

The Vernacular Panther: Encyclopedism, Citation,
and French Authority in Nicole de Margival's
Dit de la panthère

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Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère* (ca. 1290–1328) has long been read as a poorly written and unoriginal composition.¹ Bernard Ribémont, the text's most recent editor, describes its rhetorical construction as boring and its poet as laborious.² Anne Berthelot, another recent critic, goes so far as to draw a parallel between the protagonist's pusillanimity and Nicole de Margival's constant recourse to the words and authority of others.³ The aim of this article is not to demonstrate the originality of the

Thanks to Kevin Brownlee, Emma Dillon, Sarah Kay, Simone Marchesi, and Julie Singer for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1. The date of completion of Drouart La Vache's French translation of the *De amore* is 1290, and Nicole cites this text. Two copies of the *Panthère* were found in Clémence of Hungary's library in 1328, making this date the terminus ad quem. On the dating of the text, see Bernard Ribémont, ed., *Le dit de la panthère* (Paris: Champion, 2000), 16. All quotations of *Le dit de la panthère* are from this edition and are given parenthetically. Pierre-Yves Badel opts for the earlier part of the date range because, he claims, the popularity of Adam de la Halle (1245?–85?) faded quickly, but he was fresh in Nicole's mind (*Le roman de la rose aux XIVe siècle: Étude de la réception de l'œuvre* [Geneva: Droz, 1980], 154). Badel also contends that Nicole shows no debt to Jean de Meun's portion (ca. 1275) of *Le roman de la rose*. It will become clear that I disagree with this position; I suspect that Nicole's blend of love allegory and encyclopedism is modeled on Jean's portion of this text.

2. "Ennuyeuse aussi la machine rhétorique lourdement mise en œuvre par un poète laborieux: en première lecture, le *Dit de la panthère* pourrait presque apparaître comme un exercice scolaire au travers duquel il s'agit de reproduire le maximum de *topoi* et de techniques éculées: fiction du songe, figuration allégorique, insertion lyrique, *topos* de la liste, insertion savante, etc." (Also boring is the rhetorical machine heavily put into operation by a laborious poet: at first reading, the *Dit de la panthère* could even be seen as a school exercise in which the point was to reproduce the maximum number of *topoi* and hackneyed techniques: a dream fiction, allegorical figures, lyric insertion, *topos* of the list, erudite insertions, etc.) (Ribémont, *Le dit de la panthère*, 25). This and all other translations from French are my own.

3. Anne Berthelot has observed, "L'attitude de l'écrivain de la *Panthère* correspond assez bien, sur le plan esthétique, à celle de l'amant narrateur: pusillanime, il n'ose pas plus s'emparer de la poésie d'autrui pour en faire son miel que l'amant n'ose avouer son amour à la 'douce

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Panthère but rather to show that its borrowings (some of which I aim to identify for the first time) are not all of the same variety. While explicitly acknowledged French authors and texts are used to align the *Panthère* with the coeval encyclopedic tradition that was flourishing in Italy and France, two unrecognized Italian sources—Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* (1280?)⁴ and Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia* (ca. 1302–5)⁵—are silently incorporated into the *Panthère*. Whereas the texts of French “authors”⁶ are treated as sources of knowledge that can be mined and put back into circulation via citation and quotation, Nicole's Italian sources are evacuated of their epistemic content, partially through the effacement of the subject positions of their authors. This strategy of authorizing French texts and deauthorizing Italian ones suggests that the *Dit de la panthère* had stakes in the promotion and illustration of French vernacular authority.

The *Panthère* begins with a prologue asserting the truth of dreams, after which the narrator soon falls asleep and is carried off by birds into a valley full of animals, including a strikingly beautiful panther that attracts other animals with the scent of its breath. The panther retreats before the love-struck narrator has time to approach, leaving him in a bout of melancholy, during the course of which he hears the music of the God of Love and his court. The narrator becomes the god's vassal and is soon led back to the valley of the panther but is unable to utter a word when he encounters the beast face-to-face. Most of the rest of the text describes the narra-

Panthère'” (The attitude of the writer of the *Panthère* corresponds fairly well, on an aesthetic level, with that of the lover-narrator: pusillanimous, he does not dare to incorporate the poetry of others to his advantage any more than the lover dares to admit his love to the “sweet panther”) (“Nicole de Margival lecteur d'Adam de la Halle: ‘Tel qu'en lui même,’” *Perspectives médiévales* 20 [1994]: 13). Berthelot also describes the text as the “comble de l'absence d'originalité en matière de littérature” (the height of the absence of originality in literature) (8). Helen Solterer, who is less critical than Ribémont and Berthelot, nevertheless discerns an “aimless quality” to the text (*The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995], 66).

