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Reading Narrative Images: Visual Literacy in Medieval Romance Texts and Illuminated Manuscripts

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READING NARRATIVE IMAGES: VISUAL LITERACY IN MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

TEXTS AND ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

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Abstract

This study examines the instructive aspects of visual material in medieval romance texts and their illuminated manuscripts. Medieval romance contains an extensive array of visual references, and the present discussion focuses on the phenomenology of these episodes: depictions of the aesthetic and intellectual aftereffects of sight, and the imagination at work. Such instances are often related within the text to the act of reading itself, and through them the author encourages correct and effective practices of reading. In romance texts the characters often struggle to interpret such signs, sometimes with disastrous consequences, and their reactions in turn become lessons for the reader. The first section of the discussion focuses on romance texts, and particularly on depictions of image-crafting, the imagination at work, and the recognition and interpretation of visual signs. The discussion in the second section concentrates on illuminated romance manuscripts, and examines the authorial perspectives expressed through narrative illustration. The visual material of medieval romance is largely concerned with communication, and the didactic conversation that occurs between author and reader is implicit within the romance text. This study therefore demonstrates that the visual material in medieval romance narratives often has a practical function: to establish a dialogue between the author and reader, and sometimes the limner and reader, concerning good reading practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION: READING TEXT AND IMAGES IN MEDIEVAL ROMANCE TEXTS AND ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Introduction

How did medieval readers respond to books? In order to attempt an answer to this question we need to think carefully about the phenomenology of reading within a medieval context, which involves delving into the subjective, psychological experience of an assumed reader. The act of reading is today so commonplace that the processes involved in digesting or interpreting a text are generally overlooked. What, after all, is actually involved in the processes of reading? Understanding these processes can tell us a great deal about a text, and also about its intended reader, and how the latter was expected to respond to narrative content. When we refer to reading we usually refer to the act of mentally processing meaning from written letters and words but, as we will see, the concept of visual literacy allows for meaning to be read from pictorial images as well. For some medieval readers, particularly those of a more elite social standing, reading a book could involve having to process images as well as text, and these images can also tell us something about guided reading. Pictorial illustrations add an additional perspective to that of the author and provide, in some cases, direct visual signs to guide the reader's interpretation or understanding of the narrative content of the illustration. This process is present in more subtle ways within textual narratives such as medieval romance. Within these, visual descriptions are translated into a visual response in the reader's imagination, which can then be converted into intellectual reflection on the meaning of the visual material that is presented. Such mental images can be used to direct the reader in their understanding of the text; and the frequent occurrence of such markers acts as a reading aid that, on a basic level, guides the reader through the events of

the narrative, and on a more nuanced level, helps them to gain a better understanding of the meaning behind those events. Text and image relations, both within the narrative and on the physical page, can therefore tell us a great deal about the phenomenology behind reading the medieval text, and how the visualisation of narrative material contributed to an instructive conversation between the author (or limner) and their reader.

<p style="text-align:center">Reader Response</p>

A phenomenological approach to narrative and reading in the Middle Ages is difficult to carry out because we cannot normally ascertain how an individual reader might have responded, emotionally or psychologically, to any given text. We know, for instance, that Christine de Pizan objected to Jean de Meun's portion of *Le Roman de la Rose* because we have her written responses to the text.[1] Direct responses such as this, however, are rare, and do not necessarily tell us the reader's reactions to the text as they read it, although they do give us some idea. This problem, however, is not exclusive to the Middle Ages, but true of the field of reception studies in general. Even in contemporary cases it is rare to have a written or spoken testimony from a reader that explicitly tells us their reaction to the text and how they are guided through it with the help of clues provided by the author; even in seemingly direct responses such as book reviews, academic scholarship and even spoken conversation, we are not party to the internal reaction of the reader as they first encounter the text. We encounter additional problems in the fact that many medieval texts are written by anonymous authors, and in such cases the context of their reception can seldom be ascertained directly; not only do we know next to nothing about the

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[1] Christine de Pizan, *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, ed. David F. Hult (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

reader in such cases, but nothing about the author either, or much about the circumstances in which the text might have been written. In a context where a book might well have been read privately, aloud to a group, or made simply to exhibit the luxury and wealth of its illuminations, ascertaining the exact nature of the reader, or audience, can be very difficult. A central problem with examining the role of medieval readers is our historical removal from them, and theories from the past century on the topic of reception studies are therefore particularly useful to the study of medieval texts for allowing us some access to the medieval reader.

Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory* opened up new possibilities in medieval studies for understanding the psychology behind processing information from texts.[2] In this book, Carruthers argues that the act of reading in the Middle Ages was directly associated with mnemonic activity, stating that 'retention and retrieval are stimulated best by visual means, and the visual form of sense perception is what gives stability and permanence to memory storage', and that in the Middle Ages 'reading was considered to be essentially a visual act'.[3] A particularly keen observation by Carruthers, relating to the internalisation involved in the reading process, is the fact that reading does not consist of mere looking, but of visual attention that is immediately followed by an internal combination of imagination, interpretation and understanding:

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[2] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Carruthers' research is not the first to focus on medieval psychology or cognitive theory, however, the most important prior example perhaps being E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Warburg Institute Surveys 6 (London: Warburg Institute, 1975).

[3] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 19 and 20.

A work is not truly read until one has made it part of oneself – that process constitutes a necessary stage of its textualization. Merely running one's eyes over the written pages is not reading at all, for the writing must be transferred into memory, from graphemes on parchment or papyrus or paper to images written in one's brain by emotion and sense.[4]

Quoting Hugh of St Victor, she elsewhere states that the start of learning is achieved through reading or study, but that its consummation is achieved through meditation.[5] This idea of the complex thought process that follows sight and/or reading, and its resulting knowledge, is crucial to our study, as we will largely be consulting visual material within romance texts that is processed mentally by the reader in order to progress satisfactorily through the narrative. Since *The Book of Memory* was published, other scholars such as Laurel Amtower, Derek Pearsall, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Melissa Furrow have tackled the question of the medieval reader and responses to texts.[6] Others have delved into this question with regard to specific texts, such as Sylvia Huot and Kevin Brownlee on *Le Roman de la Rose*; Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones, Lori Walters and Sandra Hindman on the romances of Chrétien de

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[4] Ibid, p. 11.

[5] Ibid, p. 202.

[6] Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Derek Pearsall, 'Introduction', in *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (New York: AMS Press, 2001), pp. xv–xviii; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, ed., *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript* (New York: AMS Press, 2001); and Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009).

Troyes; and Catherine Karkov on the Junius 11 poems.[7] Some, such as A. C. Spearing, Norman

Klassen, Michael Camille and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, have focused on sight and optical theory

in medieval texts;[8] others, such as Paula Leverage, Lisa H. Cooper and Jamie McKinstry, have

focused specifically on memory studies;[9] and others still, such as Jacqueline Tasioulas and

Corinne Saunders, have explored affect within medieval texts.[10] However, there is still a gap in

our understanding of the phenomenology of the medieval romance reader, and particularly the

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[7] Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot, ed., *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception* (Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones and Lori Walters, *Les manuscrits*

des Chrétien de Troyes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993); Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of*

Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and

Catherine Karkov, *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[8] A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1993); Norman Klassen, *Chaucer on Love, Knowledge and Sight*, Chaucer Studies 21

(Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995); Michael Camille, 'Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval

Practices of Seeing', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 197–223; and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the*

Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004).

[9] Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de Geste* (Amsterdam and New

York: Rodopi, 2010); Lisa H. Cooper, 'Crafting Memory', in *Medieval Literature: Criticisms and Debates*, ed.

Holly A. Crocker and D. Vance Smith (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 183–91; and Jamie McKinstry, *Middle*

English Romance and the Craft of Memory (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015).

[10] Jacqueline Tasioulas, '"Dying of Imagination" in the First Fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Medium Ævum*

82.2 (2013): 212–35; and Corinne Saunders, 'Mind, Body and Affect in Medieval English Arthurian Romance', in

Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice, ed. Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington and

Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 31–46.

imaginative processes involved in reading a text as narrative. It is largely this that the present

study wishes to address and to shed some light on, through an examination of the ways in which

both author and reader use visualisation as a tool to form an intellectual engagement with the

narrative. This relationship is crucial to our discussion, as it is both the ability of the author to

impart direction or meaning and that of the reader to absorb these and apply them more widely

that creates the dialogue of literary response. An extensive amount of scholarship on medieval

cognition has followed the work of Carruthers and her predecessors, but many aspects of the

phenomenology of reading romance texts remain to be discussed. Furthermore, within these texts

the dialogue between author and reader often centres on the act of reading itself, and instructions

for correct or constructive reading are implicit throughout a number of romance narratives.

Wolfgang Iser's theory of the implied reader states that a book is always written with a reader

in mind.[11] The theory posits that even if the book were immediately lost upon being created, or

locked away and never read by anyone, there would still be an assumption of reception involved

in the text's creation. Iser describes the term as incorporating 'both the prestructuring of the

potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading

process'.[12] This is a particularly useful tool for any theorist of medieval reception, since it allows

us to use the evidence within the text in order to determine narrative effect rather than forcing us

to search for an unattainable medieval reader. The author writes with the reader in mind, both

consciously and unconsciously. At the conscious level, the author might attempt through various

literary techniques to guide the reader through the narrative. At the subconscious level, the text

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[11] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[12] Ibid, p. xii.

will also inevitably include contemporary references to historical events, national perceptions and social conventions which tell us a great deal about the context in which author, reader and text simultaneously existed. Reception theory was first comprehensively developed by Hans Robert Jauss, whose work addresses reader reception more than response. There is a useful distinction to be made here, outlined by Iser as follows: aesthetic response is 'a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction … although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus'; whereas '[a] theory of reception, on the other hand, always deals with existing readers, whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature. A theory of response has its roots in the text; a theory of reception arises from a history of readers' judgments'.[13] According to these definitions it is reader response, not reception, that most concerns the present study. Jauss does not necessarily make this distinction, however, and treats reception as both an aesthetic and historical matter. He says that '[a] literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions', and that reading also involves 'the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals'.[14] Jauss introduces here the idea of narrative conventions allowing the author

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[13] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. x.

[14] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, Theory and History of Literature 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 23.

of a text to direct the reader on a certain course, using signs and signals that are present

throughout the narrative. The reader is then expected to respond to such signals in a number of

ways. Both Iser and Jauss discuss a dual role of the reader: that of the first, aesthetic reading of

the text, and the secondary, intellectual understanding of it. Jauss describes this as being '[t]he

relation between primary aesthetic experience and secondary aesthetic reflection'.[15] On the

primary aesthetic side, he argues, we as readers project ourselves onto the protagonist of the text

and thus allow ourselves to partake in the experience within the text by association: 'By

sympathetic identification, we refer to the aesthetic affect of projecting oneself onto the alien

self, a process which eliminates the admiring distance and can inspire feelings in the spectator or

reader that will lead him to a solidarization with the suffering hero'.[16] This idea is later defined

by Iser as the 'double role' of the reader. One role is subjective and immersed in the perspective

of the text, whilst the other is objective and intellectual. He describes this effect further:

> As a rule we readers slip into the role mapped out by the text. The split that then occurs, and
>
> that is responsible for the double figure, is due to the fact that on the one hand we are
>
> prepared to assume the role, and yet on the other we cannot completely cut ourselves off from
>
> what we are – not least as we have to understand what we are given to perform.[17]

The dualism of the reader, then, is primarily divided by aesthetic and intellectual response, and

relies upon both a suspension of disbelief and a full awareness of the context of reading in order

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[15] Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 153.

[16] Ibid, p. 172.

[17] Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 63.

to work. The theory of the implied reader, instigated by Jauss and elaborated by Iser, therefore combines authorial intention with reader reception, and thus allows a fuller interpretation of the elements of narrative reception that can be located within the text itself. Reception theory and reader response, and Iser's contribution to this area in particular, therefore help us to gain a better understanding of how medieval author-reader relations might have worked, in large part by identifying and developing the crucial, theoretical figure of the implied reader.

Theories of reader response must be central to our discussion, in order to examine how visual material within the romance narratives helps to guide the implied reader (henceforth 'the reader') through the processes of visualising and interpreting narrative material. As we shall see, this guidance often pertains to the act of reading itself. Many romance narratives incorporate descriptions of physical books and pictorial images, which are confronted, manipulated and interpreted by the characters in myriad ways, and with a range of success. The presence of books within books is not in itself surprising, as such subjects pertain to the authors' livelihood. For instance, a large number of novels from the past century place books or reading at the centre of their narratives: a necessarily selective list of examples might include Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004). The fact is: authors think about texts and how we interact with them, and this line of thought naturally pervades many of the texts they write. Some books, such as Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979), force the reader to imagine themself within a text or story, an effect which is analogous to the idea of immersing oneself within the act of reading.[18]

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[18] See Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, p. 45; and Rosa María Rodríguez Porto, 'Beyond the Two Doors of Memory: Intertextualities and Intervisualities in Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and the

Some medieval texts also deal with metafictional techniques, making storytelling a key ingredient of the narrative and thus drawing attention to the craft of the author. Perhaps the best known example is Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (whose format relies closely on that of its predecessor, Boccaccio's *Decameron*), in which the storytelling aspect of the tales is key to the text, and the pilgrims frequently interrupt one another and call attention to each other's existence throughout the individual narratives. Medieval authors seem to have been quite aware of their status as communicators, and whether their primary concern was entertainment or instruction they used many techniques to convey to the reader that the key to achieving greater understanding of the narrative is in improving the act of reading itself. Medieval romance authors often employ narrative instances of imagination, visualisation and recollection in connection with reading and/or improved understanding in order to call to mind (whether consciously or not) similar methods for the reader to employ in their own reading practices.

Visual Literacy

The matter of reader response is complicated further when we consider the possibilities for reading images in illuminated texts. From the thirteenth century onwards manuscripts that contained fictional narratives, which were relatively recent themselves, were accompanied in some instances by illuminations.[19] Secular fiction in the Middle Ages is somewhat ambiguous by definition, and its meaning depends on how we wish to define written narrative around this time. Written texts, and pictorial illustrations, had long existed at this point for saints' lives, chronicles,

Histoire Ancienne', in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*, ed. Elma Brenner, Meredith Cohen and Mary Franklin-Brown (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 55–76 (p. 56).

[19] For more on the history of the book trade in France and England, see Chapters 7 and 8.

and scientific studies such as bestiaries or medical documents, but it was not until the introduction and increasing demand for romance texts that vernacular narratives in writing became relatively common. Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian romances were some of the earliest examples to gain wide distribution in France, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although illuminated manuscripts were a luxury rather than the norm, these objects offered new and exciting innovations by presenting narrative as a multivalent concept that relied upon a conjointly textual and visual format. The relationship between texts and images in such manuscripts therefore begs an additional question: how did medieval readers look at and understand illuminated texts? Work has been done in this area as well. Some texts, such as the conference volume *Reading Images and Texts*, edited by Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert, have attempted to bridge the gap between text and image, but most use an art historical approach instead of using literary analysis to investigate the narrative reception of visual texts.[20] One volume that successfully combines both is *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* by Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Linda Olson.[21] Traditionally, text and image have been treated as separate entities, and they do require different cognitive processes in order to be read. Our challenge is to strip away previous assumptions involving narrative and to

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[20] *Reading Images and Texts*, ed. Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005); for more art historical perspectives also see William J. Diebold, *Word and Image: An Introduction to Early Medieval Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Bernard James Muir, ed., *Reading Texts and Images: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Art and Patronage: In Honour of Margaret M. Manion* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002); Heather Pulliam, *Word and Image in the Book of Kells* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006); and Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[21] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

recognise that it exists in a number of unorthodox formats. In many instances it is possible to trace a narrative as a multiplicity of voices in which the collective elements of text, image, word of mouth and various other means of communication contribute towards an overarching narrative frame. For instance, a single manuscript was usually constructed by a number of hands; and its patrons, scribes, rubricators, illuminators and editors all had a role in shaping the narrative presentation of the text within it. Another example can be found in the formation of legend or myth, in which various types of narrative combine to make a collected, narrative whole. Arthurian material is perhaps one of the best examples of this effect, since its narrative is collected from various sources rather than one master text, and incorporates diverse interpretations from textual, visual and oral adaptations. Similarly, the story of Mélusine, a less familiar character, appears in a number of diverse formats which coalesce to form a wider, more multivalent version of her than we see in just one text. The addition of images to a text alone creates a small, contained version of this effect, in which the new perspective provided by the limner is one of both a guided reader and an authoritative creator. This approach is in keeping with how medieval authors and readers are likely to have approached literature in general: not as something concrete, but as a changing and evolving art form which retained the spontaneity of oral storytelling in its shifting forms and in the multiplicity of its delivery and reception, using a variety of media and methods. Medieval narratives are thus composed of layers of interpretation, which incorporate not only the work of the original author, but also the additional hands involved in producing the manuscripts, images and divergent editions of the text, and, of course, the response of the reader as well: all of which is a somewhat dizzying prospect for the modern reader. Manuscript illuminations provide an additional angle on the ideas of reader response

expressed above and, although these are specific to their individual copies, they provide a similar instance of dialogue between creator and receiver.

Visual literacy is a wide-ranging term, but one that is gaining ground as a significant phrase for text and image studies. Where literacy refers to the ability to engage with and understand text, visual literacy refers to the same ability used to read pictorial images. The term is often used to refer to educational tools and pedagogical methods,[22] but appears in academic scholarship as well. W. J. T. Mitchell describes the impact of the phrase in the following way:

> *Visual literacy* has been around for some time as a fundamental notion in the study of art history, iconology and visual culture. It is a strong and seemingly unavoidable metaphor, one that compares the acquisition of skills, competence, and expertise (quite distinct levels of mastery) to the mastery of language and literature. Seeing, it suggests, is something like reading.[23]

Visual literacy is a term that can be applied to any graphic form, whether that be fully pictorial images or graphs, charts or mixed media that combine text and image, and thus to a wide range of text-image relations. It usually refers to physical pictorial examples, but covers such a wide

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[22] See Matthew Daniel Eddy, 'The Shape of Knowledge: Children and the Visual Culture of Literacy and Numeracy', *Science in Context* 26 (2013): 215–45; Jo Anne Vasquez, Michael W. Comer and Frankie Troutman, *Developing Visual Literacy in Science K-8* (Arlington, VA: National Science Teachers Association, 2010); Johanna Riddle, *Engaging the Eye Generation: Visual Literacy Strategies for the K-5 Classroom* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2009); Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, ed., *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008); and James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[23] W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?', in James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp 11–30 (p. 11).

range of these that it can also be usefully applied to the visualised material of narrative texts. The act of reading a text is inextricably tied up with that of reading an image, not least for the fact that reading text involves deciphering the visual signs of language.[24] However, the ability to read images also becomes necessary to the effective understanding of narrative text once we consider the processes of visualisation that are involved in such an act. In this way, any attempt to read narrative text becomes, by necessity, an act of visual literacy.

We can gain further perspective on the role of visual literacy in our understanding of medieval readership with the assistance of modern and contemporary theorists. At the end of the nineteenth century the field of semiotics was revolutionised by Ferdinand de Saussure. His definitions of the sign, signifier and signified established the idea that the marked sign or image did not represent the object itself, but rather a reproduction of it, and that linguistic signs were inevitably entangled with issues of reader interpretation and subjective response.[25] He uses the example of a tree to emphasise the arbitrary nature of the sign: neither the word 'tree' nor an image of a tree represents the real object it signifies, but the consistency of such signifiers allows us to use these as imitational referents of the real thing, and thus to communicate meaning.[26]

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[24] Ibid, p. 11.

[25] Similar notions of the artificiality of language and texts had been established by earlier thinkers, perhaps most notably Plato and Aristotle and their discussions on the concept of mimesis. See Plato, *Republic*, trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), II, III and X; 'Ion', in *Plato on Poetry: Ion, Republic 276e–398b9; Republic 595–608b10*, ed. Penelope Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[26] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), pp. 65–70.

Saussure's works reveal the integral role of the reader in creating meaning out of signs, that is, making the association between signifier and signified, and thus implicate the reader as a necessary figure in the communication of narrative. His theories also indicate the importance of visual interpretation in both text and image, as Saussure treats both as visual signs which we read in order to glean order or meaning from them.

Erwin Panofsky established, through his definitions of iconography and iconology, that various levels of cognitive response are required in order fully to understand or appreciate a work of art. In *Studies in Iconology* he defines three layers of art appreciation: at the first stage, a basic understanding of visual forms; at the second stage, a learned or culturally inherent knowledge of social or cultural context (iconography); and, at the third stage, a synthetic understanding of what the piece of art accomplishes, and why (iconology). He argues that the third level, iconology, is crucial to a real understanding and appreciation of the artwork:

> As long as we limit ourselves to stating that Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco shows a group of thirteen men around a dinner table, and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we deal with the work of art as such, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as its own properties or qualifications. But when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms.[27]

He also emphasises the ability of the reader, or viewer, to interpret iconographical signs by referring to their own knowledge and experience, and explains that proficiency in learning and

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[27] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1972), p. 8.

cultural understanding are key to gaining a wide-ranging familiarity with the allusions that might be encountered within a work of art:

> *Iconographical analysis*, dealing with *images*, *stories* and *allegories* instead of with *motifs*, presupposes, of course, much more than that familiarity with objects and events which we acquire by practical experience. It presupposes a familiarity with specific *themes* or *concepts* as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition.[28]

Context is therefore crucial to understanding an image or sign, and to obtaining a correct reading of the subject. Panofsky adds that an iconographical appreciation of these forms is not enough, and that in order to really understand them they must be considered within the context of their production and reception. For Panofsky, then, visual art appreciation involves reading the signs in order to determine their narrative context, and meaning is derived from an ability to read the image at a number of interpretive levels. His work has had a significant impact on the study of art history, but can also be applied to literary studies; the interpretation of visual signs is very much present within narrative texts as well as in the physical images of illuminated manuscripts, and a sense of context is equally important in order to understand these to their fullest potential. In reading any text, there are innumerable layers of meaning that can be gleaned through the various abilities of the reader. Theorists such as Saussure and Panofsky can therefore provide a basis for our understanding of how pictorial images can be read for narrative meaning.

This study is concerned for the most part with romance texts and manuscripts, but devotional manuscripts can also give us some idea of how reading and instruction were connected to visual literacy in the Middle Ages. Books of Hours, a type of devotional manuscript that was mostly

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[28] Ibid, p. 11.

Figure 1.1. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 1857 (Hours of Mary of Burgundy), fols 14v–15r.

Figure 1.2. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 1857 (Hours of Mary of Burgundy), fol. 43v.

prominent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, often lavishly illuminated and belonging

mostly to laymen, were thought to have been particularly suited to private devotion. One full

page miniature from the Hours of Mary of Burgundy, made in Flanders in the 1470s, and likely

to have been presented as a wedding gift to Mary of Burgundy, shows the owner of the

manuscript reading a devotional text (Figure 1.1). In the window behind her, we see Mary's

imagination at work as she envisages what she is reading in her book. In the vision, Mary herself

appears again, kneeling before the Virgin and Child. We see not just a vision of the contents of

Mary's book, but the reader's place within it. The miniature appears opposite a prayer by

Thomas Beckett, the *Gaude flore virginali*, and so the larger image might be intended to instruct

Mary on how she might go about contemplating the prayer.[29] Another window miniature on fol. 43v depicts Christ being nailed to the cross (Figure 1.2). We do not see Mary of Burgundy this time (unless we place her in the crowd), but an open book within another interior scene, with the vision in the background. The miniature shown in this book does not match that shown in the window: in the latter Christ is being nailed to the cross whereas in the former he is already on it. Amtower has argued that Mary's absence from this second scene negates the idea of the first depicting an act of imagination.[30] However, another reading is possible. As the window image does not merely replicate that in the book, the reader is encouraged instead to think beyond surface meanings and to consider the image within its wider context, in order to achieve a fuller devotional reading. In the Hours of Mary of Burgundy the image of Mary reading with her imaginative vision of the content of the text in the background provides us with some idea of how the limner envisaged the imagination and the process of visualising the contents of a text. Despite being a devotional text, the Hours of Mary of Burgundy provides images that could be read as instructive to the reader in the manner in which she ought to read, and visualise, her text. This in turn can be applied to romance texts, many of which likewise encourage the reader to develop strong and effective reading practices through the guidance of visual signs.

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[29] Herbert L. Kessler and Robert Deshman both use as an example the 'disappearing Christ' motif (in which Christ's Ascension into heaven is depicted by showing only his legs or feet) to demonstrate the power of images for devotional learning and practise, and for improving skills in contemplating difficult visual material: 'in affirming the limits of corporeal sight in the achievement of spiritual vision … [it] established that images can and do aid in the acquisition of spiritual understanding'. Robert Deshman, 'Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images', *Art Bulletin* 79.3 (1997): 518–46 (545). Also see Herbert L. Kessler, 'The Object as Subject in Medieval Art', *Haskins Society Journal* 23 (2011): 205–28 (211).

[30] Amtower, *Engaging Words*, p. 75.

Books and the intellectual side of reading play a prominent role in the visual programmes of a large number of devotional and secular manuscripts. In British Library Royal 1 E IX, of 143 historiated initials, 75 contain one or more codex volumes (many of which depict Jerome at his study), 7 contain written scrolls or leaflets, and 19 contain other forms of text including speech scrolls. It is, again, not surprising that a limner would have portrayed items so closely related to their own trade, or that they might use for inspiration the tools and materials gathered directly around them. However, there is a noteworthy level of textual engagement within these images, with a number of the miniatures focused on figures surrounded by books or involved in active reading or writing, and others in which interactions with text objects provide vivid depictions of communication. Given their devotional context, these images might be associated more with the importance of the biblical word than anything else (we might call to mind John 1:1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'), but we might also consider the instruction at the beginning of *The Prick of Conscience*, to 'rede & look':[31] a common enough phrase in medieval romance and other vernacular literature, but one that takes on particular significance in images that promote the written word so well as here. Books as physical objects make a large number of appearances throughout medieval manuscript illuminations. They are particularly prevalent in devotional manuscripts (the images of the four Evangelists with their books and Jerome in his study are familiar tropes), often as an attribute to designate the writer or scribe of the text, and sometimes as an indicator of wisdom. Some manuscripts seem to feature the physical book with particular zeal. In London, British Library, King's 9 (made in Bruges *c.* 1500), books appear consistently throughout the full page

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[31] *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience: A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text*, ed. Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood, Early English Text Society OS 342 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

miniatures, and we see many figures actively engaged in the act of reading. In several instances, however, the books seem to act as more than attributes. The inclusion of the saints reading shows an exemplary attitude for the reader to emulate: you, too, can be like the saints if you read your texts carefully. There are hints, perhaps, that the reader should not only be pious and read up on their scripture, but also use the example of the holy figures within these books to guide their own devotional reading, and practise devotion using the wisdom that comes from good practices of reading. For instance, the Virgin Mary is often reading in pictorial versions of the Annunciation, presumably as a sign of her piety. Amtower has said that '[b]oth image and book were witness to a new cultural phenomenon in which private reading became synonymous with spiritual growth, and the book itself came to be seen as imbued with sacramental attributes that could be directly

Figure 1.3. London, British Library, King's 9, fol. 53v.

Figure 1.4. London, British Library, King's 9, fol. 36v.

Figure 1.5. London, British Library, King's 9, fol. 93v.

fused with the individual reader'.[32] In King's 9, some books are placed more realistically than others in the miniatures. We can imagine St Anne being interrupted from her devotional reading to hold the Christ child (Figure 1.3), but perhaps not St Andrew reading on the way to his crucifixion (Figure 1.4). The images are not necessarily supposed to be realistic, as long as they get their point across. If we think of the angels in the Adoration as reading to Christ, or directing their reading towards him, we see a more didactic reason for including the books as they are in the miniatures: to direct the reader towards devotional readings that will encourage them to turn towards Christ (Figure 1.5). This is the effect we also see in the full-page miniatures of the Hours of Mary of Burgundy. These demonstrate an encouragement of private and subjective devotion in the reader, but also remind the modern reader of the complex manner in which vision and imagination could be put to devotional purposes in illuminated texts. The same attitudes and techniques can be applied to secular literature and manuscripts. The creators of medieval romance texts and illuminations not only explored the possibilities of representing visual phenomena such as the imagination, but also created material that could easily be applied to the main component of their relationship with the reader: reading itself.

In reading romance images, whether we do so within the text or in the accompanying visual artwork, we must be aware of several things: that images can exist in text as well as in physical form; that various levels of recognition are involved in reading these images; and that each image is subject to the interpretation of the implied reader. Romance texts are embedded with clues that are left for the reader to follow, deliberately or subconsciously, and manuscript miniatures provide an additional layer of interpretation for the reader to contemplate. Each opens up a dialogue that instructs the reader in the ability to read such visual signs effectively.

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[32] Amtower, *Engaging Words*, p. 47.

Chapter Summaries

The following chapters will address various areas of visual literacy in medieval romance texts and illuminated manuscripts. Chapter 2, 'Optics in Medieval Thought and Literature', deals with the history of optical theory in classical and medieval thought and literature, in which we find that the duality of sight and perception are key components. This is followed by a series of literary chapters which focus on English romances. The first of these, Chapter 3, 'The Crafted Image: Nigromancers, Ymageoures and Authors', discusses romance texts that focus in large part on the artifice of images, and the craft that is implicit in the presentation of wax images used for nigromancy, or of mechanical or artisanal objects. In addition to drawing attention not only to the artificiality of the images but also to the artificers behind them, the authors of these works highlight the constructed nature of their own craft, and the processes involved in both making and receiving the crafted image. These texts therefore introduce the idea of the image within the romance text being an instructional tool used by the author to improve the reader's appreciation and understanding of the narrative. Chapter 4, 'Inner Sight: Dreams, Memory and Book-Learning', focuses on romance depictions of the imagination at work, largely in the case of dream visions and their relations to fictional texts. Here we see the example of the fictional mind at work, which becomes a model for the reader to follow; and in many examples the activation of the fictional imagination is tied to the act of reading. These examples therefore reinforce the intrinsic relationship between the romance author and reader, and the didactic conversation that takes place between the two through the narrative. Chapter 5, 'Recognising the Visual Signs of Medieval Romance', explores romances in which the recognition of images and visual signs plays a vital role. A number of these aim to instruct the reader on the contents of the text: in some cases, questions of morality are raised with regard to central characters, and the text

provides guidance on how best to recognise true and false natures; in others, disguises play a key role, and again guidance is provided on how best to navigate the visible and invisible, and outer and inner forms; lastly, minor episodes in which sign recognition plays a vital role are common in medieval romance, and their authors are also instructive on how best to make use of these episodes, and apply them more widely. The motif of recognition is important for obtaining understanding and meaning, something that applies to the romance protagonists and therefore, by extension, the reader. This chapter is followed by an exploration of the anonymous English *Melusine*, in Chapter 6: 'Reading Images and the (In)ability to Interpret Visual Signs in the Middle English *Melusine*'. This romance deals specifically with the idea of misinterpreting visual and textual signs; not only does this motif form the basis of the romance, which tells the story of how the faerie Melusine is cursed for life because her husband Raymondin fails to follow her instruction not to attempt to see her on Saturdays, but it also figures in various guises throughout the narrative. Melusine's children are marked by visual signs of their faerie lineage but their characters vary between being noble, evil and benign, and Melusine herself is misread by Raymondin at several points in the narrative, perhaps most pertinently when he blames her faerie origins for the tragedy that befalls their family in an outburst that brings about their separation. Of particular interest is their son Geoffray's encounter with the tomb of his grandfather Elinas, which incorporates both textual and visual signs in order to tell the family's history; Geoffray fails to read these signs correctly at the time of encountering them but remembers them afterwards and is able to call them to mind when he learns the truth about his family, and then to realise their significance. This and other such incidents of the interpretation, and often misinterpretation, of visual signs highlight some of the issues of visual evidence and

correct reading that lie at the heart of *Melusine*, and encourage the reader to be careful in their own reading of images and texts within the the romance narrative.

The second part of this thesis addresses illuminated romance manuscripts, particularly focusing on French and English examples. Chapter 7, 'Perfecting Sequential Narratives in French Romance Illuminations', discusses some of the trends that developed in French commercial manuscript production up to the fifteenth century, with particular reference to storytelling techniques such as narrative sequencing and composite scenes that consist of detailed summaries enclosed within a single frame. The neatly polished artwork typical of French commercial productions in the fifteenth century is impressive in its scope, and its images are for the most part successful in illustrating their accompanying texts. However, many examples show particular skill in depicting narrative episodes, and present the perspective of the limner as having a level of authority comparable to that of the romance author. Many of the secular manuscript miniatures presented here offer diverse interpretations of their accompanying texts rather than direct illustrations. Chapter 8, 'Visual Intertextuality and Narrative Engagement in English Romance Illuminations', explores English romance illumination, which is scarce and often derided for its rougher style compared to some of the more sophisticated examples made in royal courts and commercial centres elsewhere. However, in a number of English manuscripts we see an alternative form of narrative illustration. Partly as a result of the lack of wealthy patrons willing to commission luxury romance miniatures, limners of romance texts were forced to use creative alternatives. We find illuminations that inhabit the margins, and many that provide corrections, explanations or conceptual assistance for their accompanying texts, rather than depicting full narrative scenes. The result is a form of illumination that connects the reader closely with the text and allows text and image to function collaboratively in conveying the

content of the manuscript page. English romance illumination, then, engages with the accompanying text in ways that complemented the rising intellectualism of late medieval English literature. Chapter 9, 'Perspective and Interpretation in the Illuminated *Mélusine* Manuscripts', offers a case study of the manuscripts of the Mélusine romances. In these, text and image combine to form cohesive readings of the source material, with varying effect and using methods that are specific to each artist. The result is a variety of interpretations of the original story and its variants, all of which contributes to the larger narrative of the Mélusine legend. The Conclusion of this section, and of the entire thesis, discusses the contemporary life of pictorial narratives, and addresses the relevance of media such as illustrated books, film and comics to medieval manuscript studies. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the relevance of contemporary literature, readers and artists to medieval studies; we might not have direct access to the medieval author or the medieval reader, but we can apply our knowledge of contemporary visual narratives, and particularly modern adaptations of medieval texts, to medieval narratives. Although several centuries separate us from the medieval authors and their implied readers, sometimes a fresh outlook is required in order to understand a familiar subject from a slightly different angle, and might enlighten us further as to the purposes and effects of visual material in medieval romance texts and the illuminated manuscripts that accompanied them.

Conclusions

It is difficult to know with any certainty how medieval readers responded to the texts they read. Our current understanding of how they might have done so relies for the most part on ideas such as authorial intention and the implied reader, which allow us to examine the expected role of the reader in reading the romance text. Two streams of thought in particular are essential to the

following study: reader response, being the reader's ability to visualise and make sense of textual material; and visual literacy, being the viewer's ability to read images as text. These two areas overlap to provide us with a sense of how medieval readers might have responded to and made intellectual use of the visual material within their texts. In addition, our knowledge of the instructional elements of medieval romance literature gives us a more specific understanding of the instructional relationship between the authors and readers of medieval texts. Our own investigations along these lines, with the help of recent scholarship, can help us to piece together an idea of how the medieval romance text and its images provide us with an intellectual conversation between the authors and their readers on the nature of reading itself. The examples given are by no means exhaustive, but provide ample evidence to suggest the presence of visual signs as guides for effective reading in medieval romance texts and manuscripts.

SECTION I

ROMANCE TEXTS

2. OPTICS IN MEDIEVAL THOUGHT AND LITERATURE

Introduction

Medieval romance narratives are frequently concerned with matters relating to the sight, visualisation and interpretation of images. Camille has noted that insight through vision 'is never just a matter of optics' and necessarily involves levels of internal perception, formulated by cognitive processes that are still largely unknown, and that we tend to think of today in largely biopsychological terms.[33] Similarly, images in medieval romance texts are necessarily connected to the interpretive and imaginative processes that follow from the sight of them, and tend to require some insight from both the romance protagonist and the reader of the text.[34] In medieval writings on optics we find that a difference is established between sight and insight, so that where there is a viewer and an image, a process of visualisation takes place in which the image is both recognised at a base level and interpreted through imaginative processes. Images in medieval romance and critical thought therefore require insight and interpretation by both the protagonist of the romance and its reader, one often being led by the example of the other.

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[33] Camille, 'Before the Gaze', p. 202.

[34] For more on this topic see Kessler, 'The Object as Subject'; Jérôme Baschet, 'L'image-objet', in *L'image: fonctions et usages des images dans 'l'Occident medieval*, ed. Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris, Léopard d'or, 1996), pp. 7–26; and Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?: The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum* 80.1 (2005): 1–43.

Optical Theory

Greek philosophy shaped late medieval ideas of optics and the reception of the image. The idea that sight relied on matter that existed outside of ourselves, i.e. light, was essential to the theories developed by several philosophers, and continued to form the primary basis of optical theory throughout the following centuries. The two primary theories of sight in Greek philosophy were those of intromission and extramission. The theory of intromission, which was developed by philosophers such as Aristotle and Epicurus, claimed that the eye receives images that are essentially copies of the object of sight (*eidola*), and thus implicated the image or object as an active agent in the generation of these copies and their transmission towards the eye of the subject. Extramission theory claimed that physical rays of light are emitted from the eyes, and that these travel towards the object of sight and return to the eye with the captured image.[35] This theory thus implied that the subject of the gaze was imbued with more agency than its object. Plato, in the *Timaeus*, describes this process in the following way:

> The eyes were the first of the organs to be fashioned by the gods, to conduct light … the pure fire inside us … they made to flow through the eyes …. Now whenever daylight surrounds the visual stream, like makes contact with like and coalesces with it to make up a single homogeneous body aligned with the direction of the eyes. This happens wherever the internal fire strikes and presses against an external object it has connected with. And because this body of fire has become uniform throughout and thus uniformly affected, it transmits the motions of whatever it comes in contact with as well as of whatever comes in contact with it,

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[35] Klassen, *Chaucer*, pp. 4–5.

through the whole body until they reach the soul. This brings about the sensation we call 'seeing'.[36]

Plato's description posits the phenomenon of sight as a beam of light emitted by the eyes which attaches itself to the image, so that the act of seeing is predominantly internal. This theory was also developed by Euclid and Ptolemy; the latter partially combined the theories of intromission and extramission using a concept of conical vision in which conical rays extend from an apex point behind the eyes and return with the projected image of the object, which lies somewhere on the line of vision between the apex and the perceived object.[37] The relationship between subject and object, and the agency behind each of these, are key concerns of the extramission and intromission theories. The intromission and extramission theories essentially disagree on agency: does the initial act of sight originate from the eye, or the external image? This question is essential to understanding how medieval authors and readers might have thought about cognitive or optical agency in the act of reading.

Plato also introduced the theory of mimesis, the idea that an image imitates nature. In his *Republic* he first outlines this concept with reference to the imitative voice of the narrator in

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[36] Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 45.

[37] Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Theory of Visual Perception: An English Translation of the Optics*, ed. A. Mark Smith, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 86.2 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996). The first book of Ptolemy's *Optics* is lost and the earliest known copy of the remaining four books is an Arabic translation. A. Mark Smith has noted that Ptolemy is particularly interested in the properties of illusions that are associated with vision. For more on this, see A. Mark Smith, *Ptolemy and the Foundations of Ancient Mathematical Optics: A Source Based Guided Study*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 89.3 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1999).

Homer's *Iliad*.[38] He also later distinguishes between object and form with reference to craftsmen and artists, stating that art is necessarily imitative: 'So, if he doesn't make what is, he doesn't make the real thing, but something resembling it but distinct from it'.[39] According to Plato, then, art and narrative are necessarily inferior representations of nature. Aristotle also addresses this topic in his *Poetics*, but is far less critical in his appraisal of the imitative art form and instead argues in favour of its pleasures, stating that '[r]epresentation comes naturally to human beings from childhood, and so does the universal pleasure in representations', and also that 'man … learns his earliest lessons through representation'.[40] He also considers the interpretive aspects of the image: 'people like seeing images, because as they look at them they understand and work out what each item is'.[41] Both Plato and Aristotle, then, explore the function and aesthetics of an object which is removed from our experience through literature or art. Where Plato condemns the utilisation of imitational representation in narrative, however, Aristotle demonstrates its necessity, and posits that image interpretation, in both narrative and visual art, relies heavily on the ability to use one's mental faculties in order to dissect the meaning of the represented form.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provides us with a literary application of some of the classical understandings of optics outlined above. The text is filled with an extraordinary amount of visual material, with particular emphasis on symbols and the lover's gaze. In many episodes within Ovid's text an initial act of sight ignites a chain reaction of events which results in a physical transformation, and often the creation of a symbol. For instance, the laurel tree which Daphne

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[38] Plato, *Republic*, 392d–393c.

[39] Ibid, 597a.

[40] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b.

[41] Ibid, 1448b.

transforms into becomes a symbol for Apollo, and the mulberries which mark the deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe become a symbolic reminder of their tragic demises. Each episode also emphasises the distinction between the subject and object of the gaze, as is perhaps most notably demonstrated in Apollo and Daphne's tale, in which the god acts as a voyeur and the nymph, the focus of his desire, is eventually transformed into a literal object. The eponymous act of metamorphosis creates a shift from the object of sight to a symbol that represents the events of the narrative within a single, visual form. We see further instances of this effect, and of the dangers of seeing what you should not, in the story of Diana and Actaeon, in which Actaeon sees the goddess Diana naked and is transformed into a hart before being devoured by his own hounds; Pygmalion, in which a sculptor falls in love with a statue he created and she is made real by Venus; Arachne, in which Arachne's *hubris* whilst weaving beautiful tapestries causes her to be turned into a spider by Minerva; Semele and the birth of Bacchus, in which Semele demands to see Jupiter in his true form and dies as a result, leaving the foetus of her son behind; Orpheus and Eurydice, in which Orpheus loses his wife to the underworld because he looks back at her whilst leading her out after having been instructed not to do so; and numerous others. These episodes were transmitted to medieval Europe both in their original context and in moralised adaptations; they also served frequently as didactic examples in a number of medieval romances such as *Le Roman de la Rose*. The episode of Narcissus and Psyche, for instance, is commonly cited in medieval writings as a warning against the temptations of the gaze, although episodes such as that of Pyramus and Thisbe have also been the subject of a number of decorative art objects such as ivory caskets, and therefore demonstrate the pleasures of the image as well as the potential dangers that stem from the gaze and the misinterpretation of visual signs. The aspects

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of classical optical thought which are infused into the work of Ovid were not only available to but widely used by many authors of medieval romance texts.

In early medieval ecclesiastical thought it was important to distinguish between the aspects of sight that were either divine or sinful, one being attached to worship and learning, and the other to the temptations of the gaze. For example, Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) wrote on the function of visual material for the laity, and is popularly quoted as having declared visual art to be a method of reading and learning for the illiterate.[42] In this case, visual material functions as a liturgical aid and is seen as positive for encouraging biblical learning and worship. However, Augustine (354–430) had already written at length in his *Confessions* on the pitfalls of sight and the visual temptations associated with it.[43] Camille notes that 'on the very basic level of recognition, literacy meant being able to distinguish between true and false images'.[44] A sensory understanding of sight, however, was crucial to an understanding of Christian doctrine. In the sacrament of the Eucharist, for instance, which focuses on the spiritual consumption of the blood and body of Christ, a sensory connection to worship was imperative. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) claimed at a later stage that the sense of sight was particularly noble ('spiritualior et subtilior inter omnes sensus' [more spiritual and more subtle than the other senses]),[45] and so, in the

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[42] Michael Camille, 'Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy', *Art History* 8.1 (1985): 26; and Lawrence G. Duggan, 'Was Art Really the "Book of the Illiterate"?', in *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, ed. Mariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 63–107 (p. 63).

[43] Augustine, *Confessions: Books I–XIII*, ed. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 35–6.

[44] Camille, 'Seeing and Reading', 34.

[45] Thomas Aquinas, *De anima*, Library of Latin Texts – Series A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), II.14.417, last accessed 14 August 2016, <http://clt.brepolis.net.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/llta/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=3167632>. Own translation.

correct context, sight and vision could be considered acceptable, and even encouraged, in medieval theological thought. Some ecclesiastical writers are cautionary about the pitfalls of the senses, but others such as Aquinas are also tolerant and even approving of them, and sight in particular, when applied to devotional contexts.

Augustine also wrote extensively on the identification of three types of vision, which he mentions first in *Contra Adimantum* and then outlines further in his commentary on Genesis, *De Genesis ad litteram*. The first of these types of vision is *corporale*, physical sight; this represents the basic faculties of sight that process physical objects into internal images via the eyes. The second is *spirituale*, mental sight; this represents the internal act of envisaging, combining vision and imagination to form a unique image in the mind that would not be visible to others. Allan D. Fitzgerald describes this type of vision as 'that through which the soul either perceives or remembers images, below the level of the mind'.[46] The third category of vision is *intellectuale*, intellectual sight; in Augustine's writings *visio intellectuale* is separated from the other two categories, and refers more to engaging in an act of faith than to intellectual activity. Kari Kloos refers to this third category as 'the apprehension of intellectual truth apart from bodily sensation or images',[47] and also states that

for Augustine there are two ways of knowing: by 'sight' (physical or mental) and by faith. However, Augustine even regards faith as a type of sight, since the belief is seen by the mind although the object of belief is not. He writes, 'We are correctly said to see mentally what we

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[46] Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsmans, 1999), p. 579.

[47] Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 169.

believe, even though it is not present to our senses. … Faith itself is certainly seen by the

mind, although what is believed by faith is not seen'. Therefore, God might be 'seen' in faith

by the mind, although God cannot be seen by bodily eyes. Yet even this vision of God in faith

is properly a vision of the faith itself, and not of God as the object of faith.[48]

Augustine's considerations on the subject of vision demonstrate an early medieval understanding

of the processes involved in sight but also visualisation and imagination, and that multiple

categories of vision exist and are not easily defined. The categories of physical, spiritual and

intellectual sight that Augustine outlines are not absolute in themselves, but do tell us of a desire

on Augustine's part to separate the different types of vision and to consider the disparate effects

of their processes and results. Through these categories he focuses not on the external capacities

of the image or of light, but on the internal capacity of the recipient to perceive and interpret the

image in myriad ways. As Kloos points out above, even the *visio intellectuale* is more the image

of faith in the individual than an image of God himself; thus, some degree of subjectivity is

implied to be essential to vision. Augustine's definitions demonstrate that there is no singular

way in which to interpret vision, and that any definition by necessity cannot be complete and

must overlap with others; but also that Augustine's focus here is not so much on the object, but

on the viewer and their capacity for the internal interpretation of images.

   Optical theory was revolutionised in Western Europe in the twelfth century with the influx of

Arab scholarship, including translations of previously unknown texts by philosophers such as

Plato, and the transmission of theories from Arab philosophers such as Ibn al-Haytham (965–

1039), known in the Latin translations of his works as Alhazen. Plato and a number of his

contemporaries were essentially unknown in Western Europe until some of their works were

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[48] Ibid, p. 168.

translated from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, along with various medical texts in Arabic which strongly influenced late medieval understandings of optical theory. Although the writings of these philosophers had been a staple of Arabic learning for centuries, they were only transmitted at an earlier stage through scarce Latin translations and copies or references from other works which had succeeded the original authors. Charles Haskins was the first scholar to examine this topic.[49] Alhazen claimed that optical theory was best understood if the existing theories on the subject were combined, so that the transmission of light rays from the eye to the object of the gaze was both an internal and external process, and involved a reciprocal relationship between subject and object (along with external forces). The increasing emphasis on the intromission theory at this stage is important for the perception of the image in late medieval thought and literature, as it endows the image with more authority than the extramission theory, in which the subject is largely responsible for the capture and transmission of the image.[50] The influence of Alhazen and other Arab scholars on late medieval optical theory was enormous; and the fact that Alhazen argued for combing the intromission and extramission theories is particularly significant for combining the agency of the image (the object of sight) and the viewer (the subject).

Aquinas wrote on the aesthetic and intellectual effects of classical concepts such as phantasms or imagined forms. Saunders describes these thus: 'Thoughts were dependent on "forms", *imagines*, *simulacra* or *phantasmata* (Aristotle also uses *eikón*, copy), sense impressions

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[49] Charles Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

[50] Klassen, *Chaucer*, pp. 40–2; and Robert S. Nelson, 'Introduction: Descartes's Cow and other Domestications of the Visual', in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–21 (p. 5).

involving perception and response, put together by the inner senses, and passing through imagination, cognition and memory'.[51] This idea of sight being followed by a cognitive response is explained by Aquinas as follows:

> …quia hoc quilibet in seipso experiri potest, quod quando aliquis conatur aliquid intelligere, format aliqua phantasmata sibi per modum exemplorum, in quibus quasi inspiciat quod intelligere studet. Et inde est etiam quod quando alium volumus facere aliquid intelligere, proponimus ei exempla, ex quibus sibi phantasmata formare possit ad intelligendum. (…anyone can experience himself that, when he tries to understand something, he forms some phantasms in the manner of exempla, in which he examines what he wants to know. And it is also the case that when we want to make someone understand something, we place examples before him from which he forms for himself phantasms in order to understand.)[52]

This tells us something of the process of using visualisation to understand and interpret images: namely, that a duality exists between aesthetic and intellectual responses to sight. If we wish to gain an understanding of something we must first picture it mentally, and then interpret it correctly. Aquinas also mentions the obstacles that can impede the imagination, and the ensuing inability of the individual to process information well: 'Videmus enim quod, impedito actu virtutis imaginativae per laesionem organi, ut in phreneticis; et similiter impedito actu memorativae virtutis, ut in lethargicis; impeditur homo ab intelligendo in actu etiam ea quorum scientiam praeaccepit' (We see this when the imagination is impeded by a lesion of the organ, as

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[51] Saunders, 'Mind, Body and Affect in Medieval English Arthurian Romance', p. 33.

[52] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Library of Latin Texts – Series A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), I.84.7.17–22, last accessed 14 August 2016, <http://clt.brepolis.net.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/llta/pages/Toc.aspx>. Own translation. Also see Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, pp. 23–4.

in the delirious; and when the memory is similarly impeded, as in the lethargic. This prevents man from actually understanding even those things which he knew before).[53] This effect is particularly pertinent to our later discussions of reading visual signs in romance narratives, as it indicates that the ability to understand something correctly is inextricably tied to the ability to visualise or imagine it, and to process the imagined form intellectually.

Robert Grosseteste (*c.* 1175–1253) and Roger Bacon (1214–94) were prominent contributors to late medieval English optical thought, and focused particularly on the significance of light and the enhancement of the image through conical vision and image replication.[54] In *De luce* Grosseteste prioritises light over all corporeal forms: 'Formam primam corporalem, quam quidam corporeitatem vocant, lucem esse arbitror' (The first corporeal form, which some call corporality, is, I think, light).[55] His emphasis on the importance of light, which in *De luce* is metaphysical rather than empirical, is developed further in *De iride*, in which he argues that visual perspective is determined by the exchange of light between the eyes and the perceived object rather than the dominant agency of one or the other: 'Perspectiva … veridica est in positione radiorum egredientium' (perspective is verified in the position of the emitted rays).[56] His theories were furthered by Bacon, whose *Opus majus* was also heavily drawn from the works of Alhazen and Ptolemy, and Aristotle. Late medieval optical theory was concerned with both

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[53] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 84.7.13–16. Own translation.

[54] Klassen, *Chaucer*, pp. 45–9.

[55] Robert Grosseteste, *De luce*, The Electronic Grosseteste, last accessed 2 September 2016, <http://www.grosseteste.com/cgi-bin/textdisplay.cgi?text=de-luce.xml>. Own translation.

[56] Robert Grosseteste, *De iride*, The Electronic Grosseteste, last accessed 2 September 2016, <http://www.grosseteste.com/cgi-bin/textdisplay.cgi?text=de-iride.xml>. Own translation.

the cognitive processes behind sight and an emphasis on its external agents (light, for example). Bacon in particular supported the idea of sight and vision being separate physical processes, one involving external agency, the other internal; vision is therefore established as being based upon the external recognition of the image (sight), but then in the act of visualisation it becomes ultimately an internal process for the subject.

Bacon develops Aristotle's idea of a 'common sense' separate from sight, establishing a difference between sight and vision or interpretation, meaning the individual's capacity for subjectively responding to visual stimuli. He states that 'visus non sentit se videre, nec auditus percipit se audire, sed alia vertus, quae est sensus communis' (that which is seen does not perceive that it sees, nor does that which is heard perceive that it hears, but another virtue does, which is the common sense),[57] and that as 'sensus communis recipiat speciem, & imaginatio retineat eam, sequitur judicium completum de re, quod exercet phantasia' (as the common sense receives the image and the imagination retains it, a complete judgment follows concerning the matter, which is made by phantasia).[58] Bacon therefore sees the need for the mind to process sight into something understandable, and that this process necessarily involves the imagination. He goes on to say that:

> Oportet … quod aliud sit sentiens praeter oculos, in quo completur visio, cujus instrumenta sunt oculi, qui reddunt ei speciem visibilem, & hoc est nervus communis in superficie cerebri,

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[57] Roger Bacon, *Ordinis minorum, opus majus ad Clementem quartum, pontificem romanum. Ex MS. codice Dubliniensi, cum aliis quibusdam collato*, ed. S. Jebb (London: William Bowyer, 1733), p. 258. All translations from this text are my own.

[58] Ibid, p. 259.

ubi concurrunt duo nervi venientes a duabus partibus anterioris cerebri, qui post concursum

dividuntur, & extenduntur ad oculos.

(It is necessary that there is something other than the eyes that senses, by which and of which

vision is completed and the eyes are instruments that provide it with a visible form; and this is

the common nerve on the surface of the brain, where two nerves coming from two parts of the

front of the brain meet, and after meeting are divided, and extended to the eyes.)[59]

Late medieval theorists of sight and vision relied heavily on biological evidence to support their

arguments. They also, however, recognised the limitations of their knowledge. Bacon, for

example, gives an analysis of time with regard to sight, saying that 'oritur dubitatio maxima circa

speciem visus & visibilis, an fiant subito & in instanti, an fiant in tempore, & si in tempore, an in

tempore sensibili & perceptibili, vel non?' (great uncertainty arises concerning the form of sight

and what is visible, or whether these occur suddenly and instantly, or over an interval of time;

and if the latter, whether they occur over an interval of time that can be sensed and perceived, or

not?).[60] Where Alhazen argued for the probability of time having elapsed between the release of

light and its arrival at a final destination, Bacon argues that this must be incorrect. He speaks of

vision as something alive and active in itself, stating that 'oportet quod visus faciat operationem

videndi per suam virtutem' (vision must perform the act of seeing through its own power),[61] and

therefore treats vision as an active agent. He also admits, however, that in order to make any

sense of the act of sight it must be considered in relation to the cognitive processes of the brain, a

viewpoint which remains a focus of contemporary research on this topic.

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[59] Ibid, p. 277.

[60] Ibid, p. 298.

[61] Ibid, p. 217.

In recent years the different facets of optical scholarship have tended to be addressed by separate disciplines; in contemporary physics, for instance, the study of optics focuses on objective matters such as the properties of light and of optical technologies, whereas in biology or neuroscience, the study of optics focuses on the faculties of the human eye and the biological processes that make sight and vision possible.[62] Modern understandings of the processes of sight have not evolved all that much from those of Alhazen and Bacon. In the MSD manual for the structure and function of the eyes (part of the best-selling medical textbook also known as the Merck Manuals), James Garrity summarises the activity of the visual pathways in the following terms: 'Nerve signals travel from each eye along the corresponding optic nerve and other nerve fibers (called the visual pathway) to the back of the brain, where vision is sensed and interpreted'.[63] The description is more accurate than Bacon's, but follows a similar line of thought. The structure and function of the human eye is well understood in an era in which medical ailments involving the eyes are easily treated and optical oddities are explored in great detail; we know, for instance, why we see out of two eyes but interpret the result into a single picture, why some people are short-sighted and others long-sighted, and how our minds interpret certain optical illusions. However, it is still not fully understood how the brain converts visual

[62] In physics, light is understood in terms of simultaneous wave- and particle-like behaviour, following work by Einstein and Planck; previously, light had been thought of solely in terms of particles by Newton and solely in terms of waves by Huygens, Young and Fresnel. Within this context an 'image' refers to a pattern of light reflected from or emitted by an object, and 'imaging' refers to the measurement of this pattern. See Eugene Hecht, *Optics*, 3rd edn (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1998).

