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NANCY FREEMAN REGALADO

The Medieval Construction of the Modern Reader: Solomon's Ship and the Birth of Jean de Meun*

. . . cette lumière qui nous fait nous émerveiller
devant de vieilles écritures.

—Daniel Poirion

All writing arises from an occasion: its themes are formed by particular purposes and its questions are those of a given moment. One of Daniel Poirion's special gifts, as a teacher and scholar, was to show how the esthetic and ideological questions of today could be turned to illuminate medieval works. He is indeed, for many of us, "the light that awakens in us a sense of wonder before old writings."¹ The piece I have chosen to honor our mentor is conceived in such a spirit of wonder. It was prompted by a question that bears the stamp of our time and that I answer here with all the passionate faith in literature that Daniel Poirion inspired.

THE MEDIEVAL THING?

In 1990 *The New York Times* published an article relating the differences between the cosmological models of Tycho Brahe and Copernicus to their relative position as children within their families.² Tycho

*I am grateful for the support of an NEH Fellowship during the period this article was completed.

1. Daniel Poirion, "Introduction" to *Écriture poétique et composition romanesque* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1994), 16. Translations, here and throughout, are my own unless otherwise specified.

2. Daniel Goleman, "Historian Links Birth Order to Innovation," *New York Times*, 5 May 1990, C1. Goleman reports on research conducted by Dr. Frank Sulloway on the relation of birth position to an individual's record of radical scientific innovation.

YFS 95, *Rereading Allegory*, ed. Sahar Amer and Noah D. Guynn, copyright © 1999 by Yale University.

Brahe was a first child: he maintained that the planets and sun revolved around the earth (and around him). Copernicus, as a second child, knew he was not the center of the universe: rejecting the received opinion of his day, he was convinced that the planets move about the sun. It is perhaps because I, too, am a second child that when I read the following statement formulated for a conference entitled *The Medieval Thing!*: “Beyond the realm of objects (which are always constructed by the subject, and thus always under suspicion of stemming from the imaginary), does there exist a medieval thing?” a number of questions leapt into my mind.³ Is nothing real but our awareness? As readers, do we respond only to ourselves, or to literary texts that exist outside us? Do we not speak and read languages and works that transcend subjectivity? I felt a deep sense of conviction that, for me, the issues to consider in response to this statement and its provocative presuppositions lay not only in my mind but also out in the world of evidence. It is indeed difficult for us to escape our solipsisms: not only am I a second child, but my mother’s maiden name was Hume. My blood, therefore, speaks to me of empiricism, of knocking our ideas against a few texts like the stone Samuel Johnson invited the idealist Bishop Berkeley to kick. My sex too—at least in the patristic and medieval tradition described by Jane Burns and R. Howard Bloch⁴—favors an approach through knowledge derived from experience and the authority of evidence derived from the realm of matter and the world of history. I will, then, march forth under the motto of Chaucer’s Wife of Bath—“Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynough for me” (ll. 1–2)—to test against the evidence of experience the presuppositions behind the assertion that textual objects are always constructed by us.

It is, of course, quite true that we construct texts within the framework of our competence and the beliefs and values of our time. But is it not also true that texts construct our constructions? Are our responses and our interpretations not—equally and always—directed by those

3. “La chose médiévale? / The Medieval Thing?” sponsored by the Center for French and Francophone Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 3–6 October 1990. I deeply appreciate the many conversations I had about “The Medieval Thing” and this paper with Michel Beaujour, Mary Carruthers, Ellen Freeman, Toby and John Harke, Nathan Horwitz, Sylvia Huot, Mariana Regalado, Antonio Regalado, Alison Stones, E. B. Vitz, and an attentive audience of faculty and graduate students in Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania on 8 April 1991.

4. E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).

powerful objects, those ingenious machines we call texts—"the most beautiful signifying machines," in Poirion's words⁵—machines that operate on our thoughts even as we read them? This question declares my constructivist approach to textual dynamics. Constructivism focuses on how texts structure our readings (or loose certain interpretive processes in our mind, according to Jerome Bruner).⁶ In my view a text is indeed an object, but far from being constructed solely by the subject, it is organized so as to bring the mental processes and imaginative constructions of the receiving subject or reader into action in a particular way.⁷ Hans Robert Jauss speaks of "a process of perception that the text, like a 'score,' indicates for the reader."⁸ This process is particularly visible within self-conscious literary texts, the form and content of which strongly shape our readings while they compel awareness of the mediating structures that pattern our constructs.

By analyzing how the particular properties of individual texts lead readers to read in very different ways, I propose, then, to show that texts construct their readers. As I formulated this approach to the question of "the medieval thing," I saw immediately what kinds of textual evidence I wanted to use. I chose two thirteenth-century texts, both heavily invested with allegory, a textual domain that makes direct interpretive demands on the reader: the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal* (c. 1225), an Arthurian prose romance relating adventures of the knights of the Round Table seeking the Grail, adventures subjected to numerous internal allegorical interpretations; and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1270), a courtly-philosophical allegory combining an 'art of love' with reflection on man's place in the cosmos. These works represent two essential and complementary modes of reading: interpretation and reproduction. Interpretation is a reading that elaborates

5. Poirion, "Semblance du Graal dans la *Queste*" (1982), rpt. in *Écriture poétique et composition romanesque*, 214. Similarly, Poirion writes, "Allegorical romance is thus a great machine that relates different levels of knowledge, and its function is to represent that other great machine that is the world" (*Le roman de la Rose*, Connaissance des Lettres [Paris: Hatier, 1973], 197).

6. Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 7.

7. This question is rather different from that often asked by reader-reception theorists, who have sought to analyze how readers organize their understanding of texts (and even decide what a literary text is) according to their competence (i.e., their experience as readers).

8. Hans Robert Jauss, "The Poetic Text Within the Change of Horizons of Reading: The Example of Baudelaire's 'Spleen II,'" in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 141.

a metatextual gloss around and about a work in words and themes that may be quite different from the text. Reproduction, in contrast, is a reading that remembers, copies, imitates, translates, or summarizes a work in words or themes very like those of the text itself.

Within these two works I selected passages that represent—in striking and amusing images—the future reader. For just as we strain to see them through their works, the medievals imagined us, projected and portrayed the readers to come, in the imaginary world of their fictions. We can see them as they peer ahead to see us, their future readers, anticipating the voyage of their text through time toward us, seeking to manage, to construct our reading. My title—“The Medieval Construction of the Modern Reader”—has thus two senses: the constructions these works seek to lead every reader to make, and the fictional image in these texts of the reader to come. We might call such themes and images of the future reader a new kind of *translatio studii*: *translatio ad futurum*. The old *translatio studii* fictionalized the medievals' consciousness that their era had succeeded that of classical antiquity, that the living spark of power and learning, of *chevalerie et clergie* (as Chrétien has it in *Cligés*, ll. 29–42), has passed to France from Greece and Rome.⁹ The new term *translatio ad futurum* describes the ways medieval texts project this succession toward the future. Images of the old *translatio* focus on textual production; the concern is that present time be used well in imitation of the artful industriousness of the ancients. Images of *translatio ad futurum* focus instead on textual reception, on reading; the concern is how the text itself will be used in times to come.