4. The date of the *Tesoretto* is uncertain: it may have been composed during Brunetto's exile in France (1260–66) or after his return to Florence, where there are no records of him after 1294. How scholars choose to date the text within this range has much to do with whether or not they think Jean de Meun's portion of the *Rose* (and not just Guillaume de Lorris's) was a source. For bibliographic references on this issue, see Kevin Brownlee, “The Practice of Cultural Authority: Italian Responses to French Cultural Dominance in ‘Il Tesoretto,’ ‘Il Fiore,’ and the ‘Commedia,’” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 33 (1997): 267 n. 8.

5. On the date of this text, see Steven Botterill's introduction to his translation of *De vulgari eloquentia* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii. I will cite parenthetically from this edition throughout the course of this article. The manuscript tradition of *De vulgari* is meager, but I would note that for my argument to hold, Nicole need not have known the text firsthand. He may instead have heard it described.

6. I use this term advisedly; Nicole's treatment of French writers borders on scholastic treatment of the *auctores*.

tor's self-doubt. A pep talk by Venus proves ineffective, as does an amorous missive she supplies. The God of Love eventually gives up on the narrator, telling him that the only path left is that of Fortune. Luckily, the panther arrives, accompanied by *Bonne Volenté* (Good Will), *Merci* (Mercy), and *Pitié* (Pity), and decides to concede to the narrator's request. At this point, the narrator wakes up, affirms the truth of what he has dreamed, and writes down what he presents as his own poetry.⁷

Almost all readers have remarked on the intense saturation of references to or quotations of other texts in this 2,672-line *dit*.⁸ In addition to its explicit debt to the *Roman de la rose* (Guillaume de Lorris, ca. 1230; continuation by Jean de Meun, ca. 1275), mentioned in line 1031, Nicole's text refers to Drouart La Vache's 1290 French translation of Andreas Capellanus's *De amore* (ca. 1186–90)⁹ and to a lapidary by the otherwise unknown Jehan L'Épicier. The *Panthère* also features excerpts from *grands chants courtois* by Adam de la Halle and some other lyrics, most of which are presented as the protagonist's own compositions. Although the presence of these French texts is repeatedly remarked upon in criticism, what has been overlooked is the way in which they draw the *Panthère* into the realm of encyclopedism. The copresence of lapidary- and bestiary-related material should suffice to tip the reader off to Nicole de Margival's encyclopedic aspirations.¹⁰ Lapidaries and bestiaries were frequent features of encyclopedias, although they did appear independently. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (seventh century), for example, includes both a section on animals (bk. 12) and one on stones and metals (bk. 16), as does Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum naturale* (bks. 5–14, 18–22), one of the books of the *Specu-*

7. On how the imbrication of dreams in the narrative complicates our access to truth, see Christiane Marchello-Nizia, "La rhétorique des songes et le songe comme rhétorique dans la littérature française médiévale," in *I sogni nel medioevo: Seminario internazionale, Roma, 2–4 ottobre 1983*, ed. Tullio Gregory (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), 256.

8. Bernard Ribémont has identified this sort of constant deference to authority as a typical feature of encyclopedic texts, which are characterized by "la référence quasi permanente, la mise à l'abri du savoir énoncé derrière l'autorité" (almost constant reference, the sheltering of enunciated knowledge behind an authority) (*Littérature et encyclopédies du Moyen Âge* [Orléans: Paradigme, 2002], 13). This description applies remarkably well to the *Dit de la panthère*.

9. Nicole de Margival's *Panthère* is the only text to allude to this translation. For an edition, see Robert Bossuat, ed., *Li livres d'amours de Drouart La Vache* (Paris: Champion, 1926). For a discussion of how the two authors might have known each other, see Bossuat's *Drouart La Vache, traducteur d'André le Chapelain* (Paris: Champion, 1926), 248.

