnis does not look at the possibility of the Physician as a preacher or quasi-preacher.

text: ‘Therefore I rede yow this conseil take: / Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake’ (VI.285–6); ‘Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespas, / And ware yow fro the synne of avarice!’ (VI.904–5). Why is the *Rose* spectrally present in a linked pair of moral exempla that seem to advertise their relationship with sermons?

I think that Jean’s *Rose* is in the background here partly because Chaucer is investigating how far meaning can be controlled. He is exploring an idea that is brought into focus by Faux-Semblant, and, as I mentioned in my first chapter, expressed succinctly by Raison (5079–88): even an evil preacher can preach a good sermon. The status of immoral preachers has been thoroughly elucidated by Minnis, whose study of preaching manuals shows that sinful preachers not only were held to be able to deliver efficacious sermons, but that they were positively encouraged to hide their own wrongdoing.⁵⁷ For Jean de Meun, and for Chaucer, who are poets and not preachers, it seems that this discourse is tapped into in order to refocus attention on the irrecoverability of their own authorial intentions. It is clear that the Pardoner is an openly immoral man who tells ‘som moral thyng’ (VI.325), but it is less clear that any obvious moral status can be attributed to the Physician. Nevertheless, his tale focuses on how institutional forms of speech are abused through hidden intentions, and, perhaps even more than in the Pardoner’s Tale, interpretation and its pitfalls are thematically foregrounded.

Angus Fletcher has drawn attention to a number of terms drawn from medieval literary theory in the Physician’s Tale, which are intimately related to the way in which Virginia is presented in the text. While I do not agree with his reading of all the evidence, his conclusions, which I examine in more detail below, are compelling.⁵⁸ This tendency of the Physician’s Tale to draw on terms generally associated with textual interpretation is perhaps most striking in the word *sentence*, which is clustered five times in the space of fifty lines, and in these occurrences moves through its range of possible meanings. Chief amongst these

⁵⁷ Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 40–8. Note that although Minnis reveals a tradition in which the disguising of sin was encouraged, he adduces several examples of preachers insisting on the need for *rectitudo intentionis* (126). In contrast to this, Jean’s Raison’s claim that ‘bone predicacion / vient bien de male entencion’ (5083–4) seems rather more controversial.

⁵⁸ Fletcher, ‘The Sentencing of Virginia’.

is its legal sense: Appius deceitfully refuses to pronounce a ‘diffynytif sentence’ (VI.172) in the absence of Virginius, although later we hear his fateful ‘sentence’ (VI.204) that Virginia must be taken away from her father. But the legal sense is already shading into its hermeneutic meaning, evoking Genius’s promise to deliver a ‘diffinitive santance’ on the text that contains him in the *Rose* (19474). Virginius then pronounces his own ‘sentence’ (VI.224) on his daughter; although outside the formal setting of the court of law, his judgement that his daughter must die rather than be sexually disgraced uses the same language as the judgement passed by Appius. The narrator also recounts the legal writ sent under false pretences by Appius’s accomplice Claudius; twice we are told that we shall hear ‘the sentence of it’ (VI.177) and ‘al the sentence’ (VI.190). In these instances, Chaucer seems to be playing with the strangely broad range of meanings of the word *sentence*: both the literal meaning of a passage or text, and the deeper significance, meaning or moral of a text.⁵⁹ We are offered the ‘sentence’ of Claudius’s writ, but of course its deeper sentence or significance is hidden under its false pretences, and at the same time it prefigures and brings about the two alternative sentences (rape or death) that will be passed upon Virginia.

A second clustered term, less frequently deployed but equally important, is *ensample*. The Physician’s Tale begins by describing Virginia’s beauty; the narrator imagines Nature expressing her pride at having created in Virginia a work that cannot be imitated by artifice, not by Zeuxis, Appelles, or Pygmalion. This passage is an imitation of a passage from Jean’s *Rose* in which it is Nature herself who cannot be depicted by these great artists (16146–16155). The mention of Zeuxis is particularly telling: in the *Rose* he attempts and fails to reconstruct an image of the perfection of Nature by assembling five beautiful maidens as exemplars:

qui, por fere l’ymage ou temple,
de .v. puceles fist example
(16157–8)

[who, to make the image in the temple, took five maidens as his exemplar]

⁵⁹ *MED*, s.v., *sentence* (n.), 5(e), 5(f).

Nature cannot be imitated by any human artifice, and even if the creations of Nature are used as an exemplar, what is copied from these will always be subordinate to Nature herself, at two removes. The narrator then describes Virginia's virtue, before beginning a strangely light-hearted digression; he advises the guardians and parents of children not to lead them astray. First he deals with old 'maistresses' who govern 'lordes doghtres' (VI.72–3); they are appointed either because they have aged virtuously, or because they 'knowen wel ynough the olde daunce' (VI.79), and by their experience of what is bad are able to direct their charges towards what is good. This curious evocation of both La Vieille advising Bel Accueil and the wider doctrine of knowing the good through the bad — 'contreres choses' — again cements the importance of the *Rose* as a subtext here. The suggestion seems to be that Virginia's perfection is such that she will need no experienced teacher, like Pandarus, to show her how 'By his contrarie is every thyng declared' (*TC*, 1.617). The narrator then states that other young people are at risk of following the poor 'ensample' (VI.97) of their parents; this exemplarity of deeds is contrasted with an exemplarity of words, as the narrator delivers his own two-line 'ensample' (VI.103): 'Under a shephere softe and necligent / The wolf hath many a sheep and lamb torent' (VI.101–2). These clustered notions of the exemplarity of artistic reproduction, of action, and of the *exemplum* as an utterance or text prepare the way for a striking evocation of Virginia, which, according to Fletcher, is the only point in the *Canterbury Tales* at which a character is compared to a book. For the young women who observe her, Virginia herself becomes an exemplary text:⁶⁰

For in hir lyvyng maydens myghten rede,
As in a book, every good word or ded
That longeth to a mayden vertuous,
She was so prudent and so bounteous.
(VI.107–10)

Virginia's impossible originary wholeness is ruptured when her own father decapitates her; the alternative was another rupture and figurative dismemberment at the hands of Appius. The signals that this process should be read as on one level figurative of an interpretative act, of an

⁶⁰ Fletcher, 'The Sentencing of Virginia', 303.

interaction between *ensample* and *sentence*, are strong. Fletcher suggests a compelling reading:

While her relationships to hierarchy and governance, to history and fable, remain fluid and ambiguous, Virginia flourishes, becoming as a book. When she is sentenced, however, her relationships to genre, authority, and *auctoritas* become fixed, and she is extinguished.⁶¹

In this reading, the attempt to impose a ‘diffynytyf sentence’ on Virginia is what destroys her; an act of interpretation that is an act of dismemberment. The narrator’s own efforts to impose a ‘sentence’ on his tale, ‘Heere may men seen how synne hath his merite’ (VI.277), is an analogously damaging manoeuvre, and Harry Bailey’s divergent interpretation, which shifts the focus from Appius’s punishment to Virginia’s suffering, clearly points to the limitations of a singular moralised reading.⁶²

To suggest that the Physician’s Tale contains elements of meta-textual self-reflection is not to override the fact that it is also a story about male violence against women, about masculine social structures through which male desire and will is channelled and within which women are shown to be powerless. Perhaps it is the incongruity of these two elements of the tale that have caused many critics to sense that it is in some ways a failure.⁶³ What is disquieting about the tale might not be so much that the dismemberment of a woman is also figuratively an interpretative act, but that Chaucer does not quite believe in either the perfectly whole exemplary woman or the perfectly whole exemplary text. The impossible fullness of Virginia is answered by an incomplete and radically indeterminate figure who also stems from the *Rose*, the Pardoner, and whether through his pessimism or his delight in the possibilities for play, it is in this direction that Chaucer’s literary affinities seem to tend. The transition from an impossible wholeness (disrupted by the attempt to impose a final reading) to an incompleteness that recognises the illicit pleasures of plurality is signalled tellingly by the

⁶¹ Fletcher, ‘The Sentencing of Virginia’, 306. Fletcher goes on to claim that the Host’s variant interpretation of the tale reopens the continual reinterpretation and reproduction of the text, 307.

⁶² See Anne Middleton, ‘The *Physician’s Tale* and Love’s Martyrs’, 13; Ramsey, ‘The Sentence of It Sooth Is’, 196. Note Gillespie’s suggestion that ‘complaints of mistreated women in Chaucer are often also the complaints of texts (and perhaps authors) who feel themselves misused or misread’, in ‘Allegory, Allegoresis, and the Erotics of Reading’, 247.

⁶³ See Ramsey, ‘The Sentence of It Sooth It’, 185–6 for a summary of negative attitudes to the tale.

adjective with which Harry Bailley chooses to praise the Physician before turning to the Pardoner:

So moot I thee, thou art a propre man
(VI.309)

AUTHORSHIP AND THE *ROMANCE OF THE ROSE* (I): *THE HOUSE OF FAME*

With the exception of the *House of Fame*, one conventional mechanism for establishing authorship of a text — that is, the narratorial ‘I’ naming itself as the author — does not occur in Chaucer’s writings.⁶⁴ Even the *Book of the Duchess*, now widely understood to be an occasional piece in memory of John of Gaunt’s wife, Blanche of Lancaster, is internally anonymous. It is worth stressing the strangeness of this fact. The naming of both patron and author is central to the genre of the occasional poem, and is demonstrated most strikingly, perhaps, by Machaut naming both himself and Jean, duc de Berry in the same cryptogram at the end of the *Fonteinne amoureuse*. Other elegies of the period written in French — even other elegies for Blanche and her mother Philippa — as Butterfield points out, ‘have an explicit public role which *The Book of the Duchess* lacks.’⁶⁵ While Chaucer does name John of Gaunt, obliquely, he remains silent on the question of his own authorial identity precisely in the one place where we might expect him to reveal it. What we find instead is a strange emphasis on anonymity, ventriloquism, and a world of speech in which the ability to participate in discourse is more important than any externally ratified authority. When Juno’s messenger comes to the God of Sleep and is asked ‘Who clepeth ther?’ (185), his response does not point towards any concrete identity: ‘“Hyt am I,” quod this messenger’ (186). The conceit of the fiction, of course, is one of recognition: Morpheus knows Juno’s messenger by sight or by sound. But the validity of this sense of recognition is later called into question. When Morpheus responds to Juno’s request to bring news of Ceyx’s death to Alcione, Chaucer deviates from his sources in both Ovid and Machaut’s *Fonteinne amoureuse*:

⁶⁴ Although the Man of Law discusses Chaucer and his works, he does not imply that Chaucer is present among the pilgrims (II.46–89); in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* the narrator’s works are listed (including *Troilus and Criseyde*), but he is not given any name. The Prologue is discussed below.

⁶⁵ Butterfield, ‘Lyric and Elegy’, 38.

Chaucer's Morpheus does not transform himself into Ceyx, nor bring his image to Alcione in a dream.⁶⁶ Instead, gruesomely, Morpheus picks up the corpse from the ocean floor and, following Juno's instructions to 'crepe into the body' (144), brings it to Alcione's bedside to speak in Ceyx's voice:

And stood right at hyr beddes fet,
 And called hir ryght as she het
 By name, and sayde, 'My swete wyf,
 Awake!
 (199–202)

Alcione recognises Ceyx, but she is mistaken; the king's dubious reassurance, 'I am but ded' (204), is a dramatic fiction spoken by Morpheus. It is an untruth; not because Ceyx is not dead, but because the 'I' is not Ceyx. All this lends a particular weight to the only clue that the narrator gives us to his own identity, as he sits and reads the story of Ceyx and Alcione:

trewley I, that made this book,
 Had such pittee and such rowthe
 To rede hir sorwe
 (96–8)

On the one hand, this moment suggests that we should recognise Chaucer as this poem's narrator, by the simple fact of knowing him, as a patron might recognise his client. But at the same time, there is the suggestion that a poetic 'I' can never be easily reduced to a singular historical identity, and that if we understand this voice to be inhabited by Chaucer we might be committing the same error as Alcione.