I will compare these images of future readers to three kinds of evidence: textual evidence demonstrating the readings and interpretive responses these texts are designed to elicit from readers; historical evidence concerning typical patterns of medieval readers' responses to particular texts; and historical evidence comparing the interpretations of medieval and modern readers. When we read works such as the *Queste* and the *Roman de la Rose* we are following patterns set out long ago—dynamic, powerful forms that shape our thoughts as they fill them. The idea that texts represent their readers and structure our readings is not novel in itself, of course, but it may well be that we have not yet fully investigated either the particular sets of instructions offered by specific works or the precious evidence provided by the shifts in the

9. Douglas Kelly explores the connotations of *translatio* as invention in medieval rhetoric in “*Translatio studii* in Medieval French Literature,” *Philological Quarterly* 57 (1978): 287–310.

way readers at different periods respond to the constructing force of particular texts. How do they satisfy or contend with our notions of genre and meaning? What is the relationship between the fictional representation of the reader and the interpretive constructions the text seeks to lead every reader to make? To what degree do the interpretive strategies laid down within the text order the responses of real readers through the ages? Or are these textual instructions superseded by other interpretive paradigms readers have brought to the text?

Our three points—the construction of the reader by the fiction, the particular interpretive strategies laid down in the text, and the evidence of medieval and modern responses to the “instructions” of each work—constitute a triangulation that gives us a fix on “the medieval thing.” The interplay between our readings and the texts that structure them—the uses of these interesting verbal instruments the Middle Ages has put in our hands—enables us to observe “the medieval thing” through study of the intermeshing of readers’ minds with these intricate textual objects that have come sailing through time from the Middle Ages to us and that act upon us even as we act upon them. Shifts in reading reveal changes in what Thomas Pavel calls the “ontological landscapes” within “the world view of a given community.”¹⁰ Readings reveal changes in “things” just as surely as do the varying styles and subjects of the texts themselves.¹¹ For what constitutes that “medieval thing,” if not the dynamic and complex foundation of cultural, social, and esthetic beliefs, practices, and productions that still speaks to us from long ago, from each text, and that still constructs our reading?

SOLOMON'S SHIP

No romance seems more actively preoccupied with reading as interpretation—*demonstrance, senefiance*—than the *Queste del Saint Graal*,¹² which elaborates lengthy fictions about the interpretations of future

10. Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 139.

11. Commenting on the “textually immanent potential for meaning in the change of horizons of historical life-worlds,” Jauss asserted the “alterity” of the Middle Ages, while pointing to the continuing relevance of C. S. Lewis’s description of the building of the medieval world-model in *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). See Jauss, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature,” *New Literary History* 10 (1979): 183.

12. Citations of the *Queste* refer to page numbers in Albert Pauphilet’s edition, *La Queste del Saint Graal* (Paris: Champion, 1949), and Pauline Maud Matarasso’s translation, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Penguin Books, 1969).

readers.¹³ The story line of the *Queste* is thrust ahead not just by romance adventures, but—even more strongly—by spiritual interpretations that are given for each adventure by a hermit, wise man, or holy woman and that advance the knights in the plot and in their quest. The most elaborate interpretations in the romance explain the significance of the ship to which Perceval's sister has led the three heroes of the *Queste*—Galahad, Perceval, and Bors—in a final test of their spiritual worth.

The boat bears a strange cargo: there is a bed on which is placed a golden crown and a jeweled sword half drawn from a red scabbard incongruously fastened to a crude hemp belt; the bed itself is covered by a canopy suspended over a frame made from three wooden spindles, one as white as snow, one as red as blood, and one as green as emeralds. The maiden recounts the events that have already fulfilled the dire warnings inscribed in "Chaldean" on the ship and on the sword: the dolorous stroke, the broken sword, the wasteland, and the maimed king. The marvelous ship and these objects are reserved for the one for whom they are predestined, the purest of the pure.

"Or dit li conte" (*Queste*, 195): the story itself takes over from the maiden as narrator,¹⁴ to tell the story of the woods used to make the three spindles.¹⁵ The white wood comes from the very tree that bore the fateful fruit, a branch of which Eve absentmindedly carried out from Paradise and that she then planted and propagated in remembrance of the Fall. The original tree turned green when Adam and Eve coupled under it, following God's command, and all its branches and

13. On issues of interpretation in the *Queste*, see the following studies: Tzvetan Todorov, "La quête du récit," in *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 129–50; Poirion, "Semblance du Graal," 201–15; Regalado, "La chevalerie celestiel: Spiritual Transformation of Secular Romance in *La quête del saint graal*," in *Romance: Generic Transformations from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1985), 91–113; Laurence N. de Looze, "A Story of Interpretations: The *Queste del Saint Graal* as Metaliterature," *The Romanic Review* 76 (1985): 129–47; Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 55–77; and Eugene Vance, "Le temps sans nombre: futurité et prédestination dans *La Queste del Saint Graal*," in *Le nombre du temps. En hommage à Paul Zumthor*, ed. Emmanuelle Baumgartner et al. (Paris: Champion, 1988), 273–83.

14. On narrative strategies in the *Queste*, see Burns, *Arthurian Fictions*, 13–14.

15. See Pauphilet, *Études sur la Queste del Saint Graal attribuée à Gautier Map* (Paris: Champion, 1921), 144–56; Esther Casier Quinn, "The Quest of Seth, Solomon's Ship and the Grail," *Traditio* 21 (1965): 185–222; Baumgartner, *L'arbre et le pain. Essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal* (Paris: SEDES, 1981); and Alexandre Leupin, *Le graal et la littérature. Étude sur la vulgate arthurienne en prose* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1982).

those of the saplings rooted from it were green and bore flowers and fruit. However, when Cain slew Abel under this very tree, it became entirely red and no longer bore fruit. We are told that all these green and white trees and the original Tree of Life, now red, lasted through the Flood and lived unchanged until the time of Solomon, son of King David.

Now Solomon—the story tells us—suffered greatly because his wife was smarter than he, and he could never win out over her. One day, as he asked himself why women take such pleasure in annoying men, a voice spoke, telling him that in his lineage would come a woman through whom man would know a joy greater than the sorrow his wife had brought him:

Quant Salemons oï ceste parole, si se tint a fol de ce qu'il avoit sa fame blasmee. Lors comença a penser par les choses qui li aparoiert et en veillant et en dormant por savoir s'il porroit conoistre la verité et la fin de son lignage. Et tant encercha et enquist que li Sainz Esperiz li demonstra la venue de la glorieuse Virge, et li dist une voiz partie de ce qui li ert a avenir. Et quant il oï ceste novele, si demanda se ce estoit la fins de son lignage: "Nanil, fist la voiz; uns hons virges en sera la fins, et cil sera autant meillors chevaliers de Josué ton serorge come cele Virge sera meillor de ta fame. Or t'ai certifié ce dont tu as tant esté en doutance."