10. In its encyclopedic aspirations, the *Panthère* bears a resemblance to the *Rose* (one of its acknowledged sources), although in the *Rose* the encyclopedic material is more organically incorporated. On the chronological coincidence of the *Panthère* and encyclopedism, see Ribémont, *Le dit de la panthère*, 25–26.

lum maius.¹¹ That much of Nicole's source material seems to be drawn from the standard encyclopedic tradition indicates that at least one purpose of Nicole's network of citations was to root the *Panthère* within this broader literary and epistemic framework.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Nicole's *auctores* are drawn exclusively from the French vernacular tradition: *De amore* is cited in French translation, rather than in the Latin original,¹² and Jehan L'Épicier's treatise is probably also a vernacularization of Latin models.¹³ Nicole consistently treats these vernacular authors—including composers of lyric—as sources of knowledge. The *Rose*, for example, is described as containing a "semence" (seed) (line 1032) from which the narrator can "aprendre" (learn) (line 1033). Likewise, Adam de la Halle is described as a clerk (line 1067), and his songs are treated as a source of vernacular wisdom from which a "sentence" can be extracted (line 1097). Jehan L'Épicier is also called a clerk (line 1266) and is further given the epithet of "master" (line 1268). Drouart La Vache is explicitly evoked in his role as translator of Ovid (line 1717) and is also given the accolade of master (line 1720). Apparently having picked up on the scholastic treatment of Drouart and other French writers, a reader of Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS fr. 24432—following common practice for scholastic texts—has underlined the line in which Drouart is identified as a master, despite the fact that no quotation is attributed to him.

Given Nicole's enthusiastic recognition of so many (French) sources, it is all the more surprising that Brunetto Latini's encyclopedic *Tesoretto*—clearly, I think, a model for the *Panthère*—is never acknowledged.¹⁴ The

11. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, trans., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum quadruplex; sive, Speculum maius* (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1964).

12. In "Les poésies lyriques du 'Dit de la panthère' de Nicole de Margival," *Romania* 40 (1920): 204–30, Ernest Hoepffner assumes that Nicole de Margival was not a skilled reader of Latin and that this is the reason for his recourse to a translation.

13. Most vernacular lapidaries were reworkings of Latin models. See Jean Maurice, "Lapidaires," in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge*, ed. Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libéra, and Michel Zink (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), 816.

14. The manuscript tradition of the *Tesoretto* does not provide evidence of the text's circulation in France. The Florentine politician is known to have been exiled in France from 1260 to 1266 after the defeat of the Florentine Guelphs by Manfred of Sicily, and it is possible that it was during this period that he composed the *Tesoretto*. Notarial documents connect Brunetto to Arras, the area in which Nicole de Margival was probably working, around 1263. On these documents, and other evidence for the circulation of literature between France and Italy, see Julia Bolton Holloway, "Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri: Italian Manuscripts in French Exile; Bankers and Their Books," <http://www.florin.ms/Bankers.html>, and the introduction to her translation of *Il tesoretto*, by Brunetto Latini (New York: Garland, 1981), xiii. All quotations and translations of *Il tesoretto* are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

Tesoretto describes the narrator's journey to a valley where he encounters many strange creatures and eventually stumbles upon Nature, who gives an account of the creation of the world, the elements, the angels, the principal rivers and seas, and various creatures—including the panther (*Tesoretto*, line 1011). The narrator is told he will encounter both the God of Love and Fortune (*Tesoretto*, lines 1156, 1149; *Panthère*, line 1924). In addition to these points of contact in their respective plots, the *Dit de la panthère* contains passages that border on translations of the *Tesoretto*. Brunetto's protagonist enters the forest right after hearing he has been exiled from his native city of Florence. Upon receiving the news, he describes the sorrow he feels at the thought that he will not be able to return home.

Certo lo cor mi parte
 Di cotanto dolore,
 Pensando il grande honore
 E la riccha potenza
 Che suole aver fiorenza
 Quasi nel mondo tutto;
 E io in tal corrocto,
 Pensando a capo chino,
 Perdei il gran cammino,
 E tenni a la traversa
 D'une selva diversa.