Although Machaut was already toying with the truth and falsehood of narratorial identity in his works, largely inspired by the *Rose*, Chaucer's attitude to the expression of authorial identity seems closer yet to the radical contingency of Jean's narrator. Indeed, the unique and unsettling episode of Morpheus 'creeping into' the body of Ceyx in the *Book of the Duchess* probably finds its closest literary analogue in Jean de Meun inhabiting the fictive narratorial body of the dead Guillaume de Lorris ('Vez ci Guillaume,' as the God of Love says of the narrator to his retinue, in a poem written forty years after Guillaume's death). For Chaucer, the relationship of his authorial identity to the meaning he produces is of enormous

⁶⁶ cf. *Metamorphoses*, 11.650–5; Machaut, *La Fonteinne amoureuse*, 658–66, in *Oeuvres*, 3:143–244.

importance, and is refracted through Jean in important ways. The key site of these ideas in Chaucer's works is the only poem in which the narrator has a name: the *House of Fame*.

The *House of Fame* is Chaucer's most elaborate and complex engagement with his own authorial self-presentation, and the relationship between the meaning of an utterance and the intentions of its speaker. Important interventions from Martin Irvine, Piero Boitani, Vincent Gillespie, and Suzanne Conklin Akbari have brought into focus the extent to which this work plays with medieval theories of language and meaning, and ideas about authorial responsibility for the control of that meaning.⁶⁷ An attempt to understand Chaucer's attitudes to authorship must take this text into account; it is my contention that the attitudes expressed in the *House of Fame* reveal a deep affinity with Jean de Meun's authorial project.⁶⁸

The *House of Fame* begins by placing profound emphasis on the contingent nature of dream interpretation, and by extension the interpretation of texts. Amplifying the reference to 'Macrobes' that begins the *Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris, Chaucer opens the *House of Fame* with a long Macrobian reflection on the different species of dreams, itself drawn from a later point in the *Rose* (18467–84). He jumbles together Macrobius's dream categories, ultimately expressing pessimism or doubt about his own ability to distinguish between authoritative, truth-laden dreams ('avision', 'revelacion', 'oracles') and those that are misleading, warped, and false ('fantome'). The analogy between dream interpretation and textual interpretation, so important to the *Rose*, is clear, and is brought into particular focus by the poem's 'invocation', where the narrator prays to the God of Sleep that his work — 'My sweven' (79) — should not be misinterpreted.⁶⁹

And sende hem al that may hem plese,
That take hit wel and skorne hyt noght,
Ne hyt mysdemen in her thought

⁶⁷ Marin Irvine, 'Medieval Grammatical Theory'; Piero Boitani, *World of Fame*; Vincent Gillespie, 'Compact Imaginations in Chaucer and Medieval Literary Theory'; Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 205–10.

⁶⁸ See also John Finlayson, 'The *Rose* and Chaucer's Narrators', esp. 200–6 for *House of Fame*.

⁶⁹ Sheila Delaney notes how, in this poem, 'the process of dreaming becomes nearly synonymous with the creative act', *Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*, 44; see also Gillespie, 'Compact Imaginations', 26–7.

Thorgh malicious entencion.
(90–3)

The fact that this use of the tradition of dream interpretation to reflect upon textual hermeneutics is drawn largely from the *Rose* is made particularly clear by the reference to Croesus that concludes the invocation. The narrator says that those who misjudge or misinterpret his poem, who ‘Mysdeme hyt’ (97), should suffer the same fate as Croesus:

Lo, with such a conclusion
As had of his avision
Cresus, that was kyng of Lyde,
That high upon a gebet dyde.
(103–6)

In this unmistakable echo of Jean’s *Rose*, Chaucer signals his participation in an approach heralded by Jean de Meun: meaning can be dangerous, can slip out of the control of its authors, and interpretation itself can be a highly charged and threatening act. It is clear that Chaucer is drawing from the *Rose* here, rather than going back to Jean’s own original source, the brief reference to Croesus in Boethius, *Consolatio*, 2.pr2.11. This is shown not only by the use of ‘Lyde’ for Lydia by both poets in rhyming position (*HF*, 105; *RR*, 6461), but also by the reference to the ‘gebet’ (*HF*, 106). The gallows are not mentioned by Boethius, nor indeed is Phanie’s involvement — it is Jean’s innovation to have Croeus’s daughter correctly gloss the tree as a ‘gibet’ (6517). More broadly, these echoes of the *Rose* shift the focus onto the dreamer and his subjective interpretation of this dream of questionable authority, producing what David Aers has called ‘a dynamic world of conflicted interests and multiple viewpoints where no one can even claim access to an absolute and impersonal viewpoint, from which to issue timelessly valid “authoritative” statements.’⁷⁰

Chaucer begins his poem, then, with a reflection on interpretation heavily influenced by Jean’s text. But when this strategy is brought into close contact with a sustained reflection on authorship, how the author controls (or fails to control) meaning, Chaucer also reveals a deep affinity with Jean’s self-naming strategies in the *Rose*. Before looking at Chaucer’s

⁷⁰ Aers, ‘Authority, the Knower and the Known’, 8. See also Jacqueline T. Miller, ‘Authority and Authorship’, esp. 95–6.

striking authorial signature in the *House of Fame*, however, it is important to explore briefly the wider reflections on authorial afterlives that the poem contains.

Piero Boitani's *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* situates the *House of Fame* in the context of European discourses on fame, glory, and vainglory. With a particular focus on Boccaccio and Petrarch, Boitani examines Chaucer's representation of fame before making the important suggestion that the *House of Fame* also reflects Chaucer's engagements with medieval theories of signification.⁷¹ But while Boitani's detailed analysis of everything from Old Testament reflections on *gloria* to Machaut and Deschamps discussing *renommé* is enormously useful, it is striking that Boitani simply does not address the *Rose*.⁷² The significance of the *Rose* for Chaucer's poem is clearly enormous, and it is Jean's self-naming — a self-inscription in a literary tradition whose very grounds he calls into question — that colours Chaucer's signature in the *House of Fame*. This self-representation is inextricable from Chaucer's wider meditations on meaning and interpretation.

Fame's house — a literary space imitated and amplified from the allegorical dwelling of *Fama* in the *Metamorphoses* — is built on a foundation of ice on which 'famous folkes names fele' (1137) are inscribed. Some of them are melting away, however, and have become illegible:

But wel unnethes koude I knowe
Any lettres for to rede
Hir names by
(1140–3)

Earlier in this thesis, I argued that Jean de Meun names himself in the context of an Ovidian reflection on fame, reputation, or *nomen*, which literalises Ovid's claims to participate in a continuous literary tradition by implying that Ovid's Roman predecessors have become merely names — *nomina* unmoored from any historical referent by the processes of death and literary oblivion. I suggested that Jean plays with playing with the literalisation of *nomen* that occurs in Book II of Boethius's *Consolatio*:

⁷¹ Boitani, *World of Fame*, 208–16. Martin Irvine arrived at similar conclusions in an article published just after Boitani's book, 'Medieval Grammatical Theory'.

⁷² Boitani's single, suggestive, comment on the *Rose* is that a fourteenth-century French tradition in which fame was rejected as vainglory was influenced by Jean de Meun, *World of Fame*, 126.

Signat superstes fama tenuis pauculis
 Inane nomen litteris.
 (2.m7.17–8)

[What little fame is left of them — an empty name in a few letters.]
 (my translation)

By depicting the *nomina* (the names and the fames) of figures of the past melting away, Chaucer likewise seems to be tapping into these ideas, problematising fame, reputation or *nomen* by revealing that it, too, exists in language; after death and the passage of time reputation becomes an empty signifier, a *nomen* with no *res*.

The *House of Fame* is the only poem of Chaucer's in which the narrator has a name; in this case, 'Geffrey' (729). The name is casually revealed by the speech of the eagle (a parodic or at least deflated version of Dante's vision of the eagle in *Purgatorio*): unlike Dante, Geffrey does not reveal his name in a foregrounded, carefully stage-managed moment.⁷³ It is a strange irony that the poem that most aggressively calls into question the very basis and value of fame in Chaucer's canon is the only poem to inscribe his authorial ownership of the text in this way.⁷⁴ I would argue that, in a lesson learnt largely from Jean's *Rose*, Chaucer gives his narrator his own name in an attempt to implicate himself, his writings, and the very poem we are reading in the kinds of linguistic instability that the *House of Fame* explores. The most remarkable scene in which the issues of self-naming are explored occurs when the narrator has entered the House of Fame itself. When asked by an anonymous figure if he has come to seek fame, and what his name is, the narrator refuses to reveal his identity:

⁷³ cf. *Purgatorio*, 9.19–33, 30.55. All quotations and translations of Dante are from *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and tr. Charles Singleton. For Chaucer's use of Dante here see Simpson, 'Astripetam Aquilam', 2–9; Robert Edwards, *Dream of Chaucer*, 102–6. Much has been written more generally about Chaucer's attitude to Dante's self-presentation: Boitani suggests that Chaucer approached him genuine humility and respect in 'What Dante Meant to Chaucer', 124, although in *World of Fame*, 90, he hints at a more ambivalent relationship. Cooper suggests that Chaucer was 'fascinated and appalled, in roughly equal measure', 'Four Last Things', 42. Gillespie presents Chaucer's reaction against Italian poetics in stronger terms, 'Allegory, Allegoresis', 246, n.35; 'Compact Imaginations', 32–3. Nick Havely, meanwhile, points out both Chaucer's complex and potentially conflicted relationship to Dante and, at the same time, Dante's own less widely acknowledged ambivalences towards fame, 'Dante, Fame and Infamy', esp. 48–9. A broad range of critical responses to Chaucer's attitude to Dante in the *House of Fame* are summarised by William T. Rossiter, 'Chaucer Joins the *Schiera*', 29–30.

⁷⁴ For Chaucer and fame more generally see Boitani, *World of Fame*; Mary C. Flannery, *Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame*, ch.2; and the major recent collection by Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall (eds.), *Chaucer and Fame*.

Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
(1876–7)

One of the most wonderfully bizarre aspects of Fame's palace in the *House of Fame* is that it is inhabited not by people but by utterances: 'there lyves body nys / In al that hous that yonder ys' (1063–4). The sounds of spoken language that make their way to Fame's palace take on the appearance of those that 'spake the word', so much so that you would believe it was them in body.⁷⁵ Thus, although 'Geffrey' wonders whether he is transported through the heavens 'in body or in gost' (981), he is essentially different to the other figures he meets, who are all language, all utterance. The suggestion that they might be clothed in 'red or black', meanwhile, may hint that these visible utterances include written language, books.⁷⁶ Like Dante's living narrator moving amongst spirits in the *Commedia*, Chaucer's narrator is an exception, a self moving among sounds. Chaucer's refusal to self-name in the *House of Fame* seems, indeed, to deliberately invert a similar episode from the *Commedia*. When, in *Purgatorio*, the living narrator is asked by two spirits who he is, he responds with a refusal to self-name, subtly but crucially different to what we find in the *House of Fame*:

dirvi ch' i' sia, saria parlare indarno,
chè 'l nome mio ancor molto non suona
(14.20–21)

[To tell you who I am would be to speak in vain, for my name as yet makes no great sound.]
(14.20–21; my emphasis)⁷⁷

Dante does not reject the concept of fame accruing to his named authorial persona, instead he postpones it. The moment of his self-naming comes later: it is Beatrice who names him; the narrator reports it 'di necessità' (30.63). This is also precisely the moment when Virgil, the representative of classical *auctoritas*, disappears from the poem (30.49–50). At the point at which Dante's fame becomes great enough for his name to be announced, he supplants his

⁷⁵ Note Boitani's suggestion that this might reflect Chaucer's connection to the wider problems of signification and meaning explored by the *modistae*; *World of Fame*, 213.

⁷⁶ This passage is discussed by Carruthers in *The Book of Memory*, 225. The implications of this passage have been widely extended by Alexandra Gillespie in a paper at the 2014 New Chaucer Society Congress, 'What is "clothed in red or blak" in *The House of Fame*?'