Quant Salemons oï ceste parole, si dist que molt ert liez quant en si haute bonté et en si haute chevalerie seroit fichiee la bosne de son lignage. Si pensa comment il poïst fere savoir a celui home derreain de son lignage que Salemons, qui si lonc tens avoit devant lui esté, seust la verité de sa venue. A ce pensa il et soutilla mout lonc tens; car il ne veoit pas coment il poïst noncier a home qui si lonc tans estoit a venir après lui que il seust de lui mile rien. [221]

These words caused Solomon to hold himself a fool for finding fault with his wife, and led him to study every sign accorded him, whether waking or in dream, in the hope of coming at the truth about the ending of his line. He sought so diligently that the Holy Ghost revealed to him the coming of the glorious Virgin, and a voice told him in part what was to be. When Solomon learned of this, he asked whether this maid was to mark the end of his lineage. "No," said the voice, "a man, himself a virgin, shall be the last: one who shall pass in valour Josiah, thy step-brother, by as much as that Virgin shall surpass thy wife. Now I have set the seal of certitude upon thy glimmerings."

Hearing these words, Solomon declared himself most happy that the last scion of his lineage should be rooted in such virtue and high valour. He bethought himself how he could make known to the last of his line

how Solomon, who had lived so long before him, had had foreknowledge of his coming. He pondered long and deep upon this matter, not seeing how he could inform a man to live so many generations after him, how he had known of him. [230–31]

Not enough has yet been written about this radical recasting of the central myth of Christianity, which, according to Leupin, “unwrites Scripture”;¹⁶ about this breathtaking appropriation of Christian prophecy and prefiguration by secular romance, which dares to add new growth to the tree of Jesse, to imagine another male Virgin after Mary and to endow him with all the motifs of eschatological expectancy usually reserved for Christ. Solomon’s desire to get a message through the ages, to let Galahad know that he, Solomon, knew that the virgin knight was to come, is an equally unorthodox revision of Old Testament prophetic modes. The dramatic shift from the prophet’s message to Solomon’s urgent desire that his foreknowledge be recognized is a powerful representation of *translatio ad futurum*, of the text’s self-projection toward the future and its representation of the reader to come.

It is Solomon’s clever wife who devises a solution to this semiotic dilemma. She sets workmen to build a bed upon a ship of rot-proof wood; she tells Solomon to place upon the bed his own golden crown and the sword of David his father, fitted out with a new pommel and hilt endowed with all the magic powers Solomon possesses; and she adds a strangely incongruous sword-belt of rough hemp, explaining that a maiden will come to put on a new belt worthy to bear the sword. Finally she orders a frame of three spindles constructed of the three woods of the Tree of Life to be placed over the bed, a signifying framework made of materials whose profound memorial and prophetic significance has been revealed to the actual reader of the *Queste* by the preceding narrative. The carpenters are appalled to see drops of blood as red as roses flow from the Tree of Life when they chop into it. At last, all gaze at the finished ship:

Quant il orent ce fet, si regarda Salemons la nef et dist a sa fame: “Tu as, fist il, merveilles fetes. Car se tuit cil dou monde estoient ci, si ne savroient il deviser la senefiance de ceste nef se Nostre Sires ne lor enseignoient, ne tu meesmes, qui l’as fete, ne ses que ele senefie. Ne encor

16. Leupin, *Graal*, 72. On the relationship between *Queste* and scripture, see Burns, *Arthurian Fictions*, 55–57; Baumgartner, *L’arbre et le pain*; Regalado, “Chevalerie”; and Armand Strubel, *La Rose, Renart et le graal. La littérature allégorique en France au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1989), 276.

por chose que tu aies fete ne savra li chevaliers que j'aie noveles oïes de lui, se Nostre Sires n'i met autre conseil." [224–25]

When the job was done, Solomon looked at the ship and said to his wife: "You have done a marvelous work. For if all earth's inhabitants were here, they would not be able to spell out the meaning of this ship unless Our Lord revealed it to them, nor do you understand it yourself, for all that you have built it. Nor will anything you have done serve to inform the knight that I had heard of him unless Our Lord give him some other help." [234]

That night, however, Solomon dreams that an angel sprinkles the ship with water from a silver pail and inscribes letters on the sword and the ship. He has just time enough, upon awakening, to see the writing on the boat before it speeds away toward its rendezvous, two thousand years later, with Galahad and his companions. But a voice announces that the last knight of his lineage will sleep in the marvelous bed "et savra noveles de toi" (and [he] will have tidings of thee)" (225; 235). Here is a new semiotic dilemma: the insufficiency of signs renders them unintelligible, not to their readers but to their makers. Solomon's wife cannot read the miraculous ship she has had built. Her deficient understanding is represented by the hemp belt she attaches to the shining sword of David, to be replaced in the future by the predestined maiden. Full understanding of such special, prophetic signs calls for "some other help" from the Lord: interpretation requires revelation.

These passages represent the inscribed future reader as an ideal, messianic figure who correctly interprets and fulfills the meaning of an enigmatic text sent to him through the ages by an author eager to be recognized and acknowledged. This ideal reader understands everything, all the signs—even those their author does not fully comprehend. By supplying the real-world reader of the *Queste* itself with a full account of the meaning of the enigmatic objects and writings on Solomon's ship, the text turns its real reader into this ideal reader whose understanding anticipates that of Galahad and his companions. Indeed, the ship of Solomon and its wonders at first exceeds the comprehension of the Arthurian knights until they find a *brief*, a letter that tells them the story of the ship that the real-world reader has already read for himself. Interpretive constructs to be used by the future reader thus seem to be explicitly laid down into the fictional fabric of the text itself.¹⁷

17. For Poirion, the *Queste* Master treats his heroes as readers and ranks them according to their ability to decipher the meaning of their adventures. See "Semblance du Graal," 204.

It is a sign of the remarkable strength of this construction of the reader as messianic interpreter that it has led many modern critical readers to perform—time and again—hermeneutic acts upon this romance that are very like those the *Queste* itself represents. They have elaborated religious and Christian glosses that seem to replicate the spiritual interpretations initiated in the *Queste*; and they have reiterated and amplified the allegorical matching of Arthurian matter with spiritual meaning that is carried out within the *Queste*, reinterpreting as Christian beliefs the mystical values attributed to Arthurian motifs in the *Queste*. Pauline Matarasso begins the introduction to her marvelous translation of the romance by declaring, “The *Queste del Saint Graal* despite its Arthurian setting is not a romance, it is a spiritual fable” (9). Armand Strubel asserts that interpretations such as those in the *Queste* conform to “doctrine”; however, while the *Queste* draws on interpretive habits familiar from the texts of Christian doctrine, it takes its allegories from the spiritual and ethical matter of romance. And de Looze accurately concludes that “the annexation of the reader to this chain of (re)telling and (re)interpreting is the final (re)enactment of the interpretive strategy thematized within the *Queste del Saint Graal* itself.”¹⁸

Where can we look to find evidence of medieval readings of works such as the *Queste*? Copies of texts, glosses, or interpretive commentary (often written in the margins); imitations, continuations, or expansions of story matter; and, finally, association with other texts in manuscript compilations—all these tell us something about how a work was received by a medieval audience. Such evidence tells us that the medievals seem to have read the *Queste* as a secular romance rather than as a religious work; for them, its genre was marked by its characters—Arthur, Lancelot, Galahad—and by its adventure plot.