[63] James Garrity, 'Structure and Function of the Eyes', MSD Manual: Consumer Version, last accessed 15 January 2016, <http://www.msdmanuals.com/en-gb/home/eye-disorders/biology-of-the-eyes/structure-and-function-of-the-eyes>.

material into cognitive matter, or how the imagination works. Visualisation and imagination are such subjective experiences that they are difficult to test scientifically, though there has been some recent progress in this area. In one study from 2013, Alexander Schlegel et al. detected the presence of a 'mental workspace' whose functions include the processing of mental images, by collecting fMRI measurements from participants who engaged in tasks relating to the maintenance or manipulation of visual imagery.[64] The findings of the study were thought to reveal 'a widespread cortical and subcortical network that operates on visual representations in the mental workspace',[65] and thus to shed some light on a long-term problem, outlined below:

> We do not know how the human brain mediates complex and creative behaviors such as artistic, scientific, and mathematical thought. Scholars theorize that these abilities require conscious experience as realized in a widespread neural network, or 'mental workspace', that represents and manipulates images, symbols, and other mental constructs across a variety of domains. Evidence for such a complex, interconnected network has been difficult to produce with current techniques that mainly study brain activity in isolation and are insensitive to distributed informational processes.[66]

In addition to detecting the presence of a 'mental workspace' similar to Bacon's 'common sense', the study verifies that imaginative activity can be traced to certain parts of the brain, such as the occipital cortex.[67] Another study, conducted by Brock Kirwin et al. in 2014, found that the

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[64] Alexander Schlegel et al., 'Network Structure and Dynamics of the Mental Workspace', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110.40 (2013): 16277–82 (16277).

[65] Ibid, 16279.

[66] Ibid, 16277.

[67] Ibid, 16279.

imagination and memory both appeared to operate from the hippocampus, but presented different patterns of activity therein.[68] Such studies tend to focus on the location of cognitive activity rather than what that activity consists of, but in locating the areas of the brain in which visual activity takes place they are edging towards a fuller understanding of both the different types of visualisation that the mind can accommodate and how visual signals are received and processed by a central system of sensory interpretation. There are certainly advances in our understanding of how vision and imagination work, but we are still far from seeing the full picture.

Sight and the Image in Medieval Romance

Medieval romance is full of optical references that range in scope from the affective or intellectual responses a protagonist might have in reaction to sight, to the appearance, manufacture and contemplation of images, whether man-made, divine or supernatural. As in the optical theories discussed above, such references often rely upon an initial act of sight and a secondary rumination over the image that results in interpretation. Academic discussion of how images function within romance narratives has tended to focus on ekphrasis, the lover's gaze and allegorical dream visions.[69] In each of these motifs the protagonist encounters an image and

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[68] Brock Kirwin et al., 'Remembering and Imagining Differentially Engage the Hippocampus: A Multivariate fMRI Investigation', *Cognitive Neuroscience* 5.3–4 (2014): 177–85.

[69] For more on ekphrasis, see Stephen G. Nichols, 'Ekphrasis, Iconoclasm, and Desire', in Re*thinking the* Romance of the Rose*: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 133–66; and Nicholas Perkins, 'Ekphrasis and Narrative in *Emaré* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*', in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon, Studies in Medieval Romance 14 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 47–60. For more on the lover's gaze, see Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*; Klassen, *Chaucer*; and Emma Campbell, ed. *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval*

contemplates it, encouraging the reader to do the same; in such cases the object of sight might be a work of art, a loved one's face, or the contents of a dream. The interpretation of the image is not only vital to the progression of the narrative, but also reminds us of a common opinion in optical theory, that the initial act of sight is naturally followed by internal processes of perception. This process is almost always vital to the development of the romance narrative, and reminds the reader, perhaps subconsciously, of their own role in bringing the narrative to fruition through the act of reading. Since so much research has already been done on the three types of vision mentioned above, they will be discussed here in summary rather than treated in full; these areas are pertinent to the following chapters, however, especially if we consider them within the context of the optical theories outlined above. Each of the three topics supports the idea of sight and visual interpretation being separate from one another, the latter involving internalisation on the part of the viewer, and therefore the reader as well.

Late medieval romance texts present the image object most literally in ekphrastic descriptions of works of art.[70] For instance, in *Le Roman de la Rose* Guillaume de Lorris describes the negative personifications that decorate the walls of the Garden of Desire:

Text and Image (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For more on allegorical dream visions, see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Brownlee and Huot, Re*thinking The* Romance of the Rose; Stephen A. Barney, 'Allegorical Visions', in *A Companion to* Piers Plowman, ed. John A. Alford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 117–33; and Michael St. John, *Chaucer's Dream Visions: Courtliness and Individual Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[70] Ekphrasis is a term that derives from the Greek *ek* (out) and *phrasis* (speak), and is also related to *ekphrazein*, meaning to give an object meaning though its name. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, ed., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 377. In its application to medieval texts, the term ekphrasis can apply to any textual description of a piece of visual art.

…et vous diré

De ces ymages la semblance,

Si com moi vient a remembrance.

…

…vi qu'anvie en la pointure

Avoit trop laide esgardeüre:

Ele ne regardoit noient

Fors de travers en borgnoiant;

Ele avoit cet malves usages

Car ele ne pooit es visages

Regarder rien de plain en plain,

Ainz clooit .i. oeil par desdeing,

Qu'ele fondoit d'ire et adroit,

Quant aucuns qu'ele regardoit

Estoit ou biaus ou preuz ou gens

Ou amez ou loez des genz.

(I will tell you the appearance of these images as they come to me in memory. … I saw that Envy in the picture had a very ugly look: she only ever looked at anything askance with one eye; she had this bad habit because she could not look at someone face to face, but rather closed one eye in disdain, melting and burning with wrath when anything she saw was beautiful, good or noble, or was loved or praised by others.)[71]

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[71] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Librarie générale française, 1992), 140–2 and 279–90. All translations from this text are my own.

His ekphrasis is both descriptive and informative; the placement of these figures upon the walls of the garden indicates the vices that the narrator must overcome in order to enter and claim his Rose, but the figures also inform the reader of the traits that they embody, and thus enable the reader to identify these within the text and apply them to their own moral conduct. In the English *Kyng Alisaunder*, ekphrastic 'ymages' most commonly depict mythical figures such as Jupiter and Hercules, whose presentation as representations rather than realities places them in a distant past. Ekphrasis therefore relies substantially on the idea of the image being at least partially removed from its original context. Stephen G. Nichols notes that ekphrasis problematises an image because it 'calls attention to the vulnerability of the referential claims made by the image';[72] this is true of the representation of allegories and mythical figures but, as is frequently the case in medieval romance, ekphrasis can also be used to identify truth. The extensive description of Gawain's pentangle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is another example of ekphrasis, though the pentangle is a symbol rather than a personification:

Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sumquyle

In bytoknyng of trawþe, bi tytle þat his habbeȝ,

For hit is a figure þat haldeȝ five poynteȝ,

And vche lyne vmbelappeȝ and loukeȝ in oþer,

And ayquere hit is endeleȝ; and Englych hit callen

Oueral, as I here, þe endeles knot.

Forþy hit acordeȝ to þis knyȝt and to his cler armeȝ;

For ay faythful in fyue and sere fyue syþeȝ,

Gawan watȝ for gode knawen, and as golde pured,

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[72] Nichols, 'Ekphrasis', p. 135.

Voyded of vche vylany, wyth vertueȝ ennoured

in mote.

Forþy þe pentangel new

He ber in schelde and cote,

As tulk of tale most trwe

And gentylest knyȝt of lote.[73]

The text implies that the image, which appears on Gawain's shield, symbolises some aspect of

Gawain and his knighthood, or piety, which in turn constitutes the basis for the entire narrative.

This again acts as a didactic guide for the reader, encouraging the use of symbols to invoke

moral virtue and call to mind the piety of Gawain as something to aspire towards and emulate. In

addition to this didactic element, the description of the pentangle also highlights the central

tension of the narrative, that between Gawain's virtue and his errors. In the Middle English

Melusine the ekphrastic image is also used at numerous points to emphasise the larger concerns

of the narrative. For instance, the commemorative image of the King of Albany in the mountain

acts as a symbol for the repeated trope of the forbidden sight of the faerie lover, and the

illuminations in the concluding episode of the knight and the sparrowhawk are meant to educate

the knight in his task, although their message of caution is ultimately ignored. In both of these

cases the image is accompanied by text, adding to the instructive element of the image and its

capacity to be read alongside written material. The description of any artwork within medieval

romance therefore begs some scrutiny, as it is seldom there simply to instruct the reader in art

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[73] W. R. J. Barron, ed., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 625–39.

technique or history.[74] Instead, there is often a larger point being made, usually to the effect that the art object represents something removed from itself, and therefore encourages the reader to engage in a form of looking (through the processes of imagination that accompany the act of reading), which can then also be applied to reading the image and understanding the additional meanings behind it. Ekphrasis represents the most evident example of the physical object or image in medieval romance, and its detailed description makes it easy for the reader to imagine; but the image is necessarily accompanied by meaning which has to be interpreted by both the romance protagonist and the reader. This is a clear example in which an external image is internalised and applied to the protagonist's personal situation, which the reader is encouraged to do as well. The messages that accompany ekphrasis in medieval romance seem to occur at moments of critical importance to the text, either at the beginning where the purpose of the narrative is explained or implied, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *Le Roman de la Rose*, or at the end where the stakes are at their highest, as in Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine* or Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'. It is quite plausible, then, that the primary purpose of ekphrasis in medieval romance is to guide the reader in their understanding of the text at a critical moment.

The lover's gaze is another common feature of medieval romance. In Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale', both Arcite and Palamon fall in love with Emelye at their first sight of her and feel physical pain as a direct result; and Arcite falls from his horse immediately following an

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[74] This is not always the case. One of the older forms of ekphrasis is found in the classical travel monologues of writers such as Pausanias, who in his *Description of Greece* describes various pieces of art and architecture with a view to instructing readers so that they might recognise these objects in their own travels. Pausanius, *Description of Greece*, ed. W. H. S. Jones, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988–95).

exchange of looks between himself and Emelye, an incident that results in his death.[75] The

optical theories of extramission and intromission are particularly significant in the visual agency

of these episodes, as it is not clear to what extent the power of the gaze lies with the image,

Emelye, or her voyeurs. However, these passages indicate a belief in the physicality of a reaction

caused by sight, one in which bodily pain is a direct result of the gaze. E. Ruth Harvey describes

this effect as follows: 'The behaviour of the vital spirit is responsible for the passions. An

external cause, such as a wild beast or a serpent, or even a terrible nightmare, makes the vital

spirit withdraw to the heart; this constitutes the sensation called fear or dread'.[76] Palamon

declares at his first sight of Emelye that he has been pierced through the eye and to the heart;[77]

this motif is derived from the Ovidian tradition of the classical period and was revived in the

thirteenth century in texts such as *Le Roman de la Rose*. The consequences of sight are

frequently integral to key events in the narrative of medieval romance; for example, in *Kyng

Alisaunder* Neptenabus' seduction of Olympias begins with an exchange of looks between the

two of them: 'In hir he loked stedfastlyk. / And she in hymm al outrelyk'.[78] In the English

translation of Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine*, the protagonists Raymondin and Melusine also repeatedly

refer to the idea that they feed off the sight of one another. Raymondin complains to Fortune that

'"now by the / fals blynde traytour and enuyous, I must lese the sight of her of whom myn eyen

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[75] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Knight's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2679–91.

[76] Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, p. 17.

[77] Chaucer, 'Knight's Tale', 1096–7.

[78] *Kyng Alisaunder*, vol. 1, ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS OS 227; 237, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 219–20.

toke theire fedying"',[79] and Melusine states to him that '"as long as thou lyuest, I shal feed myn eyen with the syght of the"'.[80] The transmission of images here is associated with sensory consumption rather than intellectual contemplation, which highlights the capacity of the image in some instances to obscure reason rather than encourage comprehension. Tasioulas draws attention to '[t]he power of emotion to influence the brain, to the extent that judgement and reason fail' in such instances.[81] This is significant for the coming chapters, in which the ability to interpret external signs is central to the concerns of numerous romance protagonists. The romantic aspects of medieval romance are often voyeuristic, but the agency in such moments is not always clear, and most emphasis is placed on the affective repercussions of sight, which demonstrates an understanding of the internalisation that follows the initial act of sight.

Allegorical dream visions present a narrative landscape that is based entirely within the protagonist's internal senses, a situation that is not dissimilar to the reader's visualisation of the narrative within their imagination. This type of narrative tends to be explicitly didactic, the primary concern of the text being that the reader should interpret the visual signs presented within the narrative in order to apply these to their own moral conduct. Both protagonist and reader are often assisted by ekphrastic descriptions and clear character attributes, all of which carry clear moral messages that might then be applied both to daily reading and to the reading process itself. Iser, for instance, notes of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* that '[t]he book is meant to appeal to each individual reader, whatever his disposition, and its aim is to lead the

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[79] *Melusine*, ed. A. K. Donald, EETS ES 68 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), p. 298.

[80] Ibid, pp. 318–9.

[81] Tasioulas, '"Dying of Imagination"', 212–35.

believer to recognize himself'.[82] Allegorical dream visions, though highly stylised, are supposed to be applicable to the reader. In *Le Roman de la Rose* the opening lines assure the reader that the vision is true, meaning that it is divine at best and physiological at worst, and not a deception akin to an act of nigromancy (black or demonic magic), as we see in some other romances:

Maintes genz cuident qu'en songe

N'ait se fable non et mençonge.

Mais on puet tel songe songier

Qui ne sont mie mençongier,

Ainz sont aprés bien aparant.

…

Quiconques cuit ne qui die

Qu'il est folece et musardie

De croire que songes aveigne,

Qui ce voudra, por fol m'en teigne,

Car androit moi ai ge creance

Que songe sont senefiance

Des biens au genz et des anuiz,

Que li plusor songent de nuiz

Maintes choses covertement

Que l'en voit puis apertement.

(Many people think that in dreams there are only falsehoods and lies. But it is possible to have

a dream that contains no lie, as later becomes apparent. … Whoever thinks it is foolish and

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[82] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 7.

absurd to believe that dreams can become real I take for a fool, because I believe that dreams

have significance as good and ill omens to people; and that people dream at night of many

secret things that are then seen out in the open.)[83]

What follows is an account in which the dreamer encounters numerous allegorical characters

who represent either obstacles or assistants in his search for the Rose. The nature of these figures

is easily identifiable through visible attributes, such as a mirror for Oiseuse (Idleness) and a

purple robe for Richesse (Wealth); the figures represent the virtues and vices that the reader

might encounter in real life, and the attributes therefore impart to the reader the ability to identify

their visual indicators. The dreamer says 'Mes en ce songe onques riens n'ot / Qui trestout avenu

ne soit, / Si com li songes devisoit' (everything came to happen exactly as the dream described

it),[84] and this seems to be a direct and didactic appeal to the reader to adhere to the choices of the

dreamer in the narrative when it comes to identifying friend and foe amongst the allegories.

Much the same occurs in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and in the anonymous *Pearl*. In each of

these the reader, like the protagonist, is confronted by a number of allegorical figures who impart

wisdom for use in the waking world. The dream allegory therefore seems to present a series of

visual symbols in the form of allegorical characters, for the protagonist to interpret and either to

ally himself with or to ignore. The reader is drawn along the narrative with the protagonist in

order to consider his exemplary decisions and alliances, and to emulate these where appropriate.

Within this context the image, referring both to the dream vision as a whole and the individual

figures encountered by the dreamer, acts directly as an instructional tool that guides both

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[83] Lorris and de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 1–20.

[84] Ibid, 28–30.

protagonist and reader in their moral developments. The correct interpretation of the visual signs is implied to be of vital significance to moral salvation, and misinterpretation disastrous.

The image in medieval romance often performs a central function in the development of narrative events, in which the viewer develops an intellectual understanding based on their interpretation of the visual signs. This occurs on a double level, in the first instance for the internal characters of the romance, and in the second for the reader of the romance, who is meant to follow a similar process of sign interpretation and intellectual enlightenment to that of the romance protagonist. The concept of *ruminatio*, or the consumption of the book, was developed centuries earlier in monastic communities, but the idea of the contemplation and sensory digestion of the text is also important to our understanding of how the visual elements of the romance might be imagined, as similar faculties are employed by the romance protagonist and the reader in order to visualise and react towards the visual elements of the text. This approach opens up new possibilities for understanding the relationship between text and images in medieval romance, as it allows us to recognise that, just as the image can be considered for its meaning, that is, read as text, the text must also necessarily be 'imaged' or imagined, that is, read as an image. The relationship between text and images in medieval romance therefore exists necessarily both within the visual elements of the text and in the process of reading it. Medieval romance is often concerned with the interpretation of visual signs; this occurs in the narrative through the romance protagonist, but it is also used as a guide to the reader, in order to encourage both the visualisation and intellectual consideration of the visual material therein.

Conclusions

Medieval optical theory and its romance interpretations are concerned with subject-object relations in the act of sight but also the interpretive aspects of visualising an image and understanding its meaning; this helps us to understand not only how optical theory has been understood for centuries, but also how we might better understand the phenomenology of reading, particularly with regard to medieval texts. Subject-object relations are among the most prevalent features of optical theory in classical and medieval texts, but in them we also find a prevalent awareness of the interpretive aspects of sight and the imaginative faculties required in order to process mentally the form and meaning of the image. This has been a consistent feature of optical studies from the era of Plato up to the present day. Such divisions can also help us to understand more about the phenomenology of reading and visualisation, and the ways in which authors incorporate visual material into their works as vital narrative events. The following chapters will build upon the above discussion of optical theory in medieval thought and literature with specific attention to the function and reception of visual literacy within medieval romance texts. They will explore this facet of narrative visualisation through the following topics: crafting, imagining, recognising and (mis)reading visual signs.

3. THE CRAFTED IMAGE: NIGROMANCERS, YMAGEOURES AND AUTHORS

Introduction

In medieval romance, the word 'ymage', or image (*imago* in Latin), is most often used to describe an item that has been crafted by hand. It first appears in Old French and Anglo-Norman in the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively, and refers most commonly to '[a]n artificial imitation or representation of something'.[85] In medieval romance the term is used to refer to a diverse range of forms including manufactured icons and supernatural apparitions. These forms establish a connection between the voyeur within the text and the external reader, whose position naturally requires a certain amount of narrative visualisation. This in turn demonstrates the close relationship of the 'ymage' to the 'ymaginacion' (*imaginatio* in Latin), a term that first appears in Old French in the twelfth century, which entails '[t]he power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses'.[86] What this chapter is concerned with, however, is the creators of those images, and the instigators of such instances of imagination. In texts such as *Kyng Alisaunder*, *Valentine and Orson*, *William of Palerne* and *Amoryus and Cleopes*, images are often crafted by nigromancy, but also sometimes by artisans, and with no apparent use of magic. The similarities between the nigromancer and the artisan can also be extended to the romance author, whose texts require a similar process of internalising and

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[85] 'image, *n*.', Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, last accessed 18 August 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91618>.

[86] 'imagination, *n*.', Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, last accessed 18 August 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91643>.

interpreting visual material in order to be read. The crafted images of medieval romance and their creators can therefore act as an effective analogy for the romance text and its author.

Nigromancy

In medieval romance the practice of magic is often described in terms of 'craft'. In such texts the word 'craft' can be applied to a wide array of meanings: it can refer to a trade skill, a work of art, or any object made by human hands, and it can also refer to knowledge, cunning or deception.[87] But the term is also frequently used to describe the application of magical enchantments, and this form of craft usually traverses the line between something made or manufactured and the more enigmatic areas of knowledge and learning associated with magic. In medieval romance the crafted elements of the supernatural are particularly present in the construction of images, and we often find the illusions of romance enchanters presented as manufactured marvels. The art of nigromancy is closely aligned with that of the artist, in crafting a likeness, or image, and this skill is put to use quite visibly in some medieval romances, such as *Kyng Alisaunder*.

The supernatural is a complex and multivalent concept, and medieval romance contains plentiful examples of divine, demonic and otherworldly types of magic. However, the category of magic that is perhaps most concerned with craft, due to its manipulation of the natural elements, is the practice referred to as 'nigromancy'. A 'nigromancer' is usually a sorcerer or sorceress figure, associated with knowledge and cunning, and magical practices whose legitimacy is somewhat ambiguous; the term should not be confused with 'necromancer', which refers more specifically to someone who raises the dead. Saunders describes the practices of the

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[87] 'craft, *n*.', Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, last accessed 18 August 2016 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43694>.

nigromancer as follows: '"Nigromancy" can imply the use of illusions, and may signal human practitioners whose arts are extreme, dubious and sometimes villainous. It may include the power of invisibility, metamorphosis or shape-shifting, manipulation of mind or body for the purpose of love or power'.[88] The motive behind such magic is frequently to deceive, and such deception often features in medieval romance. Shapeshifting is one of the more common enchantments associated with nigromancy in romance texts. In such examples the appearance of one person is transposed onto another, often for the purpose of sleeping with an unknowing object of desire. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the shapeshifting episodes of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in which Uther enlists Merlin to take on the appearance of Igraine's husband in order to sleep with her in Book I, and Dame Brusen assists Elaine to appear as Guinevere in order to bed Lancelot in Book XI. However, we find a particularly interesting example of this effect in *Kyng Alisaunder*, an English adaptation of the *Roman de toute chevalerie* which was written around the turn of the fourteenth century, and which survives in three manuscripts and two fragments.[89] In one episode from the romance, the nigromancer

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[88] Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 154.

[89] All English references to *Kyng Alisaunder* are from the EETS edition (B text), which is edited from the text of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 622. All references to the Anglo-Norman source material are from Thomas Kent, *The Anglo-Norman* Alexander, ed. Brian Foster, Anglo-Norman Text Society (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1976). David Ashurst states that '*Kyng Alisaunder* may reasonably be called a fairly free adaptation of the *Roman de toute chevalerie* … though at times it follows the Anglo-Norman text closely', in 'Alexander Literature in English and Scots', in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Zuwiyya, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 255–90 (pp. 265 and 267). Suzanne Akbari states that '[a]lthough the account found in *Kyng Alisaunder* is almost half as long as that in the *Roman de toute chevalerie*, it includes some striking details not found in the source text', and that '[i]n general, the author of *Kyng*

Neptenabus deceives Queen Olympias by presenting himself to her in the form of the Libyan god Amon, and so begets Alisaunder on her. The episode in which Neptenabus takes on the form of the god is described as follows: 'Neptenabus his charme haþ nome, / And takeþ hym hames of d[r]agoun, / From his shuldre to hele adoun; His heued and his shuldres fram / He diȝtteþ in fourme of a ram'.[90] The magical deeds of Neptenabus are described in great enough detail elsewhere for us to assume that some magical element must be present here as well, but aside from the mention of his 'charme' here the magical properties of his preparation are not explicit, and a non-magical, hand-crafted disguise would otherwise not have been entirely out of the question. His appearance to Olympias is an illusion, but the extent to which he has gone to achieve it is not described in much detail. Far more detail is ascribed to his preparations for the enchantment he casts the previous night, in which he sends Olympias a prophetic dream that persuades her to sleep with 'Amon'. His preparations for this incident are related as follows:

> Herbes he took in on herbere,
>
> And stamped hem in a mortere,
>
> And wronge it out in a boxe,

Alisaunder improves the coherence, reduces the digressions, and enhances the flow of the narrative found in his source text', in *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 104 and 106.

[90] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 384–8. In the *Roman de toute chevalerie*: 'Un[e] pel de moton ovec les corn[e]s prist, / En semblance de dragon l'autre partie fist / De virge cire e puis la[e] inz se mist' (He took a ram's hide and horns, and made the rest into the form of a dragon from virgin wax, which he put on himself), 257–9. Own translation. The explicit reference to wax here is not made in the English description, which is vaguer by comparison. If it were not for the fact that Neptenabus uses wax elsewhere for magical purposes, magic would not be apparent here. The use of 'fist' here is also unclear, as it is not clear whether the disguise is made by magic or by hand, or both.

And after he took virgyne waxe

And made a popet after þe queen.

His aristable he gan vnwriȝen.

Þe quenes name in þe wexe he wroot

Whiles it was sumdel hoot.

In a bed he it diȝth,

And al aboute candel-liȝth,

And spraynde þere-on of þe herbes juse;

And þus charmed Neptenabus.[91]

[91] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 331–42. In the Anglo-Norman version: 'Les herbes acceptables colli e tribla, / Puis en ad pris le jus, par son sen les medlla / E de virge cire un[e] ymage fet a. / Le non de la royne par lettres figura, / En un lit qu'il ot fet l'ymage cocha. / Environ icel lit chandeilles aluma, / Del jus qu'il ot fet des herbes l'ymage arosa, / Par charmes qu'il savoit sovent la conjura. / Quanque Nectanabus a l'ymage parla / La royne end son lit par avision songa' (He gathered and ground certain herbs, then from them took the juice and blended it using his skills, and from virgin wax made an image. He inscribed the name of the queen on the image and made it lie down on a bed. Around it he lit candles, and sprinkled it with the juice that had been made from the herbs. He conjured using charms that he knew from memory. Whatever Neptenabus said to the image, the queen dreamed as a vision in her bed), 225–34. Own translation. The English author translates the *Roman de toute chevalerie* very closely here, though there are a couple of notable differences. First, the English version is more explicit in saying that the wax figure is made in the likeness of the queen, implying some artisanal skill being involved in making it, whereas the Anglo-Norman text is not specific about the form of the wax image, only that it has the queen's name on it, and that it is meant to represent her lying on the bed. The Anglo-Norman text, on the other hand, is more specific when describing the spell itself; the idea of Olympias' dream-vision being caused by Neptenabus speaking its contents to the wax figure is not mentioned in the English text, though the same effect is ultimately achieved.

Several aspects of this passage are intriguing for their description of Neptenabus' process. Firstly, the basis of Neptenabus' magic in herblore gives it a practical, almost medicinal quality, and shows, if nothing else, a real attempt on the part of the author (and particularly the author of the corresponding Anglo-Norman passage, which is translated closely here) to consider the processes behind such magical practices. The act of writing the queen's name in the wax is also telling, as it demonstrates the power words were considered to have for such magic. Saunders notes that 'writing itself may have been seen as invested with special power, a kind of binding',[92] and this certainly seems to be the case in this instance. The wax 'popet' made with the likeness of the queen also implies that the combination of representing the queen using both text and image is key to the enchantment. Wax figures appear to be a central component of Neptenabus' magic. Earlier in the text the author describes Neptenabus attempting to ascertain how best to defeat his enemies: 'Of wexe he made hym popatrices, / And dude hem fiȝtten myd latrices; / And so he lerned, ieo vous dy, / Ay to afelle his enemy'.[93] A magical element is implied here, but not stated explicitly. The author also states of Neptenabus in one instance of lecanomancy (divination using a basin of water) that he 'made his wexe and cast [hi]s charm. / His ymage he

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[92] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 20.

[93] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 77–80. The *Roman de toute chevalerie* is much more specific here: 'Ewe en un bacin prist ou en un potion / E de cire feist une conjunction / En semblance d'omes par ymaginacioun, / L'une semblance a ly, l'autre a son compaignon. / En chescune escriveit donc son proper non; Combatre les feseit par simulacion' (He poured water into a basin or pot, and from wax made a model in the form of two men made from the imagination, one in his own semblance, and the other that of his companion. On each he wrote his own name; and made them simulate a fight), 55–60. Own translation.

made onon'.[94] The use of the words 'wexe' and 'ymage' are particularly interesting here. The image refers to King Philip and his armies, but seemingly in the form of a vision rather than figurines; however, the reference to his 'wexe' tells us that part of his enchantment involved the manufacture of a physical object that was to be the basis for the spell. It was not unheard of, in actual attempts at performing magical spells, for an image or effigy to be the source of the ritual. In one example from 1324, cited from Saunders' *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval Romance*,

> The citizens paid the men £20 and £15 respectively and provided wax and canvas for seven images, of which one, made as an experiment, was said to have killed a certain Richard de Sowe: a spit of lead placed in the image's head was supposed to have caused him severe pain and frenzy, and one placed in the heart to have led to his death.[95]

The image made from wax and canvas, and infused with lead in the head and heart, provides us with a quite detailed description of how such rituals might have been performed, and also indicates the importance of the image at the centre of the ritual. The rituals involving wax figures in *Kyng Alisaunder* are quite similar, except that instead of causing harm to the image Neptenabus uses it to see or implant visions. Imprinting with wax was sometimes associated with memory: Plato uses the analogy of a seal in wax in order to discuss memory,[96] and in his copy of the *Book of Curteseye* William Caxton states that 'as waxe resseyueth prynte or figure / So

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[94] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 104–5. The wax here is unique to the English version. The equivalent passage in the *Roman de toute chevalerie* states that 'Ewe fist donc metre al bacin de laton, / Fist sors e dist charmes en estrange sermon' (He poured water into a brass basin and spoke charms in a strange sermon), 71–2. Own translation.

[95] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 74.

[96] Plato *Theaetetus*, trans. Martin Wohlrab (New York: Garland, 1980), 191c–e.

children ben disposide of nature / Vyce or virtue to folowe ande enpresse / In mynde…'.[97] Wax was not an uncommon metaphor for mental imprinting, which is addressed literally rather than idiomatically in the text of *Kyng Alisaunder*. The authors of *Kyng Alisaunder* and the *Roman de toute chevalerie* frequently provide a technical element to the spells of Neptenabus, grounded in the practical matter of making a physical image, and so divide the role of the nigromancer between that of the conjurer and the practical artisan.

The crafted object imbued with magical properties is not exclusive to *Kyng Alisaunder*, and the early sixteenth-century *Valentine and Orson*, which was translated into English from the fifteenth-century French *Valentin et Sansnom* by Henry Watson, also contains a description of such an item:

> …it was sayde unto Valentyne that within that same chamber there was a moche rych Pyller and excellente, uppon the whiche was a heade of brasse that of olde antiquite had bene composed muche subtylle by Nygromancye of a Faee, the whyche head was of suche nature that it gave answer of all thynges that was asked it.[98]

The connection between nigromancy and faerie magic is curious here, but it is also telling that the item is presented as an artistic object first, and a magical object with omniscient powers second. The specific reference to the head being made of brass again reminds us that the piece has been constructed from raw materials, especially if we remember that brass is an alloy, made from copper and zinc, and that these materials were therefore already manipulated from their

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[97] William Caxton, 'The Book of Curtesye', in *William of Palerne, Caxton: Book of Curtesye, Havelok the Dane*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, Early English Texts Society ES 1 (London: Trübner, 1967), II, pp. 1–53 (pp. 6–9).

[98] Henry Watson, *Valentine et Orson*, ed. Arthur Dickson, Early English Text Society OS 204 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 133. All English references to *Valentine and Orson* are from this edition.

natural form by the time they were used to construct the object in question. Although this does

not explain how the head is able to speak or know the answer to any question that is asked of it,

the passage provides a reassurance of sorts that the object is grounded in both natural resources

and some form of physical construction. Elsewhere in the text, we find that the sorcerer Pacolet's

horse, which can travel anywhere in an instant so long as you point it in the right direction, is

also described in the distinctly practical terms of technical craft: '…by enchauntemenne he had

made and composed a lytell hors of wodde, and in the head there was artyfycyelly a pynne that

was in suche wyse set, that every tyme that he mounted upon the horse for to goo somewhere, he

torned the pynne towarde the place that he wolde to go'.[99] The emphasis here is again on the

object as a marvellous piece of technology, whose success as a marvel depends in part on the

extent to which it has been made to resemble a horse. E. R. Truitt notes that medieval automata

often mimicked natural forms,[100] and in medieval romance it is often the combination of craft

and spectacle that makes the image memorable: some of the most memorable moments of

medieval romance, such as the appearance of the Green Knight from *Sir Gawain and the Green

Knight*, or the Grail procession in Chrétien's *Percival*, rely on spectacle. In other words, the

crafted image needs to be remarkable in order to have some purpose for the story, and to give the

reader something notable to consider. We see further automata in romances such as *Le Roman de

Thèbes*, *Le Conte de Floire et Blancheflor* and the *Voyage of Charlemagne*,[101] and Truitt

explains that:

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[99] Ibid, p. 142.

[100] E. R. Truitt, *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 2.

[101] Ibid, pp. 48, 51 and 98–9.

Medieval automata are often characterized in terms that evoke lowly artisanal craft, yet their

creators are often described as highly learned men, who are able to draw on extensive natural

knowledge. In the *Voyage de Charlemagne*, the two automata that crown Hugo's rotating

palace are first described as 'two children, cast in copper and metal' and later as 'images'.

Figure, *ymage*, or *ymagete* commonly denote automata throughout the medieval period.

'Cast' [*tregeté*], the word used to describe the automata at King Hugo's fictional palace,

connects automata to artisanal work (metalworking) and to intellectual (and verbal) endeavour

(enchantment).[102]

Such items are made through physical manufacture, and not always with magic; the description

of the technical parts of Pacolet's horse therefore renders it more plausible as a marvel of

technology rather than necessarily being the mysterious construction of a 'faee'. The language of

craft can be deceptive when it is applied to magical items, and it is not always clear exactly how

magical the objects in question are. For instance, in one episode Pacolet achieves a shapeshifting

effect by washing his face with what is described as 'a water ryght subtyl made by hys

charme'.[103] The description does not explain how he has manipulated the water to achieve this

effect; the mention of 'charme' signifies magical activity, which also fits the description of

Pacolet as a sorcerer, but the fact that the charm is 'made' tells us merely that some form of craft

or manufacture has gone into it. Pacolet is therefore presented throughout the text as being a

manufacturer of technical, artisanal and magical objects; the author's emphasis on the technical

elements of these items could demonstrate an aversion to depicting more explicitly magical

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[102] Ibid, p. 48.

[103] Watson, *Valentine et Orson*, p. 191.

material, but the result is that the crafted elements of the objects, and the skill of their maker, are brought to the fore.

In *William of Palerne*, the fourteenth-century English translation of the thirteenth-century French *Guillaume de Palerme*, Alphonse is transformed into a wolf through the enchantments of his stepmother Braunde, which are described throughout the romance as a form of craft.[104] Braunde is said to be educated, '"lettered at þe best"',[105] which corroborates the common romance motif of the dangerous educated woman who learns the crafts of nigromancy: 'lelliche þat ladi in ȝouþe hadde lerned miche schame, / For al þe werk of wicchecraft wel y-nouȝ che couȝþe, / nede nadde ȝhe namore of nigramauncy to lere. / of coninge of wicche-craft wel y-nouȝ ȝhe couȝde'.[106] The description of her crafts refers explicitly to the magical nature of her arts, but also implies their potentially negative purpose. One might think of Morgan le Fay in the Arthurian tradition, who represents the archetype of the dangerous, crafty woman. Hannah Priest speaks of 'the troubled and troubling relationship between a witch and the werewolf she creates' in *William of Palerne*, establishing Braunde as a creator through her arts.[107] The following passage describes how she changes Alphonse into a wolf:

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[104] All English quotations from the text are from 'William of Palerne', in *William of Palerne, Caxton: Book of Curtesye, Havelok the Dane*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, Early English Text Society ES 1 (London: Trübner, 1867), I, pp. 1–175. All French quotations are from *Guillaume de Palerne*, ed. H. Michelant (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1876), unless otherwise stated.

[105] 'William of Palerne', 4088.

[106] Ibid, 117–21.

[107] Hannah Priest, 'The Witch and the Werewolf: Rebirth and Subjectivity in Medieval Verse', in *Hosting the Monster*, ed. Lynn Baumgartner and Roger Davis, At the Interface 52 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 81–100 (pp. 81–2).

a noynement anon sche made of so grete strengþe,

bi enchaunmens of charmes þat euel chaunche hire tide,

þat whan þat womman þer-wiȝt hadde þat worli child

ones wel an-oynted þe child wel al a-bowte,

he wex to a werwolf wiȝtly þer-after,

al þe making of a man so mysse hadde ȝhe schaped.

ac his witt welt he after as wel as to-fore,

but lelly oþer likenes þat longeþ to man kynne,

but a wilde werwolf ne walt he neuer after.

& whanne þis witty werwolf wiste him so schaped,

he knew it was bi þe craft of his kursed stepmoder.[108]

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[108] 'William of Palerne', 136–46. In the Old French version the corresponding passage reads as follows: 'D'un oingnement li oint le cors / Qui tant estoit poissans et fors, / Tant par estoit de grant vertu / Si tost com l'enfes oins en fu, / Son estre et sa samblance mue / Que leus devint et beste mue. / Leus fu warox de maintenant: / Ce que de lui fu aparant / A tout perdu, son essient' (She smeared his body with ointment which was of such great power that as soon as the child was covered in it his form and his appearance changed into that of a mute beast. He had now become a werewolf: it was clear that he had lost his knowledge), 301–9. Own translation. The French version is in some ways more detailed. The English author seems to be less concerned with the properties of the ointment; instead, he wishes to emphasise the transgression of the stepmother for transforming Alphonse, and Alphonse's recognition, mirrored by the readers' own, that the transformation is her doing. This also provides an effective mirror for the later declaration that Braunde, having made the enchantment, is the only one who is able to undo it. It is therefore Braunde, rather than the ointment itself, which is given primary agency in the English version of the narrative. Also, 'estre' can be translated to mean either 'form' or 'nature'; this would involve two very different readings of the French version of the text, in which either Alphonse's appearance or the very essence of his being are transformed. 'Form' seems to fit better here due to the emphasis elsewhere on Alphonse being a man trapped in

Although the properties of the ointment are not described, it becomes part of a double effect

which is common to the supernatural episodes of medieval romance, which features a crafted

element (such as the ointment) and the more enigmatic enchantments and charms that imbue it

with magical properties. The statement that the werewolf is 'schaped' by his stepmother's 'craft'

indicates the crafted nature of this transformation, and that the new form he takes is a false one

that is forced upon him in order to conceal his true nature. The text states at this point that 'þus

was þis witty best werwolf ferst maked',[109] and so once again emphasises the crafted nature of

the disguise. At the final denouement of the romance Braunde returns Alphonse to his natural

form, her husband having been told that '"ȝif þi wif of wicchecraft be witti as þou seidest, / þat

sche him wrouȝt a werwolf riȝt wel i hope, sche can with hire connyng & hire queynt charmes, /

Make him to man a-ȝen"'.[110] The reversal of the charm is referred to again in terms of

manufacture and craft. The reference to the stepmother's magic here as 'queynt charmes' or

'queynt werkes'[111] is perhaps intended to lessen the serious nature of her magic for the benefit of

a happy romance ending. Braunde heals Alphonse in private with the use of a ring and a book:

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a beast's body, but this might well be an emphasis that was provided by the English author. Saunders also notes that

the English version is more insistent on the magical aspects of the episode, whereas the French version makes no

mention here of 'enchaunmens of charmes', in *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 159.

[109] Ibid, 158.

[110] 'William of Palerne', 4134–7. The Old French version does not have an equivalent passage. Instead, William

simply tells the King of Spain to send word to his wife (Braunde) and not to let her go, without any mention of

magic whatsoever (7360–2). It may be, again, that the English author wanted to ensure the reader's understanding of

Braunde's role in Alphonse's transformation, and to explain fully her role in reversing what she had done before.

[111] 'William of Palerne', 4254.

the ring is imbued with magical properties that have their basis in the written word,[112] but the

nature of the book is not made clear. As Saunders notes, '[t]he book is tantalising: is it a volume

of natural magic, or a more sinister collection of recipes that conjure demons?'[113] The

summoning of demons is supposed to be a common source of nigromancy, and so without this

element the magic cast by Braunde is somewhat safer, or at least less dark or potentially

demonic, by comparison. Most of her enchantments are presented without much technical

description, but a manufactured element is always present.

 John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes*, written in 1449, contains plentiful references to the

crafted image.[114] The text is based on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe; the narrator makes

reference to an older Greek source that was translated by a friend,[115] but the narrative contains

various elements (such as nigromancy and dragon-slaying) that seem much more in line with

romance writing. We must therefore assume that Metham wrote most of the tale himself rather

than translating from an exemplar, and that he mentions the Greek source simply to give some

credence to his version, though he may well have consulted a previous work. The earliest version

of Pyramus and Thisbe that is known to us is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and was retold in

several English versions, including Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and John Gower's

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[112] Ibid, 4421–34.

[113] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 160.

[114] All references to Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* are from John Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, ed. Stephen F.

Page, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

[115] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 57–70.

Confessio Amantis.[116] The story of *Amoryus and Cleopes* recounts the secret courtship between

the lovers Amoryus and Cleopes, which occurs during the rebuilding of a temple of Venus which

was destroyed by thunder and hail.[117] The building of the temple itself draws most of the

attention of the first half of the story; here Metham mentions 'ymagys of gold, sylver, and bras'

within the temple,[118] but also speaks at length about the astrological signs that are present

therein. Initially, these establish the temple as a pagan site of worship for Venus, but also signify

the later overthrow of the pagan gods by Christianity. It is possible that it is the pagan nature of

the temple that allows for the presence of the nigromancer; this man is described as Venus'

secretary, '"The qwyche in craftys mekanyk hath experyens, / As of dyvynacionnys,

enchauntements, and of sorcery"'.[119] This reference to the nigromancer's experience in

mechanical crafts, also referred to as 'ars magyk' that he has 'wrowgt',[120] highlights the

mechanical aspect of his skills that would allow for the rebuilding of the temple. His

'dyvynacionnys, enchauntements, and … sorcery' emphasise the more mysterious magical

powers that enable this to take place quickly and through spiritual means. In fact, his main ability

appears to be communication with spirits. He appears in front of the crowd before the suggestion

that he might help them has even been completed because 'he knwe alle beforn be hys spyryt

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[116] Jamie C. Fumo, 'John Metham's "Straunge Style": *Amoryus and Cleopes* as Chaucerian Fragment', *Chaucer Review* 43.2 (2008): 215–37; and Roger Dalrymple, '*Amoryus and Cleopes*: John Metham's Metamorphosis of Chaucer and Ovid', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 149–62.

[117] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 116.

[118] Ibid, 118.

[119] Ibid, 452–3.

[120] Ibid, 454.

namyd Incobisus'.[121] He then proceeds to conjure spirits, make a pit and throw various items into it (gold, silver, precious stones and men's bones), make a sacrifice with the help of a book he carries, and conjure a total of 700,000 spirits in the pit who make a magical sphere in three hours.[122] He uses magic to rebuild the temple in a manner that might be considered illicit within a Christian context, but as he does so prior to conversion the temple can occupy a somewhat liminal but acceptable status once it is converted. In a way this issue is side-stepped by the focus of the narrative upon the 'spere nygromantyk',[123] since it is proclaimed clearly that the destruction of this sphere will herald the beginning of the Christian era, and that when this takes place the fate of the rest of the temple is aligned with that of the sphere. The crafted elements of the temple can therefore be described as enlightening rather than deceptive, despite their original pagan origins and the ambiguous nature of the spirits that contributed to their construction.

Where nigromancy uses images to deceive, the artisan often employs them to explore or to reveal truth. In *Kyng Alisaunder* we are presented with such an example at a later stage in the text. Alisaunder hides his true identity from Queen Candace, but she recognises him on the basis of a likeness of him that she has in her possession, an 'ymage' which is said to have been made by an 'ymageoure'.[124] The presence of an 'ymageoure' refers to a skill in artistry that is in no way implied to be magical: the craft of creating a piece of art that bears a likeness to a real person. The same, however, can be said of Neptenabus, who becomes an 'ymageoure' in his ability to craft his magical arts into the likeness of a god. So the crafted image can be used for

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[121] Ibid, 457.

[122] Ibid, 482–520.

[123] Ibid, 584.

[124] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 7682.

deceptive means but, as we see in the episode of Alisaunder and Candace, it can also be used to identify truth. The concept of the image having been made by an 'ymageoure' also emphasises the artificial or constructed nature of the image, which can apply to both visual art and magical craft. A similar comparison could be drawn between the author and his craft, which follows the same process of creating an image to place in the mind of the reader, and which incorporates a similar combination of talent and technical skill.

Authorship

Throughout *Amoryus and Cleopes* Metham makes frequent reference to the author's craft. He laments at one stage that he does not have an 'artyfycer' to purify his 'straunge style',[125] as part of a frequent habit of self-deprecation. He also mentions at the end of the text that the narrative comes 'fro the eyn of the endyter'.[126] This reference to the eyes of the author shows that, as much as the author tries to mediate his role via translations and apologies, he is ultimately responsible for the vision of the story. His mention of artifice is also interesting, and perhaps revealing as to the self-awareness of his own craft. Jamie C. Fumo compares some of the instances of authorial self-awareness, the 'sudden shifts, awkward silences, and abrupt dismissals' that characterise Metham's text,[127] to works by previous authors such as Chaucer: 'As in the Squire's Tale, Metham's forays into technical subjects like astrology and medicine are recurrently paired with intrusive comments in the narrator's voice calling attention to his

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[125] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 232–3.

[126] Ibid, 1026.

[127] Fumo, 'John Metham's "straunge style"', pp. 225–6.

humility …. Like the Squire, Metham's narrator is self-consciously concerned with "style"'.[128] Whether accidental or deliberate, Metham's authorial interjections constantly draw the reader's attention to the voice of the creative force behind the text. The often apologetic nature of Metham's interjections might not seem particularly authoritative, but they help to establish a specific narrative voice, one which is in keeping with the pious message that underlies the majority of the text, and which is explicitly revealed at its conclusion. Fumo adds that Metham's shift to a Christian allegory at the end of his text

> is marked by the narrator's explicit adoption, beginning in this invocation, of a Christian
>
> voice in control of its own narrative, compelled neither to continue furtively negotiating
>
> cultural difference by telling a Squire-like tale in a Franklin-like voice, nor to effect narrative
>
> sabotage on the sympathetically realized world of his poem like the narrator of Chaucer's
>
> Troilus. Instead, Metham's rewriting of the Apollo that he inherits from Fragment V
>
> facilitates his reconstruction of the hermeneutic possibilities of his own story, and the
>
> Chaucerian tradition within which he is working, setting the stage in the final section of the
>
> romance for a programmatic inversion of each feature of the upside-down world in which his
>
> characters have thus far been doomed to live.[129]

Metham's authority is therefore a strong presence throughout the text, though it is not always clear how stylised his narrative voice is. If we are to follow on from the idea that sight is always followed by perception, we might postulate that the initial reading provided by the author is completed by the secondary putting of two and two together that occurs in the mind of the

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[128] Ibid, p. 225.

[129] Ibid, p 231.

reader. However, the text also reminds us constantly of the voice that is ultimately responsible for crafting these signs in the first place: that of the author.

Most medieval literature is didactic. This is particularly apparent in the devotional elements which form the moral backbone of many medieval narratives, including *Amoryus and Cleopes*. We might also consider moralised texts; moralised bibles were reproduced in large numbers in the later Middle Ages, as were moralised retellings of classical texts, perhaps most famously Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Hagiographical texts such as Jacob de Voragine's *Legend Aurea* were also extremely popular and contained a strong moral message, usually pertaining to piety. Didacticism was not limited to devotional texts, however; as we have seen, secular works also encouraged piety. However, the devotional and chivalric elements of romance texts tend to be considered so central to them that the guidance their authors provide on the act of reading is often overlooked. Furrow notes that

> didacticism is always there in medieval romance as in all medieval genres; it is as much a practice of reading as it is a mode of writing, seeing an exemplary case to be pondered and debated and applied in every story. What makes fifteenth-century romance distinctive is the degree to which it insists it is instructive.[130]

The idea of the romance author insisting upon his own authority is perhaps key to how we ought to interpret the didactic relationship between the author and reader. While this relationship could certainly be one in which the reader is instructed upon moral behaviour in general, it is the unique relationship established through the reading process that creates a bond specific to that particular activity, which in turn can be applied more broadly.

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[130] Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, p. 196.

The presence of an authorial voice within a romance narrative most often occurs at its beginning or end. The first lines of a text present an opportunity for the author to tell the reader exactly what their intentions for the text are, and many make good use of it. This is a common trend, perhaps so much so that the information it can provide us has often escaped our attention. Within these lines, once again, the author draws attention to the artificiality of the text, and to their own hand in creating it. Some romance authors are proponents for the vernacular, including the translator of the Middle English *William of Palerne*, who adds at the end of the text that Humphrey de Bohun ordered that the translation be made 'for hem (th)at knowe no frensche ne neuer vndersto[n]'.[131] The author of the Middle English *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is likewise well known for his declaration that 'Riȝt is þat I[n]glische vnderstond / þat was born in Inglond',[132] whereas Caxton in his Preface to *Eneydos* also makes a well-known case for the standardisation of the English language.[133] Some emphasise the historical context behind their literary undertakings: the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, does not give any self-referential advice or break the fourth wall of the narrative, but lists the grand deeds leading up to the action of the narrative; whereas Jean d'Arras, in the French *Mélusine*, emphasises the accuracy of his sources.[134] This is fitting for the 'reporter' persona of the author, in which they declare themself to be not a creator or imaginative power, but rather a translator or

[131] 'William of Palerne', 5533.

[132] *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O. D. Macrae-Gibson, Early English Text Society 268, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), I.21–2.

[133] William Caxton, 'Preface to *Eneydos*', ed. Jack Lynch, Rutgers University Electronic Texts, last accessed 2 September 2016, < http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/eneydos.html>.

[134] Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine ou la noble histoire de Lusignan*, ed. Jean-Jacques Vincensini, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2003).

messenger with little culpability for the narrative they present. In such addresses it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the author is using a narrative persona or disclosing their own personal opinions. We perhaps see the author at his most personal in cases where he asks a prayer to be said for his soul, often at the end of the text as we see from Malory in the *Morte Darthur* or the anonymous author of *Havelok the Dane*. Occasionally, and especially in later works, we find a more present authorial voice, such as that of Metham, who frequently punctuates *Amoryus and Cleopes* with authorial interjections, and ends his text with a selection of advice ('qwan folk have lytyl to do, / On haly dayis to rede, me thynk yt best so') and self-deprecation against his 'sympyl wrytyng'.[135] We also find many instances in which the author promotes the circulation of knowledge. For instance, Coudrette's version of the Mélusine romance focuses on human knowledge: 'humain entendement s'aplique / Naturelment a concevoir / Et a aprendre et a savoir' (human understanding is applied naturally to conceive, learn and know).[136] We find this didactic inclination towards reading and learning in several other examples, such as in Caxton's famous Preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur* in which he declares that 'al is wryton for our doctryne'.[137] The author of the French *Guillaume de Palerne* also speaks about the morality of spreading knowledge, stating that 'ce ne voel mon sense repondre… / …cil qui me aurront entendre, / i puissant sens et bien aprendre' (I will not hide my knowledge … that those who would fain hear me / May be able to learn knowledge and what is

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[135] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 2211–2 and 2206.

[136] Coudrette, *Le Roman de Mélusine ou histoire de Lusignan*, ed. Eleanor Roach (Klincksieck and Paris: Bibliothèque Française et Romane, 1982), 4–6. Own translation.

[137] William Caxton, 'Preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *John Rylands 18930, Malory Project* Sigs 2r; 3r–3v (Sig. 3r), last accessed 2 February 2016, <http://www.maloryproject.com>.

good).[138] At the beginning of *Partenope of Blois*, the anonymous author provides an interesting passage about learning old and new material from books: 'be wrytinge of olde storyes / Ys now broghte to owre memories / The olde law *and* eke the newe'.[139] This viewpoint demonstrates some consideration of the role of the author or translator in writing and distributing their texts, and the reader would certainly have been in mind with these thoughts. In some instances we even find authors instructing on the art of reading itself. In Caxton's edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a translation of the French *Ovide moralisée*, the author writes that we ought to read the poets in a particular way:

> And þus thenne haue we the forme and the manere how we oughte to take and rede the poetes and other auctours; that is to wete, that as we, gadrynge rooses, we flee the thorn as moche as we maye, right so in the same maner beholdyng & seeynge the wrytynges of the poetes, late vs not take but only that whyche serueth to our pourpos and is consonant vnto trouthe, and suche thynges as may hurte and greve late vs leue.[140]

The clear message here is that proper reading practices can engender noble results. Several lines later the author is even more specific, and provides some thoughts on the art of finding meaning within fables:

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[138] 'William of Palerne', 7–10. Both the French text and the English translation are given in this edition; the opening lines of the English text are missing, and the French equivalents from *Guillaume de Palerne* are therefore interpolated with the text, along with a modern English translation, in the EETS edition.

[139] *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. A. Trampe Bödtker, Early English Text Society ES 109 (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 10–12. All quotations for *Partonope of Blois* are from this edition.

[140] William Caxton, *The Booke of Ovyde Named Methamorphose*, ed. Richard J. Moll, British Writers of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period 4, Studies and Texts 182 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013), p. 72.

who so can discouré & take away the veyle or shadowe fro the fables, he shal see clerly

somtyme poetrye & somtyme right hye phylosophye, vnder other scyence of ethyque, vnder

other yconomyque, vnder other polytique, vnder other he shal fynde geste or hystorye

comprysed, yf he wil entende and enploye hys tyme by aspre diligence.[141]

In part these examples serve to show that romance authors had varying agendas, explicit or

otherwise, and that it would be prudent not to group their intentions hastily into a single

category. We might particularly wish to bear in mind that some authors probably wished to

appear learned and humble, and portrayed themselves accordingly through the voices of their

narrators. Those who give advice on reading or on discerning meaning from texts, such as in

Caxton's *Ovyde*, however, demonstrate an implicit understanding of how narrative relationships

work. The trope of the authorial address to the reader in medieval romance is so common as to

be easily overlooked, but such introductions can contain information on how some authors

wanted, or appear to have wanted, their readers to approach or understand the texts at hand. It

should not come as any surprise to say that those in the book trade, whether writers, limners,

printers, or any of the many other roles associated with that trade, thought about literature and its

readership. But we should perhaps pay closer attention to some of the messages they have, in

some cases quite directly, told us, in order to gauge the usual expectations of the creator-

consumer relationship. Most often the expectation appears to have been at least partly instructive

in nature, and it seems common enough for the romance author to advocate within the opening

lines of their texts for piety, responsibility and correct reading practices. In such cases we see

more apparently the ways in which the narrative was intended to become the piece of fashioned

wax, and the author the nigromancer or 'ymageoure'.

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[141] Caxton, *Ovyde*, p. 73.

Conclusions

The crafted image is central to the narrative of many romance texts. In each instance that such an object is mentioned, the text lays particular emphasis on both its artificiality and the creative hands responsible for it. Quite often, the creator of the image is a nigromancer, and the image is used for magical purposes; however, we also frequently find reference to the mechanical or artistic qualities of the object, thus aligning the nigromancer with the more respectable engineer or artisan. We might also consider ekphrastic passages within this category, as these often refer to made objects such as statues or stained glass; because these items tend to be specifically didactic, however, the author tends to emphasise the message behind them rather than their crafted elements. The crafted objects discussed above also carry meaning, however; in addition to providing clues and deceptions for the romance characters, they provide spectacles which cause the reader to pause and consider their import. The role of the image-crafter is usually one of either deception or revelation, and the artificial image is usually successful in either revealing information to the romance protagonist or pushing forward the progress of the narrative. The guiding aspects of this relationship between the creator of the image and the romance protagonist can also be extended to the relationship between author and reader; the strong presence of the authorial voice in some romance narratives serves to remind the reader that the text is also a crafted object, and that they are similarly guided through the events of the narrative. The nigromancer, ymageoure and author are therefore united in their authoritative control over the artificial images of romance narratives, and in the creativity inherent within their crafts.