⁷⁷ It is interesting to see that Dante, like Chaucer, suggests a relationship between fame as sound and fame as reputation.

auctor: in this model, the vernacular poet usurps his Latin precedent, but usurpation becomes possible only through the achievement of contemporary fame. Dante may well have learnt this self-authorisation from Jean de Meun; yet where Jean's self-naming is ironic, troubling, and dislocating, Dante dramatises his own ascent into a stable realm of fame — a fame propagated by the sound of his own name (*nome mio*) and playing on the double sense of Latin *nomen*. Chaucer, by contrast, seems to deflate this high seriousness, and appears as 'someone who instinctively shies away from those absolutes necessary for the creation of *auctoritas*'.⁷⁸

By undermining Dante in this way, Chaucer reveals the risks associated with fame and self-naming: he suggests, through the eagle's *ad absurdum* materialism, that the sound of language, through which literary reputation is propagated, may be nothing more than 'eyr ybroken' (765). Helen Cooper has influentially argued for a redating of the *House of Fame*, situating it later in Chaucer's career, and possibly after the composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁷⁹ Extending this argument, Cooper suggests that when the narrator sees a figure called 'Englysh Gaufride' (1470) holding up the fame of Troy, that Chaucer is referring to himself, the author of *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁸⁰ This would be a radical insistence on Chaucer's authorial identity, even if it takes place in a poem in which the arbitrary contingencies of fame are explored. But the very fact that it seems impossible to finally resolve who this 'Englysh Gaufride' might be demonstrates with particular clarity the very instability of worldly fame that Chaucer is exploring here. While this moment in Fame's house may well be a coded authorial signature, it must be seen as a deliberately contingent and elusive one — especially when the rather over-crowded pillar holding up the fame of Troy is also occupied by an author like 'Lollius'.

⁷⁸ Minnis, 'De Vulgari Auctoritate', 49. See also Simpson, 'Astripetam Aquilam', 17. Fyler discusses Dante and Chaucer from this perspective in *Language and the Declining World*, 139–54.

⁷⁹ Cooper, 'Four Last Things', 58–9, 63–5.

⁸⁰ One possible candidate for 'Englyssh Gaufride' is Geoffrey de Vinsauf, usually known as 'Galfridus Anglicus' in manuscripts, and referred to as 'Gaufred' by Chaucer in *CT*, VII.3347, where Chaucer describes his elegy on an English king, Richard Lionheart. This Geoffrey, however, writes no history of Troy.

If Jean plays with the possibilities of *nomen* in the context of a meditation on authorial death, the reverse side of this coin is a meditation on birth, on reproduction, and the problematic relationship between artificial human creativity and the natural process of generation. If Jean's God of Love presents a picture of literary inheritance that is, from one perspective, as potentially sterile as the disordered desire of which he is the greatest exponent, Genius suggests (albeit problematically) a redeemable way of harnessing that desire in licit reproduction. In one of the most subtle and sensitive analyses of Chaucer's relationship to the *Rose*, Winthrop Wetherbee suggests that both visions of love in the *Rose* — the Garden of Deduit and the Park of the Lamb — are ultimately limited.⁸¹ Wetherbee suggests that Chaucer explores precisely this contradiction in the *Troilus*. I am broadly sympathetic to Wetherbee's reading of the *Rose*, and, as far as the *Troilus* is concerned, Chaucer's response to it. One of the ways in which Jean makes available an ironic reading of Genius's seemingly straight-faced encouragement of enthusiastic human sexual activity is through the alterations he makes to the figure of Genius as received from Alain de Lille. In Alain's *De planctu Naturae*, the processes of Nature are always haunted by an explicit threat of deviance. When his hand gets tired, Genius himself can lapse from depicting the true forms of Nature with his pen into a 'falsigraphia' or pseudography (18.9). In this scene, which concludes Alain's poem, Genius is attended by two maidens. On one side is Veritas, who was not 'spawned by the lustful itch of Aphrodite' (18.10). On the other side, however, is Falsitas. Ugly and wearing tattered rags, she waits to 'attack the painting of Truth' and reduce anything Veritas creates into 'formless deformity' (18.11). This interaction between Genius and his two handmaidens produces virtuous and vicious figures from history: Hercules and Cato, or Sinon and Ennius (18.8–9). It is difficult to know how to interpret Genius's act of writing or drawing in this section; perhaps, as Chance Nitzsche suggests, 'it symbolizes the process by which the soul, celestial part of man, is united with flesh',⁸² but his pen and parchment, along with the threat of

⁸¹ Wetherbee sees 'an opposition that enhances the meaning of both perspectives and at the same time qualifies it rigorously in the light of an implied higher truth of which both *Amors* and Genius fall short', *Chaucer and the Poets*, 64.

⁸² Chance Nitzsche, *Genius Figure*, 97.

falsigraphia, clearly parallel the writing of Venus described earlier in the poem in an obvious allegory for human sexual activity (10.2).⁸³ Perhaps Alain is trying to suggest that the metaphysical process of ensoulment is problematically bound up with the biological act of coition; positioned at the end of the poem, the activities of Alain's Genius do seem to echo the twin *genii* of human generation described at the end Bernard's *Cosmographia* (14.165–6). Thus, in the *Rose*, Jean's Genius, who blithely encourages sexual reproduction as the path to salvation, seems to be ironically unaware of his own contingency as voiced by Alain de Lille, and his close relationship with both textual untruth and sexual deviancy ('Aphrodite's itch').

In the closing sequence of the *House of Fame*, the narrator, having refused to give his identity to the nameless figure who demands it, is flown by his eagle into the House of Rumour, an enormous gyrating wicker structure. There he sees 'tidynges' grow in size as they are passed from speaker to speaker, until eventually they attempt to burst out into the world. Yet when a lie and a truth both try to leave at the same time, they mingle together, so that 'fals and soth compounded / Together fle for oo tydyngge' (2108–9). Several scholars have pointed out that the *House of Fame*, as a poem of cosmic ascent, echoes or alludes to several Neoplatonic Latin poems such as Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* or the *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* of Martianus Capella (the 'Marcian' mentioned at 985).⁸⁴ In a fascinating article, Joseph Grennen argues that Chalcidius's translation of the *Timaeus* is also an important and deeply buried subtext; he compares, to take one example, the wicker House of Rumour to Plato's figure of the turbulent winnowing basket that receives matter.⁸⁵ Chaucer's presentation of the creation of utterances of 'fals and soth compounded' seems to echo yet another tributary of the Neoplatonic tradition — the conclusion of Alain's *De planctu*, where Genius's activity is diverted in different directions by the intrusions of Veritas and Falsitas. But if the tradition of cosmic poetry (including perhaps Dante) is buried in the background of the *House of Fame*, all of these echoes are filtered through the ironising prism of the *Rose*. If Jean de Meun uses the notion of sexual and textual creation borrowed from Alain de Lille to

⁸³ *ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁴ See Dronke, 'Chaucer and the Medieval Latin Poets, Part A', 161–4.

⁸⁵ Grennen, 'Chaucer and Chalcidius', 247–8; see also Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 205.

explore the value of literary creativity and its relation to human reproduction, Chaucer presents instead a world of reproduction that is absolutely abstracted, disembodied, and sexless. Chaucer insists upon the unnaturalness of what is described in the House of Rumour, evoking, only to dismiss, both the ‘Chartrian’ tradition of allegories of Nature and creation as well as the high spiritual seriousness of Dante’s *Inferno* (3.56–7) as he looks upon the ‘congregacioun / Of folk’ (2034–5):

That, certys, in the world nys left
So many formed be Nature,
Ne ded so many a creature
(2038–40)

The narrator is outside the realm of natural creation, in a place where all that is produced and reproduced is language. What looks like a turning away from the realm of literature to the realm of reality in fact remains focused on how reality is represented: ‘not reality as such, as it *exists* in the sublunary world, or as it *is* in the hyperuranian universe of being, but as it is *told*.’⁸⁶ It is not so much a debasement of the earlier poetic traditions as a shift of focus from the created world to human creation:

For may we not regard the *Hous of Fame* also as a ‘creation myth,’ explaining, with murderous prolixity and mock solemnity, to be sure, how ‘fames’ [...] come into being and fade away — make up, that is to say, a world of becoming, of generation and corruption, according to the operation of principles appropriate to Fama as Plato’s principles are appropriate to the work of the *optifex*.⁸⁷

From this perspective, the *absence* of sexuality from the *House of Fame* seems to be an important issue. Why is that, in a poem that begins in the Temple of Venus, in a poem where an eagle guide promises to escort the narrator to hear ‘tydynges / Of Loves folk’ (644–5), in a poem that ends with a press of people rushing to hear a ‘man of gret auctoritee’ discourse upon nothing other than ‘love-tydynges’ (2143), the whole question of licit and illicit desire itself appears to be almost entirely absent, other than in a ekphrastic description of a brass plaque displaying in text or image the story of Dido and Aeneas? The House of Rumour itself is called ‘that Domus Dedaly / That Laboryntus cleped ys’ (1920-1), a term that has sparked

⁸⁶ Boitani, *World of Fame*, 209–10.

⁸⁷ Grennen, ‘Chaucer and Chalcidius’, 245.

very interesting comment from Boitani in particular.⁸⁸ But while on the one hand the Labyrinth suggests complexity and mystifying interpretative obscurity (as in the *Consolatio*, 2.pr12), this great example of Daedalus's genius also carries other associations. The labyrinth was constructed to house the Minotaur, the monstrous and dangerous product of Pasiphae's illicit desire for sexual union with a bull, a desire that was realised by one of Daedalus's other great works of artifice: the wooden heifer Pasiphae used to facilitate her bestial sex-act.⁸⁹ My point here is not that the *House of Fame* is 'really' a poem about sex. But where Jean de Meun uses a whole realm of ideas about natural and artificial creativity and reproduction to reflect upon the value or emptiness of his own activities as an author, Chaucer instead sets his most profound reflections on the nature and value of authorship in a realm of pure free-wheeling discourse, completely abstracted from the question of natural creativity (that is, reproduction). In this respect, and in this poem, at least, Chaucer seems to imply a particularly radical skepticism about the possibility of transmitting any concrete aspect of his self through writing, when utterances are always an alloy of truth and fiction, when the actions of Fame are as fickle and unpredictable as Fortune, and when the text itself, finally, is open to the misreading of those who might 'mysdemen' it.

AUTHORSHIP AND THE *ROMANCE OF THE ROSE* (II): CHAUCER'S ENGLISH *ROSE* AND THE PROLOGUE TO THE *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN*

Deschamps's famous ballade to Chaucer not only names him as the 'grand translateur' of the *Rose* (11, 17), but presents him as the founder of an English community of writers who approach the dignity of classical *auctoritas*, creating a garden for those 'qui font pour eulx auctorisier' (19, 'who write in order to authorise themselves').⁹⁰ Deschamps seems to be figuring Chaucer as instigating a cultural transition in England from 'making' to *poetria* (note

⁸⁸ Boitani, *World of Fame*, esp. ch.6, 'The Cave and the Labyrinth'.

⁸⁹ The story is mentioned in passing several times in Ovid, *Met.* 8.132, 9.736. Ovid also discusses Pasiphae at length as the type of female libidinousness in *Ars am.* 1.295–340.

⁹⁰ All quotations are from Deschamps, *Oeuvres*; this ballade is at 2.138–40. See the discussion in Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries*, 248–54; Wallace, *Premodern Places*, 48–61, reworking the earlier 'Chaucer and Deschamps'; Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 143–51; Downes, 'Chaucer's French Fame', 127–34.

his use of the verb *faire* in ‘font’).⁹¹ But, as Suzanne Akbari has pointed out, Deschamps also uses the telling metaphor of insemination to describe Chaucer’s literary activity: ‘et qui as / Semé les fleurs et planté le rosier’ (9, ‘and you have sown the flowers and planted the rosebush’).⁹² Although there is no doubt something backhanded in Deschamps’s compliments to Chaucer,⁹³ it is also clear that he is playing with, and presumably expecting Chaucer to recognise, the common association of literary and biological production.

The co-occurrence of a prominent external reference to *Troilus and Criseyde* in Usk’s *Testament of Love*, along with Chaucer’s own reference to it in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* led Pearsall to remark that ‘the *Troilus* was the means through which Chaucer finally established his reputation as a poet’.⁹⁴ This is highly plausible, but it begs a very important question: what about the other work that, as we have seen, receives a prominent external reference in the ballade of Deschamps, and, alongside the *Troilus*, is lent particular emphasis in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*?

For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
That is an heresy ayeins my lawe,
And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
And of Creseyde thou hast seyde as the lyst,
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.
(F.328–34)

These words are uttered by an angry God of Love as he rebukes the narrator in a scenario that combines elements from both Machaut’s *Jugement du Roy de Navarre* and the *Rose* itself.⁹⁵ But what these lines imply, when taken alongside Deschamps’s lyric, is that in the early career of a writer for whom no contemporary manuscripts survive, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the translation of the *Rose* have equal claim to be Chaucer’s most significant and most famous work. With the absence of any evidence for dating the translation other than the

⁹¹ On the co-existence of these two notions see Olson, ‘Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer’.

⁹² Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 184.

⁹³ Wallace, *Premodern Places*, 60; Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 150–1.