In virtually all the manuscripts, from the thirteenth through the fif-

18. For religious interpretations of the *Queste*, see Laurence de Looze, “A Story of Interpretations,” 147. See also Pauphilet, *Études*; Baumgartner, *L'arbre et le pain*; and—with reservations that tie the *Queste* more directly to an aristocratic and chivalric ethos—Jean Frappier, “Le graal et la chevalerie,” *Romania* 75 (1954): 165–210, rpt. in *Around the graal* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 89–128. Karen Pratt carefully reexamines the *Queste* for evidence of Cistercian doctrines and practices; she concludes that the author probably had “a foot in both secular and monastic worlds” (“The Cistercians and the *Queste del Saint Graal*,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 21 [1995]: 69–96). The modern French translation of the *Queste* by Albert Béguin and Yves Bonnefoy was published by Seuil in 1965 in its “*Livre de Vie*” series of “the best books of Christian life,” together with devotional works by Christian writers such as Pascal, François Mauriac, and Thomas Merton, and saints such as Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, and François de Sales.

teenth centuries, the *Queste* is copied within the firm grip of the cyclical romances: in thirty-six of the thirty-nine manuscripts surveyed by Pauphilet in his edition, the *Queste* is associated with the *Lancelot*, *La mort le roi Artu*, or the full Vulgate Cycle.¹⁹ Moreover, in two of these manuscripts, episodes from the prose *Tristan* and *Palamedes* were added to the *Queste*, thus amplifying its romance identity. It was never compiled with spiritual or pious writings, but virtually always with the great narrative movement of the prose *Lancelot* (to which a reworked version of Robert de Boron's *Estoire* added a pseudo-Christian prehistory of the Grail, the elements of which are reused within the *Queste*'s allegories). Furthermore, although the *Queste* was widely read and often copied, there are few analogues to its daring spiritual allegorization of Arthurian romance motifs, which were, moreover, reduced in later versions.²⁰ There is therefore no manuscript or textual evidence that medieval readers attempted to interpret the *Queste* in terms of the spiritual allegories expounded by characters, or to apply these more generally to Arthurian romance. Given the well-known ecclesiastical hostility to secular literature, it is difficult indeed to conceive of a medieval philosopher choosing to write a commentary like Etienne Gilson's "La mystique de la grâce dans la *Queste del Saint Graal*."²¹

The *Queste* thus appears to construct two kinds of readings, two dif-

19. Nineteen manuscripts compile the *Queste* with both the *Lancelot* and *La mort le roi Artu*; eight with some version of the full Vulgate Cycle; five with *La mort le roi Artu* alone; four with *Lancelot* alone; one compiles the *Queste* with a chronicle, one with various pieces; the *Queste* appears alone in only one manuscript. See *La queste del Saint Graal*, iii–vi. I thank Lori Walters for sending me her study of Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 5218 (1351), where the *Queste* is compiled with the annals of the Church to the year 1281 and where an illustration (fol. 88) engages current ecclesiastic issues by depicting the grail liturgy (*Queste*, 229; 275) as a vision of the mystery of transubstantiation vouchsafed by the celibate ("Wonders and Illuminations: Pierart dou Tiel and the *Queste del saint Graal*," in *Word and Image in Arthurian Literature*, ed. Keith Busby [New York: Garland, 1996], 339–80 and fig. 3).

20. Poirion affirms the distinctive esthetic of the *Queste* in "Semblance du Graal," 206. Baumgartner shows how the *Tristan en prose* reduces and resists the mystical spirit of the *Queste* when the latter is joined to it in a "collage-incrustation" ("La préparation à la *Queste del Saint Graal* dans le *Tristan en prose*," in *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994], 5–7). In the *Perlesvaus* (ca. 1210?), closest to the *Queste* of all the prose romances in its enigmatic spiritual overtones, allegoresis is, according to Anne Berthelot, only "an extra ornament to the narrative: one path among others in a forest full of adventures" ("The Other-World Incarnate: 'Chastel Mortel' and 'Chastel des Armes' in the *Perlesvaus*," in *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. Poirion and Regalado, a special issue of *Yale French Studies* [1991]: 210).

21. *Romania* 51 (1925): 321–47.

ferent readers. Modern critics most often read the *Queste* according to the interpretive process represented within the story. They receive it as theological allegory and then interpret that allegory in terms of familiar elements of medieval Christian doctrine. But the medievals apparently received it as romance to be read for its succession of pathetic and dramatic events leading to the doom of Arthur and the Round Table. For the medieval reader, the allegorical interpretive processes of the *Queste* seem to be entirely enclosed by the romance that frames and contains them, part and parcel of the adventures to be read, rather than a paradigm pointing to further interpretations to be undertaken by the reader of the romance.

This romance reader who thus receives and reproduces the text without further interpretation (in contrast with the messianic reader who explicates the prophetic texts represented in the romance) is depicted briefly in the last lines of the *Queste*. Lancelot, whose sins prevented him from achieving the Grail adventure, has come back to Camelot; Galahad and Perceval have died after finding the Grail; and finally Bors returns to tell their tale:

Quant il orent mengié, li rois fist avant venir les clers qui metoient en escrit les aventures aus chevaliers de laienz. Et quant Boorz ot contees les aventures del Seint Graal telles come il les avoit veues, si furent mises en escrit et gardees en l'almiere de Salebieres, dont Mestre Gautier Map les trest a fere son livre del Seint Graal por l'amor del roi Henri son seignor, qui fist l'estoire translater de latin en François. Si se test a tant li contes, que plus n'en dist des Aventures del Seint Graal. [279–80]

When they had dined, King Arthur summoned his clerks who were keeping a record of all the adventures undergone by the knights of his household. When Bors had related to them the adventures of the Holy Grail as witnessed by himself, they were written down and the record kept in the library at Salisbury, whence Master Walter Map extracted them in order to make his book of the Holy Grail for love of his lord King Henry, who had the story translated from Latin into French. And with that the tale falls silent and has no more to say about the Adventures of the Holy Grail. [284]

Like these fictional and fictionalized characters—Bors, the scribes, King Arthur, King Henry, and Gautier Map—the medievals, too, wrote, copied, and translated the *Queste* and preserved it in their libraries; but they did not further interpret the romance or gloss it allegorically as we do. The *Queste* manuscripts do not offer additional marginal allegori-

cal glosses:²² such glossing was reserved for what Mary Carruthers calls "fully institutionalized," "authorized" works: "the Bible . . . books of canon law, and (by the late fourteenth century) the works of certain classical authors."²³ All the manuscript evidence thus suggests that the *Queste's* signs of literary genre were more compelling for the constructions of medieval readers than were its strange internal allegories. It was read as a secular work, a fine romance. Such testimony of medieval readings is a significant clue that points us toward medieval hierarchies of values and definitions of genre. It invites us to puzzle less over the theology of the *Queste* and more over the ways it exploits romance structure if we want to know the "medieval thing."

Here we find ourselves faced with further questions: How shall we read medieval literature, as moderns or as medievals? Shall we read the *Queste* as a romance to be interpreted or as a romance whose adventures are interpretations? Which construction of the future reader shall we follow? That of Galahad and Lancelot, who eagerly interpret the adventures they encounter and fulfill their allegorical prophecies? Or that of Bors and Gautier Map, who reproduce the text by retelling and translating the "Adventures"?