4. INNER SIGHT: DREAMS, MEMORY AND BOOK-LEARNING

Introduction

In medieval romance processing visual material is often treated as an internal affair, private to the individual. Whether this occurs through dreaming, conceptualising thoughts or visualising the contents of a book, romance characters most often react to visual stimuli privately, the result of which is often a realisation that helps to move the narrative forward and allows the romance protagonist to achieve a revelation or growth in understanding. In romances such as *Kyng Alisaunder*, Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, *William of Palerne*, *Partonope of Blois*, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, *The Three Kings' Sons* and Lovelich's *Merlin*, the internalisation of visual material is critical to the progress of the narrative, and instructive to the characters. We see this particularly through prophetic dreams, and the conceptualisation of thoughts, physical images or the contents of books. Such instances are ones the reader can relate to, being likewise engaged in an act of imagination, and these episodes therefore serve as examples, which generally fulfil a moral purpose and often pertain to an improvement in correct and effective reading methods.

Prophetic Visions

Harvey has stated that, during dreams, the '*sensus communis* is not occupied with images and impressions coming in from the senses outside, and hence it perceives these internal creations as real'.[142] While the allegorical dream vision has gained a lot of scholarly attention as a genre, depictions of the act of dreaming itself have not, perhaps because of their slightly nebulous status within the romance narrative. Both *Kyng Alisaunder* and the *Siege of Thebes* feature the

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[142] Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, p. 49.

apparition of the image in a private setting, in the former as an auditory vision which appears to King Philippe in his bedroom, and in the latter as a dream which is presented to King Adastrus of Argos. The image is necessary to the communication of a message in each case, which is presented in explicit terms to the viewer. The sudden appearance of somatic or supernatural images is a frequent trope of medieval romance texts; in some instances these apparitions inform the action of an entire narrative, as in the dream visions of *Le Roman de la Rose* or Langland's *Piers Plowman*, but the appearance of the image is not limited to the allegorical dream vision. As it appears in *Kyng Alisaunder* and the *Siege of Thebes*, the apparition of a god or spirit is a brief yet significant episode of the text, in which the apparition reveals something crucial to the narrative or encourages a character to follow a particular course of action. The image in such instances is used to shape key moments in the text.

The image that appears to King Philippe in *Kyng Alisaunder* and tells him the future of his successors takes the form of an anonymous voice: 'A voice ansuered [him] in an ymage'.[143] In this instance the 'ymage' stands for the apparition of a being which is in some form divine or supernatural, and is not the result of Neptenabus' nigromancy. In many cases, such apparitions occur whilst the recipient of the vision rests in bed. This is reminiscent of the allegorical dream vision in which the narrator begins both his tale and his dream in bed, and which through its connection to sleep or dreaming is perhaps meant to question the legitimacy of the incident. The

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[143] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 765. In the *Roman de toute chevalerie*, the corresponding text reads as follows: 'une voiz d'ymage ad oye le respons' (a voice responded as an image in his eye), 517. Own translation. 'oye' could refer to either 'eye' or 'ear' here; 'ear' would usually make more sense in connection with a voice, but here the voice appears as an image, which is a visual construct. In either case the source of the voice appears to be external, but its exact nature or origin is not made clear.

bed, and sleep itself, are liminal spaces similar to the forest or otherworld motifs in romance in which there are no witnesses and therefore no verification for supernatural occurrences other than the effect that they then have in shaping the narrative.[144] In such instances, the primary purpose of the image is to be read by both the narrative subject and the reader. In the allegorical dream vision each motif presents a didactic pattern of learning which is meant to guide the reader towards a form of personal and spiritual enlightenment, whereas the apparitional image guides the recipient of the vision towards new revelations and understandings, which in turn direct the course of the narrative. In the form of an apparition the image can therefore present various methods of reading and looking that act as a catalyst for knowledge and interpretation.

In Lydgate's *The Siege of Thebes* Adastrus, King of Argos, is described as receiving a combined dream and vision in the night:[145] 'He troubled was be occasion / Of a sweven and a vision / Shewed to hym upon a certeyn nyght, / For as hym thought in his inward sight / whyl he slept…'.[146] The reference to the king's 'inward sight' is particularly telling, as this implies that the dream, which also functions as a premonition, is constructed through the king's own imagination as well as whichever external agent was responsible for 'shewing' it to him. This episode is also reminiscent of how Neptenabus describes the forthcoming appearance of the god

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[144] For more on sleep in medieval romance see Megan Leitch, "'Grete Luste to Slepe': Somatic Ethics and the Sleep of Romance from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to Shakespeare', *Parergon* 32.1 (2015): 103–28.

[145] All references to Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* are from John Lydgate, *The Siege of Thebes*, ed. Robert R. Edwards, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001). All references to the Old French source material are from *Le Roman de Thebes*, ed. Guy Raynaud de Lage, Les Classiques français du moyen âge 94; 96, 2 vols (Paris: H. Champion, 1966–8). *The Siege of Thebes* was written in the first half of the fifteenth century.

[146] Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes*, 1223–7.

Amon to Olympias: '"To-niȝth þou seest hym in þi slepe"'.[147] The episode in *The Siege of Thebes* therefore establishes a relationship between the subjective nature of vision and the interpretive knowledge that naturally follows it. It presents the image as both a conveyer of information and something that must be interpreted or understood in order to be of any use to its viewer and, by extension, the narrative.

<p style="text-align:center">*Imagination and Memory*</p>

In *The Siege of Thebes* Eddypus (Oedipus) states upon confronting the sphinx: '"Thow vyle monster, thow dragon, thow serpent, / Which on this hyl lich as I conceive, / lyst in awaite folks to deceive"'.[148] In this instance the sphinx is connected both with deception, which is synonymous in many romances with nigromancy, and the idea that it must somehow be 'conceived' by its viewer. In this way the narrator signals to the reader that their own senses of imaginary conception will have to be put to use in order to picture this scene. At a later stage in *The Siege of Thebes* the narrator declares in an exchange between the king and an army of knights that 'he hadde her trouthe ful conceyved',[149] meaning that he understood their words. The idea of conception, then, is related in the text to both the sight and imaginary construction of a supernatural creature, and the interpretation and consequent understanding of an idea. The mental processes involved in envisaging visual material therefore also apply to an understanding or interpretation of that material. Where the interpretation of the visual signs is crucial to the progression of the narrative in both *Kyng Alisaunder* and *The Siege of Thebes*, it is equally

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[147] *Kyng Alisaunder*, 322.

[148] Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes*, 690–2.

[149] Ibid, 2649.

important for the reader, who is deceived and enlightened in turn by the visual elements of the text. *The Siege of Thebes* and other romance texts therefore use visual material to emphasise the importance of interpretation and visual conception.

In *William of Palerne*, Alisaundrine makes the sleeping protagonist, William, dream of Melior, and thus awakens a love for her in him. The dreams themselves are quite odd for the fact that they are lucid to the extent that William is able to think for himself within them. William's self-awareness within the dream causes him to wonder whether he might be going mad,[150] and so he is aware, at least on a subconscious level, that there is something not quite right with his surroundings. The dream places the image of Melior inside William's head so that he will dwell on her and fall in love. In a sense this is a form of entrapment, in which William has little choice once Alisaundrine has placed the image of Melior inside his mind, but as the protagonists fall in love the dream is not presented as sinister or untoward, but simply as a means to a narrative end. McKinstry suggests that dreams 'rely more on the cognitive processes of the characters and audience' than memorial (as in material) objects,[151] so that the reader is forced to keep up with what is going on when William sees Melior in the dream and to realise that it is happening in his head, as well as what that might signify. After the dream, William keeps the image of Melior at the forefront of his thoughts, so that '[t]he dreams are recollected and validated by the present and united by images that move from dream to reality'.[152] Similarly, the reader can keep the images of the dream in their thoughts and apply these to understanding the narrative as well as possible. In order to understand how dream and memory might have correlated for the medieval

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[150] 'William of Palerne', 715.

[151] McKinstry, *Middle English Romance*, p. 118.

[152] Ibid, pp. 121 and 124.

reader, we might turn to Dante, who in the last lines of his *Paradiso* explains the effect of

retaining dream information in the heart rather than the head:

As memory fails at something so out of its way.

As someone who sees something in his sleep

And after his dream has only an impression

Of what he felt, and can recall nothing else,

So am I, for my vision has almost gone,

And yet into my heart still, drop by drop,

Flows the sweetness which was born of it.[153]

Dante places an emphasis here on dreams leaving impressions rather than full facts, and

compares this effect to his own vision. In light of the fact that these lines are included for the

benefit of the reader, we might also surmise that Dante is telling his reader to focus more on the

message of his vision than on the individual details of it. This instructiveness can apply on

various levels to romance depictions of dreams and to the reading and mental application of the

romance text. In addition to the motif of the image being planted within the head, the author of

William of Palerne, like Dante, also mentions the idea of an image being painted within the

heart. This motif has a strong basis in the common romance motif of the lover's sight, in which

each lover is usually said to feed off the sight of the other, and to become distressed when they

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[153] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. C. H. Sisson, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), XXXIII.57–63. In Italian the passage reads as follows: 'e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio. / Qual è colüi, che sognando vede, / che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa / rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede, / cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa / mia visïone, e ancor mi distilla / nel core il dolce che nacque da essa'. See Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia: paradiso*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Milano: Mondadori, 2005), 57–63.

are no longer able to see one another.[154] There is a similar instance in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which the figure of Criseyde is formed in the 'mirror' of Troilus' mind: 'Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde, / In which he saugh al holly hire figure'.[155] Carruthers uses this example to argue for the idea of 'disciplined imagination' that can be both recalled and controlled.[156] However, some episodes of a similar nature emphasise a lack of control. The romance protagonist often designates the agency of love to either the heart or the eye, and thus denies personal culpability for the physical and emotional effects of their actions. Melior in particular makes use of language which explicitly states that her sight is directly linked to her heart, and speaks to her heart as a personified agent for her own sight. For instance, when she sees William she declares: '"Heart, what hast thou? / What hast thou beheld or seen – / For mine eye shews or tells me nothing"'.[157] Once she becomes distressed at the feeling of lovesickness within her she moves on to blame the eyes for being directly connected to the heart. She says it is

[154] See Mary Carruthers, 'Virtue, Intention and the Mind's Eye in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Medieval English Literature: The Influence of Derek Brewer*, ed. Charlotte Brewer and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 73–87; Saunders, 'Mind, Body and Affect', pp. 31–46; Tasioulas, '"Dying of Imagination"', 212–35; and S. Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[155] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Troilus and Crisyede', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 471–585 (1.365–6).

[156] Carruthers, 'Virtue, Intention and the Mind's Eye', p. 74.

[157] 'William of Palerne', 136–8 (p. 23). The English here is Skeat's translation of the French text, as the corresponding folio from the English text is lost, and the passage has been given separate line numbers. The French edition reads as follos: '"Cuers, que as tu? / Qu'as tu esgardé ne veu? / Que t'ont mi oel monstre ne fait"' (Heart, what is the matter? What have you beheld or seen, that has not been shown to my eye?), 829–31. Own translation. The agency of sight differs between the French version and Skeat's translation of it.

wrong to blame her heart ('"whom schal I it wite but mi wicked eyiȝen, / þat lad myn hert þrouȝ loking þis languor to drye?"'),[158] but then bestows her blame on the heart again, saying: '"Min eiȝen sorly aren sogettes to serue min hert, / & buxum ben to his bidding as boie to his master; / eke wite i al þe wrong þe werk of mi eiȝen, / & þouȝh sertes, so may I nouȝt by no soþe riȝt; / For seþþe i knowe þat mi siȝt is seruant to mi hert"'.[159] Although she is unable to blame one or the other fully, Melior identifies the connection between the eyes and the heart that is most often traced to Ovid's works and which later became central to medieval European notions of chivalric romance. This identification is accompanied by an understanding of the inevitability that this connection entails, and Melior therefore accepts that the physical pain she feels is the direct result of that physical connection between her eyes and her heart. Melior also speaks specifically of the idea of the image of William being painted in her heart, continuing the idea of a direct connection between the eyes and the heart: '"I haue him portreide an paynted in mi hert wiþinne, / þat he sittus in mi siȝt me þinkes euer-more. / & faire so his figure is festened in mi ȝout, / þat wiþ no coyntise ne craft ne can y it out scrape"'.[160] Melior declares in this passage that the image of William is imprinted within her, in a manner not unlike Alisaundrine's enchantment, which places the image of Melior inside William's head. Like the dream visions of Philippe and Adastrus, the initial source of the image is implied to be external, but to have then imprinted itself internally within the mind, and heart, of the viewer. The agony that Melior experiences as a result of her love is entirely private at this point, although its outer effects become quite visible to Alisaundrine, who in turn implants the image of Melior inside the mind, and heart, of William.

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[158] Ibid, 458–9.

[159] Ibid, 463–74.

[160] Ibid, 445–8.

The narrative therefore repeats the premise of a divide between the external source of these conceptions, and the inner consequences of them. The purpose of the image, in this case, is to ensure that Melior will not lose the sight of the man she loves, and the implication here is that Melior has specifically trained her mind to remember William ('"I have him portreide an paynted"') so that his image will not be lost to her. She declares that the image permanently '"sittus in mi siȝt"', so that the image, which is usually portrayed as being seen and then relayed to the heart, in this instance sits within the heart and relays the image back to the eyes, or the mind's eye. The text therefore displays an unusual sophistication in its treatment of inner sight, relating it to both external stimuli and its internal physical effects.

Memory is also treated within the romance as an internal function of the mind. The Queen of Palermo recalls her dream of Rome and Spain as something that 'þan com here in mynde',[161] again returning to the idea of the image or sequence of signs planted in the mind by an external source, ready for interpretation. In a previous dream the queen sees the bears and the hind and the hart that signify William and Melior, but does not understand their meaning. Within the dream the hind has the figure of a knight on its forehead, and the hart the figure of a maid, both with crowns.[162] The dream is telling her quite directly that the figures on the animals' foreheads represent the true forms within the animals; but, true to the usual structure of medieval romance, the queen is not yet able to interpret the signs, and has to refer to the priest to interpret their meaning. The priest uses his books to interpret the signs and symbols,[163] and so implies that learning, or the act of reading, can offer the key to a correct interpretation of signs. William also

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[161] Ibid 5496.

[162] Ibid, 2868.

[163] Ibid, 2917–8.

remembers his own story as something that 'cam [to] him in minde',[164] although in this instance

he is unable to interpret the memory correctly. It comes back to him as the queen tells her story,

but he is unable to make the mental link between her story and his own. The fact that the

memory is treated with the same words as the queen's dream sequence, articulating the idea of

the images coming to mind, implies an understanding of the connection between the internal

sight and interpretation of images. As we find throughout the romance, it is the interpretation of

such images that allows the narrative to advance, and so it is only when the queen is able to

interpret her dream, and William his memory, that the true meaning of their contents is able to

fall into place. Although the image within the mind does not involve a physical disguise in the

same manner as the werewolf enchantment or animal costumes that are central to the narrative

elsewhere, it involves the same process of finding true meaning lodged within the sign or image

that obscures the truth. In this way, then, the romance deals with the idea of inner and outer

forms on a number of levels, and with particular attention to the idea of false or obscured images

that the characters must interpret or uncover in order to see the true forms underneath. Romance

characters often seek help when they are unable to interpret their own dreams, and in such

instances the private, inner contemplation of the images presented within the mind becomes

public, and open to wider interpretation. This usually occurs when the dream has wider

significance for characters other than the dreamer themself, and this is certainly true of *William

of Palerne*, in which the recognition of William and Melior, and subsequently Alphonse as well,

allows for the restoration of all three to their prior statuses, and the resolution of the narrative.

Whether an internal image remains private is therefore pertinent to its wider purpose within the

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[164] Ibid, 3514.

romance narrative, and the ability of the individual to make sense internally of the material presented to them.

Partonope of Blois is a fifteenth-century English translation of Partonopeus de Blois, a French romance written in the late twelfth century which enjoyed great popularity.[165] Partonope of Blois refashions the classical tale of Cupid and Psyche, in which an invisible figure requests that his lover not attempt to see him. The text makes frequent use of the motif of imagination or visualisation. Although the processes of imagination do not occur particularly often in the central action of the narrative, the narrator makes frequent reference to the visualisation of abstract concepts, and so encourages the reader to do the same. In one instance, for example, the narrator draws an analogy using a leaf: 'Lyke as þe leffe dothe on a tre, / When hyt ys blowe, as þou may see'.[166] In creating an analogy to something the reader might easily see outside the text, the narrator encourages the visualisation of his analogy using comparative visual evidence from real-life experiences, and in doing so heightens the visual realism of the scene. In perhaps the most noteworthy example, the author ruminates on the connections between thinking and the eye:

The enpression of þoughtes of all maner þing

In mannes hert haþ his abidyng,

Be it hote love or any þing elles.

To all þes þoughtes þe chief ledere is

The Eye, and namely of lovers crafte.

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[165] See Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 114–15 (p. 109). The tale of Cupid and Psyche first appears in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* in the second century.

[166] *Partonope of Blois*, 1485–6.

For þrowe þe sight is ofte rafte

Fro man boþe herte, wisdame, and resone,

As longe as of þoughtes lasteth þe sesone.[167]

This passage demonstrates the connection between the eye and the imagination, with particular reference to the love that lies at the centre of the romance narrative. The use of sight motifs in the romance encourages the reader to visualise certain aspects of the text with reference to both concrete and abstract concepts, and to develop a further understanding of the mental processes involved in visualisation and the interpretation of the imagination. The act of imagination is quite natural and certainly does not apply just to reading, but its depiction within a number of romance narratives shows the reader how to apply this inner sight to practical purpose; this allows the reader to experience the narrative effectively, but it also acts as a more general form of guidance towards insight and its application both within the act of reading and outside it.

Visualising the Contents of Books

Books often feature as physical objects within romance narratives, and sometimes initiate visions or epiphanies. They also act as a catalyst between author and reader through depicting the act of reading. The works of Chaucer, for instance, quite often depict the narrator or other characters in the role of a reader in a private setting. *The Book of the Duchess* is a particularly good example of the effective use of depicting reading in order to elicit an instructive response in the reader:

Upon my bed I sat upright

And bad oon reche me a book,

A romaunce, and he it me tok

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[167] Ibid, 10888–95.

To rede and drive the night away;

For me thought it better play

Then playe either as ches or tables.

And in this bok were written fables

That clerkes had in olde tyme,

And other poetes, put in rime

To rede and for to be in minde,

While men loved the lawe of kinde.

This bok ne spak but of such thinges,

Of quenes lives, and of kinges,

And many other thinges smale.

Amonge al this I fond a tale

That me thoughte a wonder thing.[168]

The narrative centres on the idea of night-time reading encouraging an instructive and visually

compelling dream. Spearing notes that 'Chaucer's major innovation in the tradition of medieval

dream-poetry was to identify [a] point of contact in the experiences of the previous day with the

reading of a book',[169] and that here we find a detailed connection between the contents of the

reading passage and the events that follow it. In doing so, he provides a relevant point of

reference for his reader:

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[168] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Book of the Duchess', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 329–46 (44–61).

[169] Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, p. 58.

In *The Book of the Duchess* the connection is ingenious and psychologically plausible. …

Chaucer has been careful to make the story and the dream fit each other exactly. The purpose

of the dream is not to offer the Black Knight the promise of a reunion beyond death, but to

encourage him to adjust himself to the fact of the lady's death, and in doing so to celebrate her

life.[170]

The text is therefore instructive for the reader, and uses the example of reading to apply moral

messages to a familiar activity. In this text Chaucer also thinks about the effect of visualising

ekphrastic descriptions on the imagination of the reader, and how these might be applied to a

reading of the following passages of text. In one scene the narrator, within his dream state,

encounters a series of stained glass windows in which scenes from the Trojan War and *Le Roman

de la Rose* are depicted:

> For hooly al the story of Troye
>
> Was in the glasynge ywroght thus,
>
> Of Ector and of kyng Priamus,
>
> Of Achilles and of kyng Lamedon,
>
> And eke of Medea and of Jason,
>
> Of Paris, Eleyne, and of Lavyne.
>
> And alle the walles with colours fine
>
> Were peynted, bothe text and glose,
>
> Of al the Romaunce of the Rose.[171]

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[170] Ibid, p. 58.

[171] Chaucer, 'Book of the Duchess', 326–34.

Chaucer does not give a particularly ekphrastic description here, in that the narrative contents of the windows are recounted, but not their pictorial description. Instead, he provides a sense of which characters and whose stories from the relevant texts should be called to mind by the reader, and applied elsewhere in the narrative. The use of the word 'glose' here is particularly interesting, as it is normally used to refer to a textual commentary but here potentially seems to refer to a visual programme.[172] It is also perhaps telling that the narrator makes no particular inference upon the windows when he sees them, given the ignorance he reveals in conversation with the knight at a later point. When the knight tells his story to the protagonist he says that '"I telle the upon a condicioun / That thou shalt hooly, with al thy wyt, / Doo thyn entent to herkene hit"'.[173] The knight is essentially asking him to pay attention, which he does not, and his inattentiveness could be applied more generally as a warning to pursue good reading, or listening, practices. The knight's responses that '"I have lost more than thou wenest"' and that '"Thou wost ful lytel what thow menest"' are particularly revealing of the protagonist's ignorance, and the repetition of this point means that the reader cannot miss it.[174]

In *The Three Kings' Sons* (*c*. 1475–85) a similar emphasis is laid upon the importance of contemplating literary material.[175] Philip, the son of King Charles, has been trying unsuccessfully to persuade his father to go to war in aid of his neighbours. The text states that Philip 'withdrew hym in-to an Inner chambre with suche as pleasid hym / and made one rede

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[172] Ibid, note p. 969.

[173] Ibid, 750–2.

[174] Ibid, 1138 and 1305.

[175] *The Three Kings' Sons*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society ES 67 (London: Kegan Paul, 1895). The text is from a French source copied by David Aubert in 1463. Aubert is possibly also the author.

holy stories and lyues of Seyntes, seruauntes to the cristen feith / wher-by he sawe the paynes and trauailes that the holy Apostells and Martirs had sofred to gete the perdurable glorie'.[176] The text implies through this scene alone that the works Philip reads here have the capacity to shape his perspective and future actions. It emphasises this point, however, just a few lines later:

> This yong prince beyng in his bedde, contynuelly thinkyng on the wordes that he had hadde with his ffadir / aftir came him to remembraunce the stories he hadde herd redde a litle bifore his going to bedde / callyng to mynde also / the paynes that be in this world / hou myghti a kyng someuer he be, here hath he no surete in noon erthly thyng / but only of the kyngdom of the kyngdom of heuen…[177]

The prince's contemplation of the text he reads and its application to his own life is the central focus of the scene. Philip says to himself that '"I remember the paynes / the seyntes of whom I rede to day endured to come to thy Reaume"',[178] and this is what persuades him to his course of action, to leave the city and help the cause his father would not. The narrative makes frequent use of the word 'perception' to describe inferred information rather than visually blatant information. By physical signs the emperor interprets his daughter Iolante's distress, reading the signs and coming to the correct conclusion about them: 'he perceyued hir hert was not in ease'.[179] Later in the text Iolante is described as being harder to read: 'neither he nor noon othir shold perceyue hir thought, al-be-it she had not leste pleasir to behold him'.[180] Perception, again,

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[176] Ibid, p. 7.

[177] Ibid, p. 8.

[178] Ibid, p. 8.

[179] Ibid, p. 150.

[180] Ibid, p. 193.

is seen as being required to understand something hidden rather than to convey explicit information. It could even be equated with insight, like the kind Philip encounters through reading. The reader is taught, here, how to apply reading and insight to practical use.

The narrative of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin,* a translation of the French Vulgate *Merlin* which was written around 1450,[181] addresses several issues of memory, beginning with Merlin's conception. Merlin's mother becomes confused in her memory of the events by which Merlin is conceived within her, and only realises what has happened once she is able to recall the events of the previous night: 'thanne cam it in hire mynde anon / that the enemy hire hadde ouergon'.[182] We are later told that Merlin has been given wit and memory by God.[183] Merlin's abilities of memory appear to be somehow conjoined to his visual abilities: he can foresee the future, read prophetic signs, create them, make things appear and disappear, and also assume a number of physical appearances. This initial announcement of his capabilities in wit and memory speaks to

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[181] All English quotations from the text are from Henry Lovelich, *Merlin*, ed. Ernst A. Kock, Early English Text Society ES 112 (93) (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1904); Old French quotations are from *Lestoire de Merlin*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 7 vols (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1908), II. Lovelich's edition of *Merlin* did not, as far as we know, enjoy great popularity: we only know of one manuscript that contains it. Scholars have derided the work for its poor quality; the text was left incomplete, and contains a number of mistakes. For more on this, see Roger Dalrymple, '"Evele knowen ye Merlyne, in certeyn": Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 155–67 (pp. 157–8); Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Through the Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 90; and Raluca Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 88–90; 144–5.

[182] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 629–30.

[183] Ibid, 1579. This is described as 'sens et memoire' in the Old French version (p. 18).

his intelligence, but also to his abilities of visualisation and the interpretation of visual signs. Raluca Radulescu notes that Lovelich 'seems to have focused on memory, speaking and understanding the truth, and the clarity of the divine message' throughout the text.[184] Peter H. Goodrich, on the other hands, speaks of the emphasis in the text upon 'the magical power of words to shape as well as represent reality that underpins [Merlin's] function as the master narrator and architect of Camelot', and declares him to be '[t]he personified faculty of our imaginative powers'.[185] The issues of visualising the contents of the romance are quite real to the reader. For instance, the text, at an early stage, features a walking, talking, argumentative baby Merlin. Medieval romance does not necessarily follow the laws of logic we usually like to ascribe to texts, but even a medieval reader would have had some problems piecing such a scene together. The book makes constant reference to memory and visualisation, and connects these processes with reading. Merlin, at an early stage in the text, says to Blaise of his written accounts, "'Ʒe han it don i-wreten In a book, / my concepsiown, and ʒe wyle lok, / and þerby mown ʒe ful wel knowe / the lyveng of my modir al this throwe'".[186] There is some implication, here, that in writing of Merlin Blaise learns more of his character: 'and evere the lengere that Blasye gan wryte, / the bettere hym thowhte he cowde endyte; / and euere the more this mater gan he drawe, / evere the bettere he lykede merlynes Sawe'.[187] By committing the story to writing Blaise essentially commits it to memory, not just his own, where he is able to evaluate

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[184] Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts*, p. 141.

[185] Peter H. Goodrich, 'Introduction' in Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompason, ed., *Merlin: A Casebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1–88 (p. 2).

[186] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 1247–50.

[187] Ibid, 1641–4.

and thus commend Merlin's behaviour, but also to public memory, where those who are able to read well, meaning those who are able to interpret the signs within the narrative correctly, will gain a true picture of the proceedings that are set forth in the text, and the truth of Merlin's dealings. Gareth Griffith states that, as a result of Blaise's authorship, which is directed under Merlin, 'in effect, Merlin is authoring *Merlin*. As such, he has power over his own representation – perhaps the ultimate power in a textual realm'.[188] In committing his story to posterity via Blaise Merlin ensures his authority, and in having him do so the author makes a comment on his own authority and the singular or collective memory of his readership.

In Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes*, the text deals in large part with the passing of a pagan era into a Christian one. When he is first confronted with the idea that the sphere which holds the temple of Venus together, and thus the pagan gods, might not last, the secretary of Venus declares that one should '"thynke yt nowt; that ys but a fantesy!"'[189] This particular attribution to fantasy is an interesting and, to the modern reader, ironic statement given the nature of the temple that has just been built, a task that would have been substantially slower had the characters not had a local nigromancer to hand. The reader knows that the fantasy spoken of here is to become a reality, but in the meantime the alignment of the above statement with a fanciful thought or fiction seems overblown when so much that must have seemed impossible to some readers had already occured within the earlier stages of the narrative. In a dream Venus states to the secretary that '"A crucyfyid man schal take possessyon and us put asyde"',[190] and so the

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[188] Gareth Griffith, 'Merlin' in Neil Cartlidge, ed., *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 99–114 (p. 111).

[189] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 650.

[190] Ibid, 667.

reader is well aware of the progression that must take place by the end of the story, needing only to keep an eye open for the signs that crop up throughout the rest of the narrative. Venus speaks, among other things, of the memory of the pagan gods being lost;[191] this accentuates the idea of their becoming artificial through remembrance, present only (in contemporary medieval society) through the artificial memories of art and literature, and no longer through living memory. Later in the text Venus is described as '"a devyl of helle"';[192] this contrasts with the initial portrayal of Venus and the temple, which do not appear base or demonic. The whole situation rather exemplifies a catalyst for social change. When the transition comes the pagan gods give way easily, and the spirits convert readily. The pagan gods are only demonised in the later remonstrations of the priest. He also warns against the dangers of illusion, and cautions that his congregation should recognise this in the temptation of beautiful objects: '"for thow yt seme gold and schynyth rychely, / Alle ys but a sotelté of the fend to blere yowre ye"'.[193] There is a moral message here not to allow oneself to be blinded by riches and their temptations, but the narrative has spent so much time dwelling on the riches of the temple and its contents that the reader is not offered any direct examples of the dangers of sight. Instead, this is left to the imagination.

One episode of Amoryus' and Cleopes' courtship is quite unusual for its specific reference to the merits of communicating and gaining deeper understanding through reading texts and images. This occurs when Cleopes uses her illuminated book of devotions, which appears to be analogous to a Psalter or Book of Hours, to communicate with Amoryus:

There was, as seyth the story, a portrature mervulus

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[191] Ibid, 672.

[192] Ibid, 1976.

[193] Ibid, 1980–1.

In a boke that Cleopes had to sey on her devocionys,

Portrayd wyth gold and verd, the qwyche conseyt representyd thus:

Ther was an hynde lying as yt had bene on stonys,

Holdyng an hert that bordyryd was wyth trw lovys,

Beforn qwyche depeyntyd was a knyght knelyng,

Holdyng in one hand an hart, in the odyr [a] ryng.

But qwy yt was portrayd, ne fallyth me to telle

But for the conseyt womannys wytt to expres.

Thys lady had caught an ymagynacion of that mervel,

That in lyke thingys the dome lyke schuld be, sche gan ges,

'And yf he wyse be, my menyng he schal perseyve in more and les'.

And as he yede forby, sche held aloft her boke, and bysyly

Her ymagys beheld, and Amoryus yt gan aspye.[194]

There is an anachronistic aspect to this passage, in that a Psalter or Book of Hours such as this one would have had no place in a pagan temple prior to Christian conversion. But the use of an illuminated text in this guise is very telling as it shows a direct connection between wisdom and reading; the episode suggests to the reader that if they are diligent in reading then they might become wise like Cleopes too. The communication between the lovers is very much like that between author and reader, and Metham is perhaps indicating a wish to communicate well with his readers, and a desire that they should read the signs correctly to understand the text and apply its messages outside of reading the narrative. The episodes in which Amoryus and Cleopes fall in love are in some ways quite typical of medieval romance, but the episode of the illuminated book

[194] Ibid, 800–13.

draws quite specific attention to the potential for successful communication between the lovers, and also between the author and reader; the reader is likewise encouraged to use text and image to learn, understand and be pious. Amy N. Vines notes that 'the romance is designed both to entertain and to provide spiritual inspiration for the reader',[195] and so we can perhaps think of the text as appealing to numerous levels of understanding. Vines also comments on the importance of Cleopes' textual knowledge to the narrative: 'These acts of influence are based almost exclusively on a woman's broad textual knowledge that becomes a catalyst for male chivalric excellence; Cleopes recognizes the importance of texts as intellectual resources as well as physical objects that can function as a means of communication'.[196] Cleopes' proficiency with books can perhaps be seen as an encouragement to the reader to behave in the same way. She demonstrates book-learning in her knowledge of dragons, which she recounts at length to Amoryus, and which helps him to succeed in his mission; at each turn, then, the knowledge that she has acquired from reading propels Amoryus to success of various chivalric kinds.[197] Cleopes' proficiency with texts and knowledge within the narrative therefore acts as a guide of sorts for the reader. For instance, the fact that Amoryus replicates the image from the book in his handkerchief means not only that he wishes to meditate upon his love, but also that he has learned the important role that such images can play in matters of communication and remembrance. The narrative at various turns is therefore very much concerned with reading images, and provides various didactic examples for the reader.

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[195] Amy N. Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), p. 56.

[196] Ibid, p. 64.

[197] Ibid, p. 65–7.

In Ovid's version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe the tragic death of the couple is commemorated at the end by the symbol of the mulberry. In Metham's version, the symbol appears to have been replaced by another melding of text and image, in two instances. The opening of the text introduces the story by describing a statue of Cleopes' father in detail:

The fadyr of Cleopes, as seyth this story,

Was clepyd Dydas, hos wurchyp and fame

Was spred ful wyde; so that the cyteceynys for a memory

Lete make a pyler of bras, therein wrytyn hys name

And hys benefetys, moreovyr, hys ymage heldyng a frame,

In tokyn that be equité he reulyd the toune,

And eke that the tempyl was of hys fundacion.

My boke tellyth the cause of this remembrauns…[198]

The statue combines image and writing in order to create a true 'remembrauns'. Memory therefore appears to be a key concern of the narrative, and the author implies here that memory is best preserved in text and images. We find a similar effect at the end of the text when the tomb of Amoryus and Cleopes is described to the reader following their deaths: 'Ther chyldyr them byryd in a tumbe of marbyl gray, / Platyd wyth ymagys of gold; and superscrypcionys thei have / Into this day'.[199] The description of this tomb and its inscriptions is extensive, and includes the message that the monument is supposed to recount: 'Thys ys ther epytafy, wrytyn at ther fete, / In a plate of laton, and yche notabyl dede / Of hys bateylys and howe he wyth Cleopes dyd mete

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[198] Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 106–13.

[199] Ibid, 2089–91.

/ Gravyn be ther eke, that thei that can may them esyly rede / For a gret remembrauns'.[200] Again, the emphasis here is on the idea that the monument, through the effective combination of text and image, can be 'esyly rede' in order to generate 'a gret remembrauns'.[201] Kara Doyle emphasises that that the tombstone serves not only to commemorate the dead lovers, but also Metham's patron, Katherine Stapleton, and that this episode therefore provides a didactic example for the reader that commingles with various levels of commemoration:

> This tombstone treats each protagonist as an individual monument and exemplar. Amoryus is a 'memorial / Of trosty love', a (now dead) testament to the fact that male fidelity in love can coexist with knightly virtue; Cleopes serves as a model of femininine 'trwelove, stedfastenes, and curtesy' for medieval female readers. *Amoryus and Cleopes*, likewise, presents Katherine's (premature) epitaph. Moreover, Metham wants *all* of his texts to serve as monuments to Katherine Stapleton, inspiring her descendents to remember her as a paragon of medieval female virtues. Such monuments, whether in bronze, in marble, or in parchment, immobilize the past in the process of making it exemplary.[202]

Text and image therefore combine in the mind of the reader in order to help them to understand and remember both the events of the narrative and what moral lessons might be taken away from it. *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Amoryus and Cleopes* both use nigromancy to present visual material but they diverge in their approaches to storytelling; the author of *Kyng Alisaunder* uses images as

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[200] Ibid, 2101–5.

[201] Kara Doyle, 'Fabulous Women, Fables of Patronage: Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* and BL MS Additional 10304', in Seeta Chaganti, ed., *Medieval Poetics and Social Practice: Responding to the Work of Penn R. Szittya* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), pp. 124–42 (p. 142).

[202] Ibid, p. 142.

plot devices and encourages interpretation in a general sense, whereas Metham uses quite specific examples of text and image in order to instruct the reader on how best to approach them.

Conclusions

Dreams are a curious aspect of medieval romance. In some instances, as we see in *Kyng Alisaunder* and *The Siege of Thebes*, a prophetic dream is largely a plot device intended to impart knowledge to the characters and the reader, with a view to propelling the narrative action forwards. In such instances, however, the source of the dream, its visual aspects, and its presence as an external being or one which exists internally within the mind, are something of a mystery, which renders vague any clear idea of how the medieval reader might have most naturally conceived of dreams and their ability to impart visual information. Elsewhere we see dreams that are closely tied to texts, as in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and in such cases the instructive nature of the dream seems to signify more than just an impetus to forward the narrative action; instead, the instructive element is emphasised to the extent that the didactic nature of the dream and the text are intertwined, and the lesson therein becomes, essentially, one of reading. The reader of romance dreams is encouraged to read correctly and to retain information (or the essence of that information, as we see in Dante) just as the dreamer might. The dreaming state of the romance protagonist and the imagination of the reader are comparable, as in the former case the subject is at the mercy of the dream vision, and in the latter case the subject is at the mercy of the author. In both cases, the ability to visualise material and to organise meaning from that material is vital to the dream or narrative having a positive impact. As we have mentioned elsewhere, the allegorical dream vision is a prominent genre of medieval romance, and one that is particularly didactic; we see the same effect in non-allegorical instances of dreaming, in which

education is key, not necessarily in relation to piety or good living, though these are certainly

present as a general rule, but to a matter that is much more pertinent to the healthy continuation

of the author-reader relationship: the ability to visualise and interpret a text.

5. RECOGNISING THE VISUAL SIGNS OF MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

Introduction

A central concern in medieval romance is the ability to read and interpret the meaning of the visual signs that are presented to the protagonists. The art of recognition is frequently depicted as being crucial to this ability, and it often drives the primary action and resolutions of the narrative. In texts such as Lovelich's *Merlin*, *William of Palerne* and *Partonope of Blois*, we see frequent reference to the recognition of good and evil, the recognition of true and false forms, and the recognition of minor visual signs which help to forward the narrative. Where the romance characters learn the art of recognition, the reader is encouraged to do likewise. The narratives provide in some instances a moralised reading of how one ought to interact with invisible, disguised or cryptic images, thus allowing the reader to engage with those which occur in their own reading patterns, and to improve in the art of deciphering imagined narrative material.

True and False Natures: Demons, Werewolves and Ambiguous Magic

If the reader of medieval romance is encouraged by the author to undertake a correct interpretation of the contents of the text, one vital aspect of that skill is the ability to recognise the nature of ambiguous or supernatural characters: as either divine (or, at least, pious and supportive of the overarching divine purpose) or diabolical (either evil or mischief-making). Liminal characters such as those with demonic origins, like Merlin; those who are under an enchantment, like Alphonse in *William of Palerne*; or those with knowledge of ambiguous and potentially dangerous magic, like Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, are initially problematic, and an

essential component of the text focuses on persuading the reader of the trustworthiness of these characters.

Merlin is an elusive figure in Arthurian literature. Much of the enigma surrounding him is the result of his origins, and in *Merlin* we are given an explicit account of the events in which Merlin's mother is visited by an incubus, who begets Merlin on her. Merlin is a paradoxical character in the text, and indeed throughout most of the Arthurian literature in which he appears. His deeds are condoned for the fact that he serves the king and the Christian God, but his origins are explicitly diabolical, and scholars of Arthurian literature and medieval romance have been fascinated by the duplicities of Merlin's nature.[203] Ultimately, the paradox amounts to a narrative problem for the author: Merlin has dubious origins, but he is also central to the narrative, and so he must be established as legitimate. Saunders postulates, for example, that because he is depicted as being protected by God his magic is 'both authorised and directed to the establishing of the Arthurian world'.[204] Neil Cartlidge adds that 'Merlin feels no compulsion whatsoever to show any allegiance to his father's infernal kin' and that, as a result, we do not tend to see 'any tensions within his character'.[205] Merlin's status as a romance protagonist is therefore safeguarded by his piety and allegiance to God. His function within the text is incontrovertably positive, but there are several hints of his demonic origins. For instance, when he is born we

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[203] Goodrich, 'Introduction', p. 1; 'Merlin', in Carl Lindahl, John McNamara and John Lindow, ed., *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 268–70 (p. 270); William Blackburn, 'Spenser's Merlin', in Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson, ed., *Merlin: A Casebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 334–53 (p. 337); and Griffith, 'Merlin'.

[204] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp. 115 and 229.

[205] Neil Cartlidge, 'Sons of Devils', in Neil Cartlidge, ed., *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 219–35 (pp. 226 and 227–8).

learn that he has black eyes.[206] The text emphasises in the episode of the incubus that demons

hate light and prefer darkness: "'and where so evere thow lye on nyht, / Loke be ony weyes that

thou have lyht, / For there as lyht is, he ne wyl not be, / For lyht hateth he most, ful Sekerle!"'[207]

This provides us with a fairly straightforward division which equates light with the divine and

darkness with the diabolical, and places the incubus firmly in the latter category. We are

reminded of the dishonourable actions of the incubus in the scene in which the king quenches the

lights in the bedroom of the duke's wife before he rapes her,[208] and this preference for darkness

can perhaps be equated with his dark deeds. There is also a curious instance in which Merlin

goes to the forest to visit Blaise, and before departing declares his natural affiliation for that

location: "'to the forest i moste me hye / be enchesoun of my nature'".[209] The forest is a well-

known locale for all things liminal or supernatural in medieval romance, but it also reminds us in

this instance of the marginality of Merlin's origins. In *Politics* Aristotle states that any man who

chooses to live outside of the city is assimilated with the wilderness, and segregated from

society.[210] Medieval authors promoted this view, and we see it in many examples, as well as in

the *mappa mundi* tradition of medieval mapmakers, in which the monstrous races were situated

at the edge, cordoned off from human society. William Bradford Smith has said that, to medieval

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[206] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 1030.

[207] Ibid, 497–500. In the Old French version this passage is worded slightly differently: "'Et garde que la ou tu

garras ait clarte. que diables ne vient mie volentiers ou clartes est'" (And see that where you rest you have a light,

since the devils will not go willingly where light is), p. 8. Own translation. The passage is a reference to John 3:20:

'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved'.

[208] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 14471.

[209] Ibid, 8710–11.

[210] Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. Ernest Barker and R. F. Stalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I.1253a.

readers, '[t]he act of articulating boundaries involves the definition or the redefinition of what it means to be a social person'.[211] We are reminded of Merlin's liminal status by his habitation outside of any populated centre, but as long as his deeds move the narrative forward, and apparently follow God's will, his liminality is negated in a manner that the reader can easily accept for the duration of the narrative.

The term 'werewolf' has connotations in modern parlance that do not correlate with its use in *William of Palerne*. Rather than referring to a person who is human the majority of the time, but then is transformed under a full moon as the result of having been bitten by another werewolf,[212] the text refers to a man who has, through enchantment, become trapped in the form of a wolf. The term literally means 'man-wolf', *wer* originating from the Old English word for 'man'.[213]

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[211] William Bradford Smith, 'Crossing the Boundaries of the Civic, the Natural, and the Supernatural in Medieval and Renaissance Europe', in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 133–56 (p. 155). Also see Claude Lecouteux, *Witches, Werewolves, and Fairies*, trans. Clare Frock (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), pp. 9 and 26–35.

[212] The Oxford English Dictionary gives the primary definition of 'werewolf', to mean '[a] person who (according to mediæval superstition) was transformed or was capable of transforming himself at times into a wolf'. 'werewolf/werwolf, n.', Oxford English Dictionary, last accessed 1 February 2016, <http://www.oed.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/227846>.

[213] The werewolf is a popular figure in medieval romance and also appears in Marie de France's *Bisclavret* and the anonymous *Lai de Melion*. For more on these, see David B. Leshock, 'The Knight of the Werewolf: *Bisclavret* and the Shape-Shifting Metaphor', *Romance Quarterly* 46.3 (1999): 155–65; Gloria Thomas Gilmore, 'Marie de France's Bisclavret: What the Werewolf Will and Will not Wear', in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images*, ed. Désirée G. Koslin and Janet E. Snyder, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 67–84; and Neil Cartlidge, 'The Werewolf of Wicklow: Shapeshifting and Colonial Identity

Alphonse, the werewolf in *William of Palerne*, has the appearance of a wolf, but the mind of a man. The text states that the wolf 'has mannes munde',[214] and so the implication in the text is that Alphonse has not been transformed into a wolf so much as having taken on the outward appearance of one, and that he is still a man on the inside. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that the figure of the 'sympathetic' werewolf was a popular trope amongst romance texts in the later Middle Ages, and that such figures 'are changed into wolves, usually by evil women, but … retain the "intelligence and memory" of rational human beings'.[215] Whilst in lupine form, however, Alphonse remains problematic. Jeffrey J. Cohen suggests that the idea of the werewolf helps man to query his inner animal,[216] and that the retrieval of Alphonse's human form deals ultimately with the anxiety of the reader: 'Werewolves' bodies are convenient animal vehicles for meditating upon human identity in the Middle Ages [because they] pose difficult questions about identity and continuity'.[217] Throughout the text we are repeatedly made aware of the

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in the *Lai de Melion*', in *Medieval Romance and Material Culture*, ed. Nicholas Perkins, Studies in Medieval Romance (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 75–89.

[214] 'William of Palerne', 4123. The Old French version does not use a similarly explicit phrase, but instead explains that Alphonse has just as much sense and memory as William: '"Autant a il sens et memore / Com j'ai ou plus, et plus encore"' (He has as much sense and memory as I do and more, and more again), 7245–6. Own translation. The French version emphasises William's connection with Alphonse, and the latter's merits; the English version, on the other hand, emphasises Alphonse's nature, and offers a specific example of inner-outer paradox in order to emphasise the nature of Alphonse's condition. We see several further examples of this throughout the English text.

[215] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf', *Speculum* 73.4 (1998): 987–1013 (1001).

[216] Jeffrey J. Cohen, 'The Werewolf's Indifference', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 351–6 (351).

[217] Cohen, 'Werewolf's Indifference', 355.

paradox that exists in Alphonse. We find references to Alphonse as both a 'wilde werwolf' and a 'witty werwolf', implying that whilst in this form he is a wild animal, but one with human intelligence. He might usefully be compared to the legend of Saint Christopher, who was often depicted with a dog's head. Cynocephali (dog-headed men) were included in Pliny's monstrous races and pervaded medieval bestiaries and *mappa mundi*; Christopher's dog-head is meant to recall this tradition of monstrosity, but also suggests duality in his character, since Christopher is also a saint.[218] Even once Alphonse's true identity has been revealed, William refers to him as '"mi swete dere best"' while he is still in lupine form.[219] For William it is not enough to know that Alphonse is actually human; his appearance must return to normal before he can be treated as a man, and in the meantime, despite a number of noble actions on his part, he is treated on the basis of his outward appearance, as an animal. However, the fact that Alphonse retains memories of his former self in human shape means that he is still ultimately human in nature despite his physical form. The text also highlights the idea of Alphonse as a 'new-made' man, ashamed of his nakedness once he is transformed back into human shape.[220] This again emphasises his

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[218] Also see Laurence Erussard, 'The Watchdogs of the Soul: The Role of Dogs in the Spiritual Salvation of Robert the Devil', in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 209–21; Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'From Monster to Martyr: The Old English Legend of Saint Christopher', in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, Studies in Medieval Culture 42 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 167–82; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno Press, 1969); and Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[219] 'William of Palerne', 4359.

[220] Priest, 'The Witch and the Werewolf', p. 93.

humanity and his nobility, reassuring the reader that he retains human sensibilities. The appearance of the wolf is purely cosmetic and does not affect Alphonse's true nature, which allows him to remain a sympathetic, if troubling, character.

Braunde, Alphonse's stepmother who is responsible for his enchantment, is not presented as an entirely safe figure, and the death she is threatened with, by fire, is that normally associated with heretics.[221] Priest notes that '[o]f perhaps more relevance to medieval chivalric romance, however, is the threat the stepmother poses to a culture based on inheritance and primogeniture';[222] this prompts the idea that the political threat posed by the stepmother is more prominent than her magic. The concern of the text seems to be not so much the possibility of her being evil or monstrous in nature so much as overstepping her bounds in deciding who should next inherit the kingdom; the question here is not one of evil, but of transgression. Braunde is stigmatised within the text because she uses her charms for ill means, whereas the primary function of Alisaundrine, Melior's handmaid, is to bring about a match between William and Melior. Within the context of the romance this is a noble and honourable goal, and so, although her enchantments might have been considered dangerous within another context, Alisaundrine's magic is portrayed as good and unproblematic because of its purpose. The text emphasises the fact that Alisaundrine's knowledge of magical craft is rooted in a medicinal knowledge of herbs.[223] This functional aspect of her learning also helps to remove Alisaundrine from any

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[221] Barbara A. Goodman, 'The Female Spellcaster in Middle English Romances: Heretical Outsider or Political Insider?', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 15 (1998): 45–56 (49). Also see Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 160.

[222] Priest, 'The Witch and the Werewolf', p. 88.

[223] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 131.

suspicion, as she is associated in the text more with natural medicine than with nigromancy, a term that is not applied to her within the narrative. When Melior is taken ill with lovesickness, Alisaundrine claims that she knows of a herb with virtuous properties that can cure her: ''I schal þurth craft þat ich kan keuer ȝou i hope, / Mow i geten a grece þat i gaynli knowe! / haue ȝe sleiliche it seie & a-saide ones, / & feled þe sauor & þe swetnesse þat sittes in þe rote, / hit schal veraly þurth vertue do vanisch ȝour soris!'''.[224] Her personal concern for Melior's wellbeing is further evidence that she is a trustworthy accomplice, and her craft is not described as being explicitly magical. However, when she makes William dream of Melior her art is described in magical terms: 'Ful conyng was sche & coynt & couþe fele þinges, / of charmes & of chau[n]temens…'.[225] It is clear, then, that Alisaundrine's knowledge contains magical elements, though it is unclear how far Melior is aware of this. The magical terms of charms and enchantment are seldom used in relation to her, and are replaced instead with more precise talk of herbs and ingredients. Erik S. Kooper notes that 'the poet has introduced this theme of sickness, healing, and medicine with great care', and that this element is illustrated by examples

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[224] 'William of Palerne', 635–9. The Old French passage provides the following text: ''Une herb connois que je ai: / Se vos une seule foie / L'aviés veue et essaie, / De la dousor de la racine / Seriés tote garie et fine / Quite de cest mal et deliver / A tot les jors qu'avriés a vivre''' (I know of a herb that I have: if you have seen and tried the sweetness of the root just once, you will be healed and fully free of this malady for all the rest of your living days), 1086–92. Own translation. The French version does not mention Alisaundrine's 'craft' in any form, but simply presents her medicinal knowledge of this particular herb.

[225] 'William of Palerne', 653–4. There is no direct equivalent of this passage in the Old French version, which again refrains from discussing Alisaundrine's knowledge or powers in terms of 'craft', or any other manner that might link her explicitly to nigromancy. The French text instead speaks of her courage and wisdom (1097–8).

that are not present in the French version of the text.[226] Priest adds that, 'though the handmaiden offers assistance to the lovers, she does not effect any love magic. The hero falls in love with the heroine as the result of an unexplained erotic dream, and not in consequence of affirmative action on the part of the women', and that subsequently *William of Palerne* 'offers a harmless, positive version of love-magic'.[227] She adds that '[t]he vocabulary of charms and enchantments portrays Alisaundrine's arts as going beyond medicine, but the emphasis on plants and healing places them as natural magic', and that '[h]er natural magic … is portrayed as just one aspect of her intense practicality, which also includes the preparation and fastening on of the disguises'.[228] In fact, when Alisaundrine places the second dream within William's mind she claims that she requires a particular herb, and uses this as an excuse to absent herself and make her enchantment.[229] The fact that she covers up the more magical aspects of her craft with a medical aspect is interesting since she is portrayed in a positive light, and implies that the use of a more direct form of magic might not have been openly acceptable to her mistress.[230] Alisaundrine,

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[226] Erik S. Kooper, '*Grace*: The Healing Herb in *William of Palerne*', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s.15 (1984): 83–93 (85).

[227] Hannah Priest, '"Bogeysliche as a boye": Performing Sexuality in *William of Palerne*', in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 85–98 (pp. 88 and 131).

[228] Ibid, p. 131.

[229] 'William of Palerne', 797–800.

[230] Linda Ehrsam Voigts has argued that herbal medicine was sometimes considered to have a comedic reputation in the Middle Ages, which, if applied here, could indicate further that Alisaundrine's herbal lore is a front for what would otherwise be considered magical activity. Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Herbs and Herbal Healing Satirized in Middle English Texts', in *Herbs and Healers from the Ancient Mediterranean through the Medieval West: Essays in*

then, projects a false appearance over her activities, one in which her crafts are more medical or biological in nature than explicitly magical. This layer of practicality helps to legitimise her role within the narrative, however, and to establish her as being useful rather than problematic.

Melior's magical abilities in *Partonope of Blois* are presented as being somewhat ambiguous. The danger of the educated woman is a common emphasis of medieval romance, as we see with characters such as Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or Braunde in *William of Palerne*. Melior emphasises the fact that the craft she practises is her own: '"Alle thys dyd I þorowe my crafte"'.[231] However she also emphasises that she is a Christian in order to mediate this.[232] The fact that Melior is responsible for her own learning makes her a potentially dangerous character in the context of medieval romance. However, the fact that her education was ordered by her father, and that he followed her progress closely, implies that he mediates her education, and therefore makes it permissible.[233] It is Melior's associations with nigromancy in particular that are problematic, since such practices are assumed to have potentially demonic origins. Saunders notes that, within the text, nigromancy 'is not necessarily condemned', but that 'doubt is maintained concerning Melior's arts'.[234] The nature of Melior's magic throughout the romance is ambiguous. Saunders argues that '[t]he message of *Partonope* is complex and ambiguous. Melior's active pursuit of the knight through enchantment places her as a powerful

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Honor of John M. Riddle, ed. Anne Van Arsdall and Timothy Graham, Medicine in the Medieval Mediterranean (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 217–30.

[231] *Partonope of Blois*, 1659.

[232] Ibid, 1344–7 and 1887–1906.

[233] Ibid, 5904–45.

[234] Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 155.

agent of her own destiny. Yet the consummation with its accompanying test of secrecy leads to

her loss of power'.[235] She loses her magical abilities once Partonope has seen her, and yet

maintains a noble status and ultimately ends up with her chosen romantic partner. Bruckner

observes that the 'incognito' motif in medieval romance is 'a kind of controlled visibility that

conceals and reveals at the same time, ultimately revealing more thanks to the greater clarity

bestowed by the momentary obscurity of anonymity', and that '[a]s the female equivalent to the

knight's incognito, invisibility allows Melior to reshape her identity'.[236] The fact that Melior

loses the use of her power is presented as an unfortunate occurrence in the narrative, but it also

neatly dispels any risk of the hero, Partonope, being paired with a female character who is more

powerful than he is. Partonope's willingness to accept that he should expose Melior using the

lantern, despite her numerous warnings, demonstrates his helplessness within the action of the

narrative. Melior has expressly ordered him, numerous times, not to attempt to see her,

instructing him 'That yn no wyse ye ne besy yow howe / By craffte of nygromansy me to see'.[237]

But when he is advised to do so by a member of the clergy, his duty to God is called into

question. The decision to expose Melior might seem odd to modern readers, but it seems quite

probable that Partonope had little choice.[238] When the text states that 'he be- þoȝte what wes

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[235] Lovelich, *Merlin*, p. 157.

[236] Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, pp. 136–7.

[237] *Partonope of Blois*, 2424–5.

[238] Some suspension of disbelief is implicit in reading most medieval romance, but with regard to some aspects more so than others. For instance, it is difficult for the modern reader to envisage Partonope as a thirteen-year-old boy as he is in the French original source, particularly when we consider some of the more sexual content of the narrative. The English author appears to have considered eighteen to be a more appropriate age for the protagonist. See Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 119; and Spearing, *Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, p. 142.

beste to done / Wyth the crafte of Nygromansy',[239] it highlights his uncertainty over the use of

such magic, and the fact that he is caught between one source of craft and the other, both of

which appear to be remarkably similar. Melior warns Partonope to be wary of charms so '"that

ȝe ne be / Wythe [hem] be-gyled"',[240] and warns him specifically against the enchantments of his

mother: '"She wolle make some crafte where-by / Ye shulle a-yen my wyll me se"'.[241]

Partonope's mother is convinced that Melior is an agent of the devil: '"My sone ys loste by

crafte of charme, / Alle by þe deuyllys Enchauntemente"',[242] when really it appears to the reader

that Melior's crafts are no different from her own. The means by which Partonope's mother and

the priest enchant her son are not altogether straightforward. For instance, they cause Partonope

to be presented with a drink which leads him to express his love for another maiden. The maiden

refers to the ensnarement as craft ('"be crafte I haue yowe take"'),[243] but it is possible that this

craft refers to their beguilement rather than any actual magic. However, when Partonope realises

what has occurred the drink is referred to as an enchantment: 'He cursed þe moder and hur

Enchauwntmente',[244] and when he tells Melior what has happened he says that craft was

involved in the making of the drink itself: '"A wyne I dronke, was made by crafte, / Þorowe

wyche my wytte was me by-rafte"'.[245] The reference to losing his wits through the drink, and the

fact that no mention of magic is made prior to its administration, implies that the drink might not

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[239] *Partonope of Blois*, 5849–50.