⁹⁴ Pearsall, *Life of Chaucer*, 178.

⁹⁵ Calin, *French Tradition*, 290, 296–7; Knopp, ‘Chaucer and Jean de Meun’. The scheme for the *Legend of Good Women* as a whole may be derived from Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*; see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 337.

terminus ante quem of the *Legend of Good Women*, scholars have generally placed Chaucer's translation of the *Rose* at the very beginning of his career. This has been asserted on the inadmissible evidence that what survives as the *Romaunt of the Rose* is, for subjective and often obscure reasons, 'evidently the work of his younger years'.⁹⁶ The question is muddied by the problematic status of the *Romaunt*, a text that I will consider on its own terms in my next chapter, where I view it more as evidence of the fifteenth-century shift in attitudes towards Chaucer, rather than trying to force it into a Chaucerian context when its authorship must remain at least partly uncertain. But whatever the status of this strange survival, there is no reason to doubt the implication of the God of Love and Deschamps's ballade: Chaucer's translation of the *Rose* was a major event — perhaps *the* major event — in his earlier career, a project of international significance that may well have been undertaken when his literary reputation was already significant, rather than being a piece of exploratory juvenilia. It seems odd to position the translation of the *Rose* at the beginning of Chaucer's career when the mentions of it by both Deschamps and Chaucer himself are likely to occur in the 1380s: a point closer to this decade seems more plausible for Chaucer's undertaking of the translation, whether or not it was ever finished.⁹⁷

In addressing Chaucer's translation of the *Rose*, the God of Love seems to imply that it is a work of comparable status to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*; but, more importantly, he focuses on the questions of meaning, intention, and responsibility that Jean had played with so prominently ('je n'i faz riens fors reciter', 15204), and that would crop up in a different guise a few decades later in the *Querelle de la Rose*. Throughout this thesis I have resisted drawing simplistic connections between fourteenth-century English texts and the *Querelle*, but it seems that the Prologue offers the closest equivalent to an English controversy over the *Rose*; this possibility must be heavily qualified, however, by the fictionality of the frame, and the fact that the conceit of an author's readers inveighing against

⁹⁶ Skeat (ed.), *Works*, I.11. See also Pearsall, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, 77.

⁹⁷ The early, 'F' version of the Prologue *Legend of Good Women* is generally dated to 1385–6; see *Riverside*, 1059. The Deschamps ballade is more difficult to date; suggested dates range from 1377 to 1396, see the discussion in Joyce Coleman, 'The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster', 53, n.87.

his earlier works clearly imitates Machuat's *Jugement du Roy de Navarre*.⁹⁸ The first comment that the God of Love makes on Chaucer's translation of the *Rose*, quoted above, is wonderfully elusive. It is clear that the God of Love reads the *Rose* as a *Remedia amoris*, a work that turns potential lovers against his edicts: it is by no means the case that Chaucer authorises this reading as in any sense true or correct. The 'lawe' that the God of Love mentions (F.330), against which he feels the *Rose* to be a 'heresy', evokes not only the commandments of love given by Guillaume's *Amour* and repeated in Jean's text, but also the wider notion of desire as a natural law of reproduction.⁹⁹ The God of Love's complaint seems to be that the *Rose* satirises his commandments and instils in its readers the kind of circumspection that might allow them to overcome the law of desire: from a certain perspective, this is a 'sympathetic' reading of Jean's intentions in the *Rose*. But the import of what the God of Love actually says about Chaucer's translation is extremely opaque:

For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose
(F.328–9)

The first difficulty is with *glose*, which, in Middle English as in Old French, can carry two basically contradictory meanings: to provide a clarifying interpretation, or to 'gloss over' an ambiguity.¹⁰⁰ To 'glose' can thus mean both to illuminate and to obfuscate, suggesting both directness and circumlocution. A second difficulty lies in the first line of the couplet, and rests particularly on the word 'nede'. It is possible, but I feel unsatisfactory, to read this as a suggestion that the translator has 'no need' of a gloss in his activity as a translator of the *Rose*. But the clearest reading would refer the 'withouten nede' to the translation itself: the translated 'pleyn text' is self-sufficient, it doesn't require an externally imposed supplementary meaning. No doubt there is an element of self-promotion here, but perhaps we are also back in the realm of imaginary, impossibly perfect texts, like the 'texte and glose' of the *Rose* dreamt by the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess*. But since the *glose* can both reveal and conceal, the God of Love also seems to be suggesting that what he found

⁹⁸ Crépin does not examine the Prologue to the *Legend* in 'La Querelle anticipée par Chaucer'.

⁹⁹ See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 21, for the Ulpianic definition of natural law.

¹⁰⁰ *MED*, s.v., *glosen* (v.), 1(a), 1(b), 2(a).

unsavoury in the *Rose* is directly transmitted, offensively obvious and not decorously covered. It seems very likely that the God of Love is referring to the obscene language used by Raison, ‘ribaudies’ that he specifically states to be against his laws in the *Rose* (2098). This is particularly clear when we compare what must be the source of Chaucer’s couplet: Jean’s Raison’s claim of her right to name the sexual organs without imposing any indirect ‘gloses’:

se je nome les nobles choses
par *plein texte* sanz metre *gloses*
(6927–8, my emphasis)

[... if I name noble things in plain text without adding glosses]

With this intertextual interaction in mind, it is hard to ignore the striking metaphor the God of Love uses to describe his queen in the lines before:

Yt is my relyke, digne and delytable
(F.321)

I do not want to suggest that an intertextual relationship with the *Rose* implies that when the God of Love is talking about Alceste, he is really talking about his genitals: but there is some sense in which the God of Love’s relationship with Alceste might be veering towards the idolatrous and potentially auto-erotic aspects of courtly love that are evoked in the *Rose*. But perhaps, more than this, Chaucer is summoning the spirit of the *Rose* to suggest to those who are intimately familiar with the text a fleeting *double entendre* that strains against the decorum of the work, particularly if, as seems likely, it was sent to Queen Anne (F.496–7).¹⁰¹ The *Rose* as an intertext opens up a realm of illogical slippage in meaning, full of hermeneutic dead ends, not least of which is the God of Love’s own difficult and obscure lines about ‘pleyn text’.

This passage contributes to the core preoccupation of the Prologue to the *Legend*, which is the authorial ownership of meaning when a text is released into a world of readerly misprision.¹⁰² The God of Love, as I have already suggested, sees the *Rose* as a moral or at

¹⁰¹ See Andrew Taylor, ‘Anne of Bohemia’.

¹⁰² Copeland sees the *Legend of Good Women* as drawing on the exegetical category of *intentio auctoris*: *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 186–202.

least an anti-erotic work that acts against aggravated desire, and this is precisely his complaint. In response to this, the narrator is forced to abandon any claim to own the meaning of both his translation of the *Rose* and his composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Alceste suggests that he may have been forced to perform these acts by a patron, eliminating his responsibility for their *sentence* (F.366–7), and the narrator later claims that he has been misunderstood, that any wrongdoing should be attributed to his sources:

They oghte rather with me for to holde
 For that I of Creseyde wroot or tolde,
 Or of the Rose; what so myn auctor mente,
 Algate, God woot, yt was myn entente
 To fothren trouthe in love and it cheryce
 (F.468–72)

Simpson has argued that, taken whole, the *Legend of Good Women* reveals Chaucer attempting to resist the oppressive strictures of a reading community's expectations, and that he 'transmits messages out of the prison of readerly power and appropriation'.¹⁰³ But the dangers of releasing a text into the world, and the fraught difficulties of readerly attempts to reach towards an unstated authorial intention, remain starkly visible in the Prologue. The fact that Chaucer would return a decade later, after the death of Queen Anne, to heavily revise the poem suggests that his apparent insouciance about the irrecoverability of authorial intention masks a more anxious interest in how the meanings of his poems were apprehended and projected back onto a view of Chaucer the author — at least when direct political affiliations are at stake.

Many of these questions about how far an authorial meaning can be recovered from a text are refracted through Chaucer's activity or supposed activity as a translator of the *Rose*, and clearly demonstrate the importance of Jean's text for Chaucer's exploration of this issue. Chaucer's play with authorial identity in a realm in which meaning cannot be controlled casts an interesting light on a moment that occurs when the God of Love first notices the narrator. When Cupid asks him who he is, the narrator responds in words that recall of Juno's messenger in the *Book of the Duchess*, 'Sir, it am I' (F.314). Once again, as readers we must

¹⁰³ Simpson, 'Ethics and Interpretation', 93.

imagine a scene of recognition, in which the God of Love sees the narrator and recognises him as the meddling translator–poet, Chaucer. But what the Prologue to the *Legend* makes clear, what it performs, is the difficulty of that act of recognition, of responding to the ‘it am I’ with the correct set of interpretations. Chaucer, like Jean de Meun, recognised that poetry did not offer a safe route back to a single authorial meaning.

It is difficult to move from the richness of Chaucer’s playful exploration of his own translation of the *Rose* to the Middle English translation known as *Romaunt of the Rose* and thought to be at least partly by him. Our attempts to get to grips with the *Romaunt* are inhibited by its fragmentary nature; not only does it seem to be a composite work of several translators, it omits vast swathes of the French original, including Raison’s discourse on *reliques* that, I would argue, lies behind the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. Part of the difficulty of the *Romaunt of the Rose* is that it is at least partly a phenomenon of the fifteenth century, and filtered through a set of fifteenth-century preoccupations that would shift the position of the *Rose* in English literary history. These changes, and Chaucer’s posthumous role in them, are the subject of my next and final chapter.

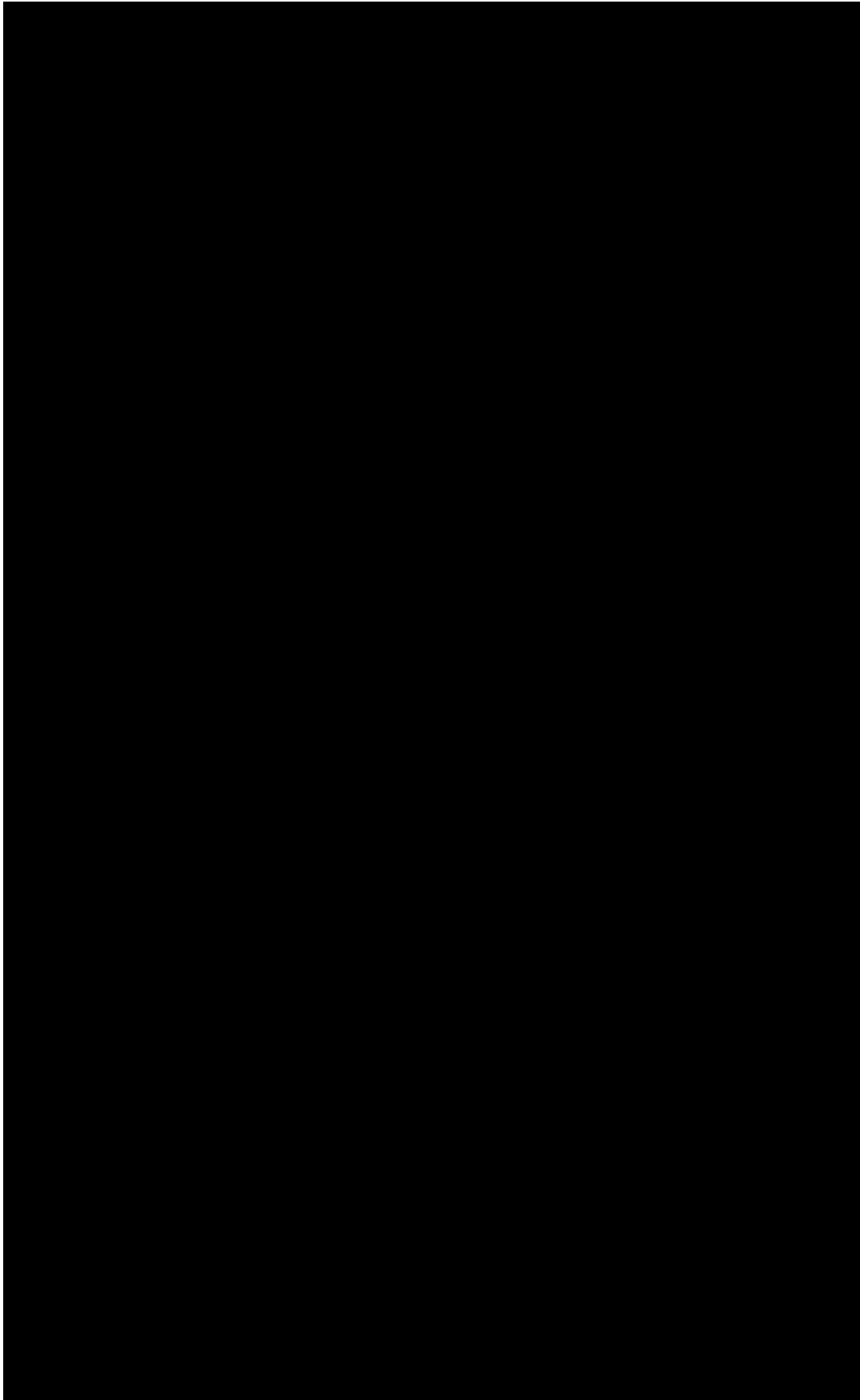


Fig. 10. André Thevet, *Les Vrais portraits*, BodL, Douce T subt. 39, f.499r.