We might begin by asking why modern critics have felt such an urge to interpret the *Queste* in theological terms instead of reading it as romance. It took all the theoretical conviction of a Todorov finally to break the constraints the *Queste* had seemed to impose on our readings, to stop repeating *demonstration*, which de Looze sees as "the hermeneutic process thematized within the literary work."²⁴

Of course, the *Queste* exhibits and performs allegorical constructs of reading very prominently within the text itself, soliciting the reader's attentive participation alongside that of the characters. But the construction of the future reader as spiritual interpreter has a strong grip over us because it is founded on a myth the medievals themselves inherited from antiquity and that is profoundly rooted within Judeo-Christian culture: the conception that the meaning of certain texts is produced either through fulfillment of prophecy or through interpretation by a future reader (who, for Christians, is enlightened by revela-

22. In a personal conversation (21 September 1992), art historian Alison Stones affirmed that she had never seen allegorical glosses in any of the numerous *Prose Lancelot* manuscripts she has studied.

23. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 215.

24. De Looze, "Story of Interpretations," 147.

tion). The prophecies of the Old Testament were thus represented as fulfilled in the New Testament. And just as Homer and the ancient *fabulae* were rationalized by classical allegorists, ancient and medieval Christian readers "saved" some of the prestigious texts of pagan authors by allegoresis, an allegorizing commentary that is a metatextual interpretive reading often formulated in religious terms quite different from those of the original text and proposed as its true meaning.²⁵ The myth of an enlightened reader is still fully active today, but we are not the same readers as the medievals. The categories of literature considered worth interpreting have shifted, are shifting still. The hierarchical distinction the medievals made between chivalric romance and "authorized" texts has blurred: our own cultural beliefs have thus led us to draw the spiritual allegories out of the *Queste's* narrative matter and have propelled them into the framework of modern critical commentary, whereas "the medieval thing" kept the allegories locked within the fiction. The *Queste* itself—like Solomon's ship—has thus sailed through time, bearing meaningful structures that are both predetermined and yet ever enigmatic, bringing each reader knowledge of a maker "who had lived so long before him."

THE BIRTH OF JEAN DE MEUN

Like the *Queste*, the *Roman de la Rose* speaks to us eloquently and seductively of interpretation. Jean de Meun's Lady Reason urges allegorical interpretive reading on the recalcitrant Lover in the *Rose* so he may discover the truth concealed in the ancient poets:

Bien l'entendras, se bien repetes
 les integumanz aus poetes.
 La verras une grant partie
 des secrez de philosophie
 ou mout te vodras deliter,
 et si porras mout profiter:
 en delitant profiteras,
 en profitant deliteras;
 car en leur geus et en leur fables

25. Bibliographical references for these questions can be found in Phillip B. Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980); Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le "Roman de la Rose" au XIVe siècle. Étude de la réception de l'oeuvre* (Geneva: Droz, 1980); Regalado, "Chevalerie"; and, most recently, Renate Blumenfeld Kosinski, *Reading Myth: Classical Mythology and Its Interpretations in Medieval French Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

gisent deliz mout profitables
 souz cui leur pensees covrent,
 quant le voir des fables vestirent.

You will understand it [the truth] well if you review the integuments on the poets. There you will see a large part of the secrets of philosophy. There you will want to take your great delight, and you will thus be able to profit a great deal. You will profit in delight and delight in profit, for in the playful fables of the poets lie very profitable delights beneath which they cover their thoughts when they clothe the truth in fables.²⁶

It was a commonplace to speak, as did Marie de France in the general prologue to her *Lais*, of the *surplus* of understanding the reader could bring to the ancient texts (l. 15). In a passage filled with delicate irony, Jean de Meun's Nature declares that pagan authors such as Plato and Virgil wrote texts pregnant with meanings that could only be understood through Christian revelation, by a future reader figured as a maiden with a rising belly:

Si n'an pot il pas assez dire,
 car il ne peüst pas soffire
 a bien parfetemant antandre
 ce c'onques riens ne pot comprendre,
 fors li ventres d'une pucele.
 Mes, sans faille, il est voirs que cele
 a cui le ventres an tandi
 plus que Platon an antandi. [ll. 19089–96]

He [Plato] could still not say enough, for he was not capable of understanding very perfectly what nothing except a virgin's womb could ever comprehend. But it is true without fail that she whose womb swelled understood more than Plato. [316]

Moreover, Jean repeats at intervals Guillaume's promise that he will gloss his text in an interpretive discourse that will reveal the meaning hidden in his words. He affirms at the midpoint of the *Rose*:

Puis vodra si la chose espondre
 que riens ne s'i porra repondre. [ll. 10573–74]

26. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 1965–1975), 3 vols., ll. 7137–148; *The Romance of the Rose*, 3rd ed., trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 136. Subsequent citations will refer to line numbers in Lecoy's edition and page numbers in Dahlberg's translation.

Then he will want to explicate the affair in such a way that nothing can remain hidden. [188]²⁷

But while the *Queste* constantly shifts its narrative matter from present action to a future determined by interpretation—we rush, leap from Solomon to Galahad, eager to see the message received, the meaning-to-come revealed, understood, fulfilled—Jean, in contrast, paints his Lover as a reader who refuses to read and gloss. Interpretation is put off, deferred for the urgent, vital business of love:

Mes des poetes les sentances,
les fables et les methaphores,
ne bé je pas a gloser ores.
Mes se ja puis estre gueriz
et li servises m'iert meriz
don si grant guerredon atens
bien les gloseré tout a tens.

.....

Qu'il ne m'i covient plus muser
ne mon tens en gloser user.

.....

Et se je sui fols, ne vos chaille:
je veill amer, comment qu'il aille,
la rose ou je me sui voez. [ll. 7160–66, 7173–74, 7181–83]

But as for the sentences, fables, and metaphors of the poets, I do not now hope to gloss them. If I can be cured and if my service, for which I expect so great a recompense, is meritorious, I shall gloss them all in time. . . . I do not need to waste any more effort on them or use up my time in glossing. . . . It makes no difference to you if I am a fool. However it goes, I want to love the rose to which I am pledged. [136–37, trans. modified]

Is this postponement of interpretive reading just the whim of an impatient lover? Or does the Lover also contain Jean's projected image of the future reader of the *Rose*? For Jean, too, holds us in the present of his business, the writing of his text: the gloss he promises never comes.²⁸

27. See also ll. 980–84, in Guillaume's *Rose*; ll. 15115–23 and 21183–84, in Jean's continuation; and Regalado, "Des contraires choses. La fonction poétique de la citation et des exempla dans le *Roman de la Rose* de Jean de Meun," *Littérature. Intertextualités médiévales* 41 (February 1981): 68–70.

28. Although Strubel states, "Whether concealed or openly announced, *senefiance* is obtained in the same way, and the *Roman de la Rose* demands of its audience a frame of mind identical to that of the hermits in the *Queste*: the steps of reading are the same" (*La Rose*, 91), readers of the *Rose* are given few examples of, and little opportunity to in-

For Jean, as for his Lover, the interpretive process is always deferred; there is no final gloss of his own text nor allegorizing commentary on those he cites.²⁹ What reading could be more important than interpretation, so favorably presented by Reason, so temptingly offered by the narrator?