[240] Ibid, 2539–40.

[241] Ibid, 5567–8.

[242] Ibid, 5055–6

[243] Ibid, 5286.

[244] Ibid, 5308.

[245] Ibid, 5446–7.

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necessarily be magical, but merely alcoholic. However, the frequent references to craft and his

mother's enchantments appear to counter this argument. The lantern Partonope is given to

expose his lover is a more expressly magical object than the drink, in that it has the power to

reveal Melior in her true form: "'I haue ordeyned þerfore an arte / Where-þorowe ye shulle hur

naked see'".[246] Although the lantern involves enchantment, its legitimacy is not questioned, since

it is an enchantment that is ordered by the priest. The priest, however, is erroneous in his

conclusions, and it is unclear how the reader is supposed to respond to this, and whether the

priest's mistake is supposed to be an understandable blunder, or whether his own spiritual vision

might be blocked. The priest, like Partonope's mother, uses enchantment to combat an unknown

magic, which is assumed to be illicit since its source is not known to them. Magic in medieval

romance becomes acceptable once it is proven to have been undertaken within a Christian

context, and also under male supervision. Even though the enchantments are attributed to

Partonope's mother, she produces no magic without the express permission or direct aid of the

priest. Melior refers to the lantern as "'þat fowle lyghte'",[247] and so implies that, although it is

not demonic, the magic practised by Partonope's mother and the priest is not altogether pure.

This calls into question the classification of certain types of magic or light in terms of true and

false sight. Partonope's mother refers briefly to the notion of true sight when she laments the fact

that Partonope is unable to see his lover: "'Yette of hur persone, shappe, ne fygure, / Wyth hys

eyen he neuer [had] syghte trewly'".[248] Melior's situation is precarious exactly because she is

unable to prove that her form is true and pure, as Partonope finds when the lamp reveals that she

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[246] Ibid, 5797–8.

[247] Ibid, 5875.

[248] Ibid, 5083–4.

is beautiful: 'Hys launterne he putte vp wyth hys lyghte. / Alle naked þer had he þe syghte / Off þe ffeyreste shape creature / That euer was formed þorowe nature'.[249] In medieval romance beauty and goodness are often combined,[250] and Melior's looks help her to establish further her virtuous nature. Melior refers to the actions of Partonope's mother as the '"crafte of false nygromansye"',[251] which is problematic since the latter undertakes her magic under the supervision of the priest, but it is clear that the reader is supposed to sympathise with Partonope and Melior. The text emphasises, therefore, that nigromancy can be used for good or ill. The true and false natures of the characters are complicated by their acts of nigromancy, and their acceptability to the reader relies ultimately on their demonstrations of piety and wisdom.

True and False Forms: Disguise

The primary means by which Merlin demonstrates his magic within Lovelich's *Merlin* is in his ability to shapeshift into an array of appearances, which he showcases within an extensive number of episodes in the text. We hear, for instance, that he 'cowde taken ony oþer semblaunce',[252] and he warns Arthur of this habit himself.[253] We are not offered a visual description of Merlin in what is known as his 'ryht semblaunce',[254] but we are told that he

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[249] Ibid, 5862–5.

[250] See Corinne Saunders, 'Beauty, Virtue and Danger in Medieval English Romance', in *The Recovery of Beauty: Arts, Culture, Medicine*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Jane Macnaughton and David Fuller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 35–52.

[251] *Partonope of Blois*, 7892.

[252] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 3226.

[253] Ibid, 8723–4.

[254] Ibid, 5332. In the Old French version this is described as 'droite samblance', as on pp. 67 and 124.

appears at various stages as an elderly man, a blind man and a disabled man. Merlin's magical abilities are met with doubt at various points throughout the tale, eliciting comments such as '"A, Sire, kyng, how may this be, Sure, / that a man him-self scholde disfegure?"'[255] The process through which Merlin 'disfigures' himself is not clear, but his propensity for altering his appearance on a consistent basis provides the text with a firm grip on the ideas of illusion and image-crafting that are central to many romance texts. The concept of Merlin's 'rhyt semblaunce' is also interesting, however, for the fact that it introduces the concept of true and false forms, and the moral ambiguities of disguise. We are assured by Ulphin that '"his semblawnce he wil schewen, wel i wot"',[256] meaning that though Merlin might obscure his appearance, he will revert to his true form in due course, and sure enough he does so: 'thanne took merlyne his owne Semblaunce, / that he to-forn hadde, with-owten variaunce. / and thanne, anon as they hym Sye, / they seiden it was merlyne, trewlye'.[257] The revelation of Merlin's true form is essential to his status as one of the central and more positive characters of the narrative. Uther's foray into shapeshifting is depicted in quite different terms from instances in which Merlin does likewise. It can be supposed, perhaps, that Merlin's ability to change form is natural rather than manufactured, although such matters are left nebulous throughout the text, and we never hear any details of Merlin's shapeshifting abilities. The plan to place the duke's appearance on that of Uther is presented at first in quite similar terms to those used of Merlin's

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[255] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 5325–6.

[256] Ibid, 11702.

[257] Ibid, 3395–8.

shapeshifting: '"the semblaunce of þe dewk i wyl putten to the, / that non man schal ȝow from hym knowen, sikerle"'.[258] However, the description thereafter becomes quite technical:

'Take ȝe this herbe that is here,

and Frote ȝowre visage al in fere,

ȝoure hondis, ȝoure body, ȝoure feet also;

in alle wyse that ȝe thus do'.

the kyng thanne dide his comaundement

thanne hadde he hol semblaunce, verament,

lik as the dewk it hadde i-be,

i Seye ȝow, Sires, ful certeinle.[259]

The herb provides a physical, medicinal basis for the spell. By contrast, we are told that Uther only has to think of Jordan's appearance in order for Ulphin to take on his form ('"be-thenke ȝow now of a thyng: / ȝif evere jordayn that ȝe sye." / "ȝis", quod the kyng thanne, "Sekerlye!" / thussone hadde vlphyn jordayns lyknesse'),[260] and Merlin's transformation into Bretel's form is given particularly vague treatment ('and thanne loked they bothe vppon merlyn tho, / and

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[258] Ibid, 5455–6.

[259] Ibid, 5497–504. The Old French version states that: 'merlins apporta une herbe & li rois la prinst si sen froia . & quant il sen fu froies si ot tout apertement la samblance del duc' (Merlin carried a herb and the king put it on, and when he had done so he had, to all outward appearances, the semblance of the duke), p. 67. Own translation.

[260] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 5506–9. In the Old French version this passage is described as follows: '"Et lors" dist merlins. "Or vous souiegne se vous ueistes onques iordain". Et li rois dist iou le connois moult bien. & merlins li monstre vlfin en la samblance de iordain' ('And now', said Merlin, 'remember the sight of Jordan'. And the king said that he could picture him very well. And Merlin made Ulphin appear in the semblance of Jordan), p. 67. Own translation.

Bretelis semblaunce hem semede bothe two').[261] It seems that human transfiguration has to be

technical in order to be either feasible or acceptable, whereas Merlin's supernatural nature allows

him to effect his own transformations immediately. The ability of the other characters to

recognise Merlin is also important to the tale, and such moments of recognition recur at various

points throughout the text. Something of a joke appears twice in the text, first between Merlin

and Uther, and then Merlin and Arthur, in which Merlin does not immediately reveal his identity

to either king. Arthur is fooled by Merlin's guise as a beggar and laughed at by his men until he

is told the truth. Ulphin recognises Merlin through his words ('evere stood sire Vlphyn and

herkened, i-wys, / and thussone he gan for to Smyle, / and knew hit was merlyne be his wyle'[262]),

and Bretel likewise ('thanne wyste Bretel he hadde merlyn fownde'),[263] after hearing his speech.

Both men have learned to recognise Merlin through his speech rather than his appearance,

whereas at this stage Arthur requires the visual appearance of Merlin's true form in order to be

reassured that it is indeed he. His men laugh at his ignorance ('"Sire … knowe ȝe not

merlyn?"',[264] '"Sire, knowe ȝe not merlin, and ȝe hym se?"'[265]), especially when he states that he

would know Merlin if he were to see him.[266] Ulphin then reveals to Arthur the truth: '"many

semblances he kan ȝow schewe, / vi other viii sone vppon a rewe. / For also often as hit is his

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[261] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 5519–20. In the Old French version this episode occurs as follows: 'Et quant il orent vn poi

ensi parle si vint merlins & lor fu auis que ce fust bretel' (And when they had spoken a little Merlin came, and

behold he was made into the form of Bretel), p. 67. Own translation.

[262] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 11626–8.

[263] Ibid, 11656.

[264] Ibid, 11665.

[265] Ibid, 11681.

[266] Ibid, 11668.

pleasaunce, / he wyl sone chongen his semblaunce, / and al be craft of Negremauncye'".[267] The

incident repeats one in which Uther similarly fails to recognise Merlin, and declares that he

would know him if he saw him.[268] In this instance Uther and his men claim that '"his werkis we

knowen not, in certeyn, / but his Semblaunce we knowen ful wel, / and we hym syen

everydel'".[269] The ability to recognise Merlin is heralded throughout the text under the phrase 'I

hym knowe wel and fyne',[270] but the characters are not constant in their abilities to do so.

Moreover, the ability to recognise Merlin becomes aligned with having an affinity for his work,

and for accepting his assistance. Ulphin and Bretel have worked with Merlin before; they believe

in his magic and are sympathetic to his aims. Arthur, however, requires some persuading, and it

is only once he chooses to recognise Merlin's magic that he is able to accept his help. The same

can be said for his father. Uther recognises Merlin in the final moments of his life, on his death

bed,[271] and therefore indicates to the reader that he, too, has been sympathetic to the work and

aims of this elusive figure. The other characters have a mixed ability to recognise Merlin, and

that recognition of him often tallies with their acceptance of his guidance. The text presents the

issue of true and false semblances as a concept that is physical, in the shapeshifting exploits of

Merlin, but also metaphorical, in the sense of recognising someone's true character. One of

Uther's men asks, for instance, '"how scholde ȝe ony man knowen, in certeyn, / but ȝif ȝe

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[267] Ibid, 11711–5.

[268] Ibid, 3365–8

[269] Ibid, 3374–6.

[270] Ibid, 5327.

[271] Ibid, 6780.

knowen his Semblaunce?"',[272] and this is a matter that is addressed repeatedly in the text. True

semblance lies at the bottom of issues such as Arthur's claim to the crown, or the legitimacy of

Merlin's magic. The matter is confused further by the numerous instances in which shapeshifting

occurs, under which circumstances it is often impossible to tell a man's identity, let alone his true

character. However, we are offered a vital clue on this matter on Uther's deathbed. Not only does

Uther recognise Merlin at this point, but Merlin also makes a crucial pronouncement on Uther's

character: '"Sire, a fair ende hast thow mad here, / ȝif hit In thy conciense now be / as thy

Semblaunce here scheweth to me"'.[273] Uther, who has previously shown a false physical

semblance in taking on the appearance of the duke, with Merlin's help, has proved himself

worthy, in the end, by presenting his true character.

Priest argues that '[t]he first half of *William of Palerne* reveals a preoccupation with disguise

and role-playing, which is not found in the French source text'.[274] William and Melior choose to

assume animal disguises because of the 'crafty cunsayl'[275] given by Alisaundrine, that they

should go forth in disguise so that they will be 'vnperceyued'.[276] Alisaundrine's counsel is

readily taken, rather than forced as Alphonse has been by enchantment. However, the idea of

concealment in animal form is the same, and the costumes are also crafted, though without

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[272] Ibid, 3378–80.

[273] Ibid, 6794–6. In the Old French text this passage reads as follows: '"tu as fait moult bele fin se la consciense est tele comme la semblance"' (you have made a very fine end if your conscience is now like your semblance), p. 79. Own translation. The English version is perhaps more poignant here for its implication that Uther has shown his true semblance to Merlin, and that Merlin has recognised this semblance in him.

[274] Priest, '"Bogeysliche as a boye"', p. 85.

[275] 'William of Palerne', 1697.

[276] Ibid, 1700.

magical assistance. Unlike Alphonse, though, William and Melior are able to switch their disguises, so where at first they are dressed as bears they later make their own disguises from the skins of a hind and a hart. The recognition of the people underneath the animal costumes becomes crucial to the resolution of the narrative, and it is only once the disguises are discarded that William and Melior can return to their rightful states, and bring to completion the satisfactory resolution of the narrative. Bynum notes that

> the whole romance plays with the idea that appearance is a skin put on, that bodies lurk under skins. The queen knows William and Melior are human, not because she sees something naked gleaming through the cracked deer skins, but because she sees clothes, the normal covering for the human body. Small wonder that Alphonse's restoration is bathing and receiving new clothes; it's as if the human body were there under the wolf skin all along.[277]

The episode of William and Melior's animal skins is therefore instructive with regard to how the entire romance is to be read. Susan Small suggests that 'Guillaume and Melior are mannequins; the real player – the model – in this story is Alphonse, in whom stain and fabric, scar and skin, stimulus and psyche, wolf and man, are permanently and inextricably fused'.[278] The animal costumes are clearly temporary and therefore do not complicate the characters of William and Melior as Alphonse's form complicates his. Instead, the episode mimics, and even parodies, the main narrative content through the use of temporary disguise.

Partonope of Blois offers numerous instances in which sight, or the object of sight, is notably either present or absent. The most obvious example is Melior herself, in the role of the invisible

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[277] Bynum, 'Metamorphosis', 1012.

[278] Susan Small, 'The Medieval Werewolf Model of Reading Skin', in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, ed. Katie L. Walter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 81–97 (p. 92).

lover, but before Partonope encounters her he comes across an array of invisible attendants, who

steer the ship that guides Partonope to Melior's country, and attend on him within the tower.[279]

The physical absence of the attendants from Partonope's line of vision ('man on lyffe Sawe he

non')[280] contrasts with the marvellous sights he encounters when he arrives in the country. He

thinks of his surroundings as being 'wonder fayre to se',[281] with most of his attention being held

by the architecture of the tower, but also the brilliance of its surroundings. The absence of the

attendants is all the more startling for being placed within a setting that otherwise offers so much

visual stimulus for Partonope's contemplation. Much of the emphasis the text places on the

beauty of the strange country Partonope arrives in is on its light. He notes, for instance, that the

country appears to be lit with daylight even though its peripheries are surrounded by night: 'A

grette mervayle þen sawe he, / For nyghte hyt was vppon þe see, / And in þe Cuntre hyt was as

bryghte / As thowe hyt had be day lyghte'.[282] It is immediately apparent, then, that there is

something either magical or otherworldly about the country, but the particular emphasis on light

sets up the parallels between light and sight, and darkness and blindness, that occur throughout

the narrative. A similar emphasis on light occurs when Partonope awakes in Melior's

bedchamber: 'As he caste vp hys ey, sodenly he gan loke / Alle a-bowte þe chamber; he sey so

gret a lyghte, / Alle þe dayes of hys lyffe he seye neuer soche a syghte'.[283] Such a startling

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[279] For more on the ship, see Sebastian I. Sobecki, 'A Source for the Magical Ship in the *Partonopeu de Blois* and

Marie de France's *Guigemar*', *Notes and Queries* n.s.48.3 (2001): 220–2.

[280] *Partonope of Blois*, 740.

[281] Ibid, 982.

[282] Ibid, 846–9.

[283] Ibid, 1934–6.

display of light might have suggested either celestial or otherworldly connotations, if Melior's

magic were not the result of educated craft but divine or faerie power. The abundance of light in

the chamber implies that, although Partonope is unable to see Melior, she is a positive force in

the narrative. Spearing notes that other senses such as touch and hearing gain unusual

prominence in this passage as a result of the inability to see Melior:

> In the absence of looking, and of the 'discrimination and individualization of form' that it
>
> permits, the poet's account of events in the bed gives unusual prominence to touching and
>
> also to hearing – unusual, that is, given the predominant pictorialism of medieval poetry and
>
> what we have seen to be the scopic bias of its descriptive conventions.[284]

Since hearing is usually more of a receptive or passive sense, Spearing suggests that its

prominence here 'surely indicates the translator's awareness of transmitting a scene in which the

accepted predominance of sight no longer operates'.[285] The romance also makes an unusually

large number of references to nightfall, and the lack of sight which one experiences at night: 'Till

vpon hym fell þe derke nyght. / And þen anoone he loste þe sight'.[286] The abundance of

references to night adds a certain degree of realism to the temporal aspects of the narrative. It

makes sense, for instance, that a battle or tournament would have to end when night falls due to

the lack of visibility: 'Tylle aponne hym felle durke nyȝthte, / Thatt [n]onne off them myȝthte

oder see'.[287] However, the numerous references to the lack of sight which accompanies darkness

closely mirror the references to a polar opposition between light and dark, and between sight and

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[284] Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, p. 145.

[285] Ibid, p. 145.

[286] *Partonope of Blois*, 7061–2.

[287] Ibid, 2982–3.

its absence. Partonope is unable to see when he becomes separated from his companions and is lost in the forest at night: '"Tylle derke nyghte felle vppon me; / And þen I myghte no lenger see"',[288] and it is later verified that this was a deliberate ploy on the part of Melior.[289] Although the darkness quite literally means that Partonope is unable to see his way, we can also extend Partonope's lack of sight to his inability to see Melior, and her invisibility in this instance allows her to watch him unnoticed under the natural effect of nightfall. Darkness is therefore connected with the lack of sight that also occurs elsewhere in the narrative. A lack of sight is treated as problematic in a number of other instances. Melior's initial threat to Partonope, before she reveals that she has led him to her, is that he should be imprisoned in a space in which he cannot see his own hands: '"Thowe shalte wyth ffeterys be harde knytte, / And deþe þrowe downe In-to a pytte, / Where þou shalte neuer þy hondes see / As longe on lyve as þowe shalte be"'.[290] It is not the imprisonment or fetters that are emphasised as being of any particular terror here, but the perpetual state of darkness. Partonope's inability to see Melior is also problematic for his mother, and this is the source of the troubles that occur throughout the latter part of the narrative.[291] Melior refers to Partonope as being blind without the sight of her: '"And be þat tyme þynge þat ys nowe blynde, / Shalle be to yowe ryghte opon I-nowe. / Ye shall se all folke, and all folke

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[288] Ibid, 1377–8.

[289] Ibid, 1668.

[290] Ibid, 1335–8.

[291] Joy Hawkins posits that blindness and disability were associated with sin throughout the Middle Ages. See Joy Hawkins, 'Did Drunkenness Dim the Sight? Medieval Understandings and Responses to Blindness in Medical and Religious Discourse', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 203–20 (p. 204).

shall se yowe"'.[292] The implication here is that once the year and a half is over, Partonope will

not only have the sight of Melior and her attendants, but also further understanding. Once he has

proven himself worthy, he will have gained both the sight and the insight he requires in order to

progress in the narrative. At a later stage of the narrative Partonope disguises himself in order to

present himself before the now-visible Melior; at this point, then, their roles have been reversed.

Disguise and image distortion are important to the resolution of the narrative; the distorted

appearances of the characters, first Melior's through invisibility and then Partonope's through

disguise, means that it is only when the narrative is resolved that the appearance of both becomes

unobscured.

Reading Visual Signs

A number of visual signs in Lovelich's *Merlin* are presented to be read by its characters. In many

such instances the visual sign is presented as a prophecy, such as the two dragons that Merlin

interprets for the king. The sight of two dragons warring is in itself a marvel: 'thanne in the eyr

aperede that syht / that merlyne afore tyme hem tolde ful ryht, / of wheche Syhte the enemyes of

the kyng / hadden gret drede',[293] but through Merlin we also learn the import of the incident, and

that it signifies Pendragon's victory over the king. As much is made of the fact that no-one but

Merlin can read the sign as of the sign itself. The king's astrologers are forced to make up their

own prophecy rather than reveal that they cannot understand it. Merlin, in fact, holds back from

telling the king the entire prophecy, and thus creates a division of power between those who can

read the signs and those who cannot. Such prophetic markers are presented to be read, and often

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[292] *Partonope of Blois*, 1820–2.

[293] Lovelich, *Merlin*, 4159–60.

misread, throughout the rest of the narrative, and are often crafted by Merlin himself. For instance, he presents the empty chair to Uther's knights as a signifier that only one who is worthy will be able to sit in it, and that he has not arrived yet. It is obvious to the reader at this point that the chair signifies Arthur's coming,[294] but the knights do not see any significance to the chair, and refuse to recognise its importance ('but what that place dide signife, / Niste þe kyng ne non of his compenye'),[295] to the peril of one knight, who sits in the chair and promptly disappears.[296] Merlin's powers apparently extend to the ability to make him and others appear or disappear at will. Such an incident occurs when Merlin appears in England and the king's company 'ne wysten owt of wheche plas' he came from.[297] Merlin also frequently obscures the sight of the enemy in battle, creating fires and winds that prevent them from seeing one another: 'and þerto the storm so strong there was, / that non man othir sawh in that plas'.[298] He also constructs light-oriented objects in battle, such as the dragon banner that breathes fire, and the sword that shines so bright, 'as thowh xx torches hadden ben lyht, / So that there hit semede to alle here Syht'.[299] Merlin's abilities, then, involve an array of illusory devices that can obscure a person's appearance, confuse an army's sight or even make people, including himself, appear and disappear; Merlin therefore has the ability (not unlike an author) to direct or misdirect others as he chooses. The sword in the stone offers a similar instance of visual signification, in which the

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[294] Ibid, 4413.

[295] Ibid, 4427–8.

[296] Ibid, 4564.

[297] Ibid, 10313–30 (10330).

[298] Ibid, 10631–2.

[299] Ibid, 8409–10.

sword is heralded as a visual token that may be used to solidify Arthur's claim to the throne: 'ʒow a kyng to chesen of honowr, / that at this Feste chosen myhte be / be som tokeneng that they myhten se'.[300] This is another example of Merlin's abilities, not only in magical craft but also his intelligence. He foresees trouble with crowning Arthur out of the blue, and so invents a sign whereby the men might accept his coronation, a visual token by which to recognise Arthur as their king. Signs of recognition are rife throughout the text. There is, for example, the birthmark belonging to the daughter of King Leodagan and his unnamed queen, which allows her to be distinguished from her otherwise identical but illegitimate half-sister ('but hit were be thike mark, / cowde non man hem disseuere in lyht ne derk').[301] Moreover, the birthmark is in the shape of a crown, thus solidifying the daughter's claim to royalty.[302] The birthmark provides the purpose of facilitating recognition, though of a less portentous sort than the other examples mentioned here. The dragon banner also operates as a visual sign, one which signifies Arthur's royal status, evidences his physical place in the battlefield and acts as a vital sign to his people regarding their fate in the war. The banner contains marvellous properties: 'Swiche plente of fyr hit cast owt thar, / that tho whiche weren in the cyte, / Large half a myle they myhten hit se, / the clernesse of that Fer so bryht, / how into the eyr hit wente vp rhyt'.[303] As well as being a sign that is associated with Arthur through Uther's legacy and the two dragons that Merlin first identified as signifying his uncle's victory, the banner provides a marvellous sight that is accentuated by Merlin's magical and/or technical additions, many of which seem to be based on

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[300] Ibid, 6886–88.

[301] Ibid, 14499–500.

[302] Ibid, 14496–8.

[303] Ibid, 14178–82.

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tricks of light and fire. The banner also serves the practical purpose of announcing Arthur's

presence on the battlefield. In one episode Arthur's people fear because they can see neither the

banner nor the king.[304] When the banner is not initially identified the people search for the king

on the battlefield, hoping that their side will be victorious. The banner serves as a beacon of hope

when it is finally revealed: 'and Syen merlynes Baner that tyde, / the dragon that the feer blew so

hygh, / as hit hem Semede, in-to the Skyhe, / that al the eyr semede on fyire there'.[305] Not only

does the banner somehow present a series of impressive pyrotechnics, but these also allow the

ladies to see the banner from the top of the city walls, and to call out comforting remarks to the

knights, who are still unable to see the banner, that help is on its way.[306] Whereas much of the

text focuses on Merlin himself and the ability of others to recognise him, in fact there are

important political motivations at stake as well and Merlin is treated as an authority in this area

so that he can lead others to recognise Arthur's status; as ever, it is not only the characters, but

also the reader who is encouraged to do so and to believe not only in Merlin's (or the author's)

authority but in the authority he ascribes to certain characters as well, particularly Arthur.

The recognition of visual signs is also a repeated motif of *William of Palerne*. When the

bower woman sees William and Melior in disguise, accompanied by the werewolf, she forgets

their identities and runs away in fright: 'whan sche saw þo þre bestes so þroli come, / so hidous

in þo hides as þei hertes were, / sche wex wod of hire wit witton, for fere'.[307] Melior reprimands

the bower woman for not recognising them, to which the woman replies that she remembers her

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[304] Ibid, 14727–8.

[305] Ibid, 14816–9.

[306] Ibid, 14816–9.

[307] 'William of Palerne', 3176–8.

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but is scared of the others. This statement does not correspond with the passage above, which emphasises her fright at seeing the 'hidous' hides of the three beasts. The implication of the passage is that the bower woman has failed to recognise any of them, including her mistress, and that she retracts this claim afterwards. Moments of recognition, and moments in which characters are not recognised, recur throughout the romance. William and Melior are surprised not to recognise Alphonse once he has been returned to a man's form, although they knew he was about to be transformed.[308] When William returns his horse recognises him,[309] but his men do not despite being able to recognise the horse.[310] In fact, much is made throughout the romance of the ability, or inability, to recognise William. The prince of Spain, for instance, asks how he might know William: "'ȝif i encountre with þis kniȝt þat þis kare worcheþ, / how schal i him knowe what konichauns here he bere?'"[311] The ability to recognise William becomes synonymous with the ability to recognise his shield. The shield is made especially for William once his identity has been revealed, and so becomes entwined with his character. William is asked "'what signe is þe leuest / to haue schape on þi shield to schene armes?'",[312] and chooses the symbol of a werewolf on a gold shield in tribute to Alphonse, who raised him. As with the animal costumes, however, William assumes the image of a wolf by choice, whereas Alphonse was forced to assume that form through the nigromancy of his stepmother. Once William's shield is ready he becomes widely associated with it: 'whan þe stiwardes newe saw william

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[308] Ibid, 4498–523.

[309] Ibid, 3235–8.

[310] Ibid, 3326–7.

[311] Ibid, 3568–9.

[312] Ibid, 3213–4.

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come, / bi þe werwolf in his scheld wel hie him knewe'.[313] William is recognised through the image of a werewolf, but this time the image is positive because his identity is not divided as a result of it. Instead, the image of the werewolf is assimilated with his own identity, and becomes a tool for his recognition. Recognition and reading beyond surface details is an important aspect of the narrative, but goes beyond simply saying that there is a man beneath the exterior of the wolf; the resolution of the text, in part, is provided by Alphonse being restored to his rightful station, so that the narrative purpose becomes political in addition to exploring the relationship between outer beast and inner man. William is also part of this process, having been removed from his home at a young age, and therefore also being in need of restoration. His upbringing in the forest might well be compared with Merlin's affinity for that liminal space, and could potentially problematise his character; the recognition of William is therefore important to the narrative, and the ability of his men to do so indicates the return to his original status. The interpretation of signs also figures in Alphonse's attempts to communicate with the other characters. As a wolf, Alphonse is unable to talk, and so must communicate in signs instead, a feature that is also present in the later *Valentine and Orson*.[314] When Alphonse attempts to speak to the queen, for instance, she wonders at the '"wonder signes he wrouȝt"' and asks '"what mai hit tokene?"'[315] William's response to such signs is to interpret them as omens rather than translate them exactly: '"i sei þe signes mi-self & soþli ich hope, / It bi-tokeneþ gret god þat greiþli schal vs falle"'.[316] In this instance William places his own interpretation on the signs,

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[313] Ibid, 3433–4.

[314] Watson, *Valentine et Orson*, pp. 70–1 and 91.

[315] 'William of Palerne', 3488–9.

[316] Ibid, 3491–2.

although the wolf is unable to communicate directly with the characters. Even the initial reasoning behind William's capture is misunderstood as Alphonse is unable to communicate that he is attempting to save the child's life, although it is interesting that William's mother refers to Alphonse as a 'leu-garoul' (werewolf), and thus reveals the possibility that she is aware that the wolf is not entirely as it seems.[317] The interpretation of signs, like their recognition, is a central motif in the romance, in which barriers of communication are often raised between characters but then, as is the way with medieval romance, later resolved. Alphonse's attempts as a wolf to communicate in signs are another barrier between him and his humanity, but are indicative again of the author-reader relationship, through which the reader is presented with signs, symbols and indications rather than being, for the most part, directly addressed by the author.

The narrative of *Partonope of Blois* is often didactic, and uses visual interpretation (or, perhaps more fittingly, the interpretation of invisible material) as a test both for its protagonists, particularly Partonope, and for the romance reader. For instance, when Melior's invisible attendants present Partonope with basins, he is able to interpret their purpose: '"These bassennys curyd þat I see, / For sothe be resone þynketh me / Ther-of to wasshe hyt arne broghte"'.[318] However, as we have already seen, he does not know what to make of the marvellous tower, the invisible attendants, or Melior herself. He is able to interpret correctly that his surroundings must be the result of supernatural circumstances ('He then trowed þer was no man leuynge / By crafte of honde cowde suche on make, / Butte yeffe a clerke cowde vnder-take / By negromansy to

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[317] Ibid, 151. It is quite possible that the use of 'leu-garoul' here might be a simple error on the part of the French author. There is no extant equivalent episode in the English text, as the section which might have included it is missing from the beginning of this version.

[318] *Partonope of Blois*, 1014–6.

make hytte; / For hyt passeth mannes wytte'),[319] but is unsure of their source ('wenythe hyt were Illusione / Off þe deuylle and of conivrysone').[320] The invisble aspects of the narrative force Partonope to come to his own conclusions rather than rely on visible evidence, and the reader must do the same. According to Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, the text is concerned largely with matters of wisdom, and the ability to demonstrate insight in the recognition of narrative signs:

> [t]he important distinction established in these verses is located between wisdom and folly: these categories will divide the characters into those who will do good and those who will do evil, the readers into those who will fail and those who will succeed in recognizing the difference. As the narrator assures us, there will be 'maint bien et maint mal dit' (v. 130: 'many good and bad words') in his story, which guarantees that the discerning reader/listener will have much to learn about imitating the good and leaving behind the bad. The problem as stated here then is not the difference between truth and fiction, but rather our ability and desire to learn, acquire knowledge, and exercise choice.[321]

If there is a lesson to be derived from the romance, it is perhaps that of self-sufficient reading. The text is instructive for the reader, and encourages them to think of the visual aspects of the narrative as opportunities for personal improvement. Sign recognition is important to the narrative, but as Partonope is confronted with invisible rather than visible signs, he and the reader are forced to read into the meaning of absences and ambiguities rather than visible forms.

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[319] Ibid, 873–7 and 905–10.

[320] Ibid, 1284–5.

[321] Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, pp. 114–15.

Conclusions

The texts discussed here present disguise and illusion as being deceptive at times, but also encouraging the ability to read such visual signs correctly, and in doing so improving mental capacity for recognition and memory, and deeper understanding of the themes presented within the narrative, such as friendship, kingship and authority. The text of Lovelich's *Merlin* presents visual signs in a number of guises, but each of these seems to imply that, though prophetic and meaningful signs can be deceptive or take on a number of semblances, as we see with Merlin's numerous appearances, there is merit to be found in reading them correctly. In the words of Stephen Knight, 'as the Merlin myth indicates, it is what you make of knowledge that counts, for ill or good'.[322] Issues of recognition and memory are tied to those of knowledge and shapeshifting, creating visual references that centre on Merlin's knowledge and abilities as a man of 'memory' and 'wit'. The numerous indications that true visual readings lie with Merlin and those who sympathise with him may well originate from a desire to present Merlin as virtuous despite his diabolical origins, but they also present the ineptitude of the other characters in their inability to read the signs presented to them. Sign recognition is key to the text, and much of Arthur's reign owes its existence to Merlin's ability to craft visual signs that may be read, or misread, by the right people. Although Merlin also displays a sense of humour in such matters, leaving Arthur guessing until his men have to tell him Merlin's real identity, there is also a serious engagement with the idea that true companionship, and kingship, are achieved with the presentation and recognition of visual signs. *William of Palerne* presents a number of divisions between inner and outer forms. The most prominent of these is the physical division of Alphonse into the form of a wolf with the mind of a man, which divides his character so that he is not made

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[322] Knight, *Merlin*, pp. xiv–v.

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whole until the end of the narrative. In addition to this, Alphonse's form relies on having been

made or crafted by others, and his false form is enforced upon him, rather than taken by choice.

On the other hand, William's and Melior's disguises are practical solutions to the problem of

disguise, and present a more literal interpretation of the same process that Alphonse undergoes in

the form of a wolf. They, too, hide their true forms beneath their animal-skin costumes. But the

skins are easily shed, and once they have been the identities of the protagonists become apparent.

The recognition of both false and true forms, however, is central to the narrative, and again

highlights the stigma of the man trapped in an animal's body. Even once William is outside of

his disguise his companions have trouble recognising him, so that the werewolf symbol he

carries becomes crucial to the recognition of his character and his identity. *William of Palerne*

therefore identifies the true forms of its characters as something easily hidden or obscured, but

also ultimately attainable within the context of the medieval romance narrative. *Partonope of*

Blois is concerned throughout with sight and the (in)visibility of images, and presents these

aspects of the tale as moralised concepts incorporating the binaries of light vs dark, good vs evil

and seen vs unseen. The narrative does not lay out the divisions between these categories

explicitly, but encourages the reader to understand the signs and read them for themself; and thus

to internalise the morality of seen and unseen images. The sometimes physical and often

theological dichotomy of light and darkness becomes directly related to the subjective

experiences of sight and the lack of it; and, consequently, the work emphasises the lack of

understanding and insight which accompany darkness and a lack of sight. We find a similar

emphasis on incorrect interpretation in the Middle English *Melusine*, in which the misreading of

visual signs proves disastrous to the romance protagonists.

6. READING IMAGES AND THE (IN)ABILITY TO INTEPRET VISUAL SIGNS IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH *MELUSINE*

Introduction

The narrative of the Middle English romance *Melusine* (*c.* 1500) relies heavily on the interpretation of visual phenomena, including sights of things that are in some sense taboo, physical markers of potential monstrosity and revealing pictorial objects that are accompanied by useful, but often ignored or misread, passages of text. The text is translated from the French *Roman de Mélusine* (written by Jean d'Arras, 1382–94) and shares many of its visual elements, including its central premise.[323] Sight and the act of reading images support the action of the narrative, and can be found in the text's depictions of the forbidden image, faerie sight, the lover's image, distorted appearances and the (in)ability to interpret visual signs. The latter motif is particularly significant, as the interpretation of visual signs is crucial to the development of the narrative both for the characters within it, who often fail to interpret the signs correctly, and the omniscient external reader.

Forbidden Sight

The events of *Melusine* are based around the taboo of forbidden sight and the consequences of that taboo being broken. The female protagonist, Melusine, tells her lover Raymondin that she will marry him on the following condition: '"Ye muste promytte to me … that neuer while I shalbe in your company, ye shal not peyne ne force your self for to see me on the Satirday / nor

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[323] All quotations from the text are from the EETS edition. Quotations from the Old French source are from the Vincensini edition.

by no manere ye shal not enquyre that day of me, ne the place wher I shalbe"'.[324] The author also

recounts the courtship between Melusine's mother, Presine, and King Elinas of Albany, whom

she marries on the condition that he should not see her on her childbed.[325] This formula is

introduced at the beginning of the text, which provides an account of various instances of faerie

metamorphosis, including faerie women who would marry on the condition of their spouses not

seeing them on Saturdays or in childbed.[326] These conditions combine those of both Melusine's

marriage and that of her mother. In each of these instances a taboo is established in which sight

is forbidden under very particular circumstances, with disastrous consequences when the taboo is

broken.[327] Several scholars have pointed out that in Raymondin's case catastrophe does not

immediately befall the viewer on the moment of sight, but rather on the public announcement of

what he sees; in these circumstances, however, the act of sight is still the instigating factor which

leads to the adverse events that follow it. Sight therefore acts as an instigator of further action in

the text, but it also serves as a test of willpower. Melusine's fate as either an immortal serpent or

a mortal entitled to Christian burial relies entirely on Raymondin's ability to follow instructions

and resist temptation.[328] Melusine's curse is penance for her previous sins as a child, and yet

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[324] *Melusine*, p. 32.

[325] Ibid, p. 11.

[326] Ibid, pp. 4–5.

[327] See Sylvia Huot, 'Dangerous Embodiments: Froissart's Harton and Jean d'Arras's Melusine', *Speculum* 78.2

(2003): 400–20 (400); and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman

de Mélusine*', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara

Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 100–24 (p. 101).

[328] For more on Melusine's desire to become human see Huot, 'Dangerous Embodiments', p. 419; and Sara Sturm-

Maddox, 'Configuring Alterity: Rewriting the Fairy Other', in *The Medieval 'Opus': Imitation, Rewriting and

Raymondin is responsible for her fate, which he ascertains by giving in, provoked by his brother, to the temptation of seeing Melusine in her forbidden state, and then revealing her secret to the public. Forbidden sight is a topic with a long-established history, including the Ovidian tales of Orpheus and Eurydice, and Cupid and Psyche. In these, too, the protagonist is unable to maintain faith in the invisible or forbidden form of their loved one, and loses them as a result. The same occurs in *Melusine*, in which forbidden sight becomes a test of faith.

Melusine's supernatural powers as a faerie are never fully explained in the text. One crucial aspect of these powers is her ability to know every detail of events once they have occurred, a skill that is implied at various turns within the narrative. Raymondin states that '"the first tyme that I sawe her / she knew & coude reherce all my fortune & auenture"'.[329] When Melusine meets Raymondin for the first time she informs him that she knows of the accident involving his uncle, stating that '"wel I wot that thou hast slayn thy lord"' and also that 'I knowe the full trouth of thy faytte"'.[330] Raymondin's later statement implies that Melusine's abilities are the result of

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Transmission in the French Tradition. Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Institute for Research in Humanities, October 5–7 1995, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ed. Douglas Kelly (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 125–38.

[329] *Melusine*, p. 311. In the French version this passage reads as follows: '[elle] sçavoit bien la dolour qui lui approuchoit' (she knew well the grief that approached), p. 690. Own translation.

[330] *Melusine*, pp. 30 and 31. In the French version the corresponding passage reads as follows: '"je sçay bien comment tu as occis ton seigneur par mespresure comme de cas volontaire, combien que pour l'eure tu ne le cuidas pas faire. Et sçay bien toutes les paroles qu'il te dist par l'art d'astronomie dont il fu garny"' (I know well that you have killed your lord by mistake but as if it was deliberate, and that you did not think to make this your fortune. And I know well all the words he said to you about the art of astronomy in which he was accomplished), p. 164. Own translation. This reference to Raymondin's astronomy lessons is a further indication that he has not absorbed the

her faerie powers, though this claim is based upon his memory of their first meeting. Melusine's words at the time of the meeting itself are rather vague by comparison; not only is the origin or means by which she knows Raymondin's path left uncertain, but the statement that "'I knowe the full trouth of thy faytte'" is not fully explicit in its meaning either. Does she mean that she knows the events that have happened, their consequences, or, as is perhaps implied here, that she knows the motivation behind them, meaning that she is able to read Raymondin's thoughts? This would correspond with the later scenes in which she knows that Raymondin has discovered her secret, but it is never explicitly stated within the text other than as part of Raymondin's final outburst. The most evident aspect of Melusine's faerie abilities is her physical manifestation as a serpent, but she also appears to possess hidden qualities, which are unseen by mortal eyes. These qualities appear to differ from faerie to faerie: Melusine's sister Melior is able to disappear at will, and her mother has the ability to declare curses upon each of her daughters, whereas Melusine's powers are most evident in organising marvels such as the hart's pelt that stretches for two miles and the rapid building of Lusignan. The text presents a vague idea that faeries are omniscient, but does not explain the phenomenon fully: Melusine knows all of Raymondin's movements once they have occurred, and yet in various parts of the narrative she significantly lacks insight. For instance, when Raymondin spies on her while she is bathing he makes such a commotion that the idea of her not noticing him there is absurd: 'and whan he perceyued the doore of yron he toke hys swerd, that was hard & tempered with fyn stele, and with the poynte of it dyde so moche that he perced the doore, and made a holl in it, and loked in at that holl, and

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lessons taught to him by his uncle, and that he continues to display a lack of either foresight or insight in his encounters that might have been avoided had he been more attentive in his lessons.

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saw thenne Melusyne that was within a grete bathe of marbel stone'.[331] The text implies at the

time that Melusine is completely oblivious of Raymondin's presence, or at least that she does not

indicate her awareness of him. Raymondin presumes his secret is safe but the reader is told later

that Melusine is aware of what he has done ('she wyst wel that he had not entamed nor shewed

the matere to no man');[332] however, the text implies that her knowledge is the result of her faerie

powers rather than the simple employment of her perceptive faculties during the incident in

question. Significantly, however, she appears to lack the power of foresight. She states that

'"Raymondyn / the day that first tyme I sawe the was for me ryght dolourous and vnhappy / in an

euyl heure sawe I euer thy coynted body, thy facion, & thy fayre fygure / euyl I dyde to desire &

coueyte thy beaute, whan thou so falsly hast betrayed me"',[333] at which point she places the

blame for her fate partially on herself for her own lack of insight, foresight and even wisdom for

having married Raymondin in the first place. The implication here is that Melusine's

supernatural abilities, which are for the most part used for noble or divine purposes, are clouded

by the perhaps more mortal employment of her sight for love of Raymondin. Her powers are not

well defined overall, though, and even in specific instances of marvel or metamorphosis they are

never fully explained, so that the full extent of Melusine's abilities remains a mystery to us.

In the first encounter between Raymondin and Melusine, he is asleep upon his horse and

unable to see her because he is stupefied by the events that have just transpired: 'he passed

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[331] *Melusine*, p. 296.

[332] Ibid, p. 299. In the French version this episode reads as follows: 'elle scet bien tout, mais pour ce qu'il ne l'ot

descouvert a nullui, elle s'en souffry et n'en monstra semblant' (she knew everything, but because he had revealed it

to no-one, she let the matter rest and made no mention of it), pp. 664–6. Own translation.

[333] *Melusine*, p. 315.

byfore the fontaynne where the ladyes were, without hauyng eny sight of them. but the hors that sawe them, was sodaynly afrayed'.[334] He does not see the faeries but the horse does, and is afraid, which is interesting since Melusine emphasises throughout the text that she is godly rather than demonic. There is therefore no particular reason why the horse should be afraid of her, unless it is particularly sensitive to otherworldly phenomena. She is initially offended by Raymondin's behaviour, and insists that he notice her: '"By my feyth, sire vassal, hit commeth to you of grette pryde or of grette rudesse for to passe byfore ony ladyes without spekyng or somme salutacion"'.[335] This is another instance of Melusine's lack of insight: she is unable to see that he is asleep until she walks right up to him and harangues him for not speaking to her ('And the lady thane perceyved wel that he yet had not seen her')[336] but then she later informs Raymondin of her supernatural knowledge of the events that led him to where he is at that point in the narrative. The incident foreshadows Raymondin's own lack of insight, but it also explores the

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[334] *Melusine*, p. 28. In the Old French version there is no mention of the horse being afraid (p. 160). It is possible that the English author mistranslated the 'aleure' of 'ly chevaulx l'emporte grant aleure' (his horse carried him in great haste), or that he chose deliberately to place an additional piece of interpretation into the scene.

[335] *Melusine,* p. 28. The Old French version adds the description 'monstre' to imply that Raymondin's behaviour is not only discourteous, but even monstrous (p. 160).

[336] *Melusine,* p. 29. In the Old French version Mélusine's reaction is described as follows: '"Par foy", dist elle, "je croy que cilz jeunes homs dort sur son cheval"' ('By faith', she said, 'I think that this young man sleeps on his horse'), p. 162. Own translation. She also adds '"Sire vassaulx, dorméz vous?"' (Sir vassal, do you sleep?), after this statement, as if to verify with Raymondin while he is unconscious that he is asleep. Mélusine's discovery in the first person in the Old French version adds a more human element in which she is caught by surprise; the English version gives her realisation in the third person, without direct speech, and therefore does not present the scene as being a direct moment of revelation for Melusine in the same way that the Old French text does.

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paradoxical nature of Melusine's abilities and understandings, which fluctuate between the omniscience of faerie knowledge and the perhaps more human failure to read visual signs correctly.

The text confuses conventional ideas of beauty and monstrosity by presenting the children of Melusine and Raymondin as both deformed and superlatively beautiful. It states of Melusine's first child that he 'was moche fayre, and wel proporcyoned or shapen in alle hys membres / except his vysage that was short and large / one ey he had rede, and the other blew'.[337] Each entry begins by lauding the child on his beauty, and then almost as an afterthought includes his more unusual visible traits. The other children's defects are as follows: having one ear greater than the other, having one eye higher than the other, having a lion's paw on one cheek (whether it is protruding or a mark is unclear), having only one eye, having one particularly large tooth which extends over an inch out of the mouth, having a tuft of hair on the nose, and having three eyes.[338] She also has two sons who do not have any physical defects. The text later states that '"goodnes & bounte is betre than fayrenes & beaulte"',[339] and it is possible that the physical defects of the children are deliberate meditations on the nature of nobility as proved by internal or external signs; Melusine, after all, embodies this paradox, and it is not surprising that we might be asked to consider her children in a similar light. Douglas Kelly notes that Melusine's children are varied in their faerie markings. The eldest five find wives easily and those wives 'see the nobility of their spouses despite their disfigurement', whilst claiming that these brothers

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[337] *Melusine*, pp. 64–5.

[338] Ibid, pp. 102–5.

[339] Ibid, p. 135.

'are not necessarily repulsive or even unattractive'.[340] The other three that have disfigurements

are 'more problematic',[341] and Geoffray, Fromont and Horrible all demonstrate morally

transgressive behaviour, or at least not as normative behaviour as the others. None of these three

marry, and they are problematic for different reasons.[342] Since the primary political purpose of

the narrative is to strengthen Jean de Berry's claim to the chateau de Lusignan, genealogies play

an important role here; and the inability or unwillingness of these three sons to marry declares

them comparatively unfit to carry on the family line. This is why, although Fromont is not cruel

like Geoffray or Horrible, he is considered just as transgressive by his family for the fact that he

takes holy orders rather than spreading the family line and reputation to far-flung corners of the

world. It has even been suggested that the destruction of Horrible may have strengthened the

family line.[343] Indeed, Huot notes that '[t]hough Melusine herself is expelled from society and

remains a liminal figure, her blood is diffused throughout the noble families of Europe, from

Britain to Armenia',[344] proving her social worth through the ability to keep the genealogies of the

family not just alive but also far spread out, so that the family's influence and growth can be

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[340] Douglas Kelly, 'The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 32–47 (p. 34).

[341] Ibid, p. 35.

[342] Ibid, p. 35.

[343] See Tania Colwell, 'Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?', in *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller and Sarah Rees (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 181–203 (p. 197).

[344] Sylvia Huot, 'Others and Alterity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (2008), pp. 238–50 (p. 241).

assured even once she is gone. The other two sons, Thierry and Remonnet, 'have no marks like their older siblings, nor are they morally or emotionally unstable',[345] which places them on a higher moral ground than the others. Their physical normality could be read as a symptom that the faerie effect is wearing off at this point, and that Melusine is drawing closer to her goal of achieving a Christian burial:

> Since Remonnet and Thierry have no physical abnormality, does not the absence of a mark betoken Melusine's progress in metamorphosis into a mortal? Not only do Remonnet and Thierry lack the marvelous features of their older brothers and mother, they also seem to escape their father's tragic fate and that of some of their older siblings…[346]

The lack of markings of the kind found on the other children seems to imply that Melusine draws closer to achieving human status.[347] However, Geoffray and Horrible also possess physical defects and embody the monstrosity that ugly appearances usually tend to imply in romance narratives. Jane H. M. Taylor notes that '[i]n a romance world, as we know, deformity of any sort is generally equated with moral turpitude',[348] so much so that Horrible has to be put to death

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[345] Kelly, 'Domestication of the Marvelous', p. 34.

[346] Ibid, p. 35.

[347] Sara Sturm-Maddox, 'Alterity and Subjectivity in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in *The Court and Cultural Diversity: Selected Papers from the Eighth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, the Queen's University of Belfast 26 July–1 August 1995*, ed. Evelyn Mullally (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 121–9 (p. 123).

[348] Jane H. M. Taylor, 'Melusine's Progeny: Patterns and Perplexities', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 165–84 (p. 174).

because he is too much of a risk. Horrible is also described as being the tenth son,[349] which means that he was born after the unblemished pair of children. The physical image within *Melusine* is unstable or deceitful, and occasionally misunderstood, which contributes to the conflict between inner and outer forms. This is nowhere as well pronounced as in the juxtaposition between good and evil, nobility and monstrosity, that is present in the inner and outer forms of Melusine and her children. The narrative claims throughout that Melusine is noble and Christian, and yet it is her children who are her downfall for their lack of nobility; it is when Raymondin hears of Geoffray's evil deeds that he turns on Melusine, as he considers this to be proof of her own transgressive nature. The reader, on the other hand, is left feeling that Melusine has been wronged, and that she is not defined by her serpentine form, no matter what the behaviour of her children. Sara Sturm-Maddox suggests that

> Melusine's serpentine transformation, while it has invited a number of negative readings of
> her status, is not identical with her fairy nature. Presine [her mother] has no animal traits;
> Melusine's animality, moreover, acquired as a punishment specified by her fairy mother, is
> not shared by her fairy sisters, to whom other punishments are assigned.[350]

The evidence of her serpent form alone, then, should not be enough to condemn Melusine entirely. Nichols adds that the problem is one of uncertainty based upon the recognition of inner and outer forms; he notes that 'the demonic image is never what it seems' and that it 'calls into question the very possibility of truth in images, that is, reliable cognition based on aesthetic or

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[349] *Melusine*, p. 105.

[350] Sara Sturm-Maddox, 'Crossed Destinies: Narrative Programs in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 12–31 (p. 22).

sensory perception (*pathos*) as opposed to reason'.[351] Melusine's serpentine form, then, breeds

uncertainty because of its association with the demonic, and leads both Raymondin and the

reader to question the truth of those images. Rather than Melusine acting as the deceiver, she is

the victim of the curse that plagues her, and so the image of her metamorphosis distorts the

typical view of the serpentine form and the associations that it might have evoked in a medieval

audience. Melusine states that '"I certyfye the, Raymondyn, that I am of god, and my byleue is /

as a Catholique byleue oughte for to be"',[352] but Raymondin later accuses her and their children

of being demonic.[353] The text never adequately resolves which reading of Melusine is correct,

although on the whole it is sympathetic to her and her plight. The idea of falsity in the text

extends to false traitors, meaning someone who conceals their true nature, which is apparent in

Raymondin's statement to his brother and his outburst against Melusine, declaring her to be a

'"fals serpente"'.[354] Ideas of falsity in this work, then, extend beyond the obvious physical

deformities of Melusine and her children, and if anyone it is Raymondin and his brother who

appear monstrous in the end for exposing Melusine and submitting her to her final punishment,

to live out the rest of her days as a serpent. Melusine's fate is not in her own hands, and it is

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[351] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History: Profile of a Female Demon', in *Melusine of*

Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA:

University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 137–64 (p. 143).

[352] *Melusine*, p 31. In the Old French version Mélusine states that: '"je te certiffie que je suiz par Dieu et croy en tout

quanque vraye catholique doit croire"' (I certify to you that I am of God and believe as a true Catholic must), p. 164.

Own translation. The double use of 'croire' in the French version emphasises Melusine's internal devotion as being

a virtue that acts in contrast to the associations of her regular serpentine form.

[353] *Melusine*, p. 314.

[354] Ibid, p. 314.

through the transgressions of others that she is forced to assume her serpentine form, and to be denied a Christian burial. Barbara A. Goodman notes that Melusine's unmasking 'occurs not through a noble act but through an ignoble act. Raymound too is not what he appears to be; he is unmasked as a dishonorable knight in his failure to uphold his sworn oath, not a surprise given his willingness to dissemble about his uncle's death'.[355] Both Raymondin and Melusine are therefore problematic characters for their distorted appearances: Melusine appears sometimes in what might be described as a demonic form, but her nature otherwise appears to be pious; Raymondin, on the other hand, is noble in appearance but it is in fact he who transgresses and, in doing so, brings disaster upon his family. The consequences of the tragedy are much more severe for Melusine than for Raymondin, because where he faces heartbreak she also faces eternal Judgement.[356] Sturm-Maddox describes Melusine as 'a creature of two worlds, seeking to escape from one but unable, for reasons beyond her control, to achieve integration into the other'.[357] Melusine's punishment seems cruel when we consider that the ultimate transgression is committed by Raymondin, rather than her; although her transgression as a child brought the curse upon her in the first place, Melusine's fate is tragic because it appears to lie largely outside of her control.

Visual Evidence

Visual evidence, being visible proof of a claimed incident or its meaning, is another factor which impinges on the representation of truth in the text. Numerous scholars have mentioned that the

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[355] Goodman, 'The Female Spellcaster', 50.

[356] Sturm-Maddox, 'Configuring Alterity', p. 130.

[357] Ibid, p. 138.

original French *Mélusine* was written with a political agenda in mind, in order to strengthen the connection between the patron of the text, Jean de Berry, and the chateau de Lusignan.[358] Laurence de Looze argues that the text is, 'among other things, a new *translatio* of the Lusignan property; it serves to legitimize the origins of a property that passes in the late 1300s into the possession of the duke of Berry'.[359] The prologue, which recounts a number of faerie encounters, is accompanied by the following statement:

> It is seen often when a man hath yssued out of hys countree / and hath seen many awounder & meruayllous thynges whiche he neuer wold haue byleued hit by here sayeng, without he had hadd the sight of hit / but as for me that haue nat walked ferre, I haue seen somme thinges that many oon shuld nat byleue without they sawe it.[360]

The narrative sets up, from this early stage, the importance of visual evidence, something that could have supported Jean de Berry's political agenda if it strengthened his claim to Lusignan. When Presine tells her children the story of their father she does not tell them what has happened

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[358] Jacques le Goff and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie state that the Lusignans were important nobles of Poitou, whose older branch became extinct in 1308 and whose younger branch had carried the imperial title of Jerusalem since 1186 and the royal title of Chypre since 1192 ('Mélusine maternelle et déficheuse', 590). For further comment on the role of the narrative as a political claim for the Duke of Berry see Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, 'Introduction: Melusine at 600', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 1–11; Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History'; and Colwell, 'Mélusine'.

[359] Laurence de Looze, '"La fourme du pié toute escripte": Melusine and the Entrance into History', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 125–36 (p. 134).

[360] *Melusine*, p. 5.

outright, but rather shows them the kingdom of Albany from the Isle of Avalon in order to demonstrate what they have been denied,[361] an act that encourages the children to imprison their father in a mountainside, which in turn leads to Presine cursing the children to live under various enchantments. Melusine's footprint on the windowsill, which she leaves when she flies from the window in serpentine form, offers visual evidence within the text to prove the authenticity of the story. The text then ends with an epilogue in which the author again insists that he speaks of true events: he mentions that 'I haue putte my self to myn vtermost power to rede & loke ouer the Cronykles & many bokes of auncyent hystoryes, to thende that I might knowe the trouth of the forsaid matere',[362] and that 'this historye is more credible for as moche as it is not auctorised by one man only / but also by many noble Clerkes'.[363] The author appears to mention these details in order to strengthen the authenticity of the work, and thus again to further Jean de Berry's political claim upon the chateau de Lusignan. Daisy Delogu notes that:

> In his prologue to *Mélusine* Jean d'Arras cites authorities ranging from Gervais of Tilbury to Saint Paul to show that events which seem marvelous reflect acts of God which, though incomprehensible to humans, are nonetheless veritable. Jean d'Arras' insistence on the divine truth of the marvelous sets up the authenticity of his own narrative, preemting any doubts his readers might entertain as to its accuracy.[364]

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[361] Ibid, p. 13.