(Lines 180–90)

[Truly my heart broke with so much sorrow, thinking on the great honor and the rich power that Florence is used to having almost through the whole world; And I, in such anguish, thinking with head downcast, lost the great highway, and took the crossroad through a strange wood.]

Nicole's description of his state before he enters the oneiric forest was likely inspired by Brunetto's. Like the narrator of the *Tesoretto*, the narrator of the *Panthère* muses that he is far from his country and will not be able to return there soon:

Une nuit, en temps de moissons,
 Estoie en mon lit a Soissons,
 Forment du cuer pensis, par m'ame
 (Ce fu la veille Notre Dame,
 Qu'on appella l'Assumpcion),
 Pensant, en bonne entencion,
 Que loing de mon païs estoie,
 Ne pas tost venir n'i pooie.

(Lines 47–54)

[One night, during the harvesting season, I was in my bed in Soissons, with a heart in great thought, truly (it was the eve of Notre Dame, which is called the Assumption) thinking, with good reason, that I was far from my home, and that I would not soon be able to go back.]

Brunetto's forest contains a great crowd of "diversi animali" (diverse animals) (line 194) while Nicole's is "plaine de bestes moult diverses" (full of many diverse beasts) (line 61). The narrators of both texts are so overwhelmed by the diversity of animals they encounter that they declare themselves unable to enumerate their species. Nicole claims neither to be able to name all of the species he saw, nor to recall them:

Et autres que nommer ne sai
N'en ramembrance ne les ay,
Por la plenté que j'en vëoie.

(Lines 79–81)

[And others that I don't know how to name, nor do I remember them, because of the abundance I saw.]

Brunetto's narrator also claims to have seen too many different things to recall them all:

E altre cose tante
Che null'omo parlante
Le poria nominare
Né'n parte divisare.

(Lines 205–8)

[And so many other things that no man with speech could name them or put them into categories.]

These textual and diegetic points of contact between the two texts—the valley filled with beasts from a bestiary, an encounter with the God of Love, the narrator's choice of Fortune's path—along with the encyclopedic "digressions" of both works suggest that Nicole was familiar with the *Tesoretto*.

There is evidence for another important but unacknowledged source for the *Panthère*, this one also of Italian provenance. In his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante uses the panther as a recurring symbol for the highest form of the vernacular.¹⁵ He consistently refers to this brand of language as "illustrious," a term that he glosses rather unexpectedly not just as produc-

15. See, e.g., the opening of Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.16. Ardis Butterfield (*Poetry and Music in Medieval France: From Jean Renart to Guillaume de Machaut* [Cambridge University Press, 2002], 260) and Ernest Hoepffner ("Les poésies lyriques," 210, 216) note the *Panthère's* resemblances to Dante's *Vita nuova* but not to *De vulgari eloquentia*.

ing light but also as being able to reflect light received from elsewhere.¹⁶ Nicole gives a similar explanation for the panther's coloring.¹⁷ He claims the panther does not have its own color but instead reflects those of the animals around it. This trait, which appears to have been inspired by Isidore's *Etymologies*, in which the animal is said to "give back whatever it receives of the same kind,"¹⁸ is not associated with camouflage, as one might expect, but rather—at least in Nicole's text—with the artistic selection and reflection of one's surroundings:

Car por voir toutes graces bonnes
 Qui en toutes autres persones
 Sont communement esandues
 A en son corps seul retenues
 . . . Une panthere
 a en li de chascune beste
 La colour, sans faire moleste.

(Lines 475–82)

[For truly all good graces which in all other people are spread communally, it (the panther) has retained in its body alone. . . . A panther has the color of each animal, without doing harm (to it).]

We might read the panther's specular reciprocity—the way in which it absorbs and reproduces the attributes of other animals—as analogous to Nicole's strategy of reading and citation. Through his textual insertions, Nicole incorporates reflections of the authors he has read into the body of his own work. The specular panther is the perfect emblem for the encyclopedic text: on its single, meaningfully arranged body, it incorporates reflections on and of the world.¹⁹

16. "Per hoc quoque quod illustre dicimus, intelligimus quid illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens" (When we call something illustrious, we mean that it gives off light or reflects the light that it receives from elsewhere) (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.17).