To answer this question let us turn to the celebrated passage of the *Roman de la Rose* that claims for Jean all the authority of the poets of antiquity and in which Amors speaks of the future readers of the *Rose*. We are at the fateful midpoint of the romance: Amors has gathered his troops for the final assault on Jealousy's castle; the Lover has just repeated the ten commandments of Love for his master. But the matter in doubt is neither the preparation of the Lover nor the outcome of the battle. It is the birth of the text. Amors's mother Venus weeps for her dead poets: Tibullus, Gallus, Catullus, and Ovid. Guillaume is to die before completing the *roman* he has begun. Indeed, in a splendid illustration in a manuscript made for François I (see Fig. 1), the dead poet Guillaume, crowned with laurels and naked as if on a dissecting table, is laid out below an open book while the Lover waits outside the book-lined rooms for his story to continue.³⁰ It is here that Jean indicates the exact limits of Guillaume's text, from its beginning to the last pleading words: "Car je n'ai mes aillors fiance" (since I have no ties of faith elsewhere) (l. 4028, repeated by Jean at l. 10530). The question now is: Will Jean continue and finish the *Roman*? The poem represents this problem in the most concrete terms: Will Jean be born? Here is Jean's wonderful imagining of the future reader through the figures of the author to be born, the text yet to be written, the reader yet to come.

dulge in, the kind of allegorical metacommentary the *Queste* proposes (the oddly fitting gloss of Narcissus's fountain [ll. 1505–08] or the double interpretation of Croesus's dream within an exemplum [ll. 6459–18], are notable exceptions). As Poirion noted, interpretation in the *Rose* is ultimately left up to the reader: "a meaning we are left to guess at" ("De la signification selon Jean de Meun," in *Écriture poétique*, 239). On the interpretive and hermeneutic value of classical myth in the *Rose*, see Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Reading Myth*, 52–89.

29. The question of whether Jean himself offers an allegorical gloss of the classical authors he cites is vigorously discussed by John V. Fleming, most recently in "Jean de Meun and the Ancient Poets," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 92–99.

30. New York, Pierpont Morgan MS M948 (ca. 1520), fol. 44. The image is placed not where Jean announces Guillaume's death, but over *Rose* ll. 4079–100, just past the point where Guillaume's section ends (l. 4028). Compare the illustration on fol. 63 where Nero witnesses the dissection of his mother on a similar table.



Figure 1. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, M. 948, f. 44.

The place of the birthing mother is partially filled by the feminine figure of Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth, to whom Amors prays:³¹

Et por ce que bien porroit estre
 que cil Jehans qui est a nestre
 seroit, espoir, enpeeschiez,
 si seroit ce deaus et pechiez,
 et damages aus amoreus,
 qu'il fera mout de biens por eus,
 pri je Lucina, la deesse
 d'enfantement, qu'el doint qu'il nesse
 sanz mal et sanz encombrement
 si qu'il puit vivre longuement.

.....

Et qu'il devra estre abevrez,
 des ainz neïs qu'il soit sevez,
 des toneaus qu'il a torjorz doubles,
 don l'uns est clers, li autres troubles.

.....

Et li chanteré notes teles
 que, puis qu'il sera hors d'enfance,
 endoctrinez de ma sciance,
 si fleütera noz paroles
 par carrefors et par escolles
 selonc le langage de France,
 par tout le regne, en audience,
 que ja mes cil qui les orront
 des douz mauz d'amer ne morront,
 por qu'il le croient seulement:
 car tant en lira proprement
 que tretuit cil qui ont a vivre
 devroient apeler ce livre
 le *Miroër aus Amoreus*.

31. The prayer links Jean's birth to that of Venus's beloved Adonis, delivered by Lucina from the tree trunk encasing Myrrha, Pygmalion's great-granddaughter. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10, ll. 503–13. Lucina here recalls Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, a text often taken as prophecy of the Incarnation: "Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto. / Tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum / desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo, / casta fave Lucina" (Now a new generation descends from heaven on high. Only do thou, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child under whom the iron brood shall first cease, and a golden race spring up throughout the world)" (4.7–10). Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1935, rpt. 1994), 28–29.

.....

Certes prier vos en devroie
 au mains por Jehan alegier,
 qu'il escrive plus de legier,
 que cest avantages li fetes
 (car il nestra, j'en sui prophetes),
 et por les autres qui vendront,
 qui devotement entendront
 a mes conmendemanz ensuivre
 qu'il troveront escriz ou livre. [ll. 10587–96; 10599–602; 10608–21;
 10632–40]

And since it could happen that this Jean who is yet to be born might, perhaps, be hindered, and since this would be a sin and sorrow, and a detriment to lovers for he will do them much good, I pray to Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, to grant that he be born without pain and difficulty so that he may live for a long time. . . . And he will have to be made to drink, even before the time when he is weaned, from the double casks that [Jupiter] always has, the one clear, the other roiled. . . . I shall sing to him such airs that, after he is out of his infancy, he will, indoctrinated with my knowledge, so flute our words through crossroads and through schools in the language of France before audiences throughout the kingdom, that those who will hear these words will never die from the sweet pains of love, provided that they believe only him. For he will read so fittingly that all those alive should call this book *The Mirror for Lovers*. . . . I should certainly beg you at least that you give Jean the advantage of lightening his burden so that he may write more easily, for I prophesy that he will be born. I beg you also on behalf of the others who will come and who will try with devotion to follow my commandments, which they will find written in the book. [188–89, trans. modified]

Jean de Meun's conceit that compares literary creation to procreation and childbirth prepares his final comparison of erotic activity and writing (l. 19764). But the themes of childbirth and child rearing in this passage (expanded in the adjoining verses) have not yet been commented on as fully as they deserve. Just before Amors's prayer to Lucina, the theme of childbirth, maternity, and suckling is amplified by an account of the birth of Faus Semblant, the allegorical figure False Seeming, sired by Trickery, and born and suckled by Hypocrisy.³² Amors goes on im-

32. *Rose*, ll. 10437–44. False Seeming himself sires the Antichrist with Lady Constrained Abstinence: "Et dame Attenance Contrainte, / qui de Faus Samblant est enceinte, / preste d'anfanter Antecrit" (There too was Lady Constrained Abstinence, pregnant by False Seeming and ready to give birth to Antichrist) (*Rose*, ll. 14713–15; 251).

mediately after this passage to speak of himself as the obedient child of a powerful mother, Venus, who will not always do his bidding and whom he fears and reveres as a child should.³³ Jean thus sets together the births of Faus Semblant, Amors, and Jean de Meun: fiction, desire, and the poet.

These images are extraordinary in themselves, for imagery of child-birth and maternity is most unusual in a thirteenth-century secular romance; these themes were still tightly bound to Mary, to midwifery, or to religious or didactic motifs of sin and repentance.³⁴ It is these images, moreover, heavy with future tenses, that construct the representation of the reader and readings to come in terms of reproduction: reproduction of the author who must be born ("qu'il nesse / sanz mal et sanz enconbrement") and reproduction of Amors's words, which Jean will repeat again and again, and everywhere: "Par carrefors et par escoles . . . par tout le regne, en audience." Birth, too, of future readers: "tretuit cil qui ont a vivre." Each reader will reproduce the commandments of Amors, which the Lover has just recollected once again for his master at this midpoint, and which future readers will repeat in turn: "Et por les autres qui vendront, / qui devotement entendront / a mes conmendemanz ensuivre / qu'il troveront escriz ou livre." The image of the reader projected by Jean is thus not only that of an interpreter who will gloss his text and fathom its secrets. Jean's reader must also "give birth," reproduce the text itself, practice its letter following the instruction of what Jean here calls the *Miroër aus Amoreus*, the encyclopedia for lovers wherein they are multiplied as in a mirror. Indeed, as we have seen, the highest level of understanding comes through reproduction, that understanding represented in the image of the pregnant maiden whose belly swells with meaning.