[362] Ibid, p. 370.

[363] Ibid p. 371.

[364] Daisy Delogu, 'Jean d'Arras Makes History: Political Legitimacy and the Roman de Mélusine', *Dalhousie French Studies* (2007): 15–28 (15).

Michèle Perret also suggests that three particular approaches in the Melusine romance are used to make the incredible credible by presuming to reconstruct the truth: guarantors of credibility, metonymic evidence and public testimony.[365] The demonstration of evidence, visual or textual, is therefore an important feature throughout the narrative, and informs much of its action.

Physical examples of text and image also appear at several points within the narrative of *Melusine*. For example, in the mountain where Geoffray seeks the giant he finds the tomb of King Elinas, which combines both word and image:

vpon [the tomb] was figured the fourme of a knyght, that had on hys heed a ryche croune of gold with many precyous stones / and nygh by that tombe, a grete ymage of Alabaster, kerued & made aftir the fourme of a queen, crouned with a ryche crowne of gold / the whiche ymage held a table of gold / where-as were wryton the wordes that folowen. 'Here lyeth my lord myn husband the noble kyng Elynas of Albanye' / and also shewed al the manyere how he was buryed there, and for what cause.[366]

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[365] Michèle Perret, 'L'invraisemblable vérité: témoignage fantastique dans deux romans des 14e 15e siècles', *Europe: Revue littéraire mensuelle* 61.654 (1983), 25–35 (27).

[366] *Melusine*, p. 328. In the Old French version the text reads as follows: 'Et par dessus avoit la figure d'un chevalier grant a merveilles qui avoit une riche couronne d'or ou chief, ou il ot grant foison de bonnes pierres, et a ses piéz avoit en estant une royne d'alabastre, courinnee richement, et tenoit un tablel qui disoit: "Cy gist mon mary, le noble roy Elinas d'Albanie". Et devisoit toute la maniere comment il avoit la esté mis et pour quelle cause…' (And above was the figure of a great and marvellous knight who had a rich crown of gold on his head, inlaid with a great amount of precious stones, and at his feet stood a queen in alabaster, richly crowned, and holding a tablet that said: 'Here lies my husband, the noble King Elinas of Scotland'. And it described all the manner of how he came to rest there and for what cause), p. 718. Own translation. The text goes on to recount the story of Elinas and Presine in a

The romance text details not only the existence of this artefact, Presine's memorial for Elinas, but also Geoffray's contemplation of it: 'and thus geffray beholding & seeyng, [pondered] by grete space vpon the tables as vpon the beaute of the place / but he knewe not yet that the tables shewed that he was of the lynee of kyng Elynas & Presyne his wyf'.[367] It is telling, however, that he is unable to interpret the signs in order to recognise his own relationship to them as Elinas' grandson, particularly as the monument identifies Melusine. The narrative also features a sequence in which Geoffray recalls these textual and visual artefacts in his own memory when his brother comes to speak to him of their family tragedy:

And hym recounted fro the bygynnyng vnto the fin. And how theire moder was departed and al the manere …. And how she had said at her departyng that she was doughter of kyng Elynas of Albanye. And when geffray herd this word he bethought hym of the table that he fond vpon the tombe of kyng Elynas. And by this he knew that he and his brethern were come of the same lynage; whereof he thought hym self the bettre, but this not with standing he was ryght sorowfull of the departyng of hys moder, & of the heuynes of hys fader…[368]

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summarised form, mentioning the names of their daughters (including Melusine) and how they were punished for imprisoning their father in the mountain.

[367] *Melusine*, p. 328. In the Old French version this passage reads as follows: 'Lors musa Gieffroy grant temps, tant sur le tablel comme sur la beauté de lieu, mais encore ne sçot il pas qu'il soit de la lignee du roy Elinas et de Presine' (Then Gieffroy reflected for a long time, as much on the tablet as on the beauty of the place, but he did not yet perceive that he belonged to the line of King Elinas and of Presine), p. 718. Own translation.

[368] *Melusine*, p. 331. In the Old French version the text reads as follows: 'lui dist toute la maniere et la guise, du commencement jusques en la fin, comment leur mere estoit partie et toute l'aventure, et comment elle avoit dit au partir qu'elle estoit fille au roy Elinas d'Albanie. Et quant Gieffroy entendy ces mos, si lui souvint du tablel qu`il avoit trouvé sur la tombe du roy Elinas. Et lors scot au cler qu'ilz estoient il et ses freres, descenduz de sa ligne. Si

This episode is important for the fact that Geoffray uses the recollection of words and images in his memory to reach the correct conclusion about their meaning; in essence, he uses the processes of visualisation inherent in the imagination to enhance his understanding of the events surrounding his family. Although Geoffray is able at this point to understand the words and images he saw on the tomb, it is too late for him to change the tragedy that has befallen his family; this highlights the fact that he was not able to read the signs correctly the first time he encountered them, though he would have still been too late to prevent the events that unfold at home even had he done so. It is in reflection on the text and images that Geoffray, who has been rather ruthless up to this point, allows himself an emotional response that results directly from his contemplation and his newfound understanding of the signs presented to him at the tomb; this emotive reaction, however, is soon overpowered by a desire for revenge against his uncle. This instance reminds the reader of some of the more questionable aspects of Melusine herself. Gabrielle M. Spiegel mentions that there are several aspects of Melusine's own character that might well be considered transgressive aside from the serpentine form. She notes that '[e]ven Horrible is not recognized as too horrible to let live, until Melusine finally insists upon his murder',[369] and that her transgressions against her father are of equal importance:

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s'en tinte plus chiers, mais il fu moult doulent de la perte de sa mere et de la douleur de son pere' (he told him everything that had happened and in what manner, from start to finish; how their mother had left and the whole situation, and how she had said upon leaving that she was the daughter of King Elinas of Scotland. And when Geoffray understood these words he recalled the table that he had found on the tomb of King Elinas. And then he saw clearly that he and his brothers were descended from that line. This made him very proud, but he felt much grief over the loss of his mother and the grief of his father), p. 722. Own translation.

[369] Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity', p. 102.

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Even if we set aside Melusine's physical duality, is it not strange that no one seems dismayed to learn of her initial act of vengeance against her father, for which act, in fact, she has assumed the curious dual state she inhabits, if secretly? On the contrary, we are repeatedly told that upon hearing the story of Elinas d'Ecosse, Geoffroy, Raymondin, et al. rejoice in the discovery of his royal status, which bequeaths a legacy of social prestige to his descendants. But the fact that this socially prestigious origin is mediated by a mother who was the instigator of a vengeful plot against this very same ancestor goes unremarked, part of a larger pattern in which no one seems to register what they read or are told, a failure of insight that significantly marks the narrative as a tale of illusion and duplicity.[370]

Melusine is therefore transgressive for her very complacency with regard to the destruction and murder of potentially innocent victims. Marina S. Brownlee, too, notes that the positive aspects of Melusine's character are countered somewhat by her history of attempted patricide and regicide.[371] It is clear that even at this point Geoffray lacks the capacity to fully understand the import of the text and images he sees, as he soon resorts to his violent tendencies as a solution to his pain. For that short moment, though, he undergoes the revelation of putting two and two together: the words and images of the tomb and his own family history. The idea of visualising text and image in the memory in this way is comparable to reading and recalling the text and image of a narrative. Rupert T. Pickens notes that Jean d'Arras manages to establish links between the visible and invisible worlds of the narrative 'by evoking ways in which authoritative

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[370] Ibid, pp. 102–3.

[371] Marina S. Brownlee, 'Interference in *Mélusine*', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 226–40 (p. 227).

works can stimulate the reader's imagination',[372] in other words, by reading books, and by encouraging the reader to interpret correctly. The text of *Melusine* contains a number of parallels of this kind, between the visual experience of the characters and that of the reader, who in this instance must also recall the artefacts Geoffray has seen, but through their own imagination.

The physical book also retains an important status throughout the narrative, possibly as a nod to the Duke of Berry's own extensive book collection. For instance, in Raymondin's combat with Josselin the physical book of the Bible acts as a symbol for the divine words within:

the holy Euangiles were there brought, whereon Raymondin swore that Josselyn had euyl cause, and that he had doon the treson as he had byfore declared / and after he kneled & kissed the book, and sette hym self ayen on the chayere. And after Josselin swore, but he stakered, and so timerous he was that he coude not touche the boke / and also Olyuer, which knew wel the trouth of all, swore full feyntly / and that doon he sette hym self agayn in his chayere…[373]

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[372] Rupert T. Pickens, 'The Poetics of Paradox in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 48–75 (p. 53).

[373] *Melusine*, p. 82. The Old French version states that 'Le sains furent apportéz et jura Remondin que Jossellin avoit faicte la trahision et s'agenoilla et baisa les sains et puis se rassist en sa chayere, Et Jossellins jura après, mais a l'abaissier pour baisier les sains il chancella tellement qu'il n'y pot oncques touchier et Oliviers jura après, moult laschement, et se rassist en sa chaiere' (The relics were carried in and Remondin swore that Jossellin had committed treason and knelt and kissed the relics and then sat in his chair. And Jossellin swore next, but as he lowered himself to kiss the relic he stumbled so that he did not have to touch it at all. And Oliver swore next, very reluctantly, and he sat in his chair), p. 252. Own translation. The Old French version uses relics, not a book, which gives the emphasis on the power of the word more gravity and potency in the English version. This effect is all the more emphasised by

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In addition to this incident, the herald declares that 'none, on peyne of deth, shuld be so hardy to speke any worde ne to make eny signe or token that eny of the Champyons might understand or perceyve'.[374] This declaration is a simple instruction for the duel, but it also implies something important about the characters' abilities to interpret signs and how the interpretation of such signs might influence the action of the narrative. This scene reminds the reader of Raymondin's own lack of power or understanding throughout the text, though in this instance he has the moral advantage over Josselin with the help of the Bible as guarantor. In this passage, therefore, words and signs can act as both a means of interpretation and an assurance of truth.

Internalising Sight

The entire action of *Melusine* appears to be based on the process that occurs in the act of sight and the interpretation of visual signs. First of all, the author presents its visual terminology in pairs: for, example, a character in the text is often described as 'seeing, and understanding' or 'appearing, and perceiving', and so on. This implies that the act of sight is always accompanied by some form of interpretation, recognition or understanding, an effect that is supported by centuries of optical theory, which likewise claims that the act of sight occurs separately and prior to the processes of understanding that accompany it. In romance texts there is also usually a swift transition between the act of sight and the physical consequences immediately accompanying it, such as when Ermine, the daughter of the King of Cyprus, faints upon seeing that her father is

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the claim in the English version that Josselin could not touch the book because he was 'timerous'; the French version implies that Jossellin is crafty or devious in not touching the relics, but the claim in the English version that he was afraid speaks to the power that is assumed of the Bible in this instance.

[374] *Melusine*, p. 82.

wounded: 'whan she perceyued that hys harneys was all rede with bloode, and sawe his wounde, she fell doun in a swoune, & lay as she had be deed'.[375] In this instance the daughter of the king has understood the possible consequences of a visible wound, and reacts to the shock of the possibility that her father might be either hurt or dying. The text carefully outlines the transition between sight and interpretation: instead of saying outright that the king's daughter saw that her father was hurt and that he might die, the author instead presents the visual evidence and the inference the girl makes from it. In a similar vein, Raymondin is emotionally affected when he spies upon Melusine and sees her in serpentine form in the bathtub: 'Raymondyn … was ryght dolaunt and sorowful … thenne was smyten to the herte with suche sorow & dystresse that vnnethe he could speke'.[376] He is emotionally affected by the revelation and his extreme reaction is more the result of his realisation that he might lose his wife than a reaction to the serpentine form itself. In the romance, then, there is a natural pairing of action and reaction, in which the act of sight is commonly followed by an emotional or intellectual response that comprises a reaction to the original act of seeing.

The narrative particularly explores various ideas surrounding a lack of sight or knowledge, and usually a relationship between the two. First of all, no-one in the work seems able to recognise that Melusine is a faerie despite several clear indications. Melusine appears from nowhere as Raymondin's fiancée when he first presents her to his patron; he is unable to tell anyone her origins; and alongside these events he is suddenly able to make a hart's pelt stretch two miles, an event that is engineered by Melusine herself.[377] The latter particularly would seem

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[375] Ibid, p. 139.

[376] Ibid, p. 297.

[377] Ibid, p. 46.

enough to imply some kind of supernatural intervention, and yet it is happily passed off as an innocuous marvel. Rather than focus on her clearly otherworldly attributes, everyone is more concerned with her lineage. For instance, Raymondin's patron bestows his approval on the match by confiding to him that '"For of asmoche that we may perceyue by her estate & behauyng, nedes it muste be, that she be yssued & comme fro moch noble ryche and mighty lynee"'.[378] Similar instances abound throughout the narrative. Raymondin does not see Melusine when they are in the forest, and is later unable to read the true circumstances of her situation. He is unable to recognise Lusignan once Melusine has rebuilt it using her faerie powers: 'he aprouched & came nygh Lusynen. and first he perceyued & sawe the tromped toure and the new toune, and thenne he supposed not to be there as he was',[379] and demonstrates a general inability to interpret the signs presented to him. There is also an episode in which the master of the port at Lymasson sees the banners with the Lusignan arms on them when Geoffray arrives, but is confused because Urian has already set sail for Jaffa and is unable to think what might be going on: 'geffray with the grete toth, within thre days after arryued vnder Lymasson / but the maister of the porte suffred them not to entre within the porte. how be it he was abasshed to see the armes of Lusynen

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[378] Ibid, p. 59.

[379] Ibid, p. 101. The latter part of the line, 'he supposed not to be there as he was', is original to the English version. In the Old French version Raymondin's incredulity and confusion is conveyed by his conversation with the knight he encounters: '"Comment", dist Remondin a l'ancien chevalier, "que puet cecy ester? Il me semblait ores que je feusse bien prez de Lusegnen, mais il me semble que je y ay bien failly"' ('How is it', said Remondin to the old knight, 'that this can be? I had thought that I was very close to Lusignan, but it seems to me that I have missed it'), pp. 286–8. Own translation.

in theire baners vpon the toppes of theire shippes, & wyst not what to deme or say'.[380] The fact that the banners might represent someone else from Lusignan for some reason does not occur to him, until Queen Ermine suggests that the ships with the Lusignan banners might belong to Urien's brother. The narrative therefore presents various instances in which the characters within the narrative, usually mortal rather than faerie, are unable to read the visual signs presented to them; such instances can perhaps be read as didactic guides that are meant to persuade the reader to fare better in their own dealings.[381]

Conclusions

The romance incorporates a final, seemingly anecdotal tale to conclude the central narrative, which tells the story of a king who must watch a sparrowhawk in a castle for three nights without falling asleep in order to gain his prize, which is to receive whatever he wishes from a faerie woman who appears to him at the end of his trial.[382] The only condition is that he should not ask her to marry him. He succeeds in staying awake for the duration of the trial, but when the faerie appears to him he is so taken with her beauty that he asks her to marry him, and is duly punished. The tale might at first seem out of place as a short anecdote at the end of the longer narrative, but

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[380] *Melusine*, p. 266. The Old French version states that 'Non pourtant fu moult esbahiz quant il apperçoit sur les vaisseaux les armes de Lusignen et es bannieres. Si ne sçot que penser, mais tantost vint au chastel et annonça a la royne cest affaire' (He was not a little shocked when he perceived on the ships the arms of Lusignen and its banners. As such he did not know what to think, but immediately went to the castle and announced the matter to the queen), p. 596. Own translation.

[381] See Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity', pp. 102–3, on the interpretation of Melusine as a positive rather than negative force on the basis of her lineage and moral conduct. Also see Brownlee, 'Interference in *Mélusine*', p. 227.

[382] *Melusine*, p. 362.

it is not as incidental as it might at first appear to be. In the first place, the faerie woman in

question is none other than Melusine's sister Melior, whose fate as the watcher of the castle is

pronounced near the beginning of the work.[383] In addition to this, the episode also effectively

summarises the key messages proclaimed throughout the narrative. The king completes his

mission, which in the context of traditional romance ought to prove his courage and virtue, and

yet at the end of it all he is still unable to follow basic instructions. Even when the faerie refuses

him he is unable to accept her answer and attempts to rape her, which emphasises his own lack

of chivalry despite having completed his quest. There is also potential significance in the fact

that while the king is in the castle he encounters various pieces of information relayed through

text and images: 'And to dryue fourth the tyme [he] walked vp & doun the hall, taking grete

playsyr of the grete noblesse that he sawe, For there were ryche pictures where as were fygured

many a noble hystory, and the wrytyng vndernethe that shewed the vnderstandyng of it'.[384] He

contemplates these images and their textual counterparts for a long while, and yet when he

emerges from the castle he demonstrates a lack of knowledge and understanding, and therefore

contradicts the enlightening role that books are supposed to play. These pictures and their written

accompaniments include an account of the tale of Elinas and Presine; the episode therefore

reminds us of various instances throughout the narrative in which the characters have failed to

follows instructions or read visual and textual signs correctly. On the last night of his adventure

the king encounters a room full of paintings of knights accompanied by written words that detail

their names and where they came from; the paintings are accompanied by a warning that says

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[383] Ibid, p. 15.

[384] Ibid, p. 364.

'"Vpon suche a tyme watched this knight in this Castel the noble sperhauk, but he slept"'.[385] The text and images here therefore offer a direct warning to the king not to fail in his duties. He manages to stay awake and request his boon, and indeed demonstrates some wisdom in order to achieve this goal, such as when he decides not to eat or drink in excess in the knowledge that this will make him tired.[386] However, his discourteous behaviour towards Melior demonstrates that he lacks the wisdom that he might have gained had he read everything he encountered in the castle correctly. The presence of the story of Elinas and Presine within the castle is suitable not only because their daughter Melior watches over the castle, but also because the king in question is the King of Armenia, a position once held by Melior's nephew, Guion. This connection does not necessarily mean that the king is a direct descendent of Guion, but the emphasis on genealogies throughout the text, as well as the parallels here to Geoffray's encounter with Elinas' tomb, would seem to imply that this might be the case. If so, the king's desire to marry Melior becomes even more transgressive; but so does his inability to recognise this story as part of his own, as was the case with Geoffray earlier. As if to drive home the point, Melior personally recounts the story of her family to the king, proving again that it is supposed to represent a didactic warning both within and outside of the narrative. Huot notes that, in medieval romance,

[c]ontact with fairies – even half-breed fairies – is risky and, if not for extreme vigilance, can result in the fate of Lanval: being subsumed into the magical world. Allowing oneself to desire a fairy may lead to madness, grief, death, or other disaster, as is shown not only by the

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[385] Ibid, p. 365.

[386] Ibid, p. 364.

examples in Marie de France's *Lais*, but also by those in *Melusine*: Elinas, Remondin, and a king of Armenia whose encounter with Melior proves very costly indeed.[387]

It is clear, then, that despite their morally upstanding behaviour faeries are still dangerous for the fact that their relationships with mortals are largely volatile. Huot adds that only the third sister, Palestine, poses little threat because of the fact that she is conquerable and that she is directly associated with religious fervour: 'Only Palestine can be conquered, rehabilitated, and readmitted to human society; and that resolution of traumatic difference is associated with the conquest and redemption of the Holy Land, whose name she bears', and that '[c]learly, at the time of writing, Palestine has not yet been liberated – just as the place called Palestine has not. But eventually, both will be freed from their demonic and heretical possessors, and integrated back into Christendom'.[388] The third sister is also the only one of the three who achieves her happy ending and her release, and it is perhaps telling that she is the least threatening of the three to mortal man, and the least apparently faerie. In the episode of the sparrowhawk castle the King of Armenia becomes a reflection of Geoffray in the moment when he is unable to interpret the words and images in the tomb of King Elinas, and to establish his own connection to them. The incident therefore summarises the warning present throughout the narrative, that there is great personal danger in the misinterpretation of signs. It also solidifies the idea of sight as a liminal agent in the text: forbidden, distorted, and misunderstood.

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[387] Huot, 'Others and Alterity', p. 242.

[388] Ibid, p. 242. Palestine's story appears in full only in Coudrette's version of the romance.

SECTION II

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

7. PERFECTING SEQUENTIAL NARRATIVES IN FRENCH ROMANCE ILLUMINATIONS

Introduction

Up until this point the discussion has mainly concerned the ways in which the reader of medieval

romance is guided by the author, the latter emphasising visual elements in the text in order to

enhance the reader's ability to internalise and interpret narrative content. Now the discussion

turns to pictorial examples in the work of late medieval romance limners. A similar idea

pervades here: that narrative images can be read as text, and that the creators of such images are

engaged in an active, interpretive conversation with the reader. The following chapters, which

study French illumination, English illumination and the illuminated manuscripts of the Mélusine

romances, demonstrate that various techniques of narrative illustration existed within a broad

tradition of commercial and private book production; and that illuminated romance manuscripts

from this tradition can tell us about not only details of artistic style or technique, but also late

medieval manuscript creators' and readers' responses to such nebulous concepts as artist, reader,

image and text.

   French illuminated romance manuscripts have received a large amount of scholarly

attention,[389] but the narrative worth and effects of their miniatures are still not fully understood.

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[389] A full and comprehensive list of works on this topic would be too extensive to cover here. Some important works

on French illuminated romance manuscripts include: Roger Sherman and Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends

in Medieval Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de

Berry: The Limbourgs and their Contemporaries*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974); Alison Stones, 'Secular

Manuscript Illumination in France', in *Medieval Manuscripts and Textual Criticism*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz,

North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 4 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina,

The aim here is not simply to claim that these images are narrative in function, but rather to demonstrate that a number of artists within the commercial tradition that was prevalent in large centres of book production such as Paris used techniques that were specifically concerned with the effective portrayal of secular narratives, and that many of the results are quite sophisticated. Arguably the most effective technique was narrative sequencing, which condenses a narrative episode into multiple moments and textual allusions, often within a single miniature, and which prioritises ease of reading and recognition whilst establishing the authorial perspective of the limner. The final effect in many cases is that of a self-contained pictorial narrative rather than a mere accessory to the text; and it is these images that are the focus of the present chapter. The examples provided here are selective by necessity, given the wealth of available material, and have been chosen to demonstrate the development of narrative sequencing and the composite scene in romance illustration up to and including the fifteenth century.

Department of Romance Languages, 1976), pp. 83–102; Muriel Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990); J. J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Brownlee and Huot, *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*; Busby, Nixon, Stones and Walters, *Les manuscrits des Chrétien de Troyes*; Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*; Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles 6, ed. J. J. G. Alexander, 6 vols (London: H. Miller, 1996); François Avril and Nicole Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à peintures en France: 1440-1520* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1998); Richard and Mary Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200-1500* (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2000); Alcuin Blamires and Gail C. Holian, ed., *The Romance of the Rose Illuminated* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); and Alison Stones, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in France* (London: Harvey Miller, 2014).

By the fourteenth century there was a thriving community of book illuminators in Paris. The process of illuminating romance manuscripts came to be regulated, in part, by the university's control over the *libraires* (booksellers),[390] but also by the high volume of production that became the norm as the limners (manuscript illuminators) of the city were employed by wealthier patrons and faced an increasing need for a quick and streamlined means of working.[391] Limners were paid for quantity as much as artistry, and patrons were particularly concerned with deadlines,[392] so that it was common for illuminators to divide quires among themselves in order to complete them faster. It is important, therefore, to remember the economic considerations that would have been at the forefront of the limners' concerns alongside any possible appreciation of artistry and narrative effect. Richard and Mary Rouse state that '[i]lluminators had always been instructed on the subject matter of the pictures they were to paint. Quite often, no formal written directions passed from patron or *libraire* to the artist, but rather the guidelines were implicit in the text itself',[393] thus implying that the limners were often reliant on the text in order to make the accompanying miniatures. As speed was often a necessary consideration, however, it is likely that close reading and the quality of narrative interpretation often suffered as a result. In order to understand the purpose of the images in the manuscripts that were produced at this time it is

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[390] The definition of *libraire* is given by the Rouses to mean 'book contractors and book sellers' who were licensed by the university and therefore held a respected status in society (*Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 11); this was essentially equivalent to the contemporary position of stationer in England.

[391] C. Paul Christianson defines limners as 'manuscript artists', in *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300–1500* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1990), p. 13.

[392] Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 253.

[393] Ibid, p. 248.

essential to consider the practices that went into making them, including the numerous hands involved and the extent to which the accompanying text would have been either consulted for the sake of accuracy or neglected for the sake of efficiency. Manuscript illumination within a commercial centre such as Paris seems to have involved a balance of artistic and economic concerns, so that any temptation to read into the narrative purpose of the resulting images must also take into account the practical concerns that would have lain behind their production.

The growth of commercial book production meant the regulation of certain practices involved in designing the manuscript page. The most typical *mise en page* (design or layout of the page) of illuminated romances incorporated multiple columns of text and miniatures inserted within the columns at designated intervals (Figures 7.1 and 7.2).[394] In some cases the scribe and limner might have been one and the same, but a limner would often have received a text in their workshop for completion with no prior knowledge of the text or the expected miniatures other than the space provided and the guidance of the rubrics. The rubrics were extremely important for both the production and reception of the images, and functioned simultaneously as subtitles and captions. Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Olson define the rubric as follows: 'Title, chapter heading, or other summarizing information that is used to tell the reader the content of the following text'.[395] Busby also states that 'Rubrics can guide the illuminator and orient the reader;

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[394] The *mise en page* is defined as 'the layout of a page' in Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Olson, *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts*, p. xxvii. It should be noted that, although Paris in particular was responsible for producing a vast quantity of romance manuscripts, biblical manuscripts were in much higher demand; in the thirteenth century bibles dominated the output of commercial scriptoria in France (Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 33).

[395] Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo and Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts*, p. xxix. They add that 'Rubric comes from the Latin *rubrica* ("red"), a name deriving from the use of red ink for such headings'.

Figure 7.1. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 120 D 13, fols 3v–4r.

Figure 7.2. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Paris, BnF fr. 25526, fol. 6r.

they can integrate text, image, and *conte* into a unified codicological artefact; by their subject and placement they can even suggest an interpretation of the romances in which they occur'.[396] The rubrics are therefore important for their multiple roles, which helped to guide both the limner and the reader, and sometimes provided their own interpretation of the text. They were instructive for the limner because the latter might not have had the time or ability to read the text closely, if at all, and might therefore have had to rely on the rubrics to portray the contents of the text effectively. However, rubrics are also instructive for the reader because they identify the content of the following passage of text, and are therefore useful for both locating specific passages and understanding their basic premises. However, the authority behind the rubrics

[396] Keith Busby, 'Rubrics and the Reception of Romance', *French Studies* 53.2 (1999): 129–41 (140).

becomes more complicated once we consider the number of hands involved in making the manuscript, and the communication that had to occur between the individuals in question in order for the final effect to be achieved. Roberta L. A. Clark notes that 'the presentational features of certain manuscripts, in particular their miniatures and rubrics, have a transformative function. They do not simply "accompany" or "illustrate" the text, but participate in a complex interplay that brings out its gestural dimension and its multivocality'.[397] We do not necessarily know, for instance, who might have been responsible for a particular set of rubrics, and whether the authority for their contents lay with the scribe or any of the other hands involved in the production of the manuscript. A number of interpretive voices are therefore present at once in the *mise en page* of an illuminated manuscript, and they cannot always be disentangled from one another. The limner would have relied on the strengths of the text and rubrics to create their miniatures, in addition to the visual models supplied by pre-existing manuscripts, and possibly additional instructions. On a practical level, the primary purpose of the miniatures appears to have been similar to that of the rubrics: to help the reader to identify the basic elements of a passage, to provide a sense of structure to the book, and to give it an impression of quality. They often expand on the rudimentary information provided in the rubrics, however, and demonstrate pictorial techniques and artistic initiative that are not present elsewhere on the *mise en page*.

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[397] Roberta L. A. Clark, 'Liminality and Literary Genres: Texts *Par Personnages* in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture', in *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture: Liminal Spaces*, ed. Elina Gertsman and Jill Stevenson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 260–80 (p. 262).

The *libraires* Richard and Jeanne Montbaston (active *c.* 1338–53) provided the illuminations

for a large number of manuscripts, but with mixed levels of narrative comprehension.[398] The

Rouses argue that '[t]he Montbastons' illuminations usually manifest only the most superficial

connection with the written words they accompany; and at times even this frail connection

betrays either incomprehension or outright misapprehension of the text'.[399] While we know that

the Montbastons relied to a certain extent on the rubrics of the manuscripts they were working

on, and therefore that they had a basic literacy in the vernacular, the effective communication of

the narrative may not have always been the most prevalent consideration in their artworks. We

know, for instance, that they sometimes misread the rubrics, including those for well known

classical and biblical tales.[400] Some of their most memorable images are *bas-de-page* marginalia

that appear in a number of both secular and devotional manuscripts, including those of Paris,

BnF fr. 25526, which contains a copy of *Le Roman de la Rose* (Figures 7.3 and 7.4). Despite the

fact that the marginal images often do not depict the contents of the narrative they accompany, or

even show any clear relation to the text, they may have served a different purpose:

> Although Jeanne de Montbaston did not design the bas-de-pages in BnF fr. 25526 as a 'visual
>
> gloss to the *Roman de la Rose'* [Huot], nevertheless the ever-present little scenes running
>
> along the bottom margin must inevitably have affected the way readers regarded the
>
> accompanying text. Despite frequent misperception of the role of commercial illuminators,

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[398] There is ample evidence of female illuminators in late medieval Paris. The most famous example is perhaps

Montbaston, but Christine de Pizan also names a number of women illuminators in her *Cité des Dames*, including

one called Anastaise whom she holds in high regard. See Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry*, p. 3.

[399] Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 254.

[400] Ibid, p. 254.

the recent insistence that the illumination be regarded as an inseparable part of 'the text' is a major advance over an earlier scholarship for which the thousands of surviving *Rose* pictures were considered a negligible irrelevance.[401]

We might do well, then, to consider the visual effect of the manuscript page on the reader, so that even if the *bas-de-page* images of BnF fr. 25526 were not made to directly correspond with the text, they still naturally have a relationship with it because of their joint visual impact upon the page. Hilmo has stated that '[m]edieval reading often included looking, in a non-linear, holistic way, at all the components of the page'.[402] The textual and visual elements on the page have multiple layers of meaning when combined, first comprising a visual object and then a narrative document, and both aspects should be considered. Hilmo adds that:

> The visual adds to, complements, and sometimes changes the verbal text; it rarely literally reproduces it. Images placed before a text create certain kinds of expectation and anticipation, while those placed at the end can be particularly important in determining what the reader is to take away from the reading experience.[403]

We can consider this interpretive aspect when we think of the relationship between text and image in secular manuscripts, and take into account both their aesthetic and their intellectual values. Hilmo is quite right in stating that the image rarely reproduces the text exactly; this is

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[401] Ibid, p. 257.

[402] Maidie Hilmo, 'The Power of Images in the Auchinleck, Vernon, *Pearl*, and Two *Piers Plowman* Manuscripts', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 153–205 (p. 153). Also see Jeffrey M. Hamburger, *Script As Image* (Paris; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), p. 2.

[403] Hilmo, 'The Power of Images', p. 158.

certainly the case in medieval manuscript illumination, in which many hands are involved and a variety of mistakes and individual interpretations are inevitable. Instead of simple textual accompaniment, then, we find these images to be the result of commercial practices in which considerations of efficiency were paramount, but individual artistry still shines.
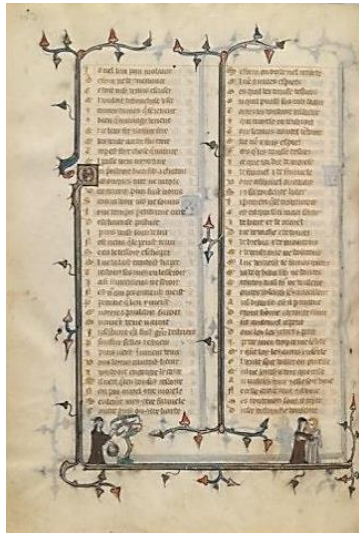
Figure 7.3. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Paris, BnF fr. 25526, fol. 106v.

Figure 7.4. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Paris, BnF fr. 25526, fol. 77v.

Early Romance Iconography

From the beginning of the tradition of romance illumination, which gained momentum in thirteenth-century France with an increasing number of lay craftsmen making manuscripts,[404] the content and meaning of texts were communicated through basic levels of pictorial recognition.

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[404] Stones, 'Secular Manuscript Illumination in France', p. 84.

This included the identification of certain figures or events through attributes or gestures that were repeated across different manuscripts and were evidence of a form of 'serial production'.[405] Stones notes that '[i]t is clear from an analysis of the cycles of MSS containing any one text that the position of the illustrations in the text and the content of the illustrations were not invented afresh for each manuscript. They tend to remain fairly standard'.[406] Limners often used pattern books that incorporated common motifs and instructions, as in the cases of Matthew of Paris and Villard d'Honnecourt,[407] and some workshops were able to reproduce images from a wide repertoire of extant scenes. Some romance texts developed relatively standardised iconography owing to the number of copies that were produced in great numbers and close proximity to each other. Over 300 copies of *Le Roman de la Rose*, for instance, were produced over the course of two hundred years, and provided a cumulative collection of iconography for later limners to rely on. In such instances, a commercial illuminator for a *Roman de la Rose* manuscript would certainly have benefitted from having seen and perhaps already illustrated previous examples, particularly because images from the same sections of text tended to be repeated. The *Roman de*

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[405] Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 31. Also see Robert Branner, *Manuscript Painting in Paris During the Reign of Saint Louis: A Study of Styles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

[406] Stones, 'Secular Manuscript Illumination in France', p. 96.

[407] Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work*, pp. 111–12. For more on medieval pattern or model books also see Robert Scheller, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900–ca. 1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); for some specific examples see Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, ed., *The Göttingen Model Book: A Facsimile Edition and Translations of a Fifteenth-Century Illuminators' Manual* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972); Anne H. van Buren and Sheila Edmunds, 'Playing Cards and Manuscripts: Some Widely Disseminated Fifteenth-Century Model Sheets', in *Art Bulletin* 56.1 (1974): 12–30; and Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, nos 8 and 90.

la Rose limners also benefitted from the fact that the text was allegorical, and the depiction of

allegorical figures with key attributes was a relatively straightforward task.[408] In other

manuscripts, however, such as the earliest illuminated works of Chrétien de Troyes, new

problems of representation emerged. The earliest examples date from about one hundred years

after the texts themselves were produced,[409] which perhaps demonstrates a growth in demand for

illuminated romance manuscripts, and a popular text such as one of Chrétien's might well have

been expected to follow in the footsteps of a widely illustrated text such as *Le Roman de la Rose*.

In the initial surge of interest in romance illuminations, however, the easiest and most abundant

supply of iconographic material was from devotional manuscripts.[410] For example, a limner who

had previously drawn the Last Supper would have had little trouble depicting the Grail

Procession of Chrétien's *Perceval* (Figures 7.5), or a secular feast scene such as the one we see

in the margins of the English Luttrell Psalter (Figure 7.6).[411] Stones argues that '[d]evelopments

in both the layout and the style of secular illustrations are closely related to those of liturgical or

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[408] For more on the illuminated manuscripts of *Le Roman de la Rose*, see Brownlee and Huot, *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*; Blamires and Holian, *The Romance of the Rose Illuminated*; Nathalie Coilly and Marie-Hélène Tesnière, *Le Roman de la rose: L'art d'aimer au Moyen Age* (Paris: BnF, 2012); Heidrun Ost, 'Illuminating the *Roman de la Rose* in the Time of the Debate: The Manuscript of Valencia', in *Patrons, Authors and Workshops*, ed. Godfried Croenen and Peter Ainsworth (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), pp. 405–36; and Jeanne Faton-Boyancé, ed., *L'art d'aimer au Moyen Âge: Le Roman de la rose. Exposition à la Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, art de l'enluminure 42 (Paris: Faton, 2010).

[409] Busby, Nixon, Stones and Walters, *Les manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes*.

[410] Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, p. 248; also see Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry*, p. 17.

[411] Stones, 'Secular Manuscript Illumination in France', pp. 95–6.

devotional books, and in many cases there is evidence that both were produced by the same workshops and artists', though she also adds that the division between devotional and secular iconography perhaps became more pronounced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[412] Artists of the earliest illuminated romance manuscripts therefore had the benefit of learning from existing iconographical traditions, and workshops naturally used their existing knowledge for new subjects. Once the initial problems of representation had been solved, however, and with substantial borrowing from other illuminated subjects, romance illumination developed its own iconographical tradition, with its own pictorial challenges and innovations.

Figure 7.5. Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*. Paris, BnF fr. 12577, fol. 74v.

Figure 7.6. London, British Library, Additional 42130 (Luttrell Psalter), fol. 208r.

Portraying easily identifiable characters was one of the most essential tasks of romance illumination. Column miniatures did not afford much space to incorporate details, and this often led to the backgrounds of miniatures being blocked out with either geometrical patterns or gold

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[412] Stones, 'Secular Manuscript Illumination in France', pp. 89–90 and 92.

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leaf, so that the necessary elements of the foreground could be identified as easily as possible. This technique was simpler and faster than painting a more natural setting, and is often indicative of a commercial product. In column miniatures, limners tended to incorporate the basic attributes of romance characters in order to help the reader to identity them, since the image would otherwise have been lacking in context. This technique is particularly prevalent in allegorical texts such as *Le Roman de la Rose*; for example, the vanity of Oiseuse, whom the dreamer meets outside the garden of desire, is portrayed through the attributes of a mirror and comb (Figure 7.7). Sometimes romance iconography relies on prior literary knowledge, or knowledge that is gained through reading the accompanying text. The association of a mirror with vanity would have been commonplace, but the meaning of an image of a man leaning over a stream might

Figure 7.7. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Paris, BnF fr. 25526, fol. 6r.

Figure 7.8. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Paris, BnF fr. 1560, fol. 10v.

have been less clear unless the reader was familiar with the story of Narcissus from Ovid's

Metamorphoses. The character of Narcissus is treated at length in *Le Roman de la Rose* and other

medieval texts as a warning against vanity (Figure 7.8). Since over 300 manuscripts of *Le Roman*

de la Rose were produced, it is likely that the limners of the later volumes would have been

familiar with the episode as a stock image to draw in accompaniment to the text. There is, of

course, an overlap in certain types of iconography: the image of a harpist, for instance, might be

associated with David in one tradition, Orpheus in another, and Orfeo or Tristan in yet another.

The differentiation between classical or biblical scenes and medieval ones was also made

difficult by the common habit of dressing all figures in contemporary medieval attire. However,

iconography relies on context in order for it to make sense, and the focus in such images, pared

down as they are, is on the recognition of basic forms rather than on nuanced readings of the text.

Sequential Art: Narrative Episodes

There is a common tradition in romance illumination of incorporating multiple scenes within a

single frame, and in some cases these are quite sophisticated in their use of implied time,

allowing the reader to fill in the gaps where appropriate. Otto Pächt refers to these as 'pictorial

narratives' – and sees episodic time and pictorial narratives as inseparable from one another;[413]

Kathleen L. Scott uses the term 'continuous narrative'.[414] However, the episodic nature of these

images is perhaps best defined by the term 'sequential art', which was coined by Will Eisner in

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[413] Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 1.

[414] Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 43.

1985 to describe the telling of narrative through a continuous series of episodic pictures.[415] The incorporation of sequential art into romance manuscript illustration began in some of the earliest illuminated romance manuscripts. Many examples, particularly in the earlier manuscripts, tend to favour a quadripartite composition of segregated scenes, placed one after the other in the style of a sequential cartoon, which allows for more detail and the inclusion of more narrative content than a column miniature would permit. In an example from one of the earlier manuscripts of Chrétien's works from *c.* 1320–30, the reader is presented on fol. 65v with a frame that is split into two horizontal scenes (Figure 7.9); the lower of the two presents a single scene. The scene above it, however, is complicated by the fact that it presents three scenes in one, all of which are overlapping. The division of the scene is provided not by a frame, but by architecture, a technique which also gained prominence in the later stages of romance illumination. The figure of Yvain crawls under the portcullis and acts as an intermediary between the two separate scenes on either side. The repetition of the same figure in these episodes indicates that they are meant to be viewed in sequence and not as occuring in a single moment. They are to be read from left to right and the repetition of the figure enhances the sense of narrative motion from one scene to the next. In some manuscripts, the beginning of the text was accompanied by a frontispiece, which incorporated numerous elements from the narrative in one frame (Figure 7.10). This technique was common in illuminated *Roman de la Rose* manuscripts. It is not difficult to see the practicalities behind such a decision: the majority of the action of *Le Roman de la Rose* takes place in the first part of the text, written by Guillaume, that later gives way to a more philosophical exegesis in Jean de Meun's narration, and so there is more action in the first

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[415] Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: Norton, 2008).

section to be depicted. The very beginning of the text also incorporates a large amount of information in order to set the scene for the dreamer's journey, and these details are often reflected in the accompanying frontispiece. The miniatures of later folios would have been much easier to pace by comparison; once the dreamer starts to encounter personified allegories the easiest method of illustration is to represent that allegory with their accompanying attribute. The frontispiece, however, presents a unique opportunity for narrative engagement with the text through the image.

Figure 7.9. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*. Paris, BnF fr. 1433, fol. 69v.

Figure 7.10. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Paris, BnF fr. 1560, fol. 1r.

Later examples of romance illumination began to incorporate more overlap between frames, and so to breathe new life into the transitions between these compositions. In one fifteenth-

century *Roman de la Rose* manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3339, *c.* 1410–15) the frontispiece incorporates a multitude of scenes without internal borderlines (Figure 7.11). The dreamer is depicted five times, in a loose ordering of left to right and top to bottom. A slight sense of framing is provided by the architecture of the dreamer's house, sparsely depicted as a single room with an interior that is entirely taken up with a bed. This is not supposed to be a realistic depiction but rather a schematic one, which incorporates the most necessary elements of the text. The dreamer is not only depicted within the space of the bedroom but also in the doorway emerging from it. This suggests an additional scene in which the dreamer gets up and exits the building, and so the reader is encouraged to fill the gaps where the figure is absent. In the following scenes the dreamer enters the forest, washes himself in the stream and encounters the icons on the wall of the garden of desire. This is a sophisticated example in which the reader is not only given useful information, but also drawn into the temporality of the scene; the miniature is reliant on the text for its original meaning, but can be read independently of the accompanying narrative. The scenes chosen for the frontispiece tend to vary from one manuscript to the next, but establish in most cases at least the primary details of the dreamer waking, exiting the house and beginning his journey. The action that follows is also suggested through the allegorical figures depicted on the wall. The wall of Arsenal 3339, for example, encloses the garden of desire but also suggests the dreamer's later encounters with each of the figures depicted. It is perhaps telling that the figures are depicted in colour and resemble real figures more than the idealised forms of classical sculpture. It is possible that the artist wished to draw the reader's attention to the fact that these figures are supposed to represent, within the dreamscape, corporeal personifications who will speak to the protagonist later. The dreamer's presence in five separate scenarios within a single frame also contributes to a sense of narrative

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Figure 7.11. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3339, fol. 1r.

continuation, which allows the reader to fill in the gaps between each episode. This effect also allows the reader to read the image without necessarily relying on the text, as there is enough detail therein that a reader who was unfamiliar with the romance could read the image and gather that a sleeping man wakes up, exits the house, encounters various points of interest in the forest and by the river, and then happens upon a wall with various allegorical figures depicted thereon, with the added implication that these figures might be encountered in person before long. Also, the frontispiece contains scenes that would be easily recognisable to someone who is already familiar with the text. The technique of narrative sequencing is particularly effective here as it enables the limner to portray a multitude of episodes in a single frame and to create a sense of narrative momentum through the actions of the dreamer and the suggestion of further scenes.

Sequential Art: Composite Scenes

In many illuminated romance manuscripts from the fifteenth century we see sophisticated attempts at narrative summarisation. This does not just involve the depiction of multiple scenes within a miniature, but also allusions to the wider narrative context of the scene. One example of this effect is found in Paris, BnF fr. 12575, one of the manuscripts of Coudrette's version of the *Roman de Mélusine*, which was originally written by Jean d'Arras for the Duke of Berry. In one miniature Guion, Mélusine's son, accepts the crown of Armenia, and the limner has attempted to include as much narrative information as possible in the scene (Figure 7.12). The image is based on a passage of text represented by the following rubric: 'Coment guion de luzignen fu roy darmeine' (how Guion of Lusignan became king of Armenia). The description is simple enough, but the accompanying portion of text involves Guion fighting a battle and winning Armenia as a result of his prowess on the field. The image cuts out the battle entirely, but still presents a scene

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in which Guion arrives in Armenia and is, in this case, given the crown as soon as he steps off the boat. The battle is absent from the scene but implied in the narrative space between Guion arriving and receiving his title. The scene departs from realism in this respect; Guion has not even stepped off the gangplank before being presented with his kingship, and so it is the suggestion of narrative elements through a reduced depiction that allows the full import of the textual content to be understood. Guion gains kingship through his actions upon arrival in Armenia, and that is all the reader needs to know at a basic level. There is an additional level of narrative detail present, however, in the presence of Guion's bride, Florye, who peers out at an alarmingly gigantic scale over the walls of Armenia. This, again, tells us that the limner is concerned less with realism and more with the suggestion of vital narrative elements within the scene. The size of the figure is no mistake, and this corner of the scene tells the reader only the vital information required, that a lady of importance, also with a crown, resides in the city of which Guion has just received his kingship. Laurence Harf-Lancner goes as far as to suggest that 'la conquête de la femme symbolise celle de la terre' (the conquest of the woman symbolises that of the land).[416] This reading certainly seems to be supported by the text, in which the trope of attaining a wife and a kingship all at once is repeated several times, and is also suggested by the inscriptions within the miniature, in which Guion is labelled by name but the label under Florye, on the walls of the city, reads 'armenie'. In the miniature, visual elements are reduced to their most basic forms; the tiled background turns the reader's attention to the foreground elements whilst allowing the reader to suspend belief in the realism of the scene, focusing instead on the individual fragments that together comprise a visual summary of the key narrative elements of

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[416] Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'La serpente et le sanglier: les manuscrits enluminés des deux romans français de *Mélusine*', *Moyen Age* 102 (1995): 65–87 (75).

Figure 7.12. Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine*. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 39v.

the passage. The inscriptions for Guion and Armenia also emphasise that these are the two elements of most importance to the reader, a decision that complies with the rubric. The limner here is not concerned with realism but with conveying the information of the episode in a limited space.

 Narrative summarisation became a distinctive trend in romance illuminations in the fifteenth century. The focus of book producers on both narrative interpretation and enhanced readability within romance images meant that limners could express some individuality in their interpretation and presentation of the narrative material, which in turn could influence the reader's understanding of the text. In a manuscript of *Guiron le Courtois* (Paris, BnF fr. 357), which was made in Paris *c.* 1450, and whose illuminations are attributed to the Dunois Master or atelier, we see a similar effect in which one miniature contains enough narrative detail for the image to be read as an episode in its own right (Figure 7.13). In this episode we are presented with one scene, but one that alludes to various elements of the text so that the effect of narrative sequencing is subtly present. Within the scene Meliadus rides out to meet the nephew of the king of Scotland; we do not see the actual meeting between the two parties, but the moments leading up to that meeting. This minor detail adds an effect of momentum to the image, as the reader is aware both of the moment depicted and that which, it is implied, will soon be taking place. The courtiers in the foreground also potentially reflect the patron's court, as leisurely riding scenes such as this one were indicative of noble courtly activities, and were often depicted within luxurious manuscripts from this period. The image also includes further details that allude to separate elements mentioned in the text, such as the church.[417] The depiction of a signpost is

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[417] *Guiron le courtois: etude de la tradition manuscrite et analyse critique*, ed. Roger Lathuillère (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966), pp. 365–6.

Figure 7.13. *Guiron le Courtois*. Paris, BnF fr. 357, fol. 241r.

interesting for its implications of narrative time; the text mentions that Hector, the companion of

Meliadus, wishes a sign to be erected in the event of his death that says 'Ci-gît Hector, martyr

d'amour' (here lies Hector, martyr of love), which stands where he has fallen in battle.[418] The

sign is presumably that which is depicted here, even though in the text it is mentioned

hypothetically, and we do not see it actually being built; we are told only that Hector's body is

left outside when the others are taken into the church.[419] The signpost within the image, if it is

indeed the one that holds the epitaph (the writing upon the sign is illegible here despite its large

scale, presumably as a result of spatial constraints), hints towards the outcome of the meeting in

the foreground, and therefore helps the reader to situate the image within the accompanying

passage of text. The inclusion of text on the sign within the miniature also highlights the act of

reading for both characters and reader, and encourages them to read elements within the image as

being connected to a larger narrative whole. The image combined with the decorative elements

of the page dwarf the text; the *mise en page* also incorporates the heraldic arms of the patron, a

symbol of status and ownership, and so the page as a whole, text and image combined, functions

as a multivalent presentation of narrative impressions and ideas which are contained within the

text and relevant to the court of the manuscript's patron.

   Another example of the abundance of visual narrative information that can be incorporated

within a single frame is found in a *Prose Tristan* manuscript (Paris, BnF fr. 103), made in Rouen

c. 1470, whose illuminations are attributed to the Master of the Échevinage de Rouen (Figure

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[418] Ibid, p. 366. Own translation.

[419] Ibid, p. 366.

7.14).[420] In this example we are presented with a scene that incorporates several elements from the text into a single frame; we see the episodes of the lovers drinking the love potion and their return upon their deaths. The narrative has to be read from lower-right to top-left in order to make chronological sense; however, it seems likely that the image is not necessarily meant to be read in any particular order, but rather to present an overall scene that summarises these episodes from the narrative. The events between the lovers drinking the potion and their deaths are left out of the miniature, but are implied for any reader who might be familiar with the text. Inscriptions are also used here, so that it would not have been strictly necessary for the reader to be familiar with the narrative in order for them to identify the location of Ireland or the figures of Tristan and Isolde on each of the boats. Any reader who was unfamiliar with the narrative would also have noted the difference between a boat with white sails and a boat with black sails, and would probably have surmised that the colour of the latter combined with the conspicuous absence of the couple on board announces the fact that the lovers are dead. A reader who was more familiar with the textual material might have been able to note that the black sails play a prominent role in the narrative, but with the aid of inscriptions, a reader who was ignorant of the story would also have been capable of reading the image and discerning the basic elements of the scene. As this is the frontispiece of the manuscript, the scene is not meant to be read in direct conjunction with the adjoining text, but to allude to later events in the narrative. This image relies on narrative elements but can also be read as a pictorial narrative in itself; it uses multiple layers of time and geography to create an overall impression of the work, which is crammed into a small space but can be enjoyed for both its aesthetic appeal and its narrative content.

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[420] The manuscript's provenance in Rouen reminds us that there were excellent centres of manuscript production outside of Paris in the fifteenth century.

Figure 7.14. Detail, *Prose Tristan*. Paris, BnF fr. 103, fol. 1r.

The illustrations of the *Livre de Coeur* of King René of Anjou provide us with a particularly subtle example of narrative allusion, and demonstrate the authorial perspective of the artist. The text of the *Livre de Coeur* was written by René in the mid-fifteenth century (*c.* 1457), and follows the conventions of medieval allegory made popular through earlier examples such as *Le Roman de la Rose*. The images (*c.* 1465–70) are generally agreed to have been illuminated by

René's *valet de chambre*, Barthélemy d'Eyck, who also had a hand in the later additions to the illuminations of the *Très riches heures*.[421] The influence of the *Très riches heures* is seen in details such as unusual framing and techniques of narrative realism, including a night scene with realistic lighting; but we also see a similar interest in narrative interpretation and technique, and more scope to enhance these without the limiting structure of a Book of Hours. The *Livre de Coeur* is a personal text written by the patron, and therefore a certain degree of sensitivity would have been required in order to complete the project with the patron's preferences in mind; Barthélemy has accomplished this with particular attention to the contents of the narrative, which he has clearly read. In the first illumination of the manuscript, René's heart is abducted by the figure Amour (Figure 7.15). Many aspects of narrative complexity are present here: in this instance René is both author and character, and the elements of allegory and dream-vision in the text are dealt with through both human personification and the use of symbols. The artist, however, does not simply depict what goes on in the text but also contributes his own interpretation to the minute details that are found there. For instance, the word used to describe the heart in the text develops from an object, 'le Cuer', to a personification, 'Cuer';[422] in this first illumination the heart is an object, but in all others it is personified as a human character. The reader, then, is presented with a dual narrative in which text and image feed off one another to create an effective visual narrative, in which the image does not only depict the action of the narrative but also uses meticulous attention to detail in order to enhance the reader's visual experience of it. In another illumination from the same manuscript Coeur and Desire encounter

[421] Franz Unterkircher, *King René's Book of Love* (New York: G. Braziller, 1980), pp. 13–4.

[422] René of Anjou, *The Book of the Love-Smitten Heart, by René of Anjou*, trans. Stephanie Viereck Gibbs and Kathryn Karczewska (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.

Figure 7.15. René of Anjou, *Livre de Coeur*. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 2597, fol. 2r.

Figure 7.16. René of Anjou, *Livre de Coeur*. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 2597, fol. 5v.

the lady Hope (Figure 7.16). The artist again pays close attention to the narrative details that appear in the text, from the 'pearls and relief' on the pavilion to the jasper stone finish of the tablet.[423] However, he also includes a number of details that are merely suggested in the text, not explicitly stated, and which therefore allows the image to contribute to the reader's

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[423] Ibid, p. 9.

understanding of the narrative. For instance, the central characters always move towards the right-hand side of the folio, in the same direction in which the pages of the manuscript are read. This effect creates a sense of narrative motion and linear movement beyond that suggested by the narrative itself. The artist also pays close attention to times of day, and incorporates sunsets and night scenes into a number of the images according to the point at which each scene occurs in the narrative. He includes a stone tablet that appears both in the text and in a number of the illuminations; the characters on the tablet represent an unknown language, and are thus placed at a sideways angle so that they cannot be identified by the reader. The inclusion of text within the image allows for a metafictive effect in which the characters themselves partake in the process of reading, and thus adds to the sensory experience of the reader who, in this instance, experiences the same sensation from outside the manuscript as those depicted within it. The artist's interpretation of the text therefore represents a form of reception that adds to the presentation of the text as a visual narrative; the illuminations of the *Livre de Coeur* demonstrate that illustrative images need not be considered as merely emulating textual material, but can actually provide their own interpretation and, in doing so through visual stimuli, can enhance the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the narrative. These elements present a sense of individual interpretation, which projects Barthélemy's own reading of the text. J. J. G. Alexander notes that, in the fifteenth century, '[a]rtists come increasingly to incorporate their own direct visual observation of the world, and objects in it, into their representations'; and that '[i]t is the extraordinarily close relationship of picture to text which makes the *Livre de Coeur* remarkable'.[424] The book, however, was made primarily for its patron, René, and the main purpose of the images, aside from their beauty and sophistication, appears to have been to allow

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[424] Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators*, pp. 143 and 148.

him to appreciate his narrative within the accompanying illustrations.[425] The illuminations

incorporate a wealth of detail from the text and also more suggestive elements that bring the

narrative to life. This is a particularly sophisticated example, and based on an individual, royal

commission rather than commercial practices, but reflects a broader trend that incorporated an

array of narrative material into a miniature in order to make it as easy for the audience to read as

possible, whilst also retaining the personal, interpretive stamp of the artist.