Chapter 7. The Fifteenth Century

JOHN BALE'S 'JOHN MONE'

Nearly thirty years after his visit to the short-lived French colony around what is now Rio de Janeiro, the cosmographer André Thevet (1516–1590) set about composing a monumental biographical compendium of illustrious figures from the history of western civilization, which he called *Les Vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens* (1584).¹ Each biographical entry in Thevet's work includes a large portrait of the 'homme illustre' in question, and his chapter on 'Iean Clopinel, dict de Meung'² is headed with an illustration of a mild and avuncular Jean de Meun, dressed in clerical robes (fig.10). Having related a few apocryphal stories about Jean de Meun's life, Thevet goes on to make some curious comments about the sixteenth-century English antiquarian, John Bale.³ Thevet claims that Bale believed Jean de Meun to be such a worthy author that he wished to pass him off as an Englishman:

l'Anglois Baleus l'a voulu transporter en Angleterre dont n'est merueilles, il est assez coustumier de choisir les plus belles roses, qu'il peut, soit en France, Allemaigne ou Espagne, pour en reparer sa patrie.⁴

[The Englishman Bale wanted to transport him [Jean de Meun] to England, which is no surprise; he is rather accustomed to choose the most beautiful roses that he can, whether they are in France, Germany, or Spain, to decorate his own country.]

More detail on Bale's supposed theft of the 'beautiful rose' of Jean de Meun appears earlier in Thevet's account, where it is noted that Jean de Meun's many imitators have included the poet Geoffrey Chaucer:⁵

Plusieurs ont voulu contre-faire ce Romans de la Rose, & entre autres Geoffroy Chaucer Anglois, qui en a composé vn qu'il intitule, *The Romaunt of the rose*. Lequel, au rapport de Balæus a esté tiré du liure de l'art d'aymer de Iean Mone, lequel il faict Anglois. Je coniecture qu'il entende nostre Iean de Meung, encores qu'il le face

¹ For Thevet's life, see Frank Lestringant, *André Thevet*; for his trip in 1555–6 to South America, see 89–100. Note also the bibliographical information on *Les Vrais portraits* at 376–8.

² André Thevet, *Les Vrais portraits*, 3:499r–502v.

³ For discussion of the passages see: Friedman, 'Jean de Meun an Englishman?', 324; Crépin, 'Chaucer and the French', 69; Dahlberg (ed.), *The Romaunt of the Rose*, 4; Kamath, 'Roman de la rose and Middle English Poetry', 1118; Downes, 'Chaucer's French Fame', 139–41.

⁴ Thevet, *Les Vrais portraits*, 3:502r. Extracts from these passages are also printed in Spurgeon (ed.), *Chaucer Criticism*, 5:22.

⁵ Crépin points out that Thevet's mention of Chaucer is likely to be the first reference to Chaucer in France since Deschamps's ballade of the 1380s, 'Chaucer and the French', 69.

Anglois, d'autant que n'est aisé a croire qu'un Anglois osa se hazarder à vne telle œuvre⁶

[Several have wanted to counterfeit this *Romance of the Rose*, including the Englishman Geoffrey Chaucer, who composed from it a work that he entitles *The Romaunt of the Rose*. Which, according to Bale, is drawn from the book of the art of love by 'John Mone', whom he makes into an Englishman. I conjecture that he means our Jean de Meun, even though he makes him English, as much as it's not easy to believe that an Englishman dared to venture such a work [i.e., the *Rose*]]⁷

In Bale's enormous *Scriptorum illustrium majoris Britanniae...Catalogus*, printed in two volumes in Basel in 1557–9, we find the source of Thevet's offence: a bizarre and fascinating entry for one 'Ioannes Mone':⁸

Ioannes Mone, Anglus natione, cupidissimus suam excolendi mentem bonis studijs, relicta sua patria, in Gallias, Lutetiamque Parisiorum recta se contulit. Vbi post cognitam Dialecticam, quæ moderatrix est rationum, Philosophiam & alias artes professus, non sine emolumento plane maximo, in illis excreuit. Qui tandem uolens ingenij specimen dare, ex Ouidio Nasone & alijs authoribus collegit, & in Gallico sermone ualde eleganter edidit

De arte amandi, Lib. 1

Quem Galfridus Chaucerus, poeta insignis, & Anglicæ linguæ illustrator maximus, in Anglica metra transtulit, titulum addens operi, The Romaunt of the rose.⁹

[John Mone, an Englishman, being most desirous to cultivate his mind through good studies, left his home country and travelled directly to France, to the Lutetia of the Parisians.¹⁰ There, after he had acquired knowledge of dialectic (which is the moderator of opinions), teaching philosophy and the other arts, he flourished in these, clearly not without great profit. Eventually, wanting to give an example of his ingenuity, he gathered material from Ovid Naso and other authors, and in the French language he very elegantly produced

The Art of Love 1 Book

Which Geoffrey Chaucer, the distinguished poet and the greatest illuminator of the English language, translated into English verse, adding the title of the work, *The Romaunt of the Rose*.]¹¹

In this section of Bale's *Catalogus*, each biographical entry displays an attribution of its source under its heading; the source referred to for the 'Ioannes Mone' entry is the rather

⁶ *Les Vrais portraits*, 3:499v.

⁷ Note that Laurent de Premierfait, in his translation of the *De casibus*, tells an apocryphal tale of Dante visiting Paris and reading the *Rose*; Laurent uses the verb *contrefaire* to designate Dante's imitation of Jean de Meun. See Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 486.

⁸ On Bale, see Anne Hudson, '*Visio Baleii*'; also Simpson on Bale and John Leland in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 17–31. For the wider sixteenth- and seventeenth-century view of Chaucer's reputation, see Cooper, 'Poetic Fame'.

⁹ ch. 37 in Bale's tenth 'century' of writers, 2:58.

¹⁰ Lutetia is the Latin name for Paris: 'Lutetia of the Parisians' is pleonastic.

¹¹ My translation. I am indebted to Nicholas Perkins and an unknown classicist at St Hugh's College, Oxford for help with parts of this early-modern Latin.

mysterious ‘*ex Chauorro*’.¹² As Albert Freidman has shown in a detailed analysis of this passage, the otherwise unattested ‘*Chauorro*’ is likely to be a printer’s error, presumably for ‘*ex Chaucero*’.¹³ Yet at first glance the works of Chaucer present no obvious source for Bale’s detailed biography of Jean de Meun. What Bale is up to here can be elucidated by a comparison with his *Index Scriptorium Britanniae*, the working notes from which the later *Catalogus* was expanded.¹⁴ Here his biographical entries are telegraphic, and the entry for Ioannes Mone reveals the skeleton from which the longer *vita* will be extrapolated:

Ioannes Mone, artium liberalium magister, Gallice scripsit,
The Romaunt of the rose,
Quem librum Galfridus Chaucer in Anglicum transtulit.
Ex volumine Chauceri, fo. 362¹⁵

Most of the hard ‘facts’ from Bale’s lengthier *Catalogus* are here in compressed form: Ioannes Mone was a liberal arts master, he wrote in French, his work was entitled ‘The Romaunt of the Rose’ and it was translated by Chaucer. Little of substance is added in the *Catalogus* entry: the implication that Ioannes Mone is English is made explicit; we are told that he migrated across the Channel to the University of Paris (perhaps also already implicit in the notion of a francophone liberal arts master); the detail that the work was Ovidian in character is added. Where did Bale find — or how did he invent — this remarkable biography of the English Jean de Meun?

We know that Bale had access to John Reynes’s 1542 print of William Thynne’s edition of Chaucer’s *Works* (originally published 1532), since he uses it to compile his list of Chaucer’s writings.¹⁶ This edition includes the first printing of Thomas Hoccleve’s translation of Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours*, known as the *Letter of Cupid*, and the volume implies that this work is by Chaucer. Hoccleve translates Christine’s reference to ‘Jehan de Meun’ (*Epistre*, 389) as ‘maister Iohn de Meun’ (*Letter*, 281), attributing to him the ‘makyng of the Romance of the Rose’ (283). Thynne prints Hoccleve’s allusion with the

¹² *Catalogus*, 2:58.

¹³ Albert B. Freidman, ‘Jean de Meun an Englishman?’, 322.

¹⁴ It survives as BodL, MS Selden Supra 64.

¹⁵ John Bale, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum*, 233.

¹⁶ Hudson, ‘*Visio Baleii*’, 320; Freidman, 322–3. For Thynne’s edition, see Blodgett, ‘William Thynne (d.1546)’.

spelling, ‘mayster Iohan de Moone’, and, as Freidman observes, Bale’s reference in the *Index* to ‘*Ex volumine Chauceri, fo. 362*’ is citing precisely the folio that contains these stanzas of the *Letter of Cupid* in the 1542 *Works*.¹⁷ Bale’s most striking claim about Jean de Meun is that he was a liberal arts master, not least because several modern scholars would share that assumption.¹⁸ But again this seems to be extrapolated from Hoccleve’s simple designation of Jean de Meun as a ‘maister’. Thynne’s 1532 edition of the *Works* and its 1542 reprint not only included Hoccleve’s *Letter* for the first time, but also the partial Middle English translation of the *Rose*, to which Thynne gave the title *The Romaunt of the Rose*. If Bale had read the translation of Faux-Semblant’s discourse on the Joachimite controversies in the University of Paris (*Romaunt, 6759–70*), this may have cemented his notion that Jean had an academic connection. The narrator’s claim, early in the *Romaunt*, that this is a work ‘In which al the art of love I close’ (40) was probably enough to suggest to Bale that the work was Ovidian in character, and is also likely to have given him the Latin title that he offers for Ioannes Mone’s work, *De arte amandi*.¹⁹ There is, in short, every reason to believe Bale when he identifies his source for Jean de Meun’s life, a source misprinted as ‘*ex Chauorro*’: Bale has constructed his English Jean de Meun from his inductive reading of Thynne’s *Works of Chaucer*.

Thevet’s accusation that Bale has deliberately rewritten literary history in order to make room for the desirable cultural commodity that is Jean de Meun is thus, in some ways, unfounded. But Bale’s bizarre invention of John Mone, the English Jean de Meun, also reveals his willful or unconscious reluctance to believe that an author announced by Chaucer as central to his own career could be anything other than English. In making what Simpson has described as ‘the first attempts to shape a British, or even an English, tradition as an identifiable national tradition of letters,’²⁰ Bale has refused — consciously or unconsciously — to allow the great ‘illustrator’ of the English tongue an intimate connection to French poetry. But even by referring to this ‘poeta insignis’ as an ‘illustrator’, Bale’s language

¹⁷ Freidman, 322–3.

¹⁸ See Introduction, n.23.

¹⁹ Freidman, 323.

²⁰ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 11.

reveals how far he has absorbed an idea of Chaucer produced in the fifteenth century — above all by Lydgate, whose fascination with metaphors of ‘illumination’ is intimately connected to his canonisation of Chaucer.²¹ The notion of a national cultural identity whose literature has its point of origin in Chaucer is only one of many ideas that separate Bale from the fourteenth-century readers of the *Rose* that have formed the focus of this thesis. The gap between 1400 and the 1550s is the space in which these ideas will crystallise, and in which the *Rose* will cease to be a generative force in English literature, becoming instead an awkward and uncomfortable footnote to the writings of Chaucer. In what follows I will briefly survey the evidence for the *Rose*’s literary afterlife in fifteenth-century England, including the *Romaunt of the Rose*, before examining the powerful political and cultural forces shaping English literature after Chaucer’s death. These explorations will lead me to address, at last, the *Querelle de la Rose*.