Jean himself practices the reading to which he aims to lead the future reader by reproducing the *Roman* of Guillaume again and again: he copies it entirely within his own *Roman*; here at the midpoint, he marks its beginning and end; finally, once again, he recapitulates it in

33. *Rose* ll. 10719–806. Amors's oaths, in the same passage, further multiply begettings: the engendering of Venus herself by Saturn, "qui ja l'agenda . . . mes non pas de sa fame espouse" (who engendered her . . . but not on his espoused wife) (ll. 10799–800; 191), and all Amors's brothers, "don nus ne set nomer les peres, / tant sunt divers, tant en i a" (whose fathers no one knows how to name, so diverse, so many are they) (ll. 10804–05; 191). See Regalado, "Contraires choses," 66–67.

34. See Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Cesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 7–21.

a highly reduced form in Genius's discourse, where it gleams like a tiny landscape viewed through the crystals in Narcissus's fountain or telescopically condensed by one of Nature's optical instruments.³⁵ Jean reproduces in his own work the *sentences*, the essential words, not only of Guillaume's romance but of many texts from a vast philosophical and literary tradition.³⁶ This is the task Reason also urges upon the lover. He must read, but he must also remember his readings, reproducing them in his memory:

D'autre part, je tien a grant honte

 quant il d'Omer ne te sovient,
 puis que tu l'as estudié,
 mes tu l'as, ce semble, oblié.
 Et n'est ce paine vaine et wide?
 Tu mez en livres ton estuide,
 et tout par negligence oblies!
 Que vaut quan que tu estudies,
 quant li sens au besoig te faut,
 et seulement par ton default?
 Certes, tourjorz en remembrance
 deüsses avoir sa sentance. [ll. 6747, 6750–60]

I consider it a great shame . . . when you don't remember Homer after you have studied him; but it seems that you have forgotten him. Isn't this effort vain and empty? You give your attention to books, and then forget everything through negligence. What is the value of whatever you study when its sense fails you, through your fault alone, at the very time that you need it? Certainly you should always have its significance in your memory. [131]

Readers are to recall and, thus, to reproduce the *Rose* and, with it, the great texts of the past in their memory, just as Jean does in his own text; the textual reproductions of the *Rose* are an art of memory as well as of love.³⁷

There is something very satisfying about understanding Jean's construction of the future reader in terms of reproduction. It links the im-

35. *Rose*, ll. 20248–580. See Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance: Genius as Rewriter of Guillaume de Lorris," in *Romance: Generic Transformation*, 114–34.

36. See Regalado, "Contraires choses," and Strubel, *La Rose*, 199–224.

37. In a personal conversation (26 October 1992), Mary Carruthers suggested to me that the childbirth imagery related to memory in the *Rose* may be Jean's amplification of a metaphor comparing memory to sowing seeds.

age of the future reader to Jean's encyclopedic model and to the central philosophical vision that underlies it: the principle of plenitude and of replenishment. It accounts for Jean's own readings in the *Rose*, readings that reproduce the *sentences*—the citations, the themes—of other texts without transposing them through allegorical reinterpretation into new terms. Instead, Jean, in characteristic fashion, reproduces other texts, recalling them through his dominant rhetorical mode of *ex-politio*, that is, through a mode of amplification that expands them discursively.³⁸

What are the future readers of the *Rose* to reproduce? Themselves or the text? The *Rose* maintains a pleasant ambiguity that equates writing and reproduction, text and sex. Genius urges his hearers to procreate: "Greffes avez, pansez d'escire" (You have styluses, think about writing) (l. 19764; 326). Jean's readers, too, must reproduce his text, practice its letter by writing with their styluses. He condemns those who fail to "write":

Mes cil qui des greffes n'escrivent
 par cui li mortel tourjorz vivent,
 es beles tables precieuses
 que Nature por estre oiseuses
 ne leur avoit pas aprestees,
 ainz leur avoit por ce prestees
 que tuit i fussent escrivain. [ll. 19599–605]

But those who do not write with their styluses, by which mortals live forever, on the beautiful precious tablets that Nature did not prepare for them to leave idle, but instead loaned them in order that everyone might be a writer. [323]

Jean envisions future readers who read the *Rose* fully, yet who retain an independent capacity to reproduce in their own way. As Jean says, he gives these readers something without taking anything of theirs,

que vos au cueillir ne failliez.
 Fetes si con vous m'orroiz fere,
 si mieuz n'an savez a chief trere;

 si le passez en vostre guise,
 quant vos avroiz la moie aprise.
 Tant avez au mains d'avantage

38. For a discussion of rhetoric in the *Rose*, see Alan M. F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1952), 89, 509–22.

que je vos apraign mon usage
 san riens prandre de vostre avoir,
 si m'an devez bon gré savoir. [ll. 21652–54, 21659–64]

so that you will not fail in your collecting. Do as you hear that I did, if you know no better how to come to your goal, then . . . [negotiate the passage] in your way when you have learned mine. At least you will have the advantage that I am teaching you my method without taking any of your money, and for that you should feel grateful. [353, trans. modified]

As we consider Jean's representation of the future reader more fully, we come to understand that if interpretation is always deferred in the reading of the *Rose*, it is because it always yields to reproduction, to producing the text itself again and again.

The notion of reading and writing as reproduction points to the special nature of *Rose* reception in the fourteenth century—that is, the extent to which it was read, imitated, and rewritten. It provided a matrix for French literature for well over two centuries; it is the forge where the great chain of being linking classical tradition and vernacular literature was hammered together. It was the last medieval work to disappear from Renaissance culture³⁹ and one of the earliest to be rediscovered in the eighteenth century. Every reader of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts—French, English, Italian, or Spanish—has reckoned over the vast debt owed to the great wealth of the *Rose*. Pierre-Yves Badel's exhaustive study of *Rose* reception in the fourteenth century demonstrates to what degree it permeates and informs almost all late medieval French literature, which reproduces again and again its language, its lines, its personifications, and its dream narrative, if not its vaunting intellectual ambitions and its bold expression of human experience.

It is the inner structure of the *Rose* that ensures its procreative power. Sylvia Huot's study of the fourteenth-century manuscripts of the *Rose* illustrates vividly how the tensions between the sexual and the spiritual in the romance generated continual reproduction and incessant rewriting, recasting, abridgment, expansion, and interpolation as well as imitation.⁴⁰ She demonstrates that the encyclopedic, global vision of the *Rose* is set up in a way that invites each new reader to contribute. Each reader-writer may be said to "interpret" in the sense that he or she tries to drag the sheets of the *Rose* over to his or her side of

39. See Badel, *Le "Roman de la Rose" au XIVe siècle*, 493.

40. Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the bed. Huot's analysis of individual manuscripts shows us meanings recast by reworking; she demonstrates that "the mutability of the vernacular text and the unceasing editorial activities of medieval scribes" (132)—rubricating, annotating, illustrating, editing, and expanding—are all processes that reflect interpretations but that are expressed as reproduction.