17. Many texts describe the panther as multicolored, but only Nicole, Dante, and Isidore attribute this trait to specular reciprocity. On the multicolored panther, see, e.g., Guillaume le Clerc: "Quer ele est rouse et inde et bleve, / Et jaune, et verte, et neire, et bise; / Coloree est de mainte guise" (For it is red and indigo and blue, / and yellow, and green, and black, and gray; / It is colored in many ways) (*Le bestiaire divin de Guillaume, clerc de Normandie, trouvère du XIIIe siècle*, ed. C. Hippeau [Caen: Hardel, 1952], lines 1952–54). Gossouin de Metz draws an analogy between the panther's colorful coat and painting: "Une autre beste converse et repaire cele part, qui est de diverses couleurs par taches blanches et noires et verz et yndes et jaunes, ausi comme s'ele feust peinte" (Another beast is found and lives there, which is of diverse colors with white, black, green, indigo, and yellow spots, as if it were painted) (*L'image du monde*, ed. Oliver H. Prior [Lausanne: Payot, 1913], 116).

18. Barney et al., *Etymologies of Isidore*, 251.

19. It is interesting that both Isidore's *Etymologies* and Brunetto Latini's *Trésor* describe the animal as covered in eyes. See Barney et al., *Etymologies of Isidore*, 251; Brunetto Latini, *The*

A similar claim might be made about the relationship between Dante's panther and the aesthetic stakes of his text. Although *De vulgari eloquentia* is not encyclopedic (its purpose is not to describe the world), the treatise does have encyclopedic qualities. It is described explicitly as a compendium, having its constitutive elements taken from other writers.²⁰ This strategy of culling the best from elsewhere—mirroring the specular panther—has much in common with the illustrious vernacular, as Dante will go on to define it. Dante's ideal vernacular appears to be a composite of the best traits of all Italian languages; it has left its "scent" in all of them but is not instantiated by any single one.²¹ It becomes clear, as the author "hunts" by process of elimination through various Italian linguistic communities, that Dante values dialects that, like the panther, are affected by their surroundings. He praises Bolognese, for instance, for being "tempered" by the dialects in its geographical proximity.²² Like Nicole's beast, the illustrious vernacular qua panther of *De vulgari eloquentia* is the one that "blends" the best. It absorbs the best traits of what surrounds it, creating a sort of hybrid or compendium.

Other similarities between the *Dit de la panthère* and *De vulgari eloquentia* include a fascination with the canzone as an illustration of vernacular eloquence (see *De vulgari eloquentia* 2.3). Nicole cites Adam de la Halle's *grands chant courtois* with much admiration. However, although paying lip service to Adam's greatness, the lyric pieces that the protagonist attributes to himself within the fictional framework of the *Panthère* make him look much more innovative than Adam. These refrain-based compositions, which include some of the earliest examples of rondeaux, *virelais*, and ballades, adumbrate the *formes fixes* that would dominate French lyric poetry throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²³ Indeed, should the reader have failed to notice, the protagonist insists on the novelty of his

Book of the Treasure (Li livres dou tresor), trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon W. Baldwin (New York: Garland, 1993), 140. This is (perhaps intentionally) reminiscent of Quintilian's comparison of the text with too many *sententiae* to Argus (*Institutions* 7.5.34, quoted in Antoine Compagnon, *La seconde main; ou, Le travail de la citation* [Paris: Seuil, 1979], 114, 202).

20. "Non solum aquam nostri ingenii ad tantum poculum aurientes, sed, accipiendo vel compilando ab aliis, potiora miscentes, ut exinde potionare possimus dulcissimum hydromellum" (I shall not bring to so large a cup only the water of my own thinking, but shall add to it more potent ingredients, taken or extracted from elsewhere, so that from these I may concoct the sweetest possible mead) (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.1).

21. Dante hunts the panther that has left its scent everywhere but is nowhere to be seen ("redolentem ubique et necubi apparentem"). Similarly, the panther is said to have left its scent in every city but made its home in none ("in qualibet redolet civitate nec cubat in ulla") (ibid., 1.16).