Conclusions

A multitude of factors governed the methods and designs of French romance manuscript

illuminators from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Some of these concerned the resources and

demands for commercial book production in Paris and for private commissions from royal or

noble patrons, others unforeseeable obstacles like the impact of the Black Death or the Hundred

Years War on French manuscript production.[426] But within the tradition of secular book

illumination there was an increasing penchant for narrative engagement and visual problem-

solving. The images of illuminated French romance manuscripts range from basic iconography

to detailed textual response, but in each case the limner has tried to make the images as easy to

read as possible, and to convey the literary contents of the text in as much detail as their medium

would allow. The results demonstrate a sophistication of thought and practicality that is

unparalleled elsewhere, and highlight the textual concerns involved in creating narrative images

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[425] For some time René himself was thought to have made the miniatures. For more on René's role in making the

book see Nicholas Ealy, 'The Poet at the Mirror: René d'Anjou and Authorial Doubling in the *Livre du Cœur

d'Amour épris*', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 37 (2012): 17–45. Also see Unterkircher, *King René's Book of Love*.

[426] Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à Peintures en France*, p. 9; Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers*, pp. 96–7.

in commercial centres of book production during this period. The French illuminated romance manuscript tradition is extensive and varied, but in many examples we see a common trend that centres largely on the summarisation of narrative content, the main purpose of which is to make the content of the text as easy for the reader to digest as possible. Such images establish their independence from the accompanying text by means of effectual visual literacy, and add an interpretive element that augments the authorial voice of the limner.

8. VISUAL INTERTEXTUALITY AND NARRATIVE ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH ROMANCE ILLUMINATIONS

Introduction

English contributions to romance manuscript illumination are not, on the whole, highly regarded. In comparison to the commercial practices of romance illumination that had become the norm in France by the fifteenth century, secular English manuscripts from the same period are often considered to be rough, sloppy, and generally of poor quality. Roger Sherman and Laura Hibbard Loomis once declared the English contributions to visual Arthuriana in the Middle Ages to be worth only minimal attention: 'English MSS offer so scanty and so undistinguished a group of miniatures that they have not seemed worthy of a chapter to themselves and are here treated cursorily'.[427] More recently, Scott declared English fifteenth-century manuscript illustration to be 'the dull stepchild of art historical studies'.[428] Although English romance illuminations might be considered to be of lesser quality than their French equivalents, their merits become more visible with some consideration of their narrative function. In the English manuscripts there is evidence of an interesting intellectual engagement between text and image, which in some ways benefits from the lack of commercial polish that has distinguished them, so far to their disadvantage, from their French and Flemish counterparts. It should be noted, however, that the sheer volume of manuscripts produced in France in the later Middle Ages means that there is a range of style in their decorative programmes. Polished, neat illuminations are typical of commercial production

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[427] Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, p. 138.

[428] Kathleen L. Scott, *Tradition and Innovation in Later Medieval English Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2007), p. ix.

in centres such as Paris, but there are plenty of manuscripts from France, and from other areas of mainland Europe, that play with the intellectual relationship between text and reader, and also plenty of examples of lesser quality compared to the most luxurious illuminations. It is the English illuminations, however, that are the focus here. I will argue that, where the French vernacular narrative illuminations are largely intended to be read as autonomous narratives by the fifteenth century, English illuminations are created in conversation with their accompanying texts, in a manner that encourages further textual engagement and the involvement of the reader. Some illuminations, such as those of the Cotton manuscript which illustrate *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, might be considered to be technically inferior; others, such as those missing from or left incomplete in Auchinleck and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 61, might be perceived as unfortunate examples of missed potential. However, other types of narrative illumination produced in England in the fifteenth century, such as in the Ellesmere Chaucer and other manuscripts that make use of narrative marginalia, remind us that these images have an inherent worth on account of their engagement with the texts they accompany, and what we can therefore learn from them of late medieval English readership and author-reader (and limner-reader) relations. Through a consideration of such images we learn to be less concerned with aesthetic beauty and more so with the intellectual conversation that takes place between the artist and the reader with regard to the text. English secular manuscript illumination is scarcer and often less pretty than many of its French counterparts, but critics may have been mistaken in seeking artistic skill in aesthetic pleasure alone; there are very interesting visual effects occuring in the English manuscripts, and these complement the new, intellectual genre of English literature that was coming to the fore in the fifteenth century.

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Fifteenth-century England was not devoid of able illuminators. Paris was the centre of manuscript production at this time, and English patrons who could afford to do so would probably have found the quality and efficiency of the Parisian limners tempting enough to draw them away from local book producers.[429] However, there is plenty of evidence to indicate a thriving book trade in England at this time. Until the fifteenth century, London had been something of a 'literary backwater', and vernacular book production was more prominent outside the city, in regional centres such as Worcestershire, East Anglia and Yorkshire.[430] However, Kerby-Fulton notes that '[s]cribes trained in the legal profession or, increasingly throughout the fourteenth century, in the writing offices of government or administration formed the backbone of vernacular book production outside of the monasteries',[431] and the rise of London as a literary centre coincided with the activity of various scribes whose identities are now well

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[429] It should be noted, however, that limners in Paris were not necessarily Parisian in origin, and the draws of the city's book production industry also brought in artists from outside of Paris and abroad.

[430] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Major Middle English Poets and Manuscript Studies, 1300-1450', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 39–94 (p. 39); and Joel Fredell, 'The Thornton Manuscripts and Book Production in York', in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 109–29 (p. 109). Christianson adds that other workshops were probably located at Lincoln, Winchester, Salisbury, Cambridge, Norwich, Bury St. Edmunds, York, Westminster, and at various sites in East Anglia, in *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans*, p. 20, n. 6.

[431] Kerby-Fulton, 'Major Middle English Poets', p. 48.

documented.[432] Along with this scribal activity, there was also manuscript illumination, much of which was of a reasonable quality, and high quality border decoration.[433] In the fifteenth century both scribes and limners, in addition to others involved in the book trade, operated under the aegis of the mistery of stationers, which was organised in 1403.[434] C. Paul Christianson argues that the foundation of this group in an official capacity tells us something of the desire among these craftsmen for a certain degree of orderliness, particularly with regard to better trade organisation, protection from competition, and quality of production.[435] Some of these anxieties had to do with competition from foreign craftsmen; Christianson notes that '[i]t is likely that many, if not most, London artisans – not only the textwriters but also the limners and bookbinders – learned their crafts elsewhere before migrating to the metropolis'.[436] One court letter lays out the following complaint from a scrivener:

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[432] See A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978), pp. 163–210; Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Julia Boffey, *Manuscript and Print in London, c. 1475–1530* (London: British Library, 2012); Kerby-Fulton, 'Major Middle English Poets', p. 39; and Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2013).

[433] For more on this, see Kathleen L. Scott, *Dated & Datable English Manuscript Borders, c. 1395–1499* (London: Bibliographical Society and British Library, 2002).

[434] Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans*, p. 14. Also see C. Paul Christianson, 'The Rise of London's Book Trade', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 3: 1400–1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 128–47 (p. 128).

[435] Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans*, pp. 23 and 27.

[436] Ibid, p. 27.

Many mischiefs and defaults are, and have often been, committed in the said craft by those who resort to the said City from divers countries … who have no knowledge of the customs, franchises and usages of the said City, and who call themselves scriveners … the fact being that they are foreigners and unknown, and also less skilled than the scriveners who are free of the said City…[437]

Book production in London did not operate on the same scale as in Paris, though. For one thing, the mistery of stationers did not rank highly among the other London crafts.[438] But the quantity and, therefore, the quality of books produced in each city were quite disparate: 'books [of hours] from London shops stand very much second in terms both of quantities made and of their quality of execution and design. Yet there was interest among London craftsmen in supplying part of this market'.[439] We have access to legal documents from the City letter-books relating to numerous limners in the fifteenth century, though there may well be many names that are unknown to us; we get an excellent idea of their legal activity, but not necessarily their work output, or the activities of those not mentioned in the legal documents. We know, for instance, that a number of bookmakers had more than one trade, and that their additional duties were not necessarily related to the book trade.[440] For instance, Roger Crane was a haberdasher and parchmener; Robert Cristemasse a textwriter and draper; Thomas Hatfield a textwriter and parish clerk; and Thomas Lesyngham a textwriter, stationer and brewer.[441] This is perhaps not entirely

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[437] Ibid, pp. 26–7.

[438] Ibid, p. 38.

[439] Ibid, pp. 134–5.

[440] Ibid, p. 41.

[441] Ibid, pp. 95–6, 96–7, 114 and 127–8.

surprising, as we know that several well-known authors also occupied other positions: after all, Hoccleve was a clerk, Lydgate was a monk, and Chaucer worked in the civil service. It is perhaps more noteworthy, then, that not many limners are documented as having had another profession outside the book trade. We know that from 1404–10 the names of three stationers, three textwriters, three bookbinders and seven limners ('decorative artists') appear in the rental records for Paternoster Row, a renowned hub for the book trade.[442] The relative disparity of numbers between the limners and the other roles might be chance, but it might also indicate both the popularity of this craft and the amount of work it required. Several known texts are associated with the London bookmakers: Piers Bauduyn, bookmaker and stationer, worked on *Frossard* and *La Forteresse de Foy*; William le Bokbindre requested an order for *Life of Blessed Edward* written in French; William Brereton, stationer, left his son a copy of *Guy of Warwick* in his will; Richard Franciscus, scribe, wrote copies of the *Legenda aurea*, *Confessio Amantis* and *Fall of Princes*; John Hervy, stationer, appears in a note in a copy of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*; John Hotersall, notary and stationer, left a copy of the *Gesta Romanorum* in his will; Roger Leget also left one in his; and Richard Marleburgh and Thomas Rolf, stationers, were once called on to assess the value of a book of *Romaunce of King Alexander*, which was said to be 'well and curiously illuminated'.[443] We therefore have some idea of the flourishing commercial centre for book production in London, and of the demand for romance texts. The evidence for what was produced and by whom is sporadic, however, and despite the above list the evidence of extant manuscripts suggests that devotional manuscripts were much more in demand than secular ones, at least as far as luxury illumination was concerned.

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[442] Christianson, 'The Rise of London's Book Trade', p. 129.

[443] Ibid, p. 131.

Figure 8.1. London, British Library, Additional 25588, fol. 109v.

Figure 8.2. London, British Library, Royal 1 E IX, fol. 3v.

Secular Illuminations

Many of the more accomplished English miniatures we know of are in devotional manuscripts.

For example, British Library Additional 25588, a Latin Missal which is thought to have been

made in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, with a possible origin in East Norwich (Figure

8.1), has border details and chequered backgrounds that are reminiscent of the French style of

miniature illumination, and the face and body are completed with great attention to detail. The

detailed Latin Bible British Library Royal 1 E IX, thought to have been made during the first

quarter of the fifteenth century, probably in London, boasts 143 historiated miniatures, some of

which are highly detailed in their composition (Figure 8.2). It is possible that this manuscript was

illuminated by Herman Scheerre, an artist of Dutch or German origin who was associated with

Cologne, and we know from documentary evidence that at least some of the accomplished

limners in London had origins outside England.[444] The existence of such manuscripts tells us that there was demand for lavish programmes of illumination in manuscripts in England. As most of these appear to be devotional, however, we should question why the illumination of secular texts did not catch on in the same way that it did in Paris.[445]

If we compare French illuminations such as those discussed above with those in the Cotton Nero manuscript, which illustrates the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Figures 8.3 and 8.4), made *c.* 1400–10, it is perhaps not difficult to see why the latter have not achieved much acclaim amongst scholars of medieval art history and literary studies. The Loomis' give the following account of them:

> The nadir of English illustrative art is found in the caricatures which accompany the unique MS of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Cotton Nero A X. It is ironic that one of the most exquisite and technically the most finished of medieval English poems should be illustrated by infantile daubs.[446]

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[444] See the British Library's details on the provenance of the manuscript, at <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_1_e_ix>. Also see Margaret Rickert, 'Herman the Illuminator', *Burlington Magazine* 46 (1935): 39–40; and Charles Kuhn, 'Herman Scheerre and English Illumination of the Early Fifteenth Century', *The Art Bulletin* 22 (1940): 138–56. On the presence of foreign limners in London, also see Boffey, *Manuscript and Print*, p. 25.

[445] See Christianson, 'The Rise of London's Book Trade', pp. 128–47; and Howard W. Winger, 'Regulations Relating to the Book Trade in London from 1357 to 1586', *Library Quarterly* 26 (1956): 157–95.

[446] Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, p. 138.

As the result of this and subsequent such condemnations,[447] the images of MS Cotton Nero are little studied, though not all scholars dismiss them entirely.[448] Although their comparative lack of quality is apparent when we compare the illuminations to their French counterparts, it would seem unfair to dismiss them entirely, since they are the only illustrations of the texts they accompany from that time. In the supposedly lesser forms of late medieval English manuscript illumination, textual engagement is not necessarily concerned with the quality of illustration so much as the conversation and conveying of information between the image, the text and the reader. Perhaps we ought to ask, instead of comparing the quality of the two traditions, how detrimental a lack of realism is to the success of an image. In other words, is the image unsuccessful if it calls to mind its own artificiality in relation to the text? It is worth remembering, in the case of the Cotton images, that they were inserted after the text was written and were not part of the original plans for the manuscript. We have no concrete information about the particular limner responsible for them (Thorlac Turville-Petre suggests that 'it is not

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[447] For instance, Hilmo describes them as 'plain', Thorlac Turville-Petre 'dreadful' and by 'an incompetent artist', and A. S. G. Edwards 'awful'. See Hilmo, 'The Power of Images', p. 172; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977), p. 45; and A. S. G. Edwards, 'Representing the Middle English Manuscript', in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 65–79 (p. 77).

[448] See Jennifer Lee, 'The Illuminating Critic: The Illustrator of Cotton Nero A.X.', *Studies in Iconography* 3 (1977): 17–46 (44); Paul Reichart, '"Several Illuminations Coarsely Executed": The Illustrations of the "Pearl" Manuscript', *Studies in Iconography* 10 (1997): 119–12; and Maidie Hilmo, 'The Image Controversies in Late Medieval England and the Visual Prefaces and Epilogues in the Pearl Manuscript: Creating a Meta-Narrative of the Journey to the New Jerusalem', in *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (New York: AMS Press, 2001), pp. 1–40.

Figure 8.3. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. London, British Library, Cotton Nero A X, art.3, fol. 90v.

Figure 8.4. *Pearl*. London, British Library, Cotton Nero A X, art.3, fol. 38r.

unlikely that the artist was a member of the family playing with paints', whereas Scott suggests

that the artist was a regional limner),[449] but in the absence of such information we can consider

instead that which is conveyed by the images, to what extent they fulfil their function, and how a

reader might have used them in conjunction with the text. Irrespective of their artistic quality, the

images present their own perspective on the text, and presumably entertained the owner of the

manuscript who arranged for the insertion of the images in the first place.

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[449] Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*, p. 45; Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, pp. 66–7.

In other English manuscripts we see further hints of an interest in illuminating romance texts, though the results are not always of the highest quality. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodl. 264, which opens with the French *Roman d'Alexandre*, presents a selection of fourteenth-century illuminations by the Flemish Jehan de Grise and his workshop.[450] A later insertion adds two texts to the manuscript: the Middle English *Alexander and Dindimus* (Figure 8.5) and the French *Li Livres du Graunt Caam* of Marco Polo (Figure 8.6). The latter contains images from the same workshop as the first section but, curiously, the Middle English section is illustrated with miniatures in a less polished style.[451] The miniatures of *Alexander and Dindimus* are technically less refined than most French and Flemish illuminations of their type. However, it is not clear whether this style is indicative of their having been produced in England, where these miniatures were added in the fifteenth century, *c.* 1400–10, to an already impressive visual programme. The fact that three other artists were involved in the miniatures added at this stage, and that their images are quite accomplished, would suggest not. We know, however, that at least one, who identifies himself in one of his miniatures as 'Johannes', is likely to have been foreign.[452] The rougher style of the *Alexander and Dindimus* miniatures could be evidence of the lesser quality of English vernacular illumination overall, but it would be prudent to remind ourselves that the

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[450] For the *Roman d'Alexandre* images and their accompanying marginalia, see M. R. James, *The Romance of Alexander: A Collotype Facsimile of MS. Bodley 264* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933); and Mark Cruse, 'Pictorial Polyphony: Image, Voice, and Social Life in the *Roman d'Alexandre* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264)', in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse and Kathryn A. Smith (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 371–401.

[451] Bodleian Libraries, 'Early Manuscripts at Oxford University: Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 264', last accessed 19 February 2016, <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msbodl264>.

[452] See Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 72.

issue here is one of quantity as much as quality, and that there simply were not as many illuminated vernacular manuscripts being produced in England as there were in other European centres of book production. As with the Cotton Nero images, we might also question the extent to which the quality of the images would have determined their success as narrative illustrations.

Figure 8.5. *Alexander and Dindimus*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodl. 264, fol. 213v.

Figure 8.6. Marco Polo, *Li Livres du Graunt Caam*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodl. 264, fol. 218r.

The Auchinleck manuscript is a commonly cited example of missed opportunity in English romance illumination. Probably made in London *c.* 1330, and, according to Christianson, 'presumably the creation of other professional scribes as well as book artists who had been hired for an unusual commission',[453] it is one of the most famous compendiums of English romance

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[453] Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans*, p. 21. Also see Susanna Fein, ed., *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2016); and particularly Venetia Bridges, 'Absent Presence: Auchinleck and *Kyng Alisaunder*', pp. 88–107.

narratives, but also famously short on images, and those which are included are small and of relatively lesser quality (Figure 8.7). Probable reasons for the manuscript's limitations lie in the question of who commissioned it, and how much money that person had to spend on manuscripts. Royal patrons in England seem, on the whole, to have been less interested in romance than the noble or merchant classes; the patron of Auchinleck is thought to have belonged to the latter.[454] The manuscript would have been comparatively expensive as it is, and the patron might not have had enough money to pay for larger or more lavish illuminations. The lack of English romance illumination is arguably based in this combined lack of interest and resources, and those who might have been interested in commissioning romance manuscripts did not necessarily have the money or inclination to pay for the images. It should be noted, however, that a number of the Auchinleck illuminations are missing, having been excised for sale (13 miniatures and 18 folios), and so the remaining miniatures probably do not represent the highest quality or largest images that were originally in the manuscript.[455] We are therefore missing a key number of images that may or may not have demonstrated a close and interactive relationship with the text. The gaps and extant miniatures of Auchinleck also force us to consider the extent to which romance was actually admired by English audiences, and how far accompanying images for romance texts might have been considered not just expensive, but potentially undesirable, or even unnecessary, for the sort of literature that English audiences enjoyed. If we consider the texts and images of the Auchinleck manuscript, for instance, we find

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[454] Olson, 'Romancing the Book', pp. 100–1.

[455] Ibid, p. 106. Olson explains that one of the Auchinleck miniaturists was associated with the workshop responsible for the Queen Mary Psalter illustrative programme, and that the quality of their miniatures therefore must have been considered reasonable at the time of their production.

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that a number of the scribes and limners were concerned with the practical application of the manuscript. The prologue to *Of Arthour and of Merlin* advocates reading for piety and practicality ('Of Freynsch no Latin nil y tel more / Ac on I[n]glisch ichil tel þerfore / Riȝt is þat I[n]glisch vnderstond / Þat was born in Inglond. / Freynsche vse þis gentil man / Ac eurich Inglische Inglische can'),[456] whilst the *King of Tars* image advocates, suitably, engagement with images (and the dangers that sometimes lie therein):

> The purpose of this miniature, an appropriate choice for the artists who would naturally be concerned with matters relevant to the craft, is to show the distinction between the worship of a lifeless pagan idol, featured in the compartment on the left, and the correct worship of a crucifix, illustrated in the compartment on the right.[457]

This argument is particularly pertinent to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century concerns about imagery based on Lollard objections to idol-worship. Scott has spoken of 'a newly spreading ethic concerning images' and 'a new mood of austerity' as a result of this stance, and suggests that this also explains in part the relative lack of realism in English illumination at this time, which replaces aesthetic quality with 'signs, tokens, and "spectacles"'.[458] Whilst the *King of Tars* image is instructive in the manner of reading texts and images, the prologue from *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is indicative of a desire to enhance the status of the English language, which would also have contributed to the development of a distinctive category of English literature in the fifteenth century and, accordingly, a style of visual programme that reflected this new literature and its literary ideologies. Both the authors' and limners' final products therefore

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[456] *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, I.19–24.

[457] Hilmo, 'The Power of Images', p. 159.

[458] Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, pp. 23 and 43–7 (pp. 44 and 46).

Figure 8.7. *King Richard the Lionheart*. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates'
19.2.1 (Auchinleck), fol. 326r.

Figure 8.8. *The Miracles of Our Lady*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. a. 1 (Vernon), fol.
125v.

form a didactic statement, but also an indication of their ideology. Auchinleck is missing many

of the miniatures that could have aided a fuller understanding of the manuscript's visual

programme, but the evidence we have hints at the possibility that the owners or creators of such a

manuscript might have been leaning towards a new literary ideology or aesthetic that was

concerned with reading primarily as an intellectual pursuit.

The Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1), made in the last

decade of the fourteenth century, is the largest known manuscript in English and contains a

wealth of texts with a number of accomplished illuminations (Figure 8.8), though none on

romance subjects.[459] However, like the Auchinleck Manuscript, the Vernon Manuscript has been

relieved of a large number of its original miniatures, and only sixteen of (at least) seventy-eight

illustrations remain.[460] This, again, limits the extent to which we can critique the visual

programme as a whole. However, the images that remain are of a high quality, which implies

that the missing illuminations must have been of a similar, if not higher, grade.[461] The images

were completed by two or three limners,[462] and detail the *Miracles of Our Lady* and *La Estoire*

del Evangelie en Englais, in addition to one historiated initial at the beginning of *The Prick of*

Conscience. The manuscript contains romance texts, although these by no means make up the

majority of the contents; most of the texts are devotional, though vernacular, with some familiar

texts such as *The Prick of Conscience* and *Piers Plowman*, and *The King of Tars*, which is also

present (and illuminated) in the Auchinleck Manuscript. It would be a stretch, therefore, to see

romance illumination as having particular priority (if any at all) within the manuscript, but its

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[459] Hilmo, 'The Power of Images', p. 165. Also see Wendy Scase, 'Preface', in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1*, ed. Wendy Scase, Texts and Transitions 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. xix–xxiv (p. xx).

[460] See Bodleian Libraries, 'The Vernon Manuscript: Illustration', last accessed 14 August 2016, <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whats-on/online/vernon/illustration>.

[461] Stones suggests that this visual programme for the *Miracles of the Virgin* is unusual, and differs from its French counterparts, in the fact that all of the miracles are depicted in accompanying illuminations. See Alison Stones, 'The Miniatures in the Vernon Manuscript', in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1*, ed. Wendy Scase, Texts and Transitions 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 149–69 (p. 152).

[462] See Lynda Dennison, 'The Artistic Origins of the Vernon Manuscript', in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1*, ed. Wendy Scase, Texts and Transitions 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 171–205 (p. 183).

scarcity confirms the idea that romance was not the prevailing genre of the higher classes at this time (bearing in mind that the Vernon Manuscript would have been very expensive to produce, much more so than Auchinleck); we might therefore do well to ask why the romance genre seems to be relatively underrepresented within the illuminative programmes of English manuscripts in the fifteenth century, rather than draw parallels that do not exist. We should remember, again, the line in the Vernon manuscript's version of *The Prick of Conscience* (and unique to it) that asks the audience to 'rede & look'.[463] The visual programme of the Vernon Manuscript, scant as it is compared to its original scope, is of a high quality and demonstrates a great amount of wealth and consideration in its conception. We should therefore note that its production was not taken lightly, and that it is devotional texts and secular allegory that tend to be prioritised over romance in late medieval English illumination.

Auchinleck and Vernon are not the only vernacular manuscripts to contain absent images. Several Lydgate manuscripts, such as Bristol, City Reference Library, MS 8; and London, British Library, Royal 18 D VI, have also had miniatures excised. The Corpus Christi Cambridge manuscript of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, *c.* 1415–20, has perhaps the most conspicuous set of absent images in English romance illumination.[464] The manuscript famously opens with a frontispiece of Chaucer reading his text to an audience, executed with a skill of illumination that

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[463] *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience*, p. 1.

[464] See Phillipa Hardman, 'Interpreting the Incomplete Scheme of Illustration in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61', *English Manuscript Studies: 1100–1700* 6 (1997): 52–69; John H. Fisher, 'The Intended Illustrations in MS Corpus Christi 61 of Chaucer's *Troylus and Criseyde*', in *Medieval Studies in Honor of Lillian Herlands Hornstein*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Robert R. Raymo (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. 111–21; and Joyce Coleman, 'Where Chaucer Got His Pulpit: Audience and Intervisuality in the *Troilus and Criseyde* Frontispiece', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010): 103–28.

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suggests promising things for the manuscript ahead (Figure 8.9). The rest of the manuscript,

perhaps just as famously, contains text interspersed with blank spaces intended to fulfil a visual

programme that was unfortunately never undertaken.[465] The reason these were not completed is

unknown, but it provides us with a fascinating example of the potential for effective romance

illumination in England. Although the manuscript does not provide a lavish visual programme, it

demonstrates the growing prominence of a new generation of English literature, composed of

notable names such as Chaucer and Lydgate. English illuminators tended to follow a different

style in illustatrating works by these authors, and so it is interesting to see this example, albeit a

largely absent one, which appears to have followed at least some of the major components of

French romance illumination. These include the spiky ivy border design, the details in the

features of the figures and the outdoor composition of the image. A fundamental difference from

most of the image's French counterparts, however, is in the subject. The frontispiece of a

romance text might typically feature a dedication scene to honour the patron of the manuscript,

or a narrative sequence such as those we see in several *Roman de la Rose* manuscripts. This

image, however, introduces the reader immediately to the practical process of actually reading

the book, and to the voice of the author behind its composition. Medieval romance was quite

frequently performed as well as privately read,[466] and the Cambridge image emphasises the

performative aspects of reading. Jill Mann comments on the aspects of authorship and readership

that present themselves in this image: 'when Chaucer gives us a self-portrait, he represents

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[465] It is not the only example. Radulescu notes that in the manuscript that contains Lovelich's *Merlin*, Corpus Christi

MS 80, there are several blank spaces, some with instructions added to them, which imply the proposed inclusion of

a visual programme of miniatures. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts*, pp. 95–6.

[466] Cruse, 'Pictorial Polyphony', p. 371.

Figure 8.9. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Cambridge 61, fol. 1v.

Figure 8.10. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch.Seld.B.24, fol. 1r.

himself … not as a writer but as a *reader*', and notes that this occurs in several of his texts, as with the avid reader in the *House of Fame* who comes home from work 'only to bury himself in his books' and his protagonist in the *Book of the Duchess* whose relation to books 'is not that of the creative writer, but that of the casual bedtime reader'.[467] This is particularly interesting in

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[467] Jill Mann, 'The Authority of the Audience in Chaucer', in *Life in Words: Essays on Chaucer, the* Gawain-*Poet, and Malory*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 102–16 (p. 103). Also

relation to the idea of a dialogue between two readers as opposed to a simple author-reader relationship. The Cambridge image manages to emphasise, without any of the images that were supposed to follow it, the reader's engagement with the text. It is telling that the image should encourage the reader's appreciation and enjoyment of the text, rather than illustrate narrative content or a dedication to the patron. The manuscript demonstrates, instead, the use of images to call to mind the processes of reading the text, and to connect with it further. In other words, 'Chaucer's role as reader of others' works is a covert surrogate for our own role as readers of his own'.[468] As Chaucer's works involve 'various imagined representations of the reader's role',[469] his combined role as author and reader gives us a more detailed idea of how he might have wished or expected his own texts to be read. Only one other known illumination of *Troilus and Criseyde* exists, in a historiated initial on fol. 1r of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch.Seld.B.24, which was made in Scotland after *c.* 1489 for Henry, Lord Sinclair (Figure 8.10). This image, however, does not provide an author portrait or any evident comment on the performative aspects of storytelling. The Corpus Christi *Canterbury Tales* is a frustrating manuscript for its largely absent visual programme, but it does show the potential for and interest in romance illumination. The frontispiece miniature also demonstrates an interest in the author as an authority figure, as well as some consideration of the relationship between the author and his audience, and between the text and its reader.

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see Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The House of Fame', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 347–73; and 'The Book of the Duchess', pp. 329–46.

[468] Mann, 'The Authority of the Audience', p. 104.

[469] Ibid, p. 105.

Figure 8.11. *The Three Kings' Sons*. London, British Library, Harley 326, fol. 29v.

Figure 8.12. *The Three Kings' Sons*. London, British Library, Harley 326, fol. 108v.

Other English secular manuscripts have complete and extensive programmes of illumination. One that is particularly relevant to our discussion is London, British Library, Harley 326 (*c.* 1475–85), which contains *The Three Kings' Sons*. The miniatures of this manuscript, numbering twenty-two in total, are very well accomplished, although their content is perhaps not particularly interesting. Various battle scenes, greeting scenes, wedding scenes and a jousting scene look as if they have come from a pattern book or a workshop repertoire that has been well practised, and none appears to engage particularly closely with the text, despite their high quality (Figures 8.11 and 8.12). This perhaps demonstrates again the difference between a high-quality commercial workshop, in which miniatures are technically and aesthetically well-executed but demonstrate little or no engagement with the accompanying narrative, and a more personal and perhaps intuitive response that does not adhere to a commercial style. Harley 326 is a rare example of a complete illustrative programme for a romance text in English, however, and so it

also demonstrates an interest on someone's part for accompanying such a text with high-quality illuminations. It is also unique for containing the sole surviving version of this romance, which indicates that it was not a particularly popular one.

The illuminated manuscripts of Lydgate's works also present a fine array of narrative miniatures. Lydgate was a court writer, and the manuscripts of his works therefore enjoyed the luxury of lavish attention to their visual layouts. It has been suggested on numerous occasions that Lydgate himself oversaw the design of some of the manuscripts, in which case their attention to detail would certainly have been constructed with the sensibilities of the text in mind.[470] The miniatures of his *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund* in MS Harley 2278 (1434–9), for instance, are highly accomplished,[471] and borrow from the continental tradition of commercial miniatures (Figure 8.13); the same could be said for London, British Library, Royal

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[470] Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 228.

[471] For more on this manuscript, see A. S. G. Edwards, *The Life of St Edmund King and Martyr: John Lydgate's Illustrated Verse Life Presented to Henry VI: A Facsimile of British Library MS Harley 2278* (London: British Library, 2004); Sarah Salih, 'Lydgate's Landscape History', in *Locating the Middle Ages: The Spaces and Places of Medieval Culture*, ed. Julian Weiss and Sarah Salih, King's College London Medieval Studies 23 (London: King's College London Centre of Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2012), pp. 83–92; and Sonja Drimmer, 'Picturing the King or Picturing the Saint: Two Miniature Programmes for John Lydgate's *Lives of SS Edmund and Fremund*', in *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350-1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, ed. Emma Cayley and Susan Powell (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 48–67.

Figure 8.13. John Lydgate, *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund*. London, British Library, Harley 2278, fol. 98v.

Figure 8.14. John Lydgate, *The Siege of Thebes*. London, British Library, Royal 18 D II, fol. 148r.

18 D II (*c.* 1457–60), which contains miniatures of both *Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes* (Figure 8.14).[472] Another of Lydgate's manuscripts, however, presents an alternative to the usual bordered and conformist miniatures of French and Flemish commercial production. Harley 1766 (*c.* 1450–60) opens Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* with a dedication scene to Humphrey of Gloucester, in which the background is filled, if not fully framed, and occupies a space

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[472] There are eight known illustrated manuscripts of *Troy Book*. See Robert R. Edwards' introduction in *Troy Book: Selections*, ed. Robert R. Edwards, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), pp. 3–19 (p. 6).

designated for it above the main body of text.[473] The rest of the manuscript's images, however,

occupy a non-bordered and open space in the margins to the side of the text, where plenty of

room has been left for them. In the first of these we see the labelled image of the Fall of Man,

following the typical format of the tree flanked by Adam and Eve on either side, with the snake

depicted at the centre (Figure 8.15). The scene is instantly recognisable from Christian

iconography, but there are a couple of interesting additions. One of these is that the snake

appears to be depicted as an anthropomorphic male; the serpent of Genesis, when

anthropomorphised in medieval images of this format, is almost always depicted as a woman,

seemingly to press home the fault of the woman in the downfall of man and his ejection from

paradise. If the figure is indeed depicted as a man here (as seems to be implied by the similarity

between his hairstyle and Adam's), this implies that the illuminator, or possibly Lydgate himself,

has thought carefully about the scene from Genesis 3:3, and attempted to portray it accurately.

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[473] Coleman refers to the dedication scene as the 'visual metatext' of the manuscript, in Joyce Coleman, 'The First

Presentation Miniature in an English-Language Manuscript', in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts,*

Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages, ed. Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse and Kathryn A. Smith,

Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 403–37 (p. 403). For more on

dedication scenes and author portraits, see Dhira B. Mahoney, 'Courtly Presentation and Authorial Self-Fashioning:

Frontispiece Miniatures in Late Medieval French and English Manuscripts', *Mediaevalia* 21 (1996): 97–160; Sonja

Drimmer, 'Visualizing Intertextuality: Conflating Forms of Creativity in Late Medieval "Author Portraits"', in

Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Volume Two, Cross-Disciplinary

Perspectives on Medieval Culture, ed. Giuliano Di Bacco and Yolanda Plumley, Exeter Studies in Medieval Europe

(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 82–101; and Kathleen L. Scott, 'Representations of Scribal

Activity in English Manuscripts *c.*1400–*c.*1490: A Mirror of the Craft?', in *Pen in Hand: Medieval Scribal*

Portraits, Colophons and Tools, ed. Michael Gullick (Walkern: Red Gull Press, 2006), pp. 115–49.

The scene, though typical in many ways, is potentially controversial for its intellectual reading of

the subject matter. The second point is the format of the image in relation to the text; some sense

of landscape is provided by the turf Adam and Eve stand upon, and by the tree itself, but

otherwise the characters float in the open space of the margins, unfettered by borders or aligned

rows of rubric and text. This creates an unusual effect of reading the text directly alongside the

image, which inhabits the marginal space to the right of a large section of the text. As the reader

progresses through the text, an interaction with the image is unavoidable; the lack of a border or

Figure 8.15. John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*. London, British Library, Harley 1766, fol. 13r.

Figure 8.16. John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*. London, British Library, Harley 1766, fol. 28r.

the usual trappings associated with French commercial manuscript production makes the format appear less professional or refined, but creates an alternative manner in which to interact with the text.[474] The same technique occurs throughout the rest of the manuscript; on fol. 13r, for instance, three separate episodes are depicted in the same manner as the Fall of Man, floating in the margins as individual bubbles of narrative information (Figure 8.16). In these we are presented with labelled images of Cadmus praying to Apollo, who is represented as a pagan idol; the brown bull of Cadmus; and the city of Thebes, which is represented as a gateway. What is perhaps most important here is the fact that the images are included seemingly not to present full narrative scenes, or to reproduce the narrative contents of the text, but rather to depict concepts, characters and items in the text that the reader might otherwise find hard to picture. The images, though in many ways quite simple, encourage the reader to call to mind the concepts necessary for close reading and an understanding of the accompanying text.

We see a similar effect in Manchester, Rylands English 1 (made after 1420), a copy of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*.[475] Like Harley 1766, this manuscript incorporates an initial dedication scene followed by narrative scenes placed in the margins (Figure 8.17). The main difference here is that the images are narrative in content. They depict full scenes that incorporate a busy array of figures and locations, and potentially involve the reader in a fuller

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[474] For some of the potential political undertones of the images, see Sarah Pittaway, '"In this signe thou shalt ouercome hem alle": Visual Rhetoric and Yorkist Propaganda in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (Harl. MS. 1766)', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2001): 1–21.

[475] Kathryn Warner, 'The Provenance and Early Ownership of John Rylands MS English 1', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 81.1 (1999): 127–40.

sensory experience as they read the text. Scott has stated that many of the marginal miniatures encapsulate 'a small core subject augmented by imposing architecture and landscape',[476] and they therefore provide a contained narrative episode, and sometimes a summary of a series of narrative events, within a slightly chaotic marginal arrangement which helps to add a sense of narrative movement to the scenes. The manuscript, like Harley 1766, effectively emulates the French and Flemish traditions of miniature illumination, with an admirable attention to detail in figures and settings, but with a less formal approach to integrating the images.[477] In short, the worth of many English secular illuminations is not necessarily in their technical ability, but rather their active intellectual engagement with the reader, sometimes simply through the provision of a balance of informational and sensory imagery in order to create a clear picture of the narrative and its key details and concepts within the reader's mind.

Another manuscript that uses the margins to interesting effect is London, British Library, Harley 3869 (made after 1408), which contains a copy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. The manuscript only contains two images, and the second uses a standard border frame. The first, however, does not. The image on fol. 5r depicts the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, in which he sees an image made of mixed metals and clay.[478] There is nothing unusual about the primary component of the image, Nebuchadnezzar sleeping, which is formatted in an entirely standard

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[476] Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 261.

[477] We also see interesting forms of narrative illumination in the manuscript illuminations of continental countries such as Italy and Germany, where marginal images and narrative sequencing also play prominent roles. For Italian examples, see London, British Library, Egerton 943; Harley 3460; Harley 2531; Royal 20 D I; and Yates Thompson 38. For German examples, see London, British Library, Burney 199; Egerton 856; and Egerton 1900.

[478] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis: Volume 1*, ed. Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 2nd edn (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 595–624.

way; this portion of the scene is bordered by the king's bedframe, although using slightly

haphazard angles, and placed in a space that is clearly designated for the image, directly above

the Latin rubric and English text. The addition of the statue from Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the

scene, however, is quite unusual. The figure dominates the right-hand margin of the page, and

overlaps the portion of the scene that depicts Nebuchadnezzar sleeping. It is not clear whether

the statue was intended to be included in the original scene or not. The fact that Nebachudnezzar

and the statue belong to what Pearsall describes as the 'standard' repertoire of the illuminated

Figure 8.17. John Lydgate, *The Siege of Troy*, Manchester, Rylands English 1, fol. 21r.

Figure 18.18. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, London, British Library, Harley 3869, fol. 5r.

Confessio Amantis manuscripts would seem to imply that it was.[479] The appearance of the statue, and particularly its shape and colouring in black and gold, is repeated across several manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*; the components of the scene, and especially the statue, bear a striking resemblance to those in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 3, fol. 2r, and it is likely that the Harley limner worked from either this or a common exemplar. However, the format of the Harley image, which stretches out into the margins, is irregular. Inadvertent or otherwise, the resulting effect is quite striking. The reader is presented with a scene that is depicted within the text, that of Nebuchadnezzar sleeping; an image that, within the narrative, is only present within Nebuchadnezzar's mind, that of the statue; and the additional knowledge from the text that this statue signifies the state of the waking world in which Nebuchadnezzar and, by anachronistic extension, Gower and the reader, live.[480] The result is a layered effect of imagination and inference, which challenges the reader's conception of what is visualised, and by whom. A reader who was unfamiliar with the text could guess that the statue belongs in a dream, since it overlaps with the image of the king sleeping and is set in an exterior location, but a more experienced reader could also use the image in its totality to picture and understand the concepts being set forth within the text. The placement of the statue within the margins adds a sense of liminality to the dream-image that is entirely suitable to its status within the narrative, as we have discussed earlier. This example combines the traditional, designated spaces of narrative

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[479] Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 73–97 (p. 86). Also see Jeremy Griffiths, 'Confessio Amantis: The Poem and Its Pictures', in *Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 163–78.

[480] Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 627–62.

miniatures with their more spontaneous and less regulated counterparts in the margins, and demonstrates the complexity of narrative thought that is enabled by using space in this way.

The Ellesmere manuscript (made before 1405) is a key example of the narrative potential for images that take their readership into consideration. The manuscript is the most famous illuminated example of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the images of which depict the narrators of each tale rather than the contents of the tales themselves (Figure 8.19).[481] It is possible that this tradition stems in part from the allegorical tradition of medieval romance in which speakers were often identified at the beginning of their sections with clear pictorial attributes in addition to the rubrics. The success of the Ellesmere figures is in providing the pilgrims with identifiable attributes, and placing them at the beginning of each tale to create a practical chapter heading, which makes each tale both easily identifiable and easy to visualise.[482] Because the images are not placed within designated spaces, as far as we can tell, it is unclear whether they were part of the original plan for the manuscript or later additions. However, the placement of the figures within the margins gives them a freedom of movement that makes the motion of the narrative frame easier to visualise, allowing the reader to relax their own mental boundaries between the text and image, and to visualise the narrator of each tale better as a continuous aspect of the text. A framed image can be easily located and referred back to as the reader progresses through a

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[481] For more on the Ellesmere illuminations, see Daniel Holt Woodward and Martin Stevens, *The Canterbury Tales: The New Ellesmere Chaucer Monochromatic Facsimile (of Huntington Library MS EL 26 C 9)* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1997); V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Tales* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); and William K. Finley and Joseph Rosemblum, ed., *Chaucer Illustrated: Five Hundred Years of The Canterbury Tales in Pictures* (London: British Library, 2003).

[482] See Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 141.

text, but an open or marginal image such as in Ellesmere is able to integrate more closely with the text as it is being read. Marginal images sit in the background as the text is being read, much as the narrators of the *Canterbury Tales* are present in the background of their tales until they are sharply recalled by an interruption from one of the other pilgrims. Although these images might be later additions to the manuscript, and were made by three different artists, they demonstrate an engagement with the text that is simpler than many of their French counterparts, yet just as

Figure 8.19. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*. San Marino, Huntington Library, EL 26 C 9 (Ellesmere), fol. 10r.
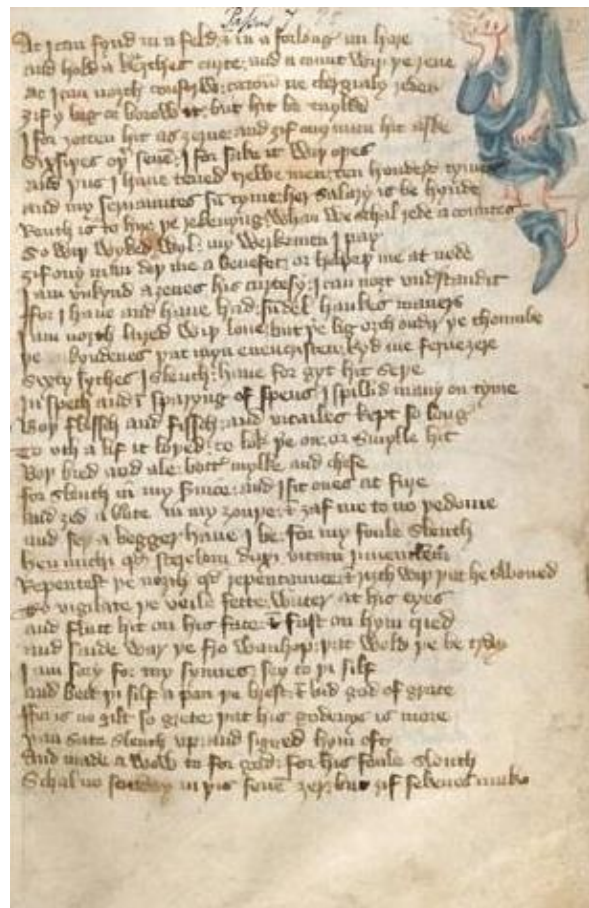
Figure 8.20. Langland, *Piers Plowman*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 104, fol. 31r.

effective for their engagement with the reader, and their blending of the narrative roles of text and image as one. We could also usefully consider Cambridge, University Library Gg. 4. 27 (*c.* 1420–30), which contains a similar visual programme to Ellesmere, but with the addition of paired portraits of the vices and virtues. The manuscript is another example of frustrating absences, as many images have been removed from it; the missing pieces include sixteen or seventeen pilgrim portraits, a frontispiece, four pairs of vices and virtues, a possible miniature at the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and another at the head of *The Legend of Good Women*. Our ability to examine the full visual programme is therefore limited, but from what we can tell it uses a concept of marginal portraits, as opposed to illustrated scenes, similar to that which we find in Ellesmere.

The images in the Douce 104 copy of Langland's *Piers Plowman* follow a similar pattern to the Ellesmere manuscript in presenting character portraits rather than narrative scenes, and placing them in the margins.[483] The Douce images at times overlap with the edges of the text, creating a transitional space between the text blocks and the blank space of the margins. On the folio that depicts Sloth, for example, the allegorical figure is wrapped around the text (Figure 8.20). The figure is recognisable from his demeanour and body language rather than from physical attributes; and, again, the placement of the image makes the accompanying portion of

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[483] Kerby-Fulton has commented on the fact that scribes also became actively engaged in the transmission of the texts they transcribed, and that the manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* in particular seemed to attract a lot of individual scribal contributions. She states that: '*Piers Plowman* was wildly popular in its day. With this popularity came a great deal of reader engagement and scribal "participation" (the polite word for spontaneous textual interference) in the text. This was so rampant that today we confront not only the different authorial versions of *Piers Plowman* (called the A, B, and C texts by scholars) but also its widespread "social authorship"'. See Kerby-Fulton, 'Major Middle English Poets', p. 65.

text easy to identify. The marginal images do not dominate the page in the same way that many of the framed margins of French commercial illumination do; they are practical identifiers and reading aids, for which the text is a necessary component that must be read alongside them.[484] Such images encourage an intellectual engagement that enhances the reader's experience of the text, rather than being self-sufficient like many of the detailed narrative images in commercial manuscripts. Working in a different environment, less favourable to illustrating vernacular romance, a few English illuminators were therefore able to create images that nevertheless interacted in distinct and engaging ways with the English literature of the fifteenth century.

The Taymouth Hours (British Library, Yates Thompson 13) presents a particularly interesting case of secular marginalia within a devotional manuscript, as the *bas-de-page* images include, amongst various depictions of religious subject matter and secular life, illustrations of absent romance narratives, namely, *Beves of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*. Folios 8r to 17r depict scenes from these romances, with inscriptions to identify the figures (Figure 8.21). The accompanying text consists of Anglo-Norman verse prayers that follow the calendar pages.

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[484] See Judith A. Jefferson, 'Scribal Responses to Latin in the Manuscripts of the B-Version of *Piers Plowman*', in *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066–1520): Sources and Analysis*, ed. Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, with the assistance of Amanda Hopkins, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 15 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 195–210; Tim W. Macham, 'Language Contact in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum* 69 (1994): 359–85; Karrie Fuller, 'Langland in the Early Modern Household: *Piers Plowman* in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 145, and Its Scribe-Annotator Dialogues', in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 324–41; and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise L. Despres, *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Figure 8.21. London, British Library, Yates Thompson 13 (Taymouth Hours), fol. 11r.

Figure 8.22. Baltimore, Walters W.102, fol. 81r.

Smith argues, however, that the *bas-de-page* images are not irrelevant to the central text they accompany, since secular enjoyments can hone in on the spiritual truths of devotional texts.[485] Although the manuscript is earlier than many of the others discussed here, with an agreed production date of *c.* 1325–35,[486] it demonstrates some interest in romance illuminations, even

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[485] Kathryn A. Smith, *The Taymouth Hours: Stories and the Construction of the Self in Late Medieval England* (London: British Library, 2012), p. 1. Also see p. 74.

[486] Ibid, p. 14.

though these are not accompanied by their textual counterparts. We might compare it to Walters W.102, a thirteenth-century Book of Hours made in England which features *bas-de-page* images that depict various figures from the funeral of Reynard the Fox (Figure 8.22). Such images demonstrate that manuscript illumination could be conceptual as well as directly illustrative, and that placing secular images next to spiritual texts helped to incorporate them into devotional readership, and in doing so to enliven devotional reading.

Pictorial markings on later medieval manuscripts were not uncommon, and were often connected directly to pieces of accompanying text. For example, sometimes catchwords would be highlighted by having images drawn around them. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Misc. 110, made *c*. 1400 in Norwich, contains numerous examples of this effect, and throughout the manuscript catchwords can be found within such items as a dog (fol. 17v), an eagle (fol. 29v), a human head (fol. 51v, Figure 8.23), a lion (fol. 86v) a hare (fol. 119v) and a fish (129v), among many others.[487] Drawn pictorial additions often served a didactic function, and one of the most popular symbols for highlighting a piece of text was the manicule, a pointing finger (Figure 8.24).[488] The commonality of this particular mark perhaps ensured its endurance through the centuries; anyone wishing to mark a passage in a text would want the reader to understand the symbol being used, and what better choice than one that is already easy to recognise? The choice of a hand itself is an interesting one; it functions no differently than a modern asterisk might when added to marginal space for emphasis, with the added bonus of the pointing index finger to show exactly which area of text is intended. However, it also adds a human element; it is

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[487] A similar effect can be found in London, British Library, Arundel 367.

[488] William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 29.

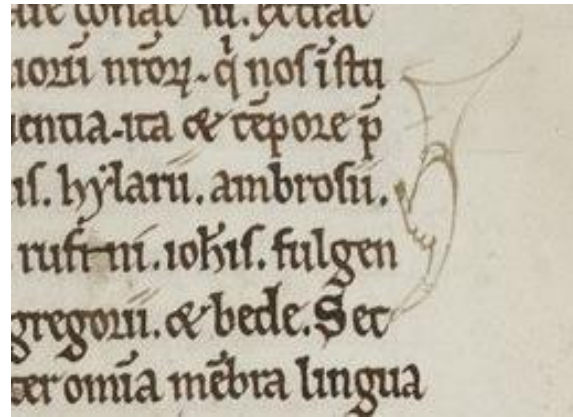Figure 8.23. Detail. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Misc. 110, fol. 51v.

Figure 8.24. Detail. Claudius Taurinensis, *Commentary on Matthew*. London, British Library, Royal 2 C X, fol. 1r.

essentially a substitute for the hand of the scribe who draws it, and it draws a closer connection between that person and the reader who follows the instruction provided by the pointing finger.

The tradition of intellectual engagement between a text and its pictorial marginalia in English manuscripts has a strong basis in the habit of visual scribal corrections. This has very early origins in examples of scribes making both textual and visual addenda to their work, and continues into the manuscripts of the fifteenth century. In a twelfth-century example in Peter Lombard's *Magna glossatura* on the Psalms, Lombard has misquoted Augustine on fol. 33v, and so his editor, Herbert of Bosham, has incorporated a visual addition, the figure of Augustine saying 'non ego', as in 'not I' or 'I did not say this' (Figure 8.25).[489] The image is not the only one of its kind in the manuscript. Augustine appears again to say 'non ego' on fol. 135v, and

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[489] See Camille, *Image on the Edge*, pp. 21–2.

Figure 8.25. Detail. Peter Lombard, *Magna glossatura* on the Psalms. Cambridge, Trinity College B.5.4, fol. 33v.

Figure 8.26. Galen, Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*. Durham, Cathedral Library, C.I.17 B, fol. 184r.

elsewhere throughout the manuscript, in addition to figures such as Cassiodorus, with a variety of corrections including 'ego aliter' (I disagree), which appears on fols 43r, 43v, 47v, 63v, 82r, 90v and 146v; 'ego aliter et ad aliud' (I disagree with this and the other) on fols 35r and 123r; 'hic michi caveat' (this makes me wary) on fols 36r and 102v; and 'ego non approbo' (I do not approve) on fol. 10v.[490] Additional marginal figures without speech scrolls appear on fols 11v, 71r and 84v; and a number of figures have been excised from the manuscript (on fols 10, 13, 20, 42 and 67). Even at this early stage, then, there is an intellectual use of visual imagery in English texts to encourage intellectual engagement. Where we find instruction in marginal additions, we often find humour as well. For example, in one mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of Averroes'

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[490] All translations from this manuscript are my own. Similar pictorial commentaries can be found in later examples from the fifteenth century, such as London, British Library, Harley 612; and Lansdowne 451.

commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* translated by Michael the Scot (Durham Cathedral Library, C.I.17 B), at II.88 (B, fol. 184r), the scribe has forgotten to include the name Galen from a phrase, and so the scribe has drawn the head and arm of Galen with a total of three inscriptions: one in a scroll, one in a phial, and the third in his nose (Figure 8.26).[491] To repeat the name three times, and in such an unlikely location as Galen's nose, seems to demonstrate a certain sense of humour on the part of the scribe. The mistake therefore becomes a humorous and aesthetic addition to the folio. In instances of pictorial correction, the scribe or illuminator responsible for the drawing establishes a conversation with the reader about the text by pointing out its flaws through visual means. Such examples therefore display particular engagement between scribe, text and reader in creating an intellectual conversation about the text on the page itself.

Another example of a visual correction appears in the Arundel 38 copy of Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, in which the scribe has made the basic mistake of omitting a passage of text, which has then been included to the side of the main body of text. As a result, a later scribe or illuminator has drawn a rope around the misplaced piece of text, and a little figure pulling the passage over to its correct place (Figure 8.27). The image, along with its misplaced stanza, was also copied into London, British Library, Harley 4866, fol. 62r.[492] The image itself is not technically brilliant in the way that some commercial examples are (though we see a similar visual technique to the Ellesmere manuscript in the inclusion of a tuft of grass to give a sense of grounding), but it is intellectually quite brilliant in the way that humour and practicality combine in order to give the reader a clear idea of what is happening on the page. In doing so the image

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[491] Richard Gameson, *Manuscript Treasures of Durham Cathedral* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2010), pp. 128 and 131.

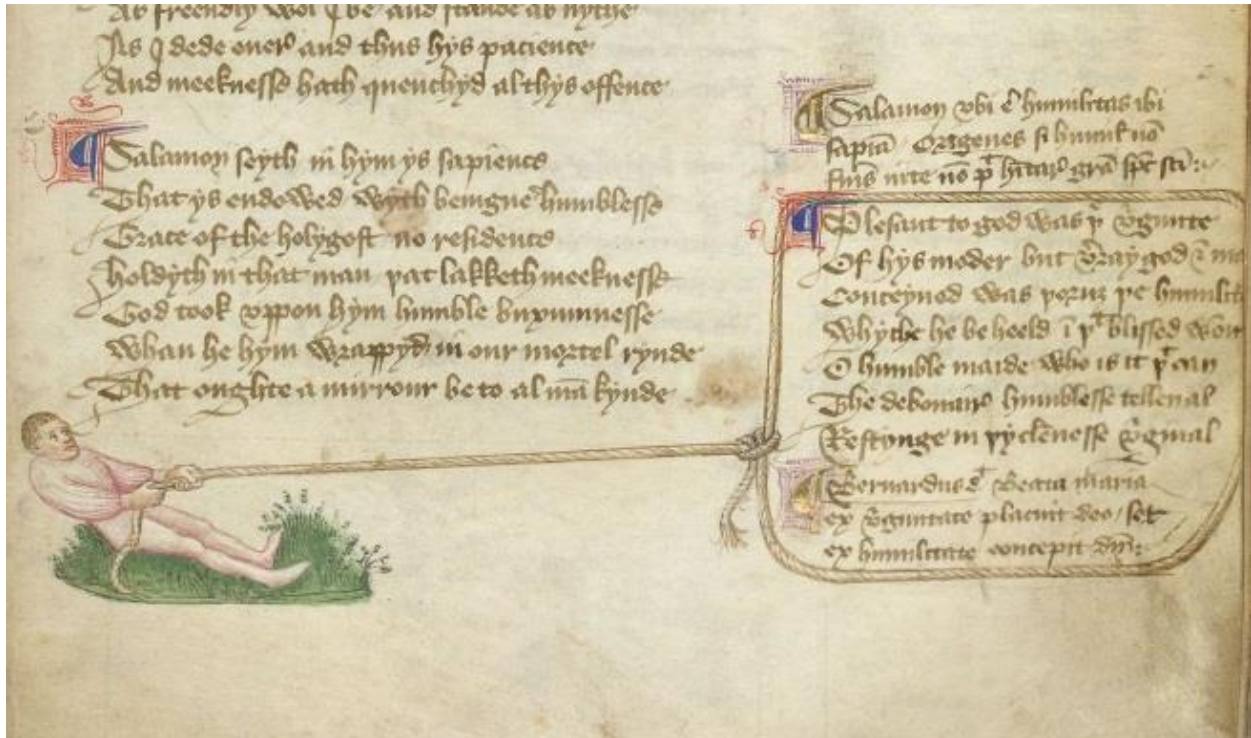[492] See Kerby-Fulton, 'Major Middle English Poets', pp. 92–4.