The fourteenth century thus produces erotic, philosophical, courtly, misogynistic, satirical, and even theological versions of the *Rose*.⁴¹ Although many readers were eager to point out worthy doctrine in the *Rose*, there was little independent interpretive metacommentary before the *querelle*, the debate over its value between Christine de Pizan, Jean Gerson, and the early humanists Jean de Montreuil, Gontier Col, and Pierre Col. The *querelle* did not interpret the *Rose* allegorically but instead commented on the moral effects it had on its readers.⁴² Interpretation of the *Rose* was thus largely practiced by rewriting rather than by metacommentary, although some fourteenth-century allegorical poems such as Guillaume de Digulleville's *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* (1330–1331 and 1355) and the *Échecs amoureux* (1370–1380) are imitations that stand in an explicitly interpretive relation to the *Rose*.⁴³ Huot and Badel show us the *Rose* rubricated and cited as if it were the work of a classical *auctor*, but its text is not subjected to a systematic allegorical commentary before Jean Molinet's *Romant de la Rose moralisé* (ca. 1500).⁴⁴ The *Rose* thus produced a *surplus* not of commentary but of text.

Certainly the *Rose* has proved a work that does not suffer interpretive metatextual commentary lightly. There have been remarkably few

41. Noting the discontinuous and selective character of fourteenth-century readings and the absence of any continuous commentary of the poem before Jean Molinet's *Romant de la Rose moralisé*, Badel asks if the *Rose* itself authorized "mutilating [. . .] fragmented" readings (499). See also 494, 501.

42. Works in the *Querelle* have been edited by Eric Hicks. See *Le débat sur le "Roman de la Rose"* (Paris: Champion, 1977). Also see Helen Solterer, "Christine's Way: The *Querelle du roman de la Rose* and the Ethics of a Political Response," in her *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151–75.

43. See Badel, *Le "Roman de la Rose" au XIVe siècle*, 263–90, 362–76; and Huot, *Medieval Readers*, 207–38.

44. Jean Molinet, *Romant de la Rose moralisé* ed. Raymond N. Andes (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina, 1948). The earliest known continuous commentary on a French text is Evrart de Conty's prose *Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés* (before 1405), an allegorical interpretation that does not appear in the same manuscripts as the poem it glosses (ed. Françoise Guichard-Tesson and Bruno Roy [Montreal: CERES, 1993]). See also Badel, *Le "Roman de la Rose" au XIVe siècle*, 290–315.

systematic modern commentaries of the poem; moreover, many take issue with allegorical interpretations such as those John Fleming has proposed, as they often seem at cross purposes with the thrust of the poem (although striking differences in meaning between text and gloss are common enough in medieval allegorical commentaries such as those in the *Queste*, in the *Ovide moralisé*, or in Molinet's *Rose moralisé*). To this day, *Rose* commentary remains meager compared to that on Dante.

Nothing, indeed, can give us as great a sense of how a text orders our reading and sets the agenda for its readers, as to compare the fourteenth-century reception of the *Roman de la Rose* to that of Dante's *Commedia* and to ask why these works generated such very different constructs of reading. Why, for all its profound impact, were there no imitations of the *Commedia*? Dante's great poem was not recast, abridged, or expanded as was the *Rose*. Why, on the other hand, did the matter of the *Commedia* immediately inspire and continue to produce volumes of commentary?⁴⁵ Although these questions cannot be explored within the limits of this article, such differences between the readings of each text do reveal the constructing forces within them as well as the medieval or modern "thing"—the models, the systems of belief, the ontological landscapes—that are made manifest in the ways these textual constructions are built and used.

TRANSLATIO, TRANSFORMATION, AND TRANSMISSION

We must, therefore, constantly rethink our relation to images of the future reader, comparing our constructions to their instructions and our readings to those the texts engendered in the Middle Ages. Shall we interpret? Shall we reproduce? Shall we change the terms or stay within those proposed by the text and its first readers? We can have it both ways, for interpretation and reproduction are essential, opposing, yet complementary interests within each text's *translatio*, its constructive projection toward the future reader. Together they allow for both transformation and transmission—the necessary construing of meaning by the reader and the equally necessary survival of the text.

45. In *The Undivine Comedy: Dethologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Teodolinda Barolini calls for a new "detheologized" appreciation of how the *Commedia*'s structure "makes the theology stick" (46); she shows how Dante's poem invites glossing and "furnishes sufficient and incontrovertible evidence of how it wants to be read" (46).

To get to this viewpoint, however, we must gaze not only at ourselves but also at texts in order to discover the individual properties built into each that construct its readers. We have seen strategies that favor reading as interpretation, that open texts to semiosis and the elaboration of metacommentary: the *Queste's* programmatic instruction in allegoresis; the *Rose's* porous, unstable, malleable mix of sex and metaphysics that invites rewriting; the *Commedia's* suggestive theological imagery that has called forth elaborate theological and moral schemes of interpretation, and its historical allusions that have required explanation through encyclopedic reconstruction of the world represented in it. We have seen how these strategies are integrated with others that favor reproduction or that forestall interpretations that substitute readers' words for those of the text: the *Queste's* preemptive insertion of interpretations into the text; the *Rose's* deferral of gloss and the compelling authority of its letter; the rigorous formal structures of the *Commedia* that throw commentary into a different place, outside the text. We can analyze our interpretations in relation to the way each text opens itself up to our difference, anticipates every reading other than the letter of its text, forces us toward metacommentary;⁴⁶ we can measure the dynamics of reproduction by the way each text maintains itself in the face of interpretation.

The questions of interpretation and reproduction raised by the construction of the future reader in the *Queste* and the *Rose* define more than a pathway to the "medieval thing." They are fundamental to our whole literary and critical enterprise. They point to the inevitable struggle between text and reader, between the constructions the text imposes on us and those we—the future readers—impose on it. Whose thinking controls the text? Whose words will be used? Why do we reach so anxiously toward "the medieval thing," all the while questioning its existence? Have we lost our intellectual confidence in the authority of experience? Our faith in texts? Is there to be any chance of *translatio studii*, of *translatio ad futurum* for us? Are those shoulders of giants we feel under our dwarfish feet, or are we footloose and fancy free, bootless, in a world without measure and without connections, without dwarves or giants?

The *Queste* and the *Rose* answer by telling us that destruction and

46. Leupin speaks of Marie de France's strategy of "obscurity, [which is] the condition for the survival of the text," that which makes it inexhaustible, capable of being reread ("The Impossible Task of Manifesting 'Literature': On Marie de France's Obscurity," *Exemplaria* 3 [1991]: 221–42).

rebirth, interpretation and reproduction, are all needed for *translatio*, to enable us to receive the past in our present. We can periodically chop up the tree of knowledge to build new beds on new Solomonic ships of interpretation in order to set sail toward the future. For we, too, can build boats: it is not necessary that we understand everything we say. Our words, our signs, like those of the ancients and of Solomon's wife, may have more meaning than we can know. We, too, can use our styluses, to reproduce, read, and write, so that Lucina may preside again and again over the birth of readers yet to come. But if we are to connect with "the medieval thing," we must also go down to the shore to board these signifying ships we call texts, to read and remember their signs.