22. Ibid., 1.15.

23. On the forward-looking nature of the protagonist's pieces, see Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 221.

compositions: one is made “de nouvel” (line 2223), and another is “toute nouvele” (line 2380). There is also a sense of generic exhaustivity to Nicole’s pieces: he includes two rondeaux on a refrain of three lines, another on a refrain of four lines, and a ballade.²⁴ By contrast, Adam’s portfolio—as it appears within the *Panthère*—is limited to the *grand chant courtois*. Nicole’s compositions are not only at the cutting edge of lyricism, but also wide-ranging. Moreover, in the same way that in *De vulgari eloquentia* all roads to vernacular eloquence seem to point to Dante himself (witness Dante’s predilection for citing himself last in his lists of examples),²⁵ the buck seems to stop with Nicole in the *Dit de la panthère*.

Both Dante and Nicole associate the panther with language, a fact not surprising in itself since the animal’s breath (often glossed as speech, as in *Panthère*, line 501) is the source of its magnetic attraction, according to bestiaries.²⁶ Unique to Nicole and Dante, however, is the suggestion that the panther’s language is tempered or temperate (*Panthère*, lines 501, 539, 543, 547, 551; *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.15). Although the meaning of this term remains unclear in the *Panthère*, in Dante’s work it seems that the quality of temperance mirrors that of illustriousness, in that it implies the incorporation of one’s surroundings.²⁷ Moreover, in both the *Panthère* and *De vulgari eloquentia*, the panther (in its symbolic function for Dante) effects unification of a community through its voice. In Nicole’s text, we are told that other animals approach the panther and congregate around it “por l’amor de sa douce alaine” (for love of its sweet breath) (line 111), while in Dante the panther qua illustrious vernacular represents a kind of imagined language that adumbrates a pan-regional Italian composed of the best traits of all dialects.²⁸

24. Hoepffner, “Les poésies lyriques,” 220.

25. See, e.g., Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 2.2 on the subjects worthy of poetry, 2.5 on the hendecasyllabic line, 2.6 on canzoni, etc.

26. Many bestiaries state that the panther’s breath emanates from the roar it emits upon awakening from a three-day nap, and draw an analogy to Christ’s words upon his resurrection. Guillaume links the sweetness of the panther’s breath to the word of God: “Ne semblez mie le dragon / Qui ne puet la doucor soffrir, / Ne la parole Deu oir” (Do not resemble the dragon, which cannot suffer sweetness or hear the word of God) (*Le bestiaire divin*, lines 2050–52). See also Debra Higgs Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 156.

27. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, the term appears with respect to the Bolognese vernacular: “Si ergo Bononienses utrinque accipiunt, ut dictum est, rationabile videtur esse quod eorum locutio per commixtionem oppositorum ut dictum est ad laudabilem suavitatem remaneat temperata” (If, then, the Bolognese take from all sides, as I have said, it seems reasonable to suggest that their language, tempered by the combination of opposites mentioned above, should achieve a praiseworthy degree of elegance) (1.15).

28. See, e.g., Dante’s claim that “illustrious authors” come from Sicily, Apulia, Tuscany, Romagna, Lombardy, and so on: “Hoc [the Italian vernacular] enim usi sunt doctores illustres qui lingua vulgari poetati sunt in Ytalia, ut Siculi, Apuli, Tusci, Romandioli, Lombardi et utriusque Marchie viri” (*De vulgari eloquentia* 1.19).

The importance Nicole attributes to voice via the panther is reiterated throughout the text. The God of Love, like the panther, unites his followers through his voice (lines 176, 315), and it is this same voice that astonishes the narrator (lines 187, 206). The God of Love also inspires the voices of other creatures, particularly those of birds: “Par la chantoient li oïsel / A haute vois si doucement / Come se Diex y fust proprement” (The birds sang there in a high voice very sweetly as if God himself were there) (lines 282–84). In the way in which the God of Love uses voice to forge community, he serves as the mirror image of the already specular panther, transposing the panther’s animal kingdom into the human realm.