READING THE *ROSE* IN ENGLAND AFTER 1400

In the years around 1400, Chaucer dies, Richard II is deposed, and the *Romance of the Rose* ceases to exercise the fascination that it once did over English poets. I do not think that this is because of an abrupt cultural shift or rupture, but rather because of a set of historical circumstances that created a space for the expression of a number of ideas about the nature of literature that had been emerging since the end of thirteenth century. It is not true that the *Rose* was no longer read in fifteenth-century England: as I have shown in Chapter 2, manuscripts continued to circulate, and, as we will see, there is scattered evidence of English writers recalling their encounter with the text. But something has changed: poets no longer seem to feel the need to wrestle with or embrace or suppress the pluralities of the *Rose* — which is not to say that the fifteenth century produces only simplistic poetry. Perhaps most important is the new consciousness of fifteenth-century English poets that they are writing in

²¹ Lois Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates*, 20–24.

a tradition — and whether that is the Chaucer tradition or the *Piers Plowman* tradition, it does not imagine the *Rose* at its foundations.²²

In fifteenth-century England the genre of the *dit amoureux* continues to develop and transform; these English poems are often vaguely evocative of the *Rose*, along with Machaut and Froissart, yet this ‘courtly’ atmosphere seems to be an incidental feature of their deliberate Chaucerianism.²³ The stock figures of love allegory derived from the *Rose* persist, and are rejuvenated in the poems of Charles d’Orléans and William de la Pole.²⁴ From a certain perspective these two bilingual aristocratic friends are exceptional, but they also reflect the wider re-engagement with continental literary culture in England in the Agincourt generation — and, like many of their contemporaries, Chaucer and perhaps also Gower are important presences in this interaction with a continental tradition.²⁵ Specific citations of the *Rose* can be found in several fifteenth-century English works, but almost exclusively in translations from earlier French texts, from which these references were usually carried across without expansion. The widespread fascination with Deguileville that took hold of the fifteenth century (and which seems to have radiated at least in part from the French court of John, Duke of Bedford) means that the citations of the *Rose* in both recensions of Deguileville’s *PVH* are carried into English.²⁶ The anonymous prose translation brings across the dreamer’s account of reading ‘þe faire romaunce of þe Rose’ (6),²⁷ while Lydgate’s verse translation of the second recension, carried out in 1426, faithfully renders the richly complex

²² The Chaucer tradition is discussed below. For the *Piers Plowman* tradition, see the poems collected by Helen Barr (ed.), *The ‘Piers Plowman’ Tradition*. The importance of this tradition in fifteenth-century English literature is generally neglected: regretfully, I will have no space to discuss it in this chapter.

²³ See, for example, Lydgate’s *Complaint of the Black Knight* in Chaucer, *Works*, ed. Skeat, vol.7; the anonymous *Floure and the Leafe*, ed. Pearsall. See also the discussion in Susan Bianco, ‘Lydgate and the *Dit Amoureux* Tradition’.

²⁴ For the English poems of Charles d’Orléans, see *Fortunes Stabilnes*, ed. Arn; for the French poems, see *Poésies*, ed. Champion. For transcriptions of the French and English poems of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, see MacCracken, ‘An English Friend of Charles of Orleans’; examples of allegorical figures from the *Rose* occur in the French poems at V.4, and in the English poems at IX.1 and XX.42. For Charles, see Spearing, ‘Prison, Writing, Absence’.

²⁵ Burrow makes the fascinating suggestion that the poems of Charles d’Orléans (particularly in their English but also in their French versions) reflect the *Confessio Amantis*: ‘Portrayal of Amans’, 20.

²⁶ Jeremy Catto comments on the vitality of Bedford’s court in ‘The Closing or the Opening of the English Mind?’, 50–54.

²⁷ Citations are from *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, ed. Avril Henry.

comments on the *Rose* that Deguileville places in the mouth of Venus (13187–276).²⁸ A much more detailed interaction with the *Rose* occurs in another work of translation, *Reson and Sensuallyte*, attributed to Lydgate by John Stowe.²⁹ This interesting text is an incomplete rendering of the *Échecs amoureux*. The prose allegoresis of this French original, the *Échecs amoureux moralisé*, has long been known to be by Charles V's physician, Évrart de Conty, but some scholars now also attribute the earlier verse text to Évrart.³⁰ Like its original, *Reson and Sensuallyte* cultivates an explicit and close relationship with the *Rose*, revisiting the key sites of its narrative and praising the author of the *Rose* for his skill in 'philosophie' and 'profonde poëtrie' (4855–6).³¹ So while this translation, perhaps by Lydgate, constitutes an interesting moment in the history of the reception of the *Rose* in England, and although, as Kamath points out, the translator at one point adds an allusion to the *Rose* not in the original, it remains an example of reception at one remove.³²

Moving beyond translations, Lydgate does reveal some interesting responses to the *Rose*, and the importance of the French allegory to works like the *Temple of Glass* would repay a fuller investigation.³³ While I do not wish to limit the interest of Lydgate's engagement with the *Rose*, I do feel that his encounters with the text are so heavily mediated by Chaucer that the French poem recedes somewhat into the background. Lydgate's explicit

²⁸ While there is some uncertainty over Lydgate's authorship of this translation, the indications are very strong: see Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 173–4; Green, 'Lydgate and Deguileville'. Citations are from Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*. For the multiple perspectives on the *Rose* that Deguileville offers across the two recensions, see Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 362–76, esp. 373. For Lydgate's dual relationship with the *Rose* and Deguileville, see Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 144–55.

²⁹ See Kamath, 'John Lydgate and the Curse of Genius'. *Reson and Sensuallyte* appears in two manuscripts; but the earliest (BodL, MS Fairfax 16) is the exemplar from which Stowe makes his own copy (BL, MS Add. 29729) in 1558. It is Stowe's hand that leaves the note in MS Fairfax 16 attributing the poem to Lydgate. But Sieper, the poem's editor, was entirely convinced of Lydgate's authorship on the basis of style and language. See Ernst Sieper (ed.), *Reson and Sensuallyte*, 1:xi–xii; 2:1–9.

³⁰ The suggestion that Évrart is responsible for not only the prose moralisation of the *Échecs amoureux*, but also the original poem itself, was first made by Gianmario Raimondi in 'Les Eschés amoureux'. See also Guichard-Tesson, 'Évrart de Conty, poète, traducteur et commentateur', 150–2, where Raimondi's arguments are summarised.

³¹ The relationship between the *Échecs amoureux* and the *Rose* is discussed in Badel, *Le 'Roman de la Rose'*, 263–90; Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 257–319; for *Reson and Sensuallyte*, see *ibid.*, 289; Simpson, 'The Economy of the Involucrum'; Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 115–20.

³² Kamath, 'Lydgate and the Curse of Genius', 43–5.

³³ For Lydgate and the *Rose* see Kamath, 'Lydgate and the Curse of Genius'; Bianco, 'Lydgate and the *Dit Amoureux* Tradition'; Kamath, '*Roman de la rose* and Middle English Poetry', 1116–7. Note also the suggestive comments in Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 90–1, 110–1.

mention of the *Rose* in the *Troy Book*, discussed by Kamath, is a good example of this phenomenon. It occurs as part of the description of the ‘ymage’ in the temple of Pallas:³⁴

For, as it is trewly to suppose,
Pigmalyon, remembrid in þe Rose,
In his tyme hadde no konnyng
To graue or peint so corious a þing.
(4.5589–92)³⁵

It is striking that Lydgate should here choose to cite ‘þe Rose’ as a source of the Pygmalion story, and it is tempting to speculate about what it might mean for Lydgate to evoke Jean de Meun rather than Ovid in a poem that otherwise insists so heavily on its classical credentials. But after closer scrutiny, what becomes even more striking is the fact that these lines make their reference to the *Rose* through a tissue of Chaucerian echoes. Lydgate’s language reveals that he, consciously or unconsciously, is synthesising the appeal to the *Rose* that occurs in the Merchant’s Tale (‘I verrailly suppose / That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose / Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse’, IV.2031–3) with the mention of Pygmalion in the Physician’s Tale (‘who kan me countrefete? / Pigmalion noght, though he ay forge and bete, / Or grave, and peynte’, VI.13–15). What is important here, as with many of these later references to the *Rose*, is the presence of Chaucer; the French text itself has become part of that Chaucerian texture. For what it’s worth, it is also interesting to note that, in the *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate omits a section from his source that includes a prominent reference to the *Rose*.³⁶

I have already had call to mention Hoccleve several times, and his engagement with the *Rose* is perhaps the most detailed, even though his explicit mention of ‘maister Iohn de

³⁴ Kamath, ‘Lydgate and the Curse of Genius’, 56. For Lydgate and Chaucer, see Persall, *John Lydgate*, 49–82; cf. below, n.50.

³⁵ Citations of the *Troy Book* are from *Lydgate’s Troy Book*, ed. Bergen.

³⁶ In his translation of Boccaccio’s *De casibus*, Laurent de Premierfait inserts a digression on the life of Dante, stating that Dante visited France, where he admired the city of Paris, and read, admired, and went on to imitate ‘le noble liure de la rose en quoy iehan clopinel dit de meun homme dengin celeste peingnit vne vraye mapemonde de toutes choses celestes et terriennes’ (‘the noble book of the *Rose* in which Jean Clopinel known as de Meun, a man of heavenly genius, painted a true *mappa mundi* of all celestial and terrestrial things’, quoted in Bergen (ed.), *Fall of Princes*, vol. 4, 386). Lydgate may have omitted this whole section from his *Fall of Princes* for any number of reasons, but it certainly does not suggest a special interest in the *Rose* or its authors. Kamath discusses this episode, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 154–64.

Meun' in the *Letter of Cupid* is likewise transferred from Christine's *Epistre*.³⁷ Hoccleve is among the most self-reflexive English poets of the fifteenth century,³⁸ and his writings explore the difficulties of transmitting and controlling their own meaning in ways that perhaps reveal his engagement with the *Rose*. In the *Letter of Cupid*, Hoccleve's God of Love vastly amplifies and intensifies the four lines spoken by Christine's Dieu d'Amours in the voice of a slanderous man (*Epistre*, 127–30; *Letter*, 99–112). As the God of Love continues to propagate the misogynistic speech that he is claiming to repudiate, we realise that we are very much in the realm of the *Rose*; Amis's evocation of the absurdly longwinded misogynist, Le Jaloux, has clearly influenced Hoccleve's strategies here. In both cases (Hoccleve's *Letter* and Jean de Meun's *Jaloux*), the texts manage both to express misogyny and to satirise the misogynist, cancelling neither.³⁹ But this deniability is called into question in Hoccleve's remarkable *Series*, where Hoccleve dramatises how his earlier *Letter* could be radically misread. Having been visited by a friend, the narrator (whose name is Thomas) is advised to produce a work in praise of women. Thomas, confused, asks what he has done to insult his female readers:

'ffrend, hard it is / wommen to greeue, I grante;
 But what haue I agilt / for him þat dyde,
 Nat haue I doon why / dar I me auante,
 Out of wommenes graces slippe or slyde.'
 'Yis, Thomas, yis, / in thepistle of Cupyde
 Thow hast of them / so largelich said,
 That they been swart / wrooth & ful euel apaid.'

'ffreend / doutelees sumwhat ther is ther-in
 þat sowneth but right smal to hir honour;
 But as to þat / now, for your fadir kyn,
 Considerth / ther-of / was I noon Auctour;

³⁷ All quotations from Christine are from her *Œuvres*, ed. Roy. Hoccleve's poems, with the exception of the *Regiment*, are quoted from *Works*, ed. Furnivall. For the *Regiment of Princes* I use the Blythe edition. See the discussion of Hoccleve's relationship to both the *Rose* and Deguileville in Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 103–37.

³⁸ See John Burrow, 'Experience and Books', 60; 'The Poet and the Book', 242; Perkins, *Hoccleve's 'Regiment of Princes'*, 82–4.

³⁹ Sarah Kay is right, I think, to warn that Howard Bloch's reading of medieval misogyny leaves us with a loss in 'political significance' and 'an uncertain gain in abstraction'. However it does seem to be true that the tradition of literary misogyny was 'a citational mode', interested in deferring responsibility for the utterance and thus sometimes calling into question the dynamics of the transmission itself. But by pointing out the self-conscious artificiality of misogynistic discourse, I have no interest in exonerating from the charge of misogyny those writers who deployed this discourse. See Kay, 'Woman's Body of Knowledge', 212–3; Bloch, 'Medieval Misogyny', 6.