Figure 8.27. Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*. London, British Library, Arundel 38, fol. 65r.

also establishes a correspondence between the scribe/limner and the reader, whose engagement with the text is enhanced by the visual addition. The addition of the image calls to mind the artificiality of both image and text and breaks the reader out of their concentration; and yet the image provides a further visual stimulus that at once corrects the existing text and improves the *mise en page* by providing an additional element of visual and intellectual interest.[493]

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[493] There are also numerous instances in which blocks of text themselves become a striking visual effect in the *mise en page* of manuscript folios. For some examples, see Hamburger, *Script As Image*. Also see London, British Library, Oriental 2733; Royal 10 E IV; and Sloane 1044.

A basic requirement of print production was that the images should be as uniform and as easy to reproduce as possible; as a result, printed books returned to the framed miniatures typical in earlier European examples, and began to follow similar methods of commercialisation. It should perhaps not come as much of a surprise that consumerism should lessen creativity, although the standardisation of print undoubtedly came with great advantages, and printers did tend to focus on vernacular works. The images in early English printed books tend to function in much the same way as earlier French commercial manuscripts in their intent and effect, and within this medium the individuality and spontaneity of the English marginal image fell into decline. Many of the more popular printed texts did not include images at all; Caxton's first edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur* is devoid of an illuminated programme, though his second edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is not, and it follows the Ellesmere model of displaying the pilgrims rather than narrative scenes. In his Preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Caxton states the following:

> After that I had accomplysshed and fynysshed dyuers hystoryes, as wel of contemplatyon as
> of other hystoryal and worldly actes of great conquerours & prynces, and also certeyn bookes
> of eusaumples and doctryne, many noble and dyuers gentylmen of thys wyame of Englond
> camen and demaunded me, many and oftymes, wherfore that I haue not do made & enprynte
> the noble hystorye of the Saynt Greal, and of the moost renomed Chrysten kynge, fyrst and
> chyef of the thre best Crysten and worthy, King Arthur, whyche ought moost to be
> remembred emonge us Englysshe men tofore al other Crysten kynges …. And for to passe the
> tyme thys boook shal be pleasaunte to rede in; but for to gyue fayth and byleue that al is trewe
> that is contayned herin, ye be at your lyberte. But all is wryton for our doctryne, and for to
> beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but to xcersyse and folowe vertu, by whyche we
> may come and atteyne to good fame and renowne in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and

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transytorye lyf, to come unto euerlastyng blysse in heuen, the whyche he graunte us that

reygneth in heuen, the blessyd Trynyte.[494]

Caxton here establishes his priority in wanting to publish a serious piece of literature. He

mentions first a propensity for contemplative texts and 'certeyn bookes of eusamples and

doctryne', but also highlights the idea that although the book might be 'pleasaunte to rede', it is

ultimately 'wryton for our doctryne'. This rather serious tone demonstrates that Caxton wishes

his publication to be considered intellectual or even devotional more than entertaining. We

perhaps see here a kernel of the now-familiar, but controversial, idea that intellectual literary

texts do not contain illustrations. The scarcity or even absence of images in some manuscripts

therefore indicates the presence of a new, intellectual attitude to illumination that corresponds to

the new, national form of English literature that was emerging in the fifteenth century.

Conclusions

English romance manuscript illumination is perhaps not as detailed or as technically well

executed as many of its French commercial counterparts, but it does display its own ingenuities,

particularly in the relegation of narrative images to the margins, and in the replacement of

narrative illustration with reading aides such as the character portraits in the Ellesmere Chaucer

and the Douce 104 Langland. English book production was not a struggling industry, and we

know of a number of scribes and limners in London and other English centres of manuscript

production whose work we can see in a broad range of manuscripts. In a way the problem here is

one of genre. We know from Caxton's prints and reprints of Malory's *Morte Darthur* that the

romance genre was not necessarily past its prime in fifteenth-century England. However, it is

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[494] Caxton, *Preface to Malory's* Morte Darthur.

possible that English book producers were indirectly forging a new identity, one more serious, perhaps, in its approach to grander literary themes, and also spirituality. The lack of interest in illuminating romance texts on the part of wealthier patrons, and the inability of less wealthy ones to afford to do so, perhaps represents a shift in literary tastes in England, combined with a pride in new authors, such as Chaucer and Lydgate, who made use of the romance genre without losing their own personal, authorial voice in doing so. As much as the lack of romance illumination in England might have resulted mainly from chance circumstances, the freedom from what had become conventional modes of illumination allowed for more of a sense of play between text and image, and a conversation, as a result, between author, limner, and reader. Romance illumination in England was often relegated to the margins, but as a result the producers of these manuscripts opened up multiple possibilities for text-image engagement that did not condense or nullify texts for the reader, but instead nudged them closer towards developing their own experience, and understanding, of the texts at hand.

9. PERSPECTIVE AND INTERPRETATION IN THE ILLUMINATED *MÉLUSINE* MANUSCRIPTS

Introduction

Jean d'Arras' prose *Roman de Mélusine* (*c.* 1393), Coudrette's verse edition of the text (*c.* 1401), and their translations into German (1456) and English (*c.* 1500) form the textual components of a number of illuminated manuscripts. There are ten surviving manuscripts of Jean d'Arras' text, three of which are illuminated (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353; BnF fr. 1485; and London, British Library Harley 4418). Coudrette's verse edition of the text exists in twenty surviving manuscripts, four of which are illuminated (Paris, BnF fr. 12575; BnF fr. 24383; Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales 5030 C; and Cambridge University Library Ll.2.5).[495] The illustrative programmes of these manuscripts have many scenes in common, but the variety of interpretation and the incorporation of scenes that are independent to each manuscript demonstrate a certain autonomy or individuality on the part of the limners, and provide a different narrative emphasis for each manuscript. Several manuscripts of the Mélusine romance, along with their design, rubrics and iconography, are discussed here in detail with the aim of placing their visual formats and iconographical programmes within the context of the texts they accompany. The variety of

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[495] See Harf-Lancner, 'La serpente et le sanglier', 68–70. The Aberystwyth and Cambridge manuscripts contain one image each: the former has one miniature of Mélusine flying over Lusignan in half-serpent form on the first folio; the latter has a historiated initial, also on the first folio, with Mélusine in her bath. For more details on these two manuscripts, see Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 69–70. Also see Harf-Lancner, 'L'illustration du Roman de Melusine de Jean d'Arras dans les editions du XVe et du XVIe siecle', in *Le livre et l'image en France au XVIe siècle*, ed. Nicole Cazauran (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole normale superieure, 1989), pp. 29–56.

responses within these images demonstrates not only artistic individuality from the perspectives of the limners, who provide their own form of reader response, but also the ways in which the manuscripts collectively contribute to the wider narrative or legend of Mélusine.

Très riches heures

The first known image of Mélusine does not occur in a manuscript containing the romance text, but in a Book of Hours. The March calendar page of the *Très riches heures* of Jean, the Duke of Berry (d. 1416) depicts a pastoral scene with the château de Lusignan in the background (Figure 9.1).[496] The scene is distinguished from the other pastoral scenes in the calendar by the presence of a small dragon that hovers in mid-air above the castle, interrupting the realistic setting of the Duke of Berry's court and instead evoking the supernatural irregularities of secular romance, interweaving fiction and reality (Figure 9.2). The depiction of the dragon here is suggestive rather than descriptive; it alludes to the legend of Mélusine instead of illustrating an accompanying passage of text, so that the unseen aspects of the story are left to the reader's imagination. The duke was an avid collector of books, and we see evidence of this throughout the manuscript; he owned several books on the Trojan War, for example, and the January

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[496] For more on this manuscript see Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry*; Raymond Jean Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988); Jean Longnon and Raymond Jean Cazelles, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, Musée Condé, Chantilly* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969); Margaret M. Manion, 'Psalter Illustration in the Très Riches Heures of Jean de Berry', *Gesta* 34 (1995): 147–61; Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à Peintures en France*; Frédéric Elsig. *Painting in France in the 15th Century* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2004); Grete Ring, *A Century of French Painting 1400–1500* (London: Phaidon Press, 1949); and Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Figure 9.1. Chantilly, Musée Condé 65 (*Très riches heures*), fol. 3v.

Figure 9.2. Detail. Chantilly, Musée Condé 65 (*Très riches heures*), fol. 3v.

calendar page features a tapestry on this subject, which may have been based on a real one

owned by the duke. The January page is full of private jokes between the artists and their patron,

and it is probable that the dragon on the March page was included for the duke's enjoyment. The

dragon, like the Trojan War tapestry, is placed at the top end of the rectangular frame, between

the astrological tympanum and the pastoral scene below it, indicating a transitional space on the

page which belongs to the fantastic or fictional. The March calendar page offers an interesting

introduction to the iconography of the Mélusine legend, having been made prior to the known

illuminated *Mélusine* manuscripts. This is not only a very early (pre-1416) pictorial response to

the narrative, but it also provides a unique perspective on the story that lies outside the tradition of narrative illustration, belonging instead to the nebulous category of literary allusion.

<div align="center">*Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353*</div>

This manuscript, which is believed to have been made between 1420 and 1430, possibly in Paris,[497] is the earliest known to contain a cycle of images for Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine*. As well as being the earliest, the manuscript contains the second-most miniatures of any French edition that was not printed: thirty-six in total. These separate the romance into thirty-five chapters, and are also accompanied by rubrics and decorated initials.[498] Though the images are plentiful they are not as luxurious or colourful as some later examples; the miniatures, which occupy the width of one of two columns, are bordered by a simple line, but open at the top (with the exception of those which use architectural details to enclose the scene, such as on fols 31v, 63r 90v, 102r, 130r, 144r, 148r and 161v), so that the image in some cases transgresses the imagined line and extends upwards beyond it. The iconographical programme of the manuscript is interesting, though, both in its own right and as the predecessor of the later d'Arras illuminations.

The number of scenes depicted in this manuscript means that some do not appear in any other known version, such as the series of miniatures depicting Raymondin living out the remainder of his life as a hermit in Montserrat (fols 146v, 149v and 156v). As a result we might be less inclined to identify any particular narrative agenda in this case, since the creators of the manuscript would have had to be less selective than those with fewer miniatures. Choices

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[497] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 68.

[498] An exception to this rule is the first miniature, the presentation scene on fol. 1r, which has an ornate decorated initial beneath it but not a rubric.

relating to image content may not have fallen to the limner; the latter would for the most part have followed the rubrics that accompanied the spaces left for them to fill, unless they were also involved in the planning of the manuscript. In some cases, though, such parameters make the interpretive choices of the artist even more interesting, especially when they are broken. On fol. 45v, for instance, the rubric states: 'Comment les deux enfans se partent du port de La Rochelle et arriverent au Lymaçon en Chippre' (how the two children left the port of La Rochelle and arrived at Limassol in Cyprus),[499] but the artist has chosen to depict a naval battle scene which is standard in style, and may well have come from a pattern book (Figure 9.3). Whether this was a deliberate choice on the part of the artist or an error we cannot say for sure, as there is fighting that takes place within the following chapter which is not mentioned in the rubric. Pattern books would not have been helpful for every miniature, though, particularly for instances in which the artist had to depict supernatural material. For instance, the miniature for the episode in which the hart's pelt is stretched for two miles on fol. 16r contains details extraneous to the rubric. The rubric states: 'Comment les mesureurs mesurent en esquarrie en long et en lé ce que le cuir de cerf comprent' (how the measurers estimated the length and breadth of the area covered by the hart's pelt), but the scene, which is quite damaged, also includes details such as the rock around which the pelt is lain and the pegs attached to the pelt being driven into the ground (Figure 9.4). This might indicate some familiarity with the text on the part of the limner, but it is perhaps more likely that the rubric seemed sufficiently opaque for the limner to feel that they needed more information, and to read part of the surrounding text in order better to understand what the rubric meant. Otherwise the artist seems to have stayed quite close to the rubrics throughout; Jean-Jacques Vincensini comments on the fact that the distinctive physical marks of the sons are

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[499] All translations of the rubrics are my own, unless otherwise stated.

missing from the miniature on fol. 86v,[500] but this is not a detail that is included in the rubric, or

for any of the other rubrics accompanying the miniatures, and so it is quite possible that the

limner was either unaware of this detail or did not think it worth including. Some leeway should

also be given since column miniatures are limited in size, a factor that might have also

contributed to the tendency here to depict a single, instantaneous moment rather than

incorporating multiple episodes into a single scene.

Figure 9.3. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 45v.

Figure 9.4. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 16r.

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[500] See d'Arras, *Mélusine*, p. 480.

The limner seems to have been somewhat reticent to depict scenes of the supernatural, perhaps for the understandable reason that they are difficult, and that these scenes lack a pre-existing iconographical programme. In the scene on fol. 139v in which Mélusine is supposed to leap from the window and turn into a serpent, she does neither; instead, we see her in the form of a woman, leaning out of a window without much sign of going any further (Figure 9.5). The rubric reads: 'Comment Melusigne se party de la fenestre et se mua en guise de serpente' (how Mélusine left by the window and transformed herself into the guise of a serpent). The temporal implication of the rubric, that she leaps and *then* transforms, is interesting, but this is not reflected in the miniature. It is quite possible that the limner deemed the scene simply too complex to do justice to it; particularly as there are two further miniatures in which Mélusine does appear as a dragon, fully formed (fols 140v and 155v), the limner might have deemed it unnecessary to attempt the transformation scene here. It is also important to remember that we are considering these images retrospectively, and it is possible that the choice not to depict Mélusine as a serpent in this scene is only surprising to us because there are so many other, later examples that do. The artist does not shy away from supernatural material elsewhere in the manuscript. The pivotal scene on fol. 130r in which Raymondin spies upon Mélusine in the bath, a staple of later manuscript illuminations, is a familiar image to a modern reader who is familiar with the iconography: Mélusine bathing in half-human, half-serpentine form (Figure 9.6). The reader would be forgiven for not spotting Raymondin straight away; the image seems to have faded a little, but the sight of Raymondin's head bobbing to the left, peering through a hole in the wall that looks more like a window than a hole bored through the door, is a little strange. It is possible that he is supposed to be in shadow in order to highlight the secrecy of his actions, but it does make him easy to miss, which could be read either as successful nuancing or poor

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Figure 9.5. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 139v.

Figure 9.6. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 130r.

execution. The artist again takes liberties with the rubric: 'Comment Remond vit Melusigne baignier par l'enhortement de son frere, le conte de Forests, et lui failly du couvenant qu'il lui avoit promis' (how Raymondin saw Mélusine bathing through the exhortation of his brother, the Earl of Forests, and so failed the covenant that he had promised her). The rubric does not mention the means of spying and so the artist, with a mind to spatial constraints, may well have invented the makeshift solution of an interior window instead of a hole in the door. But whether this indicates the artist's knowledge of the text or an inventive solution to the rubric is hard to

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say. Mathilde Grodet has also noticed that the rubric does not make any attempt to describe Mélusine at this point, and that the description of her as half-woman, half-serpent is given afterwards.[501] The form of Mélusine as it appears in the miniature is so specific to the text here, and so different from her representation elsewhere in the manuscript as either fully woman or fully dragon, that it seems certain that the limner must have read the description of Mélusine below the rubric before attempting the scene.

One oddity that is unique to this visual programme is the inclusion of a small dragon which accompanies Mélusine in three miniatures: fols 4v, 18r and 22v (Figures 9.7–9.9). These scenes depict Presine and her children, the marriage of Mélusine and Raymondin, and the building of Lusignan respectively. Harf-Lancner has suggested that the main purpose of the dragon is to introduce the marvellous through the image,[502] but Nichols hones in instead on the identity of the dragon, identifying the scene as 'the dual representation of Melusine in her human form as beautiful woman and as a rampant, miniature dragon'.[503] It would be misleading to say that the dragon accompanies only Mélusine, as in fol. 4v it appears to sit at the feet of her mother, Presine. This could be read as a comment on the inheritance of the mother's faerie nature, which is evident in the founding of Lusignan scene where Mélusine is directly using her magic; and it could be the limner's way of indicating that magic is occuring, as may also be the case in the Presine miniature if the moment depicted is the one where she curses her children. The dragon is possibly more symbolic in the marriage scene, in which there is no magic being performed; the

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[501] Mathilde Grodet, 'Le secret de Mélusine dans les romans français et l'iconographie aux XIVe et XVe siècles', *Questes* 16 (2009): 64–78 (72).

[502] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 79.

[503] Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', pp. 65 and 73–4.

Figure 9.7. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 4v.

Figure 9.8. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 18r.

Figure 9.9. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 22v.

presence of the dragon before the chapel and the bishop is particularly suited to the idea of

Mélusine adopting a status that will (she hopes) allow her to be interred as a Christian. This

motif of the paired woman and dragon could be an indicator of magical activity or it could

represent the duality of Mélusine's character; part of the intrigue of the motif is that it is unique

to this manuscript and therefore may represent the unique response of the limner. It is unclear

how closely the limner was familiar with the text, but at least some thought appears to have gone

into the presentation of faerie in these instances. Resourcefulness would have been required to

undertake a visual programme for such little-known iconography as that of Mélusine. The artist

of this manuscript, being one of the first, if not the first, to tackle this narrative in a series of

images, made use of their reading of the scenes rather than just relying on the rubrics. The result

is an interesting visual programme which combines unique elements with those that would become common to later manuscripts.

London, British Library, Harley 4418

London, British Library, Harley 4418, which contains Jean d'Arras' version of the romance, was created *c.* 1450 in Amiens. The text is incomplete, but the seventeen column miniatures, which have been attributed by some to the Créquy Master or a close contemporary,[504] are some of the most accomplished of the *Mélusine* manuscripts. Each image, contained by a rectangular border, is preceded or followed by a rubric; the following text begins with a decorated initial; and the column or folio containing the image is decorated in the margins with rectangular patches of spiky ivy and acanthus leaf (Figure 9.10). This format is repeated with considerable regularity throughout the manuscript, though the spacing between the miniatures is irregular.[505] The placement of the images before their corresponding textual passages complicates the idea that they are merely illustrative, or that they rely on prior textual understanding; however, the limners will have had to rely on either instruction or knowledge of the text in order to make them effective.

The iconographic programme of the manuscript includes four scenes that are found regularly among the *Mélusine* manuscripts: a dedication scene (fol. 1r), the death of Aimeri (fol. 17r),

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[504] See Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à Peintures en France*, p. 76 (citing Scot McKendrick); and Susie Nash, *Between France and Flanders: Manuscript Illumination in Amiens in the Fifteenth Century* (London: British Library, 1999), pp. 241–3.

[505] The miniatures are found on fols 1r, 17r, 36r, 43v, 56r, 66v, 80v, 88v, 99r, 113r, 118v, 140v, 160v, 174r, 190r, 204v and 214v. See Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 68–9.

Raymondin and Mélusine's marriage (fol. 36r), and Mélusine as a dragon (fol. 43v). The majority of the images in the manuscript, however (fols 56r, 66v, 80v, 88v, 99r, 113r, 140v, 174r, 190r and 204v), depict battle scenes.[506] The volume of war material in the iconographical programme of the manuscript corresponds reasonably well with the amount in the text, but the manuscript includes more than any of the other surviving illuminated *Mélusine* manuscripts. It is not clear that it would have been the limner's choice, however, to depict such subjects, as it is likely to have been someone else who decided on the visual programme, and who wrote the rubrics. It should also be noted that only a handful of battle scenes have been added to those depicted in Arsenal 3353, which incorporates a large number of combat scenes but also has a larger visual programme overall. The choice to design the Harley programme with predominantly battle scenes was made more selectively, and might well indicate the preferences of the manuscript's patron, or that the visual programme was largely composed of stock images from the workshop's repertoire. Many of the battle miniatures are not easy to distinguish from one another, and their identification relies heavily on minor visual details such as, in the case of the naval scenes, being either near land or entirely at sea. Save for some minor alterations to the background, the naval scenes on fols 80v, 113 and 190 are almost indistinguishable. The frequency of such images creates a narrative emphasis on the combats and crusades of Mélusine's children rather than on the more personal or supernatural elements of the text that tend to be favoured elsewhere.

There are two images that deal directly with the supernatural material of the narrative. The image on fol. 43v, which depicts Mélusine overseeing several labourers building the castle of Lusignan, is similar to that in the Arsenal manuscript (Figure 9.11). The rubric reads: 'Comment

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[506] Ibid, p. 73.

Figure 9.10. London, British Library, Harley 4418, fol. 17r.

Figure 9.11. London, British Library, Harley 4418, fol. 43v.

Figure 9.12. London, British Library, Harley 4418, fol. 214v.

la forteresse de lusignen fu fondee' (how the fortress of Lusignan was founded), and the image depicts this with reasonable accuracy, although, unlike the Arsenal manuscript, it does not mention Mélusine herself in the rubric, and details such as Mélusine overseeing the labourers would require further familiarity with the text in order to understand it. However, Jean d'Arras' text presents a number of difficulties for accurately depicting or visualising this scene. It does not actually tell us how the castle was built: the act of building the castle speedily, or arranging it to be built, is implied to be the result of Mélusine's faerie powers, and is thus left necessarily vague. The text contains a tension between the supernatural aspects of this arrangement, such as the speed at which the castle is built, and the mysterious origins of its labourers, and more practical matters such as the payment of the labourers every Saturday. The image, likewise,

depicts the labourers using tools, and they do not appear to possess any particularly magical

qualities. The miniature, then, traverses the line between realism and fantasy with vague details

of Mélusine's faerie abilities, but also possibly limits the imaginative reaches of the image by

portraying the labourers as not having any discernible magical or supernatural qualities.

    The final image in the manuscript (fol. 214v) depicts one of the most commonly illustrated

episodes of the *Mélusine* manuscripts: her transformation into a dragon (Figure 9.12). It is

unusual within the iconographical programme of the manuscript, however, for being the only

scene to attempt the depiction of a sequence, portraying one figure in two separate, temporal

moments. In the miniature Mélusine appears twice, once leaping from the window and again in

full flight. Other rubrics in the manuscript mention multiple events but are accompanied by only

one pictorial version, whereas either of the images shown in this miniature would have been self-

explanatory on its own. It is curious, therefore, that the artist would choose to depict a double

scene here. The limner possibly aimed to capture a sense of transformation in the act of leaping

from the window and flying around the castle, but if so it is odd that Mélusine is fully

transformed in both depictions. It is also the only image in the text, with the possible exception

of the Lusignan labourers, to depict monstrous or supernatural material, although, again, the

supernatural aspects of Mélusine's metamorphosis are visually negated by the limner's failure to

depict the act of transformation itself. Harf-Lancner notes that this transformation scene, and that

of BnF fr. 12575, avoid the actual moment of transformation: 'L'image ne cherche pas à traduire

la métamorphose elle-même, c'est-à-dire le passage du règne humain au règne animal' (the

image not does attempt to depict the metamorphosis itself, that is, the passage from the human to

animal realm).[507] As in the Arsenal manuscript, this decision might be explained by a reluctance on the part of the limner to attempt a transformation scene that is, like the founding of Lusignan scene, not particularly detailed in either the text or the rubric. The manuscript seems to be concerned more, overall, with earthly matters such as warfare, and less with key supernatural elements featuring Mélusine herself; there is not even a bathing scene in this visual programme, which is surprising given how pivotal that moment is to the narrative. The Harley images are quite beautiful, but often standard, and perhaps indicate the tastes of the patron more than anything else. They do suggest, however, that illuminated romance manuscripts can provide quite different readings of the texts they contain, and the Harley illuminations present a very different reading from those of many others that illustrate the same narrative.

Paris, BnF fr. 1485

This manuscript of Jean d'Arras' text was possibly written around 1485. It is unfinished: there are thirty spaces for images, but only twenty of these are filled, and many of those with sketch drawings rather than complete miniatures.[508] The intended visual programme is very closely aligned to that of Arsenal 3353, and there is little doubt that the designer of this programme had seen either that or a common exemplar. We see the resemblance on fol. 128r, in which Mélusine flies over Lusignan in the form of a dragon (Figure 9.13); the image is almost identical in design, with only slight modifications, to its counterpart in Arsenal 3353 (Figure 9.14). The formatting of the two texts is different, however; in Paris, BnF fr. 1485 there are no text columns, and no rubrics. Spaces for decorated initials have also been left incomplete. Because the design of the

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[507] Ibid, p. 79.

[508] Ibid, p. 68.

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programme so closely matches that of the Arsenal manuscript there is not much individuality, and the drawing and inking of the few complete or partially complete miniatures are rougher than for the Arsenal 3353 miniatures. Instead, it is in the incomplete spaces of this manuscript that the most interesting items can be found.

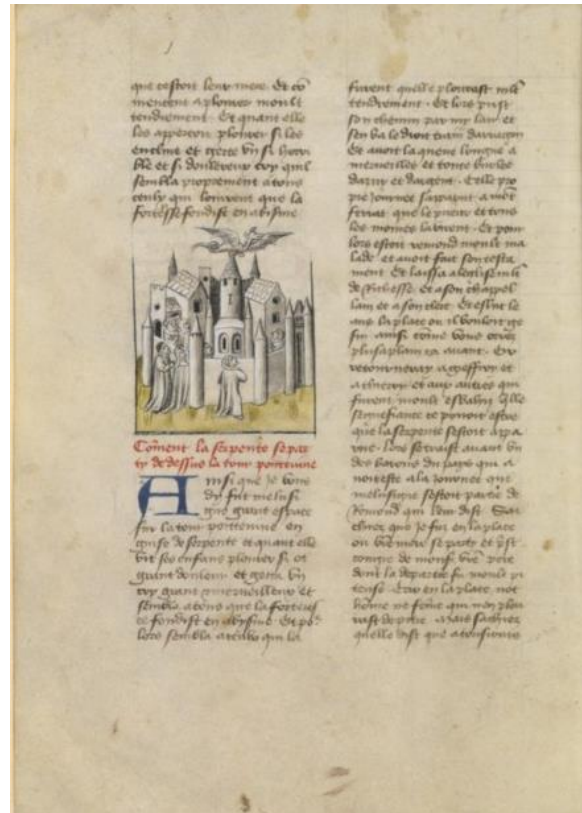
Figure 9.13. Paris, BnF fr. 1485, fol. 128r.

Figure 9.14. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 155v.

In a number of the unfinished miniature spaces there are rough sketches of the images that were supposed to occupy them, some of which are so faint that they can hardly be made out. In others, there are what could perhaps best be described as doodles. The origin of these is

unknown, but the roughness of the hand and their detachment from the accompanying text points

to an owner rather than someone who had a hand in the making of the manuscript. Some

drawings, such as that which depicts Antoine and his brothers (fol. 125r), combine the two main

pictorial styles present within the manuscript: the original limner, and a later, more irreverent

hand (Figure 9.15). The original sketch of this miniature, though rougher than its counterpart in

Arsenal 3353 (Figure 9.16), is likely to have been professional, whereas the addition of the bird

flying overhead is a rough doodle, drawn in a different, non-commercial style.
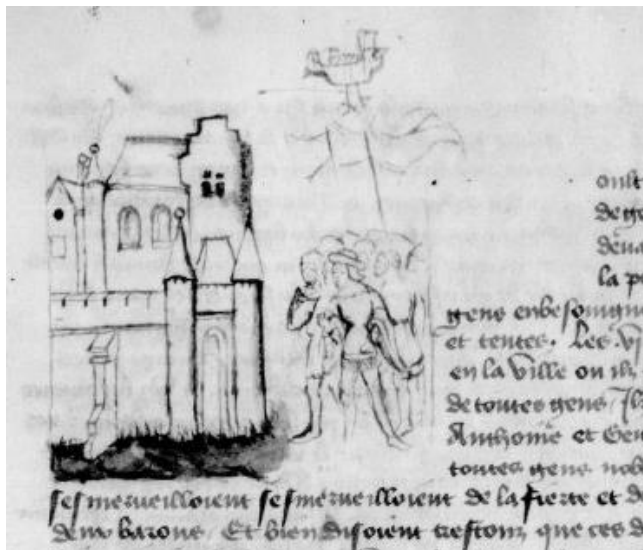

Figure 9.15. Paris, BnF fr. 1485, fol. 125r.

Figure 9.16. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 152r.

In some instances, even the more professional line drawings do not seem to show much

knowledge of their narrative contexts. On fol. 10r, for instance, we are presented with the scene

in the narrative where Mélusine first encounters Raymondin whilst he is asleep on his horse

(Figure 9.17). Arsenal 3353 seems to portray this scene following the moment when Raymondin

wakes up, but the identification of the two protagonists is clear (Figure 9.18). In the BnF fr. 1485 sketch, however, it is a lady who is riding the horse, a detail that is at odds with the accompanying narrative. The rest of the scene is damaged and the full context of the drawing is therefore unclear. The error is a curious one, however, especially as there can be no mistaking either Raymondin or Mélusine in the Arsenal miniature. The lack of rubrics in the manuscript might be responsible. We might also allow for the fact that this is a preparatory drawing, and that the limner might have intended to study the text before completing the miniature. The lack of accord between text and image here also indicates that the scribe and original limner were not the same person.
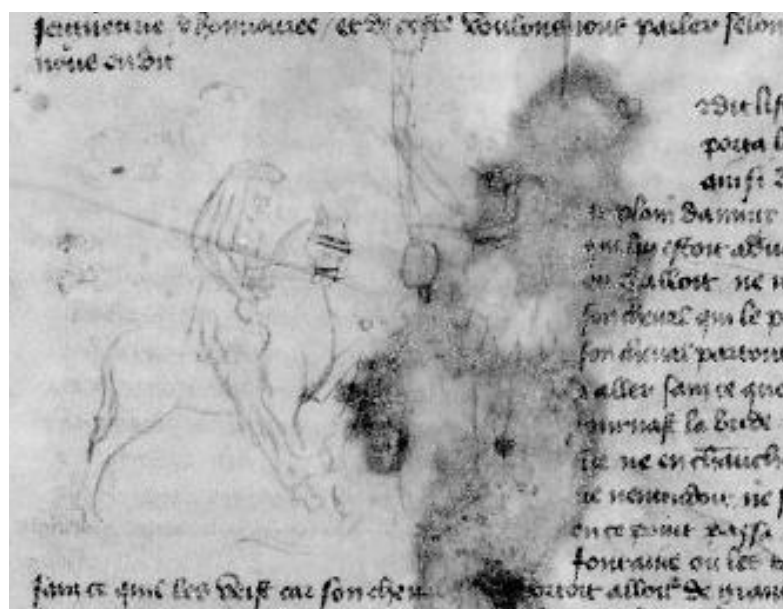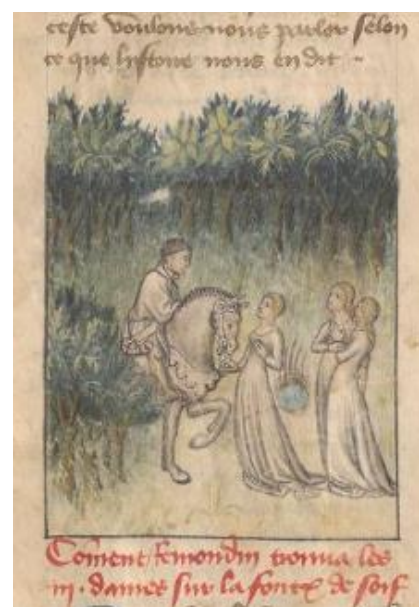

Figure 9.17. Paris, BnF fr. 1485, fol. 10r.

Figure 9.18. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 10v.

Other images in the manuscript are pure embellishment, and should be attributed to a hand other than that responsible for the original line drawings. These images, along with frequent jottings, do not confine themselves to the spaces laid out for the absent miniatures, and certainly do not follow the intended visual programme. One (fol. 86r) occupies a space intended to portray the funeral of King Frederic of Bohemia (Figures 9.19 and 9.20). Unless a large stretch of the imagination is required, the images provided have nothing to do with the funeral; instead we see two similarly-dressed figures, one of which occupies the margins, two miscellaneous items and some writing. This seems to confirm that the hand responsible for these images had nothing to do with the original production of the manuscript, and that it belongs instead to a later owner. When these images were added is not clear, however, and more work needs to be done on this manuscript, and particularly on the written annotations scattered throughout, in order to ascertain the identity of the hand with any certainty. The names 'Jehan' and 'Jacques' crop up throughout the manuscript margins (on fols 3r, 4r, 5r, 6r, 14v, 37r, 50r, 51v, 53v, 83r, 87r, 106r and 133v), seemingly belonging to different hands, and it is possible that one of them is the source of the rough images as well. The heraldry on the cover of the book identifies it as having belonged to 'Johannes Bigot'. Jean Bigot (1588–1645) was a descendent of the Somménil and Clouville lines, head of the Normandy Court, and an avid book collector, who compiled a library of over 6,000 volumes.[509] BnF fr. 1485 is entry 210 in the 1877 catalogue of his rare manuscripts collection.[510] It is possible that the marginal writing and images might be seventeenth-century additions by members of Jean's family or his acquaintances, or even by Jean himself.

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[509] Léopold Delisle, *Bibliotheca Bigotiana Manuscripta*, Société des Bibliophiles Normands (Rouen: Henry Boissel, 1877), p. iv.

[510] Ibid, p. 59.

Figure 9.19. Paris, BnF fr. 1485, fol. 86r.

Figure 9.20. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 99r.

A few, scarce sketches are scattered throughout the manuscript; one on fol. 88v contains a large, sprawling figure of a man whose legs cut through a thin portion of text (Figure 9.21). According to the text and the Arsenal 3353 miniature and rubric, the scene depicted is supposed to be that of the marriage between Renaud and Eglantine (Figure 9.22). It therefore seems safe to say that the image again bears little relation to the accompanying text, particularly as the figure seems to be accompanied by a mace and sword. The image also incorporates a small animal which hovers in the space where the decorated initial might have been. It is possible that this animal could be a dragon: it has four legs, a tail and what could pass for a smooth, serpentine head, and wings. This might be wishful thinking, especially as the accompanying passage does not include Mélusine in dragon form. But it is also probable that the artist, even if unfamiliar with the relevant passage of text to hand, would have been aware of the general contents of the

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manuscript, and would perhaps have been familiar enough with the Mélusine story, especially as

a dragon is depicted on fol. 128r, to have had dragons on the mind. The manuscript is a curious

one for its absences but also its strange additions; whatever the status of the artist responsible for

the doodles or sketches strewn throughout the manuscript, and whenever the drawings might

have been added, they represent an interesting example of a pictorial reader response, and add a
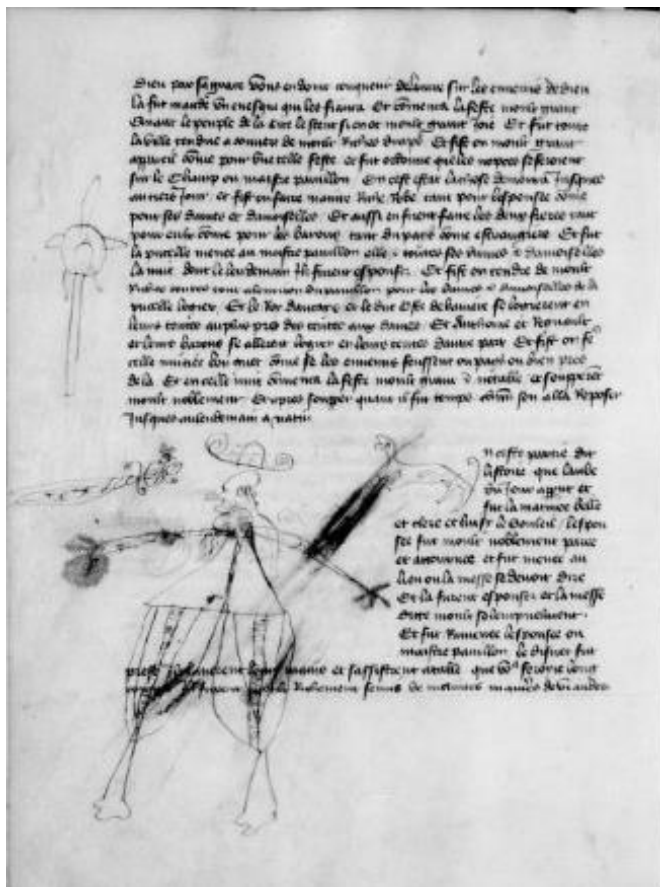
new voice to the narrative.

Figure 9.21. Paris, BnF fr. 1485, fol. 88v.

Figure 9.22. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, fol. 102r.

BnF fr. 12575, which contains Coudrettte's verse edition of *Mélusine*, is thought to have been made *c.* 1420–30, and contains sixteen images.[511] These take up more physical space on the page than many of the other *Mélusine* miniatures: the text is written in single columns of verse, and the images vary in size from roughly half to three-quarter length. The miniatures are the work of three different limners, all highly skilled, and demonstrate a large variation in illustrative technique and narrative interpretation. They differ stylistically, but the limners can also be identified by their border decoration. The first one, whom Harf-Lancner identifies as the Flemish Maître de Guillebert de Mets, uses a very dense pattern of flowers and spiky ivy; the second one uses a more modest but regular border of sparse spiky ivy leaves; and the third one groups seven patches of leaf in even spaces around the border frame of the miniature. The latter two limners are thought to have been students of the first.[512]

The first limner made the images on fols 5r, 8r, 13r, 26v, 36r and 39v. These are arguably the most accomplished images in the manuscript, and provide the most sophisticated interpretation of the text. The scenes make great use of architectural frames and patterned backgrounds. On fol. 8r, for instance, the image of Aimeri conducting his scientific studies is accompanied by a background of stars (Figure 9.23). The rubric for this image, 'Y parle du conte aimery de poitou' (this speaks of Earl Aimeri of Poitou), introduces the speaker of the following passage. The first image on fol. 5r, which depicts Guillaume Larchevêque and Coudrette, and that on fol. 26v, which depicts the marriage between Raymondin and Mélusine, introduce an attempt to portray

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[511] The miniatures can be found on fols 5r, 8r, 13r, 26v, 36r, 39v, 42v, 49r, 53r, 58r, 69r, 79r, 86r, 89r, 116v, 123v. See See Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 69.

[512] Ibid, p. 69.
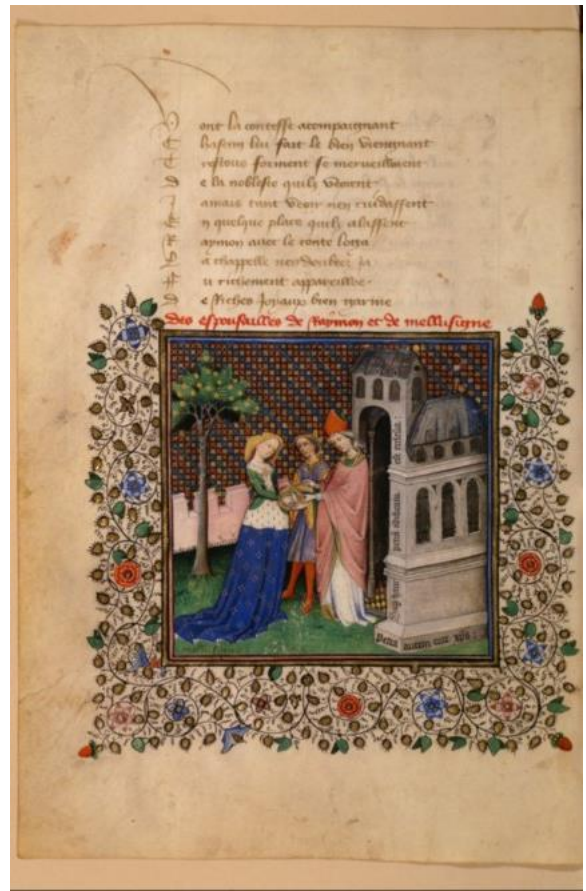
Figure 9.23. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 8r.

Figure 9.24. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 26v.

an exterior-interior divide, though not to scale, and also to present text within the image: there is

an inscription on the exterior wall of fol. 5r, and running up the side of the church in fol. 26v

(Figure 9.24). Avril and Reynaud have claimed that the Maître de Guillebert de Mets did not

understand French, but his engagement with the French text here appears to refute that

argument.[513] Inscriptions are also used in fol. 36r, which depicts Guion inheriting the king of

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[513] Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à Peintures en France*, p. 75. I am grateful to Richard Gameson for kindly

suggesting this point.

Armenia's kingdom (see Chapter 7), and elements of the miniatures frequently overlap the borders. These are the most accomplished images of the manuscript, and the limner has made good use of summarisation and the incorporation of text within the miniatures.

Figure 9.25. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 42v.

Figure 9.26. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 69r.

The second limner made the images on fols 42v, 53r, 58r, 69r and 79r. These differ substantially in style from those of the first limner: the figures are larger and closer to the foreground, and this limner also relies heavily on the minimalist background of coloured block squares and diamonds, focusing more on the figures in the foreground. Some of the images are quite similar to one another, and rely on visual markers to distinguish between the characters

depicted therein. Fol. 42v depicts the battle of Luxembourg, in which the two sides of the army are identifiable by the Saracen standard and the crown respectively, as well as two inscriptions on the ground which read 'le roy saussan' and 'anthonie' (Figure 9.25). Fol. 69r also makes use of inscriptions, but also identifies Geoffray and the giant through their clothing and weapons (Figure 9.26). The rubrics become scarce at this point, and are missing from all but fols 53r and 58r. This artist is most notable for using large figures at close range within each frame.

The third limner made the images on fols 49r, 86r, 89r, 116v and 123v. None of these, apart from that on fol. 49r, is accompanied by rubrics. The remaining four images focus entirely on Mélusine and her sisters. Fol. 86r depicts the common scene of Mélusine flying above the castle in the form of a dragon (Figure 9.27), and fol. 89r shows Mélusine as half woman, half serpent in an interior scene amongst pillars in front of a darkened background on tiled floors (Figure 9.28). The pillars are alternately placed in the foreground and background to add depth, and the towers at the top of the scene extend upwards and out of the border. Fols 116v and 123v depict the exploits of Mélusine's sisters, Melior and Palestine. This focus on Mélusine's sisters is unique to the Coudrette editions of the romance, as the episode of Palestine is not detailed in Jean d'Arras' version of the text, and therefore does not appear in any of the manuscripts that illustrate it. BnF fr. 12575 offers in some ways a similar iconographical programme to that of Harley 4418, but with several substantial differences, many of which may be attributed to the differences between Jean d'Arras' and Coudrette's versions of the text. The fact that the images are completed by different artists complicates the iconography of the manuscript, since each artist provides their own interpretive reading of the text or the rubric. The first artist is undoubtedly the superior of the three, and his images are therefore more sophisticated in their narrative reading of the romance, incorporating text, perspective, symbolism and narrative sequencing. The use of

multiple artists and the consequent variety in the iconographical programme of this manuscript therefore creates a diverse pictorial response to the narrative.

Figure 9.27. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 86r.

Figure 9.28. Paris, BnF fr. 12575, fol. 89r.

Paris, BnF fr. 24383

Paris, BnF fr. 24383 also contains Coudrette's edition of the romance, and was made in the 1490s.[514] There is no floral decoration, and the half-size images are encased in simple frames

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[514] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, p. 69.

which are either rectangular or arched. The images are distinctive in their approach to depicting the text, using narrative sequences within single frames. These primarily take the form of double scenes, which often use architectural barriers and emphasise a divide between exterior and interior space. There are fourteen images,[515] no rubrics, the text is in two columns, and the images are grouped closely together in comparison to the other manuscripts. The images focus more than those in many of the other manuscripts on Mélusine herself, and emphasise her story rather than that of her children or any of the other supporting characters.

Fol. 4r introduces the double scene format with the exchange between Aimeri and Raymondin, followed by the former's death. The two scenes are divided by a wall of trees in the centre (Figure 9.29), and an indication of the passage of time based on the celestial bodies in the sky. Fol. 5v includes the next double scene: in the first of these, Raymondin rides by Mélusine and two of her companions, and in the second he is accosted by Mélusine (Figure 9.30). In fol. 7r, which emphasises an interior-exterior divide, Raymondin greets Earl Bertrand while someone behind him carries the hart's pelt in the first, interior scene (Figure 9.31). In the second, exterior part, the figures are again smaller, and separated partly behind a brick wall: this approach to sequential art seems to be a recurring technique in the manuscript, in which the eye is drawn first to the image on the left, which tends to be in the foreground and visually more prominent. The interior and exterior scenes tend to be linked, and in architectural scenes such as this one there is often a door leading from one to the other. In the second scene Raymondin looks on as four men stretch the pelt on open ground in a circle around the fountain. The scene is one of the most imaginatively challenging parts of the text to have to illustrate, and the question of how the scene ought to have been depicted would have required some active interpretation from the limner.

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[515] The miniatures can be found on fols 2r, 4r, 5v, 7r, 10r, 13r, 14r, 16r, 19r, 23r, 24v, 30r, 33v and 36r.

Figure 9.29. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 4r.

Figure 9.30. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 5v.

In the first part of the double scene contained in fol. 19r, which is set at the exterior of the

castle, Raymondin spies through the hole he has made in the door (Figure 9.32). The second

scene is an interior one with Mélusine in the bathtub, naked but with a dragon tail and wings.

This double scene creates a slightly different effect from the others: although it depicts two

scenes, these do not occur sequentially but more or less at the same time, and no characters here

appear twice. It does, however, emphasise the exterior-interior divide common to many of the

manuscript's illuminations, and the voyeuristic nature of Raymondin's transgression against

Mélusine. Grodet suggests that '[l]'intérêt de l'histoire de Mélusine réside pour nous dans la

corrélation entre secret, privé et public' (the interest in Mélusine's story resides for us in the

correlation between secret, private and public), and also that the culmination of disaster for

Mélusine and Raymondin is not the latter's transgression into the private, but his public

revelation of it.[516] She adds that in manuscript versions that explore the division between public

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[516] Grodet, 'Le secret de Mélusine, p. 70.

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Figure 9.31. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 7r.

Figure 9.32. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 19r.

and private in their miniatures two distinct spaces are established in the private chamber of

Mélusine and the public, outside world that is inhabited by Raymondin and sometimes his

brother.[517] This is particularly true for the bathing miniature in BnF fr. 24383, in which the

architectural division between outside and inside spaces is clear. This detail is not limited to this

miniature, however, but present throughout the entire manuscript, and seems to support Grodet's

reading of the importance of public and private spaces within the narrative. Fol. 24v contains a

double scene that also features the exterior-interior divide, but in separate locations: in the first,

exterior scene, Geoffray sets fire to the priory, and in the second, internal scene Raymondin

reprimands Mélusine as she faints into the arms of two attendants (Figure 9.33). Whereas most

of the double scenes attempt to portray a sequential progression that makes use of the same

setting, or at least two settings that are directly juxtaposed to one another, the priory and

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[517] Ibid, p. 75.

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Mélusine's court occupy very different temporal and spatial fields. In this instance, then, the double scene format does not flow with the same narrative ease as many of the others.

Figure 9.33. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 24v.

Figure 9.34. Paris, BnF fr. 24383, fol. 30r.

The miniature on fol. 30r contains the scene that is most celebrated in *Mélusine* manuscript iconography: the instance when Mélusine is transformed permanently into dragon form (Figure 9.34). In the first, exterior scene, Mélusine is flying outside the window in half-woman, half-dragon form, as Raymondin and an attendant look out at her. In the second, interior scene Mélusine visits her children, and is still in her half-transformed state. This latter image addresses some problems of narrative visualisation in the text: the author is unclear with regard to Mélusine's ability to visit her children once she has been transformed permanently into a dragon, and the illuminator solves this problem by adopting the same visual format given to Mélusine during the episode in which Raymondin spies on her in the bath. This image therefore represents another instance in which the illuminator must rely on personal interpretation in order to execute

the scene, as the text is not at all clear as to how it ought to be visualised or depicted. This is one of the only *Mélusine* manuscripts to represent Mélusine in half-woman, half-serpentine form while she flies out of the window, which solves several narrative problems at once: it establishes a continuity with Mélusine's bathing scene and the scene in which she visits her children, implying that she is never fully serpentine but divided between the two forms, while the transitional state of Mélusine in the exterior portion of the miniature also adds a sense of the actual metamorphosis taking place. It should also be noted, however, that Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. Ms 4028, a copy of Thüring Von Ringoltingen's version of the story that was made in 1456, also depicts this scene with Mélusine in dual form, and that numerous print editions had been published by the time this manuscript was made. Arguably the most influential of these, by Bernhard Richel, had already been in circulation for upwards of fifteen years; this edition was in German, but also translated Coudrette's version of the story, and prominently features Mélusine flying out of the window in half-human, half-serpent form.[518] Versions of Richel's woodcuts had also been published in Geneva and Lyon by the time BnF fr. 24383 was made. The illuminator of this manuscript uses double scenes with architectural divisions throughout to create a sense of narrative progression, but the format also reflects the transitions and liminalities that are at play in the text, whether in Mélusine's duality of human and serpent form, or in the constant tension between public and private scenes. The emphasis of the iconographical programme is therefore thematic in its attention to Mélusine's curse and the events that surround it, and this is largely achieved through the format design and the content of the manuscript's miniatures.

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[518] For more on this subject see below; and Lydia Zeldenrust, 'Serpent or Half-Serpent? Bernhard Richel's *Melusine* and the Making of a Western European Icon', *Neophilologus* 100.1 (2016): 9–41.

Thüring Von Ringoltingen adapted Coudrette's version into German in 1456; this edition was the

first to be printed, in 1474, before either the French ones, the first of which was printed in

1478.[519] Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. Ms 4028 is a rare manuscript of Thüring's edition, and was made

before the printed versions, in 1468. It contains sixty-five miniatures, which gives it the most

prolific visual programme of all the known *Mélusine* manuscripts that were made prior to the

printed editions. The images are varied in their formats; for instance, some are accompanied by

rubrics, while others are not. The border design is particularly varied, and ranges from a simple,

thin line to a thick band, sometimes full and sometimes partial, and in some instances no border

at all, or images that extend to the edge of the folio. Many of the episodes depicted are familiar

from earlier Mélusine iconography, but offer unique interpretations. Grodet suggests that the

depiction of Mélusine bathing on fol. 50r differs from those in the other manuscripts because of

her attitude (Figure 9.35). She states that in bathing images such as that of Arsenal 3353,

Mélusine is often 'figurée les yeux humblement baissés, les mains couvrant ses seins ou ses

parties génitales, dans une posture de pudeur' (depicted with humbly lowered eyes, hands

covering her breasts or genital parts, in a posture of modesty). The Nuremberg version, on the

other hand, depicts Mélusine 'dans un état d'abandon, le dos appuyé sur le bois de la cuve, les

yeux dans le vague, un sourire aux lèvres, les bras ouverts' (in a state of abandon, leaning back

against the tub, her eyes unfocused, a smile on her lips, her arms outstretched), and this image

captures better than the others the relaxed attitude that is characteristic of absolute privacy.[520]

The scene is also more accurate to the text than others in its depiction of Raymondin's means of

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[519] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 65.

[520] Grodet, 'Le secret de Mélusine', p. 74.

Figure 9.35. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. Ms 4028, fol. 50r.

Figure 9.36. Detail. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. 4028, fol. 34v.

Figure 9.37. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. 4028, fol. 12r.

spying; the hole he has made has been placed in the door at about eye level, and he holds his

sword to one side, whereas the weapon is usually absent from pictorial depictions of the scene,

and the method by which Raymonidin spies upon Mélusine is usually left vague. The artist

therefore shows a certain degree of individuality here in their approach, but also a loyalty to the

text and an aptitude for portraying narrative scenes with relative accuracy as well as the nuances

of an individual reading of the text. There are further instances of this kind of reading throughout

the manuscript. For example, it appears to be the only one that attempts to depict the various

deformities accorded to each of Mélusine's children (Figure 9.36), and the stretching the pelt

scene on fol. 12r makes a real attempt to portray some distance within the landscape it depicts

(Figure 9.37). In the scene on fol. 65r in which Mélusine flies from the window we see her in

half woman, half-serpent form, but we also see the scene from the interior space in which Raymondin and Mélusine's retinue are standing, and we see Mélusine escaping directly away from us, out of the window at the centre of the image (Figure 9.44). This is a unique angle for this scene, and, like many of the other miniatures, demonstrates the individual perspective of the artist.

In one scene on fol. 74r Geoffray finds the history of his family written on a tablet at the tomb of King Elinas (Figure 9.40); none of the other illuminated manuscripts contains this scene. As there are so many miniatures in the manuscript, we cannot assume that any one was accorded special status simply on the basis of its inclusion. However, as has been discussed in Chapter 6, the episode at the tomb seems to be important for the narrative, as it is a point of failed recognition for Geoffray in which his entire family history is recounted but without any lessons learned, until he finally recognises the meaning inherent in the text and applies it to himself. The fact that this scene was not included in the other manuscripts indicates that it did not hold any particular import for their creators, and yet its inclusion here seems to fit with the rest of the visual programme. Some episodes are depicted across multiple miniatures in a short series, such as the revelation of Mélusine's secret and the sparrowhawk adventure. The episodes that have been depicted in this manner are ones that reinforce the message put across by the tomb: that it is dangerous to misread the signs that are presented to you. We cannot necessarily claim that the creators of the manuscript subscribed to this reading of the text, but the fact that the images were deemed important enough for inclusion does indicate that someone considered them to be of narrative worth. It is also important to note a vital difference between the texts of Jean d'Arras and Coudrette here: the former contains the prologue in which the story of Presine and Elinas is told; the latter does not, and this difference is reflected in the visual programmes of the

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Figure 9.38. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. 4028, fol. 71v.

Figure 9.39. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. 4028, fol. 73r.

Figure 9.40. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. 4028, fol. 74r.

illuminated manuscripts that treat each text.[521] This is significant because Thüring's text is a translation of Coudrette's, and the scene with the tomb takes on an entirely different significance if the reader is not already familiar with the prologue. Instead, the reader is in the dark, like Geoffray, and the scene becomes one of revelation more than recollection or contemplation. The two miniatures prior to the tomb scene on fol. 74r depict Geoffray's discovery of the cave in which the tomb resides, and add a sense of suspense leading up to that moment (Figures 9.38 and 9.39). We therefore see, again, the interpretation of the artist within these scenes.

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[521] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 66.

As mentioned above, it was Thüring's German translation of the text that was first set into print, in 1474.[522] The German print edition published by Bernhard Richel used woodcuts that were widely disseminated thereafter, not only in German printed editions but also in those made in Geneva and Lyon.[523] Adam Steinschaber published his edition in Geneva in 1478; Martin Husz printed the first Lyon edition after 1479, and Gaspard Ortuin and Pierre Bouttellier, who was also known as Peter Schenck, printed another in 1485.[524] These editions are almost identical in their use of Richel's woodblocks, and show only minor variations, those of the Geneva edition being slightly more pronounced than the others (Figures 9.41–9.43).

The iconography of Mélusine as a half-human, half-serpent is well established. Its origins, however, are not always agreed on. Lydia Zeldenrust claims that Thüring's text was the first to depict her as such, and that Richel was the first to illustrate her in this form. The passage Zeldenrust cites demonstrates that Mélusine does not transform fully into a serpent 'as in the French versions', but becomes '"vom gürtel nider ein vyentlicher ungehürer grosser und langer wurm" (from the navel down, a fiendish, terrible, great and long serpent)'.[525] This is certainly the case, but it is not the first time this description is used. In Jean d'Arras' edition Mélusine is described thus while she is bathing: 'Et voit Melusigne en la cuve, qui estoit jusques au nombril

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[522] For more on the fragments of an English illustrated text printed *c.* 1510 and attributed to Wynkyn de Worde (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Vet. A1 d.18. USTC: 501139), see Zeldenrust, 'Serpent or Half-Serpent?', 37; and Tania Colwell, 'The Middle English Melusine: Evidence for an Early Edition of the Prose Romance in the Bodleian Library', *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 17 (2014): 259–87.

[523] Harf-Lancner, *La serpente et le sanglier*, 68.

[524] Zeldenrust, 'Serpent or Half-Serpent?', 25.