I would suggest that Nicole’s deployment of his own voice is intended to forge a similar community—one founded in French, rather than Italian, vernacular authority. The God of Love’s request to the narrator is precisely that he distinguish himself through his voice: “Fay que chascuns te doie oïr / Et puist entendre teulz nouveles / Qui soient cortois et beles” (Make it so that everyone must hear you and can hear tales that are courtly and beautiful) (lines 1024–26). If we take rhetorical dexterity as a measure of the deployment of the narrator’s voice, his success is indisputable. Gradually throughout the *Panthère*, some of the god’s recognizable rhetorical tricks are transferred to the narrator. At the beginning of the text, displays of poetic virtuosity are mostly reserved for descriptions of or speech attributed to the deity.²⁹ The god’s first speech after he has revealed his identity contains the only anaphora in the *Panthère* (lines 354–71), and the *dit* within the *Dit de la panthère* that the god ghostwrites for the protagonist is a whirlwind of rich and equivocal rhyme (lines 1743–1864). Over the course of the work, however, some of the god’s ability seems to rub off on the protagonist, whose first inset *dit* ends with an equivocal rhyme (lines 963–64).

By the end of the *Panthère*, the protagonist is outperforming the God of Love. The passage in which he dedicates his work to the lady (lines 2601–72) includes rich and equivocal rhyme as well as *tradio* and demonstrates his mastery of the God of Love’s poetic tricks. It is also worth noting that Nicole’s other known text, “Les trois mors et les trois vis,” is a showcase of poetic virtuosity, consisting almost exclusively of rich and/or equivocal rhymes and several passages of retrograde verse.³⁰ While there is no way to know the order of composition, if the *Panthère* was written after “Les trois mors,” readers might have recognized Nicole’s poetic signature of rich or equivocal rhyme in the *Panthère*. If it remains unclear at the end of the *Panthère* whether or not the protagonist has found success in love, there is

29. See, e.g., lines 235–36, 645–47, 759–60.

30. Nicole de Margival, “Les trois mors et les trois vis,” in *Le dit de la panthère d’amours*, ed. Henry Alfred Todd (Paris, 1883), xxxi–xxxix.

no doubt that he has become a skilled rhetorician and writer.³¹ In writing the *Dit de la panthère*, he has fulfilled the God of Love's instructions.

Another feature of the text that suggests Nicole's poetic supremacy is that the narrator's voice—as a composer of vernacular lyrics—is heard last. While Adam de la Halle's songs occur (with one exception) in the allegorical section of the *Panthère* (the section of the narrative that corresponds to the protagonist's dream about Venus, the God of Love, and the panther), the protagonist's poetic corpus is showcased in what some scholars have called the epilogue (the section that follows the protagonist's awakening).³² Like many lyric-interpolated romances of the early thirteenth century, the "roman" section of the *Dit de la panthère* cites only *grands chants courtois*. Nicole plays yet another game of poetic one-upmanship by having the concluding part of the *Panthère* feature his own cutting-edge compositions.³³ This structure suggests that Nicole will pick up where Adam left off and places Nicole symbolically at the end of the history of lyric that he has traced.

To have a voice in the *Panthère* is thus to be a part of the history of vernacular writing. Without a voice, a position of enunciation, one is unquotable and uncitable. This is the position in which Nicole places Brunetto Latini and Dante, whose texts are woven into the *Panthère* without the slightest hint that their words and images have been purloined. As we have seen, Nicole reserves his deference for instances of literary achievement in the French vernacular. By denying voices to the Italians whose texts influenced his own, Nicole forecloses the possibility of achievement in Italian since, with no author, there can be no *auctoritas*. If Kevin Brownlee is correct that the *Tesoretto* was itself an agonistic response to the text most symbolic of French cultural hegemony, the *Roman de la rose*,³⁴ it is striking that Brunetto's text should have provoked a similarly (unacknowledged) agonistic French response in Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère*—surely an illustration, if not explicitly a defense, of the eloquence of *la langue française*.

31. For more on the narrator's mastery of writing, see Solterer, *Master and Minerva*, chap. 2.

32. According to Hoepffner, line 2190 marks the beginning of the epilogue ("Les poésies lyriques," 214).

33. There is one song ("Ains en merci vous et amour") by Adam de la Halle in this epilogue section, but it is, unlike the other quotations, unattributed.

34. Brownlee, "Practice of Cultural Authority," 261.