I nas in þat cas / but a reportour
 Of folkes tales / as they seide / I wroot :
 I nat affermed it on hem / god woot!
 (XXI.751–63)

Hoccleve here both admits and denies the possibility that his translation of the *Letter of Cupid* might be a piece of covert antifeminism; he shows his awareness that both readings are available, and that after a text has been released into circulation it is impossible to control the meaning attributed to it by readers. Hoccleve registers, I think, a certain anxiety about the fact that a writer is not fully able to construct and maintain his public reputation — indeed, we learn a few lines later that the friend who believes Hoccleve’s work to be misogynistic has not actually read it: ‘for neuere it yit I say’ (XXI.781). Nevertheless, Thomas does his penance by translating the story of Jereslaus’s Wife from the *Gesta Romanorum*. Curiously, having presented this text within the poem, Hoccleve then narrates that Thomas sends the translation to his friend for his approval. The friend likes it, but points out that there is something missing: the allegorical *moralizatio* that appears at the end of each of the *Gesta Romanorum* stories (XXII.12). Thomas translates and restores the allegoresis, again presenting the text within the frame of the *Series*. The idea that a narrative can become detached from its prescribed meaning is enormously suggestive, and marks Hoccleve’s fascination with the problem of how meaning is transmitted and how the author’s intentions are understood, a fascination that seems to balance a desire to imitate the sophistication of Chaucerian open-endedness with a genuine anxiety about what kind of self is suggested by his writings.

For although Thomas’s self-defence against the charge of misogyny (‘I nas in þat cas / but a reportour’) so closely echoes Jean de Meun’s narrator’s famous response to the same accusation (‘je n’i faz riens fors reciter’, *RR*, 15204), it is also obvious that ‘Hoccleve is clearly trying to create a Chaucerian atmosphere in this apology’, evoking specifically the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.⁴⁰ It is Hoccleve’s consciousness of his own status of being ‘after Chaucer’ that really marks him out as different from the poets of the previous

⁴⁰ Jill Mann, *Apologies to Women*, 21.

generation, and it is this Chaucerianism that explains, I think, why Hoccleve, who has clearly read and been exercised by the *Rose*, only glances at it in his writings.

Even the *Romaunt of the Rose* seems in part to view the French text through a Chaucerian lens. Most scholars today accept Skeat's suggestion that the translation can be divided into three separate 'fragments', each of which being the work of a different translator.⁴¹ Fragment A is the closest to Chaucer's language, and may represent part or all of the translation of the *Rose* he claims to have undertaken in the *Legend of Good Women* (although it does not include the parts of Raison's discourse that seem to lie in the background of God of Love's complaint in the *Legend*). If, as seems likely, Fragments B and C can be dated to the early fifteenth century, this might seem to suggest a continued close engagement with the *Rose* in England. But, much like Lydgate's reference to the Pygmalion of the *Rose* in the *Troy Book*, Fragments B and C of the *Romaunt* are also channelled through these translators' readings of Chaucer. Fragment B in particular is deeply Chaucerian, intercalating passages that do not correspond to the French text but that find an analogue in Chaucer's works:

For Thought anone than shal begynne,
As ferre, God wotte, as he can fynde,
To make a myrroure of his mynde
For to beholde he wole not lette
(*Romaunt of the Rose*, 2804–7)

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,
In which he saugh al holly hire figure;
And that he wel koude in his herte fynde,
It was to hym a right good aventure
To loue swich oon,
(*Troilus and Criseyde*, 1.365–9)⁴²

The translator of Fragment C does not seem to allow himself these creative expansions of the text with Chaucerian echo, although there are a handful of suggestive parallels.⁴³ But in terms

⁴¹ See the detailed discussion of shifting attitudes to the text in Dahlberg (ed.), *Romaunt of the Rose*, 3–24. Olivia Robinson argues that the term 'fragment' may have outlived its usefulness, 'Re-Contextualising the *Romaunt*', 30–1.

⁴² Compare also, 'For tyme lost, as men may see, / For nothing may recured be' (*Romaunt*, 5123–4) with 'For tyme lost, as men may see, / For nothyng may recured be' (*House of Fame*, 1257–8); cf. also *TC* 4.1283–5. The phrase may be proverbial, but the correspondence is close.

of style and diction, the C-translator's language is clearly Chaucerian.⁴⁴ While I remain agnostic on the question of Chaucer's authorship of Fragment A, I feel that the *Romaunt of the Rose* as a whole is best understood as another piece of fifteenth-century Chauceriana, a failed attempt to continue a fragmentary translation that was at least *believed* to be by Chaucer — this is not an attempt to devalue the interest or the sophistication of these three acts of linguistic transferal.⁴⁵ Perhaps it can be seen alongside those other Chaucerian continuations: the *Canterbury Interlude*, Lydgate's prologue to the *Siege of Thebes*, the conclusion to the *House of Fame* added to the Selden manuscript.⁴⁶ It is disappointing for literary scholars that the *Romaunt of the Rose* is incomplete, not least because it does not include the passage in which Jean de Meun names himself and Guillaume de Lorris. For the other medieval translators of the *Rose*, this moment compelled them to inscribe their own identities into the work, rather than the names of Guillaume and Jean. This is how we know the name of the 'Durante' responsible for the Italian translation *Il Fiore*,⁴⁷ while one of the Middle Dutch translators of the *Rose* reveals at this point not only his own name but also, it has been suggested, the name of a scribe or assistant.⁴⁸ If the *Romaunt of the Rose* was the collaborative continuation of a fragment thought to have originally been by Chaucer, who

⁴³ Compare the C-translator's reference to the 'naked texte' (6556), to Chaucer's reference to the 'naked text' in the G version of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, G.86. Again, the phrase may be proverbial.

⁴⁴ Xiang Feng, *Chaucer and the 'Romaunt of the Rose'*, points out how close Fragment C is to Chaucer's linguistic practice, and argues that Chaucer may even be responsible for this part of the poem. However, since the C-translator's practice of rhyming of word-final -y with word-final etymological -ye occurs nowhere in Chaucer's securely attributed writings, I feel that C cannot be attributed to Chaucer without further justification.

⁴⁵ Robinson argues compellingly for a refocusing of attention on the *Romaunt* as a coherent and valuable text in her attempts to situate the Glasgow manuscript in a European context, 'Re-Contextualising', 32.

⁴⁶ For the first two of these, see Bowers (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*. For the Selden MS, see Julia Boffey et al. (eds), *MS Arch. Selden. B. 24*. The continuation of the *House of Fame* appears on ff.151r–2r. On Chaucer's audience and the misattribution of Chaucerian texts to him, see Kathleen Forni, *The Chaucerian Apocrypha*.

⁴⁷ See *Il Fiore*, LXXXII.9, where the Dio d'Amore announces to the barons that 'Ch'e' pur convien ch'i soccorra Durante'. Edited in *Opere di Dante*, 8:2–466.

⁴⁸ See Karin Lensik-Oberstein, 'Adapting the *Roman de la Rose*', 137–8, 137, n.6. The translation attributed to Heinric van Aken is the earliest of the two surviving Middle Dutch translations. Dated c.1280–c.1325, it is one of the earliest responses to the *Rose* that survives from anywhere in Europe, including France. Heinric gives 'Siet hierre van Brusele Heinrecke' for 'Vez ci Guillaume', but he also names a 'Jahn'; Lensik-Oberstein argues that this is not Jean de Meun but some kind of scribe or assistant. At any rate, this seems to have been how medieval readers understood it, for in the only other complete surviving manuscript, the name 'Jahn' is replaced by 'Mechiel' — presumably this manuscript's scribe; see Lensik-Oberstein, 137, n.6.

knows what might have emerged at this self-referential moment in the poem. Fragment C begins immediately after the God of Love's prophecy: perhaps Jean de Meun's problematic self-naming was deliberately avoided by this translator. Surviving in one manuscript and one single-leaf fragment, the *Romaunt of the Rose* seems not to have been sought after by fifteenth-century copyists, despite its Chaucerian credentials.⁴⁹

The development of English Chaucerianism – a movement that imagined itself as historically posterior to Chaucer and thus historically defined by the absence or death of Chaucer — may well constitute the most important cultural change to affect the fortunes of the *Rose* in England.⁵⁰ But these changes did not take place in a vacuum, and if the cultural dominance of Chaucer shaped the fortunes of the *Rose* in England, this process was itself affected by an array of powerful cultural and political forces. Perhaps this intense focus on the departed Chaucer can be connected to the emergence of a wider humanist conception of cultural history, whereby the aspiration to cross the historical divide between the writers of a lapsed golden age and the contemporary moment necessitates a painful awareness of the present's alienation from its past.⁵¹ But the imagined poetic genealogy of 'father Chaucer' (*Regiment of Princes*, 2078) might also reflect a political environment in which a new monarch was attempting to establish his right to rule both 'by lyne and free eleccion'.⁵²

⁴⁹ Simon Horobin, 'A New Fragment of the *Romaunt of the Rose*'.

⁵⁰ For the reception of Chaucer in the fifteenth century, see Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience'; Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 59–120; Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates*, 1–18; Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, esp. 22–56; Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, 74–108. The complexity of fifteenth-century poets' responses to the haunting memory of Chaucer have been emphasised in two sensitive studies: Perkins, 'Haunted Hoccleve?'; Galloway, 'Fame's Penitent'.

⁵¹ See the comments on this aspect of Renaissance culture in Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 13; but note also Simpson's critique of Spearing's periodisation in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 47–48.

⁵² Chaucer, 'Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse', 22. On the political background to this poem and Henry's claims to the throne, see Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, 88. To suggest an imagined genealogical connection is not to argue for an Oedipal struggle between Hoccleve and Chaucer. Spearing presents an explicitly Bloomian reading of Chaucer and his fifteenth-century successors in *Medieval to Renaissance*, 92–110. But as, Perkins points out, the model of Oedipal struggle is not adequate for the complexity of Hoccleve's approach to Chaucer, 'Haunted Hoccleve?', 108. See also Langdell, 'Religious Reform, Transnational Poetics, and Literary Tradition', 81, n.11.

THE *ROSE* OF LANCASTER

Paul Strohm's influential study of the 'narrowing of the "Chaucer tradition"' argued that after the dispersal or death of Chaucer's intimate circle by the early years of the fifteenth century, the *Canterbury Tales* began to reach a wider public whose tastes inclined away from 'generically and thematically problematic' texts towards those works 'which support traditional assumptions.'⁵³ Nicholas Watson has famously argued for a comparable contraction in the realm of vernacular theological writings, precipitated by the anti-heretical Constitutions of Arundel, enacted in 1409.⁵⁴ In their broadest outlines, both of these studies usefully identify a shift in fifteenth-century English culture, but several important interventions since have nuanced our understanding of the period and moved away from the implication that the fifteenth century was an era of intellectual and artistic decline.⁵⁵ David Lawton, for example, affirms that the first decades of the fifteenth century were indeed a period of intensified ecclesiastical and political oppression, but argues that it was precisely these forces that generated a new literary subtlety and complexity.⁵⁶ It is by no means a value-judgement on fifteenth-century readers and writers to suggest that the increased scrutiny of vernacular texts, and the increasing sense that authors must be answerable, might shift taste away from the *Rose*, a work that gleefully obscures authorial intention. While aristocratic readers in England no doubt continued to read their copies of the *Rose*, it is possible to imagine Arundel's attitudes towards a text that states (albeit in the voice of the fictive persona of Genius) that copulation is the surest path to heaven. And although the evidence is partial and not probative, it is interesting that I have been unable to trace any evidence of new manuscripts of the *Rose* entering England in the first decades after 1400; they begin to flow across the Channel again in the second quarter of the century, no doubt helped by the expansion of the English kingdom on the continent.

⁵³ Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience', 14–15, 25.

⁵⁴ Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change'.

⁵⁵ See Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century'; Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 34–67. For the status of 'vernacular theology' in England in the fifteenth-century see Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (eds), *After Arundel*.

⁵⁶ Lawton, 'Voice After Arundel', 151.