[525] Zeldenrust, 'Serpent or Half-Serpent?', 22–3. Zeldenrust's translation.
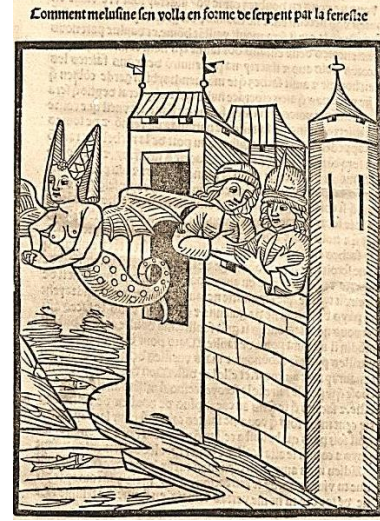
Figure 9.41. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, GC 365 (Basel: Richel, 1474), fol. 65v.

Figure 9.42. Paris, BnF RLR RES Y2-400, 12 (Geneva: Steinschaber, 1478), fol. 156v.

Figure 9.43. Paris, BnF RLR RES M-Y2-31 (Lyon: Ortuin and Schenck, 1485), fol. 42v.

en figure de femme et pignoit ses cheveulx, et du nombril en aval estoit en forme de la queue d'un serpent, aussi grosse comme un tonne ou on met harenc et longue durement' (And he saw Mélusine in the tub, who had above the naval the figure of a woman combing her hair, and from the naval down the form of a serpent's tail, as big as a herring barrel and very long).[526] The image of Mélusine leaping out of the window in her dual form could well be attributed to Thüring, but not to Richel. For one thing, we see the same, dual form in Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. Ms 4028 (Figure 9.44), but also, the idea of Mélusine's dual form in general is older, dating back to Jean d'Arras' original text and manuscripts such as Arsenal 3353, which worked from it. We see many similarities between Nuremberg 4028 and the print editions, but there are differences

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[526] d'Arras, *Mélusine*, p. 660. Own translation.

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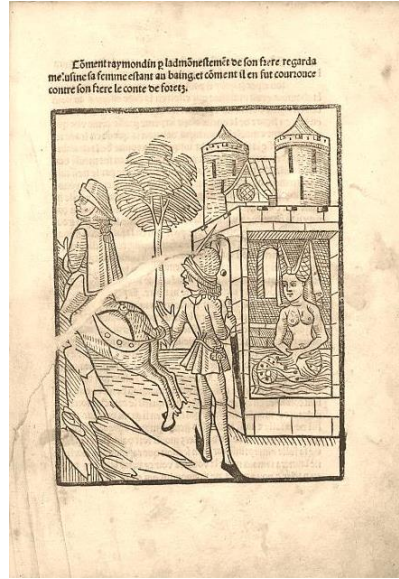Figure 9.44. Nuremberg, Nat. Mus. Ms 4028, fol. 65r.
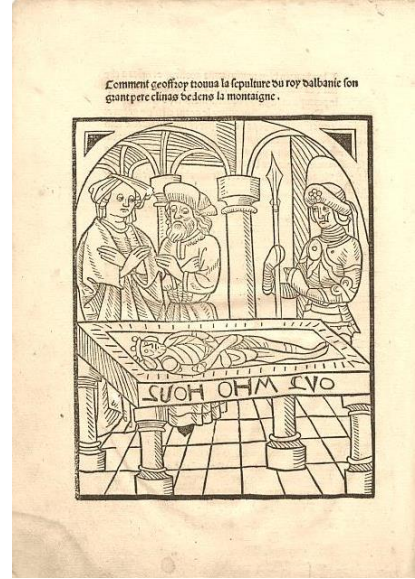
Figure 9.45. Paris, BnF RLR RES M-Y2-31, fol. 30r.

Figure 9.46. Paris, BnF RLR RES M-Y2-31, fol. 48v.

as well. The bathing scene is one example. Like Nuremberg 4028, this scene is treated more realistically for the fact that it shows Raymondin on one side of a door with a hole knocked through it, holding his sword to one side (Figure 9.45). The depiction of Mélusine's chamber is rather interesting, though, for the fact that instead of depicting Mélusine reclining in a bathtub, the entire room appears to be submerged in water. This might be a simple question of spatial constraints, particularly in a medium that uses woodblocks, but it makes for a strange interpretation of the scene. Other scenes from Nuremberg 4028, like the discovery of the tomb of King Elinas, are included but given a different composition (Figure 9.46). Many alterations are likely to have been made to suit the printing process; we can see, for instance, that in the tomb scene the writing on the tablet and the outlines of the figures are much better suited to print than

the Nuremberg version. The print editions contribute well to the polyphony of interpretations surrounding the Mélusine narrative, continuing some traditions and adding to others.

Conclusions

Zeldenrust states that '[t]he story of the Mélusine images is a story of cross-cultural, pan-European connections and exchanges'.[527] The manuscripts and printed editions of the *Roman de Mélusine* demonstrate this sentiment well, providing illustrative companions to the text whilst conveying interpretive qualities that emphasise the narrative focus of each manuscript and create an individual reading of the text, which is then passed on to the reader. Mélusine's popularity in print is not limited to its earliest incarnations, and her legend appears to have enjoyed a long and varied posterity within text, image, and even musical composition in the form of a Mendelssohn overture. She has therefore achieved a somewhat legendary status, in that her story exists in a multitude of sources rather than just the narrative version by Jean d'Arras. The fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript editions of the text add varied and often complex readings of the narrative, and demonstrate the reader response inherent in the role of the limner. The examples presented above demonstrate the varied responses to the Mélusine legend in the fifteenth century. Some are more original than others: Harley seems to rely frequently on pattern book examples, and the print editions from this period do not tend to stray far from their predecessors. However, the features that are unique to each version demonstrate that each image required some individual interpretation on the part of the limner. The decision to portray Mélusine and Presine accompanied by a small dragon in Arsenal 3353; to portray the flight from the window twice in Harley 4418; to incorporate interior and exterior scenes together in BnF fr. 24383: all of these

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[527] Zeldenrust, 'Serpent or Half-Serpent?', 39–40.

are likely to have been made by the limner in response to the text, and thus provide an independent perspective for the reader to adopt. Even the doodles of BnF fr. 1485 demonstrate something of the later readership of the romance, and in BnF fr. 12575 we are presented with the responses of three different limners within one manuscript. We also see variety in the key scenes that are depicted in almost all of the manuscripts: particularly the bathing scene and the scene that depicts Mélusine's flight from the window as a dragon. These again show the thought processes behind creating these images, and that each response results in a different reading of the text. The illuminated Mélusine manuscripts therefore demonstrate well the central position romance limners occupied between reader response and authorial creation.

10. CONCLUSION: THE CONTEMPORARY LIFE OF PICTORIAL NARRATIVES

Introduction

During the course of my doctoral research I developed an interest in comics, and critical works about their production and reception. At first, I considered this to be a sideline interest of little or no relevance to my Ph.D. topic, but I came to realise as I consulted more works on text-image relations and formal composition in comics that what I was reading in this area was in fact highly relevant, if not crucial, to my discussion of visual literacy in medieval romance texts and illuminated manuscripts. One of our chief obstacles to understanding medieval art objects is our temporal removal from them, and only being able to glean their use and intended purpose by piecing together a historical context for them. Contemporary work on comics can shed some light on the production and reception of visual narratives in a more general sense, and we can apply these thoughts quite usefully to medieval manuscript illuminations. In addition, the enduring popularity of visual narrative forms has often extended to works with medieval source material, and these might be usefully compared to their predecessors. Visual narratives that combine both image and text continue to enjoy great success and popularity and, increasingly, critical acceptance; we would do well, then, to consider medieval sources in light of more recent examples of visual narratives, and the conversations surrounding them.

Illustrated Books

In recent years, it has become much more acceptable to consider images in terms of narrative, and to consider media such as illustrated books, film and comics seriously for their academic merits. Illustrations in narrative books have traditionally been associated with children's

literature, and this has led in the long term to a widespread assumption that illustrated books are not suitable for adults, despite the presence of illustrations amongst the pages of classics of the literary canon such as the works of Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson (Figures 10.1 and 10.2). In the Victorian era in particular, book illustration was not at all uncommon for adult texts; it was also during this period that Rodolphe Töpffer created the satirical caricatures that are often considered to be the precursor of modern comics. However, illustrations for works such as those by Dickens and Stevenson were serialised, and it could be argued that while illustration in this era was common for literary texts, it was most common to see it appear in 'pulp' works made for popular consumption, rather than so-called high art. This does not negate the significance of the images, however. Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* is supposed to have originated from a request for Dickens to write a story to accompany the illustrations; and one of his illustrators, Hablot Knight Browne, commonly known as 'Phiz', even took credit for the invention of some characters in *Oliver Twist*.[528] In the case of serialisation it is quite possible for images to have some bearing on the later instalments of text; in such instances, we see a dialogue existing between the text and its accompanying illustrations across various instalments. It is also likely that the illustrations would have been included to help to sell mass-produced copies.

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[528] Melanie McDonagh, 'Where Have All the Book Illustrators Gone?' *The Independent*. 16 January 2016, last accessed 14 August 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/where-have-all-the-book-illustrators-gone-6291792.html>. Also see Philip V. Allingham, 'Reading the Pictures, Visualizing the Text': Illustrations in Dickens from *Pickwick* to the *Household Edition*, 1836 to 1870, Phiz to Fred Barnard', in *Reading Victorian Illustration: 1855–1875: Spoils of the Lumber Room*, ed. Paul Goldman and Simon Cooke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 159–78.

Figure 10.1. Hablot Knight Browne, illustration for Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Figure 10.2. William Boucher, illustration for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*.

Arthurian material was a popular topic for illustration in the nineteenth century, the best known example perhaps being Aubrey Beardsley's illustrated *Morte Darthur* (Figure 10.3). The Pre-Raphaelites promoted the more serious or spiritual aspects of the Arthurian legend; their paintings borrowed heavily from textual sources such as Malory's *Morte Darthur*, so that while there is no text within most of the images themselves, we still feel its presence through a general awareness of the textual sources. Some artists relied on the medieval source material; Dante Gabriel Rossetti is said to have declared the *Morte Darthur* to be one of the greatest works in the world, alongside the Bible and Dante's *Vita Nuova*.[529] Others worked from more recent Arthurian sources, and Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* (1833) was a popular choice for the Pre-

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[529] Michaela Giebelhausen, 'The Religious and Intellectual Background', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 62–75 (p. 72).

Raphaelite artists (Figure 10.4). This brief foray into the purely visual arts reminds us of the fact that such 'high art' has been placed canonically apart from the so-called 'low art' of the illustrated book, despite sharing source material such as the *Morte Darthur*.

Figure 10.3. Aubrey Beardsley, illustration for Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*.

Figure 10.4. John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*. London, Tate, N01543.

The prejudice against supposedly lesser narrative forms was not reserved solely for illustrated books; the fantasy genre, for instance, has long been deemed a lesser form of literature in academic circles. Professor J. R. R. Tolkien's books, though a huge commercial success with a considerable fan base which has been well established since their publication, have been criticised by scholars for their supposedly non-serious content. Tolkien commented in a letter from 1956 that his contemporaries at Oxford did not consider his creative pursuits to have been as lofty in status as regular academic work: 'Most of my philological colleagues are shocked (cert. behind my back, sometimes to my face) at the fall of a philological into "Trivial literature";

and anyway the cry is: "now we know how you have been wasting your time for 20 years"'.[530]

There has been a long-standing prejudice against texts that might appeal to children, on the assumption that these do not make suitable reading for adults. In the long term, however, the literary canon has disagreed, and texts such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*; and *The Lord of the Rings* have proven to be classics for both adults and children.[531] In the case of illustrated books, some texts have even become synonymous with their illustrations, such as those made by John Tenniel for the 1865 edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the 1871 edition of *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (Figure 10.5), and those by Quentin Blake for the children's books of Roald Dahl (Figure 10.6). In recent years, many publishers and literary authors have collaborated with illustrators in their work: Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004) features illustrations by Portia Rosenberg in the manner of a Victorian serial; while graphic novelist and author Neil Gaiman has been collaborating on various projects, such as *The Sleeper and the Spindle* (2014) and *The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains* (2014), that are not novel-length but deal with adult topics and are not intended either to be solely for children or to represent a 'lower' form of literature than if the words were to appear without visual accompaniment. Illustrated novels marketed towards adults are not particularly common today, and illustrated

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[530] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 238.

[531] For recent debate on the controversies surrounding adults reading young adult fiction such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, see Alyssa Rosenberg's article 'No, You Do Not Have to Be Ashamed of Reading Young Adult Fiction', *Washington Post*, June 6 2014, last accessed 12 January 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2014/06/06/no-you-do-not-have-to-be-ashamed-of-reading-young-adult-fiction/>.

books are still more likely to be associated with children, but some recent authors have collaborated with illustrators to great success and critical acclaim, and demonstrate both that illustrations need not be relegated to the children's section and that even those which are may deserve as much attention as the texts that contain no illustrations at all.

Figure 10.5. John Tenniel, illustration for Lewis Carrol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Figure 10.6. Quentin Blake, illustration for Roald Dahl's *Matilda*.

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Film

Perhaps the most dominant visual medium for narrative in the past century has been film. Films, or the images conveyed through the technology of film, are not texts in the strictest sense, but they do effectively convey visual narratives. Although a film appears to show continuously moving images, this effect comprises a large number of still frames; technically a film is therefore composed of a series of still images, somewhat in the manner of a comic strip. Scott McCloud says that, in both film and comics, 'our minds, aided by the persistence of vision, transform a series of still pictures into a story of continuous motion' and that 'comics asks the

mind to work as a sort of in-betweener – filling in the gaps between panels'.[532] We can apply the same thinking to medieval manuscript illuminations that use sequencing effects, but also to the imaginative processes involved in reading narrative text, for which the reader must formulate mental versions of written scenes, and fill in the gaps in order to transform the mental images into a continuous narrative. There is great potential for examining the presence of text within film, whether through the interpretation of subtitle translations, or the adaptation of narrative texts, or simply the entirely visual (and auditory) presentation of a sequential narrative. In the earliest era of Disney animated films, from the 1930s to the 1970s, it was not uncommon for the film to begin with the image of someone turning the pages of a book to introduce the story (Figure 10.7); we see this effect at the beginning of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *The Jungle Book* (1967), and *Robin Hood* (1973). The effect is perhaps supposed to evoke feelings of authenticity, and to assure the audience that the film will be culturally rewarding as well as entertaining. All of the films mentioned above have literary origins, and so the inclusion of the texts might have been intended to pay homage to the original source material. If this is the case it is interesting that the book in the prologue to *The Sword in the Stone* contains material from Malory's *Morte Darthur*, when the contents of the film, and even its title, rely much more heavily on T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). The inclusion of the text at the beginning of these films highlights the fact that literary adaptations rely heavily on pre-existing text, and perhaps indicates an assumption on the part of the filmmakers that, to audiences, textual evidence is more reliable as an authentic source than oral or visual material.

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[532] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 65 and 88.

Figure 10.7. Still from Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*.

Figure 10.8. Still from Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

Other directors have used similar techniques, including Wes Anderson, who frequently uses stills of physical books or text-based items within his films as objects of narrative significance. In *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), Anderson employs a framing device in which the main narrative is told as a text written by a dead author, which in turn is based upon an oral conversation between two characters. The opening frames show a reader who has come to the grave of the author to pay homage to him; we see the book from a bird's eye view above, before the reader sits down to read the text through, at which point the main narrative of the film begins (Figure 10.8). A similar technique is used at the beginning of Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009); here, a book, complete with library sticker, is held up in homage to the edition of Roald Dahl's text that Anderson based his own animation on, one that was illustrated by Donald Chaffin rather than the more familiar Quentin Blake edition. The clips of text again add a sense of authenticity to the narrative. Anderson credits the written works of Stefan Zweig as his inspiration for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and this might in part explain the use of the narrative frame, though the text in the film is a fictional one. Luís Azevedo connects Anderson's use of texts as narrative framing devices to memory and preservation: 'In the work of Wes Anderson,

books and art in general have a strong connection with memory .... These movies have a clear message: books preserve stories, for they exist within them and live on through them'.[533] The additional use of text in Anderson's films as chapter headings or narrative evidence forces the viewer to treat the narrative as both textual and visual. Further types of text-based objects used to this effect in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* include an art catalogue, a receipt and a passport. In each instance, the viewer must read the information provided in order to understand the events of the film. Although film is a largely visual medium, we see various instances of text being incorporated into film narratives as physical objects and storytelling devices, often in quite effective and imaginative guises. As with medieval illuminated manuscripts, and other media that combine text and image, this interweaving of text objects within a visual narrative offers a polyphonic combination of storytelling voices, the multiplicity of which adds to the authenticity and mythological status of the story being told, and voices an awareness on the part of the creator that theirs is just one interpretive voice in a long tradition of storytelling.

The Arthurian legend has become a huge amalgamation of textual and visual sources, composed of many and various types.[534] The legend was reworked in the twentieth century in novels such as T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* trilogy (first published in full in 1958) and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), both of which were adapted into film: White in Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963, Figure 10.9) and Bradley in the mini-

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[533] Luís Azevedo, 'Bibliophilia – Books in the Films of Wes Anderson', *The A to Z Review*, June 25 2015, last accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.theatozreview.com/2015/06/25/books-in-the-films-of-wes-anderson/>.

[534] See Norris J. Lacy, 'The Arthur of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 120–36.

Figure 10.9. Still from Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*.

Figure 10.10. Still from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

series *The Mists of Avalon* (2001). Other screen adaptations of the Arthurian legend are plentiful

and relate variously to the medieval sources, including *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*,

directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones (1975, Figure 10.10); *Excalibur*, directed by John

Boorman (1981); *First Knight*, directed by Jerry Zucker (1995); *King Arthur*, directed by

Antoine Fuqua (2004); and the BBC television series *Merlin* (2008–12). There has been

continuous demand for the legend to be told in an easy-to-digest visual format, and the capacity

for dealing with malleable narrative material in serious, comedic and even surrealist tones has

endured. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, for all that it might seem to some to belittle the

gravitas of the medieval Arthurian material, in fact relies more closely on the original source

material than many other film attempts. Norris J. Lacy declares it to be an 'inspired spoof' of the

legend, 'played in a register that creates humour in the name of, but not necessarily at the

expense of, the story of Arthur and the Grail quest'.[535] He notes that, by comparison, the primary

mistake made by many other filmmakers who delve into the Arthurian material is to take it too

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[535] Ibid, p. 130.

seriously. The visual medium of film has been criticised for bastardising the medieval Arthurian material, but in fact shows a capacity for humour that was absent from the Pre-Raphaelites and other serious studies, but wholly present in texts such as those of Chrétien de Troyes.[536]

Comics

Comics is a medium that has taken a vast leap in both scholarly and public opinion in recent years. Originally confined to specialist bookshops, comics are now readily available in mainstream bookshops, they have gained a vast following online, and they have an increasing presence on academic curriculums across the world. In the UK both a comics laureate and a professor specialising in comics have recently been appointed, in 2014 and 2015 respectively.[537]

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[536] See Elizabeth Archibald, 'Questioning Arthurian Ideals', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 139–53 (p. 145). Also see *Arthurian Literature* 19 (2003), which is dedicated to the topic of Arthurian comedy: see in particular Elizabeth Archibald, 'Comedy and Tragedy in Some Arthurian Recognition Scenes', 1–16; and Donald L. Hoffman, 'Malory and the English Comic Tradition', 177–88.

[537] Press Association, 'Watchmen Graphic Novelist Dave Gibbons Appointed First Comics Laureate', *The Guardian*, 17 October 2014, last accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/17/watchmen-graphic-novelist-dave-gibbons-appointed-first-comics-laureate>; and Alison Flood, '"Great Snakes!" Tintin Expert Appointed UK's First Comics Professor', *The Guardian*, 26 November, last accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/nov/26/great-snakes-tintin-expert-appointed-uks-first-comics-professor>. Also see Christopher Murray, 'Comics Studies Has Been Undervalued for Too Long: We're Fighting to Change This', *The Guardian*, 18 February 2015, last accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/feb/18/comics-studies-has-been-undervalued-for-too-long-were-fighting-to-change-this>.

This transition in reputation has not been an altogether smooth process, and Rocco Versaci has commented that 'comic books have, throughout their history, been seen as a disposable medium that is meant primarily for children'.[538] In order to escape this reputation, most serious studies of the medium refer to its texts as 'graphic novels', a term that has been controversial with some creators of comics. Many have objected to the term on the basis that it simply relabels the same product with a more serious and respectable title in order to increase its appeal to both academics and the general public, and to challenge the assumption that comics are only for children. Daniel Raeburn wrote: 'I snicker at the neologism first for its insecure pretension – the literary equivalent of calling a garbage man a "sanitation engineer" – and second because a "graphic novel" is in fact the very thing it is ashamed to admit: a comic book, rather than a comic pamphlet or comic magazine',[539] and others such as Alan Moore and Gaiman have expressed either dislike of or bemusement concerning the name. The term is useful to designate comics that follow a linear narrative as opposed to the shorter strips found in newspapers and webcomics (Figure 10.11), though less so when we consider the numerous examples of non-fiction work and non-linear narratives that are commonly labelled graphic novels, such as Bryan Talbot's *Alice in Sunderland* (2007) or Michael Goodwin and Dan E. Burr's *Economix* (2012). The terms 'comics' and 'graphic novel' are therefore quite fluid. However, the fact that Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–91) received a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, the first and only comic to have done so, has been considered by some to be a crucial turning point in the public consideration of comics as a reputable medium, and both terms have gained more prominence since then.

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[538] Rocco Versaci, *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 12.

[539] Daniel Raeburn, *Chris Ware* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 110.
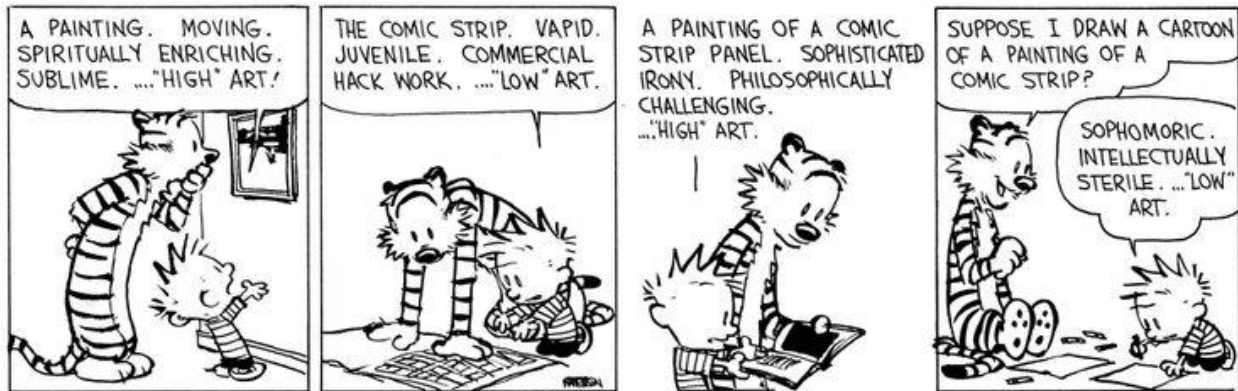
Figure 10.11. Bill Waterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*.

McCloud has defined comics as '[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer'.[540] This definition assumes that comics rely more heavily on images than on text, but does highlight the idea of an overall *mise en page* designed to evoke an aesthetic or intellectual response from the reader. It could also apply just as easily to the miniatures of illuminated medieval romance manuscripts as to comics. Eisner has pointed out that text and image are not as disparate as many people assume them to be, stating that words and images 'are derivatives of a single origin' and that 'in the skillful employment of words and images lies the expressive potential of the medium'.[541] The idea here, which is supported by the earlier work of structuralists beginning with Saussure, is that texts, words and alphabets are simply a complex version of imagery that is so well ingrained in us that we fail to equate it with the visual and place it into another category of its own. To examine text and image, then, is essentially to consider two types of image. McCloud points out that:

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[540] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 9.

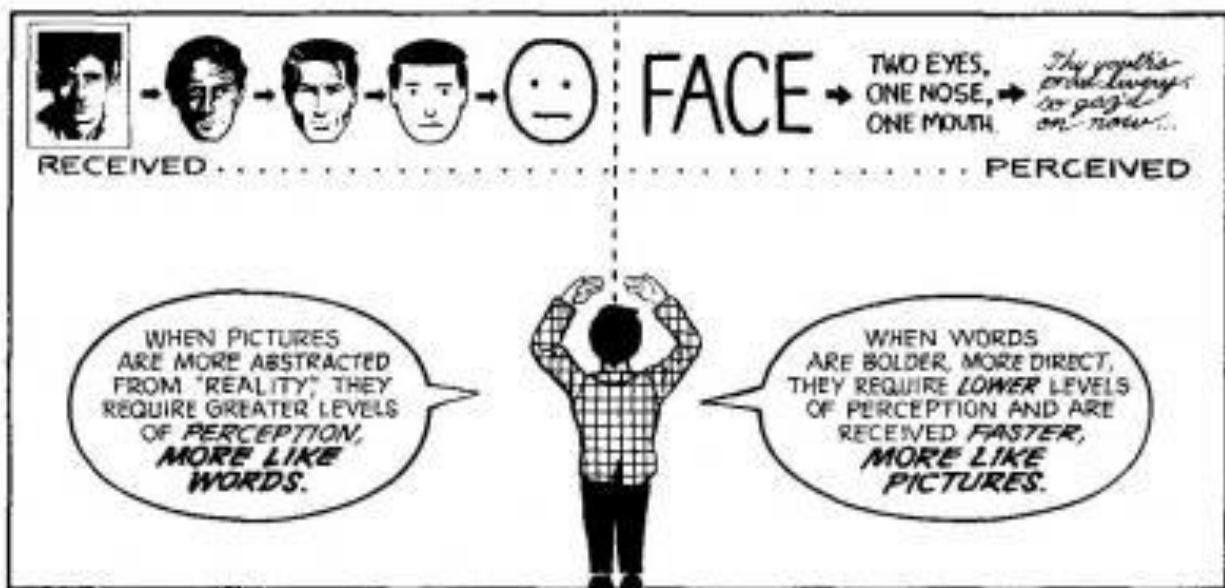[541] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, p. 7.

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Figure 10.12. Detail. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 49.

Pictures are received information. We need no formal education to 'get the message'. The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language. When pictures are more abstracted from 'reality', they require greater levels of perception, more like words. When words are bolder, more direct, they require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures. (Figure 10.12)[542]

Understanding text therefore requires more specialisation than understanding images, at least at a basic level, which may in part be why text has often enjoyed a higher status. Some comics rely more on images than words and vice versa, but on the whole the idea of the medium is that both enjoy an equal status, or at least work together harmoniously to achieve an overall textual-visual effect rather than clashing with one another or prioritising one over the other. According to

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[542] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 49.

Laurence Grove, 'there always has been, and still is, a difference between a textual narrative that includes images, and an image-based narrative that draws upon the written text as an intrinsic element'.[543] This might well be the defining difference between comics and medieval illuminations, though we might wish to pause before declaring text or image to be of greater importance in one or the other. In both, the visual aesthetic of the *mise en page* is the first thing the reader encounters, but the text then enables the reader to interpret the visual material. In some instances the text supports the images by providing meaning in a secondary role, and in others the images support the text by adding an aesthetic layer to the narrative. In short, each one supports the other in order to create a cohesive programme. Nick Sousanis has noted that,

> [t]raditionally, words have been privileged as the proper mode of explanation, as *the* tool of thought. Images have, on the other hand, long been sequestered to the realm of spectacle and aesthetics, sidelined in serious discussions as mere illustration to support the text – never as equal partner.[544]

It is perhaps the equality of text and image within comics that has persuaded many critics that it is not a worthy medium for scholarly attention, as traditionally text has been considered to be the most important element of any narrative. However, increasing interest in comics suggests that visual and textual elements can combine to create a dynamic narrative that is often poignant and deserving of critical praise. For example, there has been a recent trend in alternative or independently published comics of autobiographical works that deal with serious personal and political material. Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001); Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000–3); David

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[543] Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), p. 18.

[544] Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 54.

Beauchard's *Epileptic* (1996–2003); and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) are all good examples of this phenomenon, proving that visual content does not necessarily belittle the gravity of the material presented within a narrative work.

McCloud's assertion that words and pictures are able to act like one another by becoming either more simplified or complex is also important for considering how we visualise or internalise a medium such as comics. Eisner comments that:

> The format of comics presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit.[545]

However, there are certain instances in which the abstraction or convolution of text or image affects our understanding of a text. McCloud says that '[w]hen we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential "meaning", an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't'.[546] In other words, by simplifying an image the message of the text can be relayed more clearly, because the eye is aided but not distracted by the visual accompaniment. A prime example of this effect is Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–91), which details the events of Spiegelman's father's experience with the Holocaust. The serious content of *Maus* is more easily digestible, and perhaps even more striking, for the simplicity of the artwork and the simplification of the human figures into cartoon mice as Jews and cats as Nazis. The narrative of

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[545] Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, p. 2.

[546] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 30.

Figure 10.13. Detail. Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, p. 214.

Vladik's experiences with the holocaust is interspersed with the narrative of his son's experiences in getting the story from him and producing the book. Chapter 2 of the second part of *Maus* opens with Art feeling unsure how to proceed with the memories he has been given: "'Some part of me doesn't want to draw or think about Auschwitz. I can't visualize it clearly, and I can't BEGIN to imagine what it felt like'".[547] His removal from the original events as told by his father is reflected in the reader's own inability to really understand those events, and allows the reader to feel secure in that removal, which is emphasised by the animal imagery used

[547] Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 206.

in the comic. In one episode, Art describes an inconsistency between Vladik's memory of an event and the facts as they were reported elsewhere: in his research on Auschwitz he has found reports that an orchestra played at the gates as the prisoners left, but Vladik has no memory of this having happened, and seems incredulous about it (Figure 10.13).[548] This reminds the reader that truth, memory and narrative operate on subjective planes for any reader, and again seems to act as reassurance against the dangers of misreading the text. The considerations of form that have emerged in discussions about comics apply to a broad range of visual narratives, and remind us of the relationship between creator and receiver, and the communications that occur between the writer or artist, and the reader or viewer.

Versaci has described comics as 'the entertainment that is designed for mass appeal and minimal thinking', and that as a result '[s]uch entertainment is not "high" or even "good" art, or so the thinking goes, it's the kind of material that we engage with when we simply want to shut down our thinking centers'.[549] It is a simple fact that texts with images are, for the most part, easier to read. There are neurological reasons for this: the mind digests the information contained in an image immediately and in its entirety, using minimal additions to our cognitive load and therefore allowing us to grasp the gist of the evidence at a glance through object recognition, though our gaze might linger on the image in order to take in all of its finer details.[550] The

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[548] Ibid, p. 214.

[549] Versaci, *This Book Contains Graphic Language*, pp. 2 and 3.

[550] Gary Woolley, 'Developing Reading Comprehension: Combining Visual and Verbal Cognitive Processes', *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 33.2 (2010): 108–25 (111). There is also debate among cognitive scientists as to the exact relationship between word and image recognition in the human mind; for a comparison of cognitive locations for text and image comprehension, see R. Vandenberghe, C. Price, R. Wise, O. Josephs and R. S.

conjoined effect of the instant and the gradual relaying of information in this manner is therefore key to understanding how comics, and how other visual media, work. This effect is further discussed by Sousanis in terms of sensory experience:

> We're concerned with the ways in which we employ visual and verbal modes in order to distill something tangible from the vastness of sense experience. The verbal marches along linearly, step by step, a discrete sequence of words, 'strung one after another', as Susanne Langer writes, 'like beads on a rosary'. The visual, on the other hand … presents itself all at once, simultaneous, all over, relational.[551]

Text requires more of a cognitive leap on the part of the reader; any narrative content is imagined without additional help from visual sources, and the more complicated the language is, the more effort it will take for the reader to digest all of the information to a satisfactory enough level in order to form a clear image in the mind. Illustrations act as guides for the reader, to help with the process of visualising the text. More fully immersive visual narratives, such as those found in film or comics, save the reader or viewer the trouble of having to visualise the text, and are therefore much easier to read. It is perhaps this ease of reading that has brought scorn upon such narratives, rooted in the assumption that a worthy narrative is one that requires work in order to understand it. Comics, however, have made serious and sometimes difficult subject matter more accessible through the use of images, and their unique format allows the creators to balance text and image in order to gain as strong an effect as possible. As with illuminated manuscripts, the effect is often aesthetically pleasing, entertaining, and ultimately instructive.

J. Frackowiak, 'Functional Anatomy of a Common Semantic System for Words and Pictures', *Nature* 383 (1996): 254–6.

[551] Sousanis, *Unflattening*, p. 58.

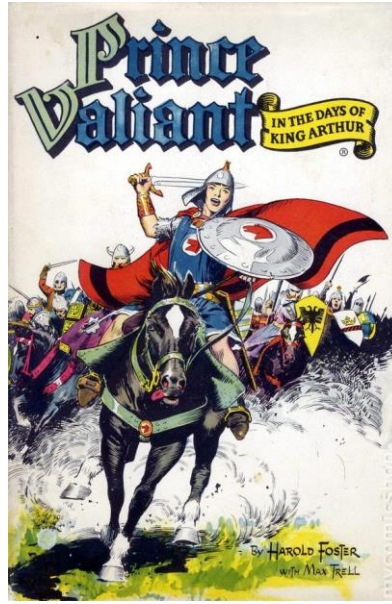Figure 10.14. *Muppet King Arthur*, title cover.

Figure 10.15. *Prince Valiant: In the Days of King Arthur*, title cover.

Figure 10.16. *Camelot 3000*, title cover.

We might compare comics to medieval illuminated manuscripts for various reasons. Martha Rust has commented that 'both medieval book artists and contemporary cartoonists make use of the page as a device for giving their readers access to a domain of representation that is beyond the regimes of either pictures or words – yet somehow in the shadow of both'.[552] We might also compare manuscripts to comics for their similar production technique, relying on a number of different hands in various roles. For instance, the first instalment of Gaiman's *Sandman* series, *Preludes & Nocturnes* (1988–9), credits the writer, artists, colourist, letterer and cover artist, along with an array of publishing roles. However, some comics, such as *Maus*, are largely the

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[552] Martha Rust, '"It's a Magical World": The Page in Comics and Medieval Manuscripts', *English Language Notes* 46.2 (2008): 23–38 (p. 23).

result of one writer and artist. Some contemporary comics have also dealt with or borrowed heavily from medieval sources. Beowulf has appeared in several comic series, for instance, including a graphic novel by Gareth Hinds (2007); and Mélusine appears in an eponymous series about a young witch, first released in 2007, though the narrative appears to bear little resemblance to its medieval namesake. There are also several children's comics with an Arthurian theme, such as the *Muppet King Arthur* by Paul Benjamin and Johanna Stokes (2010, Figure 10.14) and *The Knights of the Lunch Table* by Frank Cammuso (2008). Other forays into the Arthurian material have included *Prince Valiant*, a comic series created by Hal Foster in 1937 which takes place within an Arthurian setting (Figure 10.15); and *Camelot 3000*, a comic series written by Mike W. Barr and first published in 1982, which places the characters of the Arthurian legend in a futuristic setting (Figure 10.16). No matter how removed these comics might be from the medieval source material, they still make the original tales relevant to modern audiences. Peter W. Lee notes, for instance, that medieval-themed stories produced in twentieth-century America 'were more about the modern United States than the Middle Ages'.[553] The nature of adaptation, therefore, is not just to repeat the original source material, but to add an additional perspective to it, even if it seems far removed. The Arthurian legend has enjoyed an enduring influence, having been open to different voices commenting upon, altering and adding to the story, and its adaptation into various types of media has ensured its longevity. Its endurance highlights the ways in which adaptations, including the illuminations of medieval manuscripts, add interpretive voices to a pre-existing but ever-evolving narrative.

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[553] Peter W. Lee, 'Red Days, Black Knights: Medieval-Themed Comic Books in American Containment Culture', in *Corporate Medievalism II*, ed. Karl Fugelso, Studies in Medievalism 22 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 181–200 (p. 182).
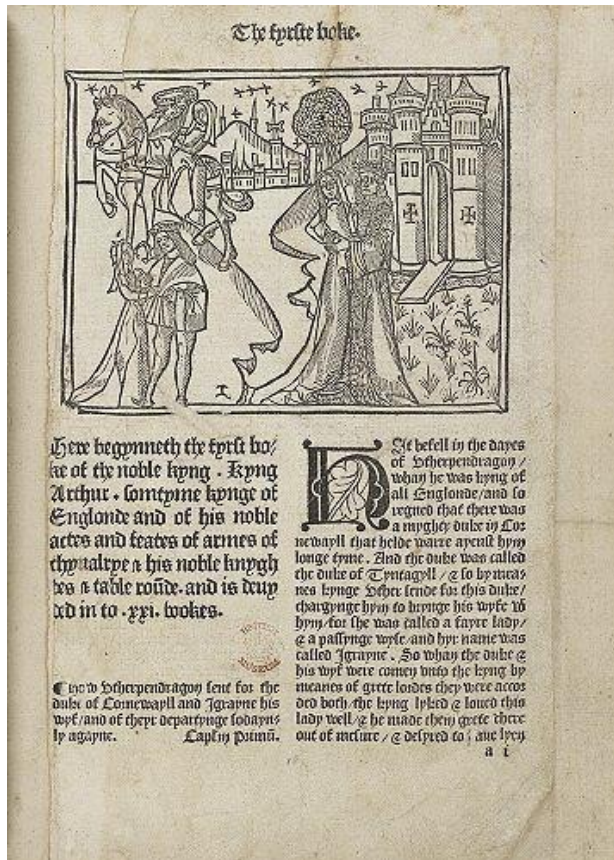
Figure 10.17. Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, Manchester, John Rylands 15396, p. 27.

Figure 10.18. John Matthews, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, p. 8.

The graphic novel version of the *Morte Darthur*, adapted by John Matthews and drawn by Will Sweeney (2011), demonstrates some of the issues faced by an artist trying to visualise Malory's text on the page.[554] There are no known pictorial versions of the text before Wynkyn de Worde's 1498 edition; between these two versions we can therefore see the treatment of Malory's material across a centuries-long gap. The opening miniature for the 1498 edition depicts the seduction of Igraine by Uther Pendragon using a composite scene of three episodes

[554] John Matthews, *Le Morte D'Arthur: The Legend of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table. Volume 1: The Coming of the King* (London: SelfMadeHero, 2011).

(Figure 10.17). Here the artist of the woodblock has attempted to depict the continuity of the scene with the use of the three episodes, but avoids explicit reference to the shapeshifting transformation which takes place. This is not particularly surprising as it would have been a difficult scene to depict, particularly as the transformation is vague within the text. Sweeney, the artist of the graphic novel, does not shy away from the visual absences within the text, and depicts the transformation with the panels focusing on Uther's face altering as it takes place (Figure 10.18). Ultimately, both artists have had to decide how best to represent their source material, though because Sweeney provides a more continuous visual accompaniment to the text he has to confront all of the material presented in his text, rather than just a portion of it. The vague contents of the 1498 woodcut are truer to the lack of information provided in Malory's text, but the 2011 adaptation addresses the gap and provides its own interpretation of the events through the images, whilst sticking close to the source material through the text. It could be argued that the chronological distance between the two pieces means that they have little in common, particularly if we compare the sparse visual programmes of medieval secular illustration to the continuous visual narratives of contemporary comics. However, by comparing the two we can learn something of how two artists within different cultural contexts thought to approach the text and transform it into a cohesive visual narrative for the reader to follow.

We might also usefully compare some of the practical decisions made by contemporary comics artists with those of their medieval counterparts. There are several differences (see Figures 10.19 and 10.20). One of these is temporal, in the sense that the medieval artists worked with less frequent images and therefore provided separate episodes in their miniatures rather than creating a sense of immediate motion, though we do see some exceptions. Another is the quality of the images: luxury, one-of-a-kind manuscript illuminations were made to a high standard,

Figure 10.19. John Matthews, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, p. 38.

Figure 10.20. *Prose Tristan*. Paris, BnF fr. 99, 1463, fol. 561r.

usually for a wealthy patron, and were very expensive, whereas mass production means that

comics creators have to make certain decisions that might be affected by the cost of production

and distribution, such as whether to work in colour or monochrome. This is not to say that

images in comics are necessarily poor quality, though, and many beautiful examples exist, using

a variety of media to create the images, including pen and ink, oils, collage and computer

colouring. Another difference between the two types is the incorporation of text into the image.

In medieval illuminations text is usually reserved for inscriptions, the purpose being to label the

components of the image rather than to use the text as dialogue or narrative description, the latter

usually being relegated to the rubrics. Some exceptions to this rule can be found in the margins

of commentary texts, or in Annunciation scenes, though in the latter the scroll is perhaps meant

to represent the act of speech and the gravitas of the words spoken rather than to provide the words for the reader. Despite these differences, the images of both medieval illuminated manuscripts and comics are similar in their purpose; the level of integration between the text and images might not be exactly the same, but they are combined with an aim to presenting the reader with the material needed in order to understand the narrative. Both medieval limners and modern comics artists have expressed an interest in finding new ways to format pictorial narratives. The comics of Gaiman and Moore, for instance, present a number of interesting framing techniques that are not limited to plain square blocks and blank space. In one page from Gaiman's *The Sandman Volume 1: Preludes & Nocturnes*, six panels are presented in five different formats: as a circular frame with an intricate border; a background image with a framing curtain hovering in semi-realistic space; two circular frames with white borders which are reminiscent of one character's glasses; a rectangular frame with a black border; and a *bas-de-page* image framed in part by the other panels and in part by black marginal space (Figure 10.21). All of this is accomplished without breaking the basic rule of Western comics that the narrative should progress from left to right, and from the top of the page to the bottom.[555] Those responsible for the layout have thought carefully about how best to convey the information required whilst also creating a visually stimulating page and setting the tone for the chapter. We might compare such techniques to those of fifteenth-century manuscript artists such as the Limbourg Brothers or Barthélemy d'Eyck. In the Fall of Man scene from the Limbourg Brothers' *Très riches heures*, for instance, the story of Genesis 3 is told within a single frame, but with multiple episodes depicted therein (Figure 10.22). The image is also read from left to

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[555] Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman Volume 1: Preludes & Nocturnes* (New York: DC, 2010), p. 2. Japanese Manga comics, on the other hand, are intended to be read from right to left.

Figure 10.21. Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman Volume 1: Preludes & Nocturnes*, p. 2.
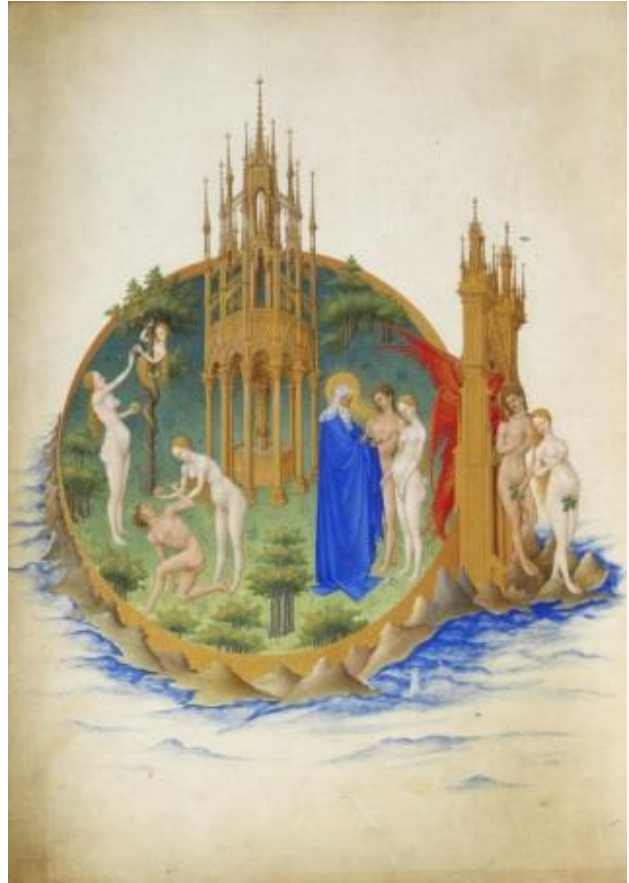
Figure 10.22. Chantilly, Musée Condé 65 (*Très riches heures*), fol. 25v.

right here, like text, so that a straightforward, linear narrative is presented. But the frame itself is

circular and cushioned by mountainous forms at its lower edge, and the artists also make use of

the blank space of the margins by transforming it into the wilderness to which Adam and Eve are

expelled once they are forced to leave Eden. In this case, again, we see the straightforward

portrayal of a narrative within a confined space, but one that is both aesthetically pleasing and

that effectively conveys the difference between the lush, enclosed space of Paradise and the

stark, empty space outside it. As is the case in most manuscript miniatures, emotion is conveyed

through gesture rather than facial expression, but in this miniature the setting also contributes to the sense of loss that is conveyed therein. Playing with frames, margins and borders can therefore create a result that is narratively, aesthetically and thematically effective, and can apply to the creations of both medieval manuscript limners and contemporary comics creators.

The last similarity between medieval manuscript illumination and modern comics that will be addressed here is their methods of communication with the reader. Sometimes this is direct, but often implicit, and metafictional in drawing attention to its own craft. In the third volume of *Kill Shakespeare*, written by Conor McCreery and Anthony del Col, and drawn by Andy Belanger (2013), the resolution of the story takes place in a blank space representing the imagination, where the character Shakespeare defeats his wayward creation Prospero when the latter is unable to summon up characters from the imagination in the way that Shakespeare can (Figure 10.23).[556] Many comics creators insert themselves into their creations in order to speak to the reader either directly or indirectly. For example, McCloud and Talbot both situate themselves as a pictorial narrator throughout *Understanding Comics* and *Alice in Sunderland* respectively, and speak to the reader in that guise, often guiding them through the contents of the text (Figure 10.24). Other instances draw attention to the artificiality of the work. In Chapter 2 of the second part of *Maus*, 'And Here My Troubles Began', Spiegelman draws himself working at his drawing board in human form with a mouse mask on, a comment on the stylistic theme of his work, but also on the sense of superficiality he wishes to communicate at this moment; here, he discusses the various successes of his first volume of *Maus*, 'My Father Bleeds History', but hints that the superficial nature of these successes for such a personal and serious subject matter

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[556] Conor McCreery and Anthony del Col, *Kill Shakespeare 3: The Tide of Blood* (San Diego: IDW, 2013). p. 114.

makes him feel uncomfortable.[557] In *Alice in Sunderland* Talbot includes a sequence in which he

wakes up in the middle of the night and wonders about the viability of the work he is currently

narrating.[558] Daniel Clowes, in 'Just Another Day' (1991), has commented on the dilemma

comics writers face with regard to confessionals, and how honest to be within them; complete

honesty gains the trust and insight of the reader, but can also be embarrassing for the author.[559]

The comics industry today is flooded with autobiographical works that engage the reader closely

with the author's perspective. The medieval author was seldom as direct, though we might

consider examples such as Thomas Hoccleve's *Complaint* as being quite personal accounts. As

we have discussed earlier, however, the medieval author was deeply concerned with instructing

their reader in the proper manner of reading; by extension, the medieval limner occupied a

similar role, even if commercial concerns might have often occluded their direct concerns in this

area. With the modern creators of comics we have an additional advantage, which is that their

own words outside of their works are better documented; we can therefore use the perspectives

of contemporary comics creators to enlighten us on the possible perspectives of their medieval

predecessors, and the possible reasons for their artistic choices. For example, Gaiman has said in

an interview that '"[w]hen I started writing *Sandman*, I thought I should probably make sure that

I have as many women in the story as men, and that they are as integral to the story as the male

characters"'.[560] This is the sort of artistic commentary that is largely absent from medieval

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[557] Spiegelman, *Maus*, p. 201.

[558] Bryan Talbot, *Alice in Sunderland: An Entertainment* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), pp. 182–8.

[559] Versaci, *This Book Contains Graphic Language*, p. 50.

[560] Neil Gaiman, 'Author Interviews: Neil Gaiman on Returning to "Sandman", Talking in His Sleep and the Power
of Comics', NPR Books, 15 December 2015, excerpts from Fresh Air interview recorded 15 December 2015, last

literary and art historical studies, and which has to be inferred instead. From many contemporary author or artist interviews, we can see that they are very much aware of their audience. For example, Chris Ware, the creator of comics such as *Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) and *Building Stories* (2012), has said that '"I try to get my pictures to read like words, so that when you see them you can't make yourself not read them, in the same way that when you see a printed word you can't make yourself not read it, no matter how hard you try"'.[561] As we, the reader, try to get into the head of the author, or artist, we ought to realise the extent to which the author is trying to get into the head of the reader. If we do so we see, then, that both the medieval creators of pictorial narratives and their more recent counterparts in the form of comics creators are quite likely to have been concerned, above all, with communication, and that this consideration is apparent in their work. There are plenty of dissimilarities between their approaches to content and format, but there are similarities as well, and these can help us to piece together some idea of the thoughts behind creating a pictorial narrative, whether for a medieval illuminated manuscript or a modern comic.

Conclusions

The existing conversations surrounding visual narratives and text-image relations in contemporary media such as comics and film should not be ignored in the study of older materials of a similar sort, as much can be learned by comparing the two. Not only does the familiar modern idea of a divide between popular and critical success for text- and image-based

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accessed 28 August 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/15/458319575/neil-gaiman-on-returning-to-sandman-talking-in-his-sleep-and-power-of-comics>.

[561] Raeburn, *Chris Ware*, p. 20.

Figure 10.23. Conor McCreery and Anthony del Col, *Kill Shakespeare 3: The Tide of Blood*, p. 114.
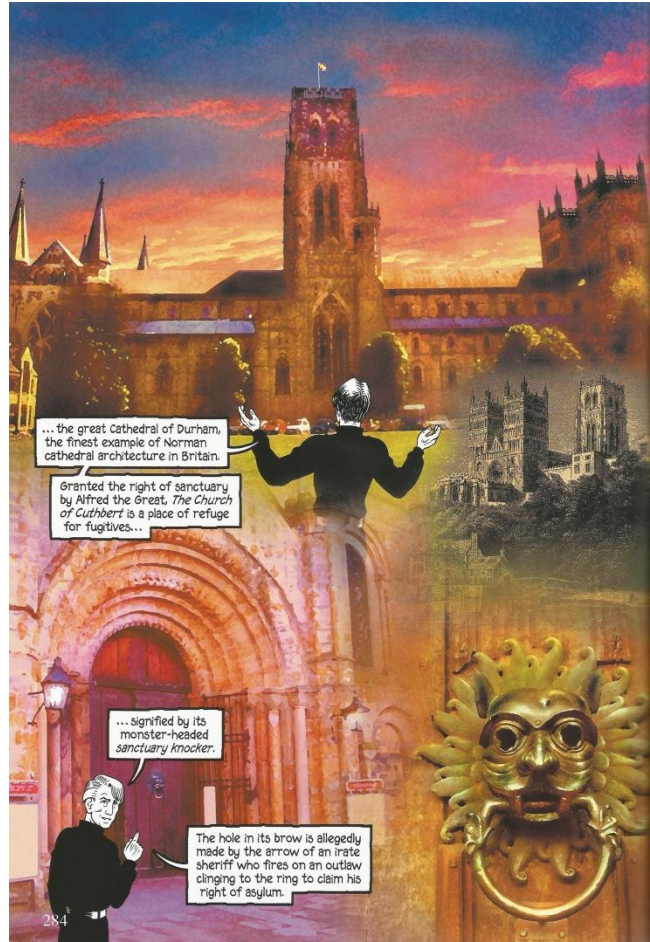
Figure 10.24. Bryan Talbot, *Alice in Sunderland: An Entertainment*, p. 284.

narratives have possible origins in the late medieval period, but the recent discussion of forms and effects in comics and other areas of visual literacy can also tell us a great deal about text-image relations, which applies as readily to medieval sources as to modern ones. Manuscript illumination went largely out of fashion after the sixteenth century, following the growth in demand for printed books, but illuminated manuscripts are not just part of a static historical

period. Rather, they belong to an ever-evolving story of pictorial narratives and their various guises throughout the centuries, and up to the present day.

Throughout this study the intellectual relationship between the author and reader has been at the forefront of the discussion. We began by asking a fairly straightforward, but also deeply complex question: how did medieval readers respond to books? As we have seen through the examples provided here, the response – or, at least, the intended response – can be gleaned through the guidance on reading that is available within the romance text, and also in the illuminations of its illustrated editions. The reader would likely have been aware to some extent of the optical theories that were commonly accepted in the later centuries of the medieval period, and particularly those which were common staples of romance narratives. The double action of sight and perception that accompanies both optical theories and romance episodes of the gaze is not far removed from the imaginative processes involved in reading, and in narratives that focus on visual evidence such as ekphrastic descriptions or allegorical dream visions, the instructive element of key visual material is quite apparent. The voice of the romance author often permeates the text: sometimes through the direct address of the authorial narrator, but also in the guise of the fictional creator or craftsman. Nigromancers, artisans and authors share a similar role within romance texts, namely that of guiding others through their crafts, and relying particularly on visual arts to persuade their audiences. The art of imagining, and also applying imagined material to intellectual purpose, is also a frequent trope of medieval romance. Dream visions are perhaps the most common method of demonstrating the art of visualisation within the romance text, but the frequency with which such instances are tied to books and reading, visualising narrative material and applying its messages to personal conduct, also reveals a strong didactic presence in many romance texts. Indeed, the ability to recognise key points in the

text and to apply them both to the progression of the narrative and to personal morality is a key motif of several romance texts. Again, this sense of morality appears in many cases to be focused particularly on reading: on the correct methods of recognising narrative signals, and gaining the best interpretation of the material provided. It is perhaps not surprising that this should be the case, since the primary relationship between the author and reader is effected through the act of reading. The Middle English *Melusine* provides an excellent case study for these concerns, as throughout the romance various characters fail in a multitude of ways to read the visual signs presented to them, often with disastrous results. The addition of manuscript miniatures to the discussion complicates matters a little, as the processes involved in visualising the contents of a textual narrative and those involved in contemplating a pictorial image are rather different. However, the miniatures enrich the discussion by emphasising an important point: that creators are also consumers, and that limners act as an intermediary between the two, presenting their own readings or interpretations of texts, and in doing so establishing their own authorial voices. With the limners in particular it is important to remember that artistic freedom to play with narrative content was often combined with and quelled by more practical concerns, such as those present in a commercial workshop. In the commercial productions typical of thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Paris this division of motives is particularly apparent, and the sheer multitude of manuscripts illuminated at this time has provided a wide range of examples in which limners puzzled out the intricacies of narrative presentation. One of the most effective methods was the sequential narrative, in which temporality is achieved by the depiction of multiple scenes within a single frame. In using this technique, limners could effectively summarise various aspects of the accompanying text within a single image, and in doing so provide a pictorial snippet of the narrative that could be read independently of the accompanying text. By comparison, we have

seen that English romance illuminations from this time are much scarcer, and that works of similar quality are therefore much rarer. However, we have also seen the ingenuity that being separated from commercial practices can engender, and many English secular manuscripts present images that engage with the text and improve the reader's communication with it. Within this context it is again the instructional relationship between author and reader that is key to the purpose of the visual material presented. The Mélusine narratives again provide an excellent case study for examining the differences between pictorial retellings of the story in illuminated manuscripts, and we find that in each case the limners have presented their own, unique stamp on the narrative and established new and interesting readings of the text through their images. Our concluding foray into contemporary pictorial narratives, and particularly the comics medium, is not as disparate from all of the above as it might at first seem. The instructive element of visual material in medieval romance narratives and illuminated manuscripts is not specific to the medieval period, and close examination of contemporary examples and the perspectives of their creators can draw us closer to a more general understanding of visual narratives, which can in turn be applied to the medieval examples. It is my hope that this line of thought may draw us closer to understanding the purpose of visual material within medieval romance narratives, and how the reader was intended to receive it. The examples available to us are myriad and wide-ranging in their scope. Medieval authors were individuals, after all, and it is unlikely that each and every one worked to the same purpose, or even had a singular purpose. Where we can see patterns and lines of enquiry within a text, however, we come closer to understanding it. If we accept that the medieval author was concerned in large part with matters of communication and instruction, perhaps such enquiry is exactly what they would have desired.

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