The deposition of Richard II brought about the instigation of a new royal court, and, perhaps, new cultural priorities.⁵⁷ The vexed question of the status of the English language is surely important for any history of continental literature in later medieval England. By the second decade of the fifteenth century, certainly, Henry V would recognise the political value of the claim to national linguistic uniqueness, a claim that could be backed up with a hastily constructed English literary tradition.⁵⁸ But as Pearsall points out, Henry V ‘was a great deal more ambiguous about English [...] than the story he has encouraged historians to tell about him.’⁵⁹ John Fisher has suggested that Henry IV was likewise involved in the pursuit of a deliberate ‘language policy’ that promoted English,⁶⁰ but the far from linear history of the uncertain shift of anglophone writings towards the privileged centres of English culture is long and complicated,⁶¹ and what we are able to reconstruct of Henry IV’s literary tastes suggests a multilingual interest. Gower (d. 1408) survives well into the Lancastrian reign, and, once again approaching England’s three main languages with remarkable evenhandedness, addresses poems to the new king in English, French, and Latin.⁶² The most detailed evidence of Henry IV’s interest in any literature is his relationship with Christine de Pizan. Jean de Castel, Christine’s son, had been living in England under the guardianship of John Montagu, the Earl of Salisbury (whose brother had been sent a copy of the *Rose* by Charles V). Having executed Salisbury, Henry IV took Jean de Castel into his care, and this tense situation lies in the background of the English king’s attempts to recruit Christine as a court poet. Christine herself describes Henry IV’s overtures to her and his attempts to bring

⁵⁷ For literature and culture in the fifteenth-century English court, see Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, and the studies gathered in Jenny Stratford (ed.), *The Lancastrian Court*.

⁵⁸ See Pearsall, ‘Idea of Englishness’, 18–9. Green examines the Lancastrian use of political propaganda in the war with France, *Poets and Princepleasers*, 186–7.

⁵⁹ Pearsall, ‘Idea of Englishness’, 19.

⁶⁰ Fisher, ‘Language Policy’, 1170.

⁶¹ For an analysis of the complexities of the interaction of English and French in across the later medieval period, see William Rothwell, ‘English and French in England After 1362’; W.M. Ormrod, ‘The Use of English’; Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 308–49; and my own ‘The English Glosses in Walter of Bibbesworth’s *Tretiz*’.

⁶² See, for example, *In Praise of Peace*, the *Cinkante Balades*, the *Cronica Tripertita*, and many other shorter Latin works which address Henry IV or explicitly support his cause. For a reading of Gower’s role as a supposed Lancastrian ‘propagandist’, see Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, 179–83; compare the more nuanced view of Frank Grady, ‘Lancastrian Gower’.

her across the Channel in the *Advision Cristine*.⁶³ As J.C. Laidlaw has argued, it seems likely that a variant prologue of the *Epistre Othea*, addressed to a great king, is not aimed at Charles VI, but rather Henry IV.⁶⁴ Laidlaw suggests that Christine, at best ambivalent towards the usurper who now held her child, dissimulated with the goodwill gesture of a revised version of the *Othea*: enough to secure the return of her son to France.⁶⁵

While there is no reason to take Christine's version of events as the truest or most accurate, there is some other evidence for Henry IV's genuine admiration of Christine. Jennifer Summit's study of the reception of Christine in England has emphasised the importance of her model of 'learned chivalry' for fifteenth-century aristocratic English households (an enthusiasm that often led, paradoxically, to the suppression of Christine's identity as a writer).⁶⁶ Indeed, the development of a nostalgically chivalric ideology over the course of the fifteenth century led English writers to turn to often unexpected literary antecedents — not least Deguileville's *PVH*, as Nievergelt has shown.⁶⁷ But when Henry IV first attempted to draw Christine to England, around 1400, he would only have known her earlier writings: richly sophisticated poems on love like the *Cent Ballades*, perhaps also the *Epistre*. Early in Henry's reign, Hoccleve translates the *Epistre*, as we have seen, and it is certainly possible to read this as reflecting a general interest in Christine that was percolating through the English court. Increasingly I feel that a work that Gower presented to the king late in life, the *Cinkante Balades*, must be seen in the same light: structurally, tonally, and numerologically so similar to Christine's ballade collection, this lyric sequence may have been designed to appeal to the literary enthusiasms of the 'noble Henri' (Pr. 2.25) to whom it is addressed.⁶⁸

⁶³ Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l'advison Cristine*, 3:11–12. See the discussion in J.C. Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan, the Earl of Salisbury, and Henry IV'; Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, 91–2.

⁶⁴ Laidlaw, 139–40. Laidlaw observes that one of the two manuscripts that preserve this variant prologue is 'of English origin', 140. He is presumably referring to BL, MS Royal 14 E II, copied for Edward IV.

⁶⁵ Laidlaw, 140.

⁶⁶ Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property*, 61–107.

⁶⁷ Nievergelt, *Allegorical Quests from Deguileville to Spenser*. For late-medieval chivalry more generally see Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood*.

⁶⁸ Different possibilities for the dating of the *Cinkante Balades* are looked at by Fisher, *John Gower*, 70–4.

Soon after her son left the protection of Henry IV to return to France, Christine found herself embroiled in a famous literary quarrel. We can only speculate as to what impact, if any, this exchange may have had in the kingdom whose monarch had so recently tried to recruit her as a court poet. There is little evidence, for what it is worth, that manuscripts of the *Querelle de la Rose* circulated outside the continental aristocracy.⁶⁹ But even the vague suggestion that famous continental figures like Christine and Jean Gerson were accusing the *Rose* of salaciousness and sacrilege might have encouraged English poets to keep it at arm's length, as the ecclesiastical microscope focused more intently on vernacular writings. There is no room here to rehearse in any detail the condemnations and defences of the *Rose* produced as part of the *Querelle*.⁷⁰ Several times already I have observed that it is common for scholars to read medieval reactions to the *Rose* through the lens of the *Querelle*, using it to circumscribe the range of possible responses.⁷¹ I have attempted to resist that temptation, tracing a number of subtle interactions with the *Rose* in England that rarely seem reducible to a singular, stable attitude. Even the *Querelle* itself might be more contingent than scholars tend to recognise. As a text, it is difficult to interpret; to some extent it is clearly a rhetorical performance, something that participates in a tradition, as Emma Cayley has emphasised, of actual and fictional debate where playfulness is never far away.⁷² The document that provoked Christine de Pizan's initial involvement, Jean de Montreuil's treatise in praise of the *Rose*, has not survived; it is thus hard to assess Christine's initial motivations. Badel has gathered the evidence for a number of humanist 'quarrels' in which Jean de Montreuil participated at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and in these other instances, there is a strong sense of ironic play in a semi-public forum.⁷³ I do not wish to abstract the *Querelle* to a realm of pure artifice, to deny Jean de Montreuil the right to actually 'like' the *Rose*, or to

⁶⁹ See the description of the manuscripts in Hicks (ed.), *Débat*, lxx–lxxxiii. Hicks identifies the following known medieval manuscript-owners: Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy; Jean, Duke of Berry; the Duchess of Bourbon; Isabeau de Bavière; 'Frère Jean de Merville'.

⁷⁰ See the discussion in Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, 361–5; Hicks (ed.), *Débat*, ix–xxii; Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 411–82; Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 209–57.

⁷¹ See ch.1, n.10.

⁷² Emma Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, esp. ch.2.

⁷³ Badel, 463.

deny Christine the right to actually ‘dislike’ it, but scholars have manifested a strange lack of generosity towards Christine in particular by refusing to allow her account of the *Rose* the complexity it implies.

John Fleming exemplifies this tendency in an article on Hoccleve’s translation of Christine’s *Epistre*; he argues that Hoccleve’s text is designed to reveal Christine’s ‘blunder in literary criticism’.⁷⁴ Like Pierre Col, Fleming claims that Christine — and, by implication, Gerson — has failed to understand Jean de Meun’s *ex persona* narration, attributing to the author the opinions of his creations.⁷⁵ The suggestion that Christine de Pizan genuinely does not understand that literary voices are fictive constructs is remarkable, and it is not clear why the idea that authors must take some measure of responsibility for what their fictions say should be seen as a primitive critical response.⁷⁶ Christine’s reaction to the *Rose* has also been flattened by critics writing from very different perspectives; in her feminist reading, Sheila Delaney confesses, ‘I have been angered by Christine’s self-righteousness, her prudery, and the intensely self-serving narrowness of her views.’⁷⁷ But perhaps deliberately self-serving narrowness is a good way of understanding Christine’s particular performance in the *Querelle*, a text in which she is clearly working, as Kevin Brownlee has observed, to construct, frame, and control how her attitudes are presented and received in the interaction with the other participants. Indeed, as Brownlee again points out, within the *Querelle* dossier that she herself puts together and sends to Isabeau de Bavière, she explicitly refers to the debate as a literary construct, now the latest work in her increasingly prolific career.⁷⁸ The dossier concludes with an authorial rubric that insists on her creative ownership of this compilation of diverse perspectives on the *Rose*: ‘Si feray fin a mon dittié du débat’.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Fleming, ‘Hoccleve’s *Letter of Cupid*’, 30.

⁷⁵ For Pierre Col’s comments, see *Débat*, 100.

⁷⁶ Writers today still struggle with this problem. See, for example, J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York, 2004).

⁷⁷ Sheila Delaney, “‘Mothers to Think Back Through’”, 182.

⁷⁸ Brownlee, ‘Discourses of the Self’, 251, 258.

⁷⁹ Hicks (ed.), *Débat*, 150. Note that Christine’s conscious and artful ending is not quite successful at bringing the debate to a close; as the other collected documents in Hicks’s edition demonstrate, it will continue outside the bounds of the manuscript she has produced.

One of Christine's most memorable claims about Jean de Meun is that he better deserves to be engulfed in flames than crowned with the laurel:

mieulx lui affiert ensevellissement de feu que couronne de lorier⁸⁰

As Mühlethaler has pointed out, this use of the word 'laurier' is the first recorded reference to the poetic laurels in the French language.⁸¹ Christine was of course originally from Pizzano, near Bologna, and many scholars have studied her connections to Italian humanism and her contribution to the emerging humanism of Paris.⁸² Perhaps the slow emergence of this complex of humanist ideas also contributed to the fate of Jean de Meun in England: the idea that a writer's career can be analysed, its public value assessed, and cultural recognition proffered or withdrawn. But despite her attempts to constrain the meaning of the *Rose* as part of the *Querelle*, Christine's engagements with the text at other moments suggest a broader set of responses than she records in her address to Jean de Montreuil.⁸³ In the early *Débat des deux amants*, Christine seems to hint that the *Rose* might have a genuine social function as a *remedium amoris*.⁸⁴ Later, in the *Advision Cristine*, we find an interesting transformation of a metaphor familiar from the *Rose*: where Jean de Meun participates in a tradition of figuratively associating writing with insemination, Christine instead presents writing as intellectual pregnancy.⁸⁵ This is surely an implicit critique of Jean's text, but it is not quite an outright rejection: the *Rose* must somehow be addressed as part of Christine's attempt to articulate her own productive poetics.

Christine's engagement with the *Rose* reveals that despite her attempts to push it out of the centre of the literary tradition in which she participated, it remained for her an influential text, a generative work that was provocative, to be sure, but also procreative of new writings. In England in the fourteenth century the *Rose* was equally inescapable — a

⁸⁰ *Débat*, 21.

⁸¹ Mühlethaler, "Les poètes", 99.

⁸² See, for example, Nadia Margolis, 'Culture vantée, culture réinventée'; Thelma Fenster, "Perdre son latin"; Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Italian Humanism'.

⁸³ See the extracts from other works commenting on the *Rose* in Hult (ed.), *Debate of the 'Romance of the Rose'*. See also the collection edited by Christine McWebb, *Debating the 'Roman de la Rose'*.

⁸⁴ *Débat des deux amants*, 961–70; see also Hult (ed.), *Debate*, 45–8.

⁸⁵ Huot, 'Seduction and Sublimation', 366–7.

productive and generative literary force. Perhaps its most important effect was to suggest to English poets ways in which they might participate in the privileged tradition of classical poetry, even as it seriously questioned the validity of that enterprise. It was no doubt the plurality of the *Rose* and its insistent play with meaning that led Christine, in the *Querelle*, to attempt to supplant it with the stable dignities of Dante — a strong foundation on which to establish her own authority.⁸⁶ In fifteenth-century England, male writers, anxious for different reasons to establish the legitimacy of their position, invented a literary tradition built on a similarly stable and dignified version of the absent Chaucer. The *Rose*, which had perhaps as much right as Chaucer to claim an originary centrality in the literature of medieval England, was written out of literary history, in a process that continues to shape and limit our understanding of the period today.

⁸⁶ Hicks (ed.), *Débat*, 141–2.

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