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LAUGHING AT OR WITH THE TEXT?

The Wavrin Master as illuminator of Burgundian prose romances

The mid-fifteenth-century Lille-based artist known as the Wavrin Master, whose name is taken from his chief patron, Jean de Wavrin, the Burgundian bibliophile and chronicler¹, was responsible for illustrating ten paper manuscripts containing fifteen romance narratives of what we can usefully term the “historico-realist” (i.e. non-Arthurian) type, many of which are prose rewritings of earlier verse texts². The manuscripts of these works are decorated with over 650 ink-and-wash drawings which are strikingly different in style from the more usual miniatures of the period which were painted in tempera on parchment³, but they likewise

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- 1 On this figure, see A. Naber, “Jean de Wavrin, un bibliophile du xv^e siècle”, *Revue du Nord*, 69, 1987, p. 281-293; A. Naber, “Les manuscrits d’un bibliophile bourguignon du xv^e siècle, Jean de Wavrin”, *Revue du Nord*, 72, 1990, p. 23-48; C. T. L. Visser-Fuchs, “Warwick and Wavrin: Two Case Studies on the Literary Background and Propaganda of Anglo-Burgundian Relations in the Yorkist Period”, PhD dissertation, University College London, 2002; A. Marchandisse, “Jean de Wavrin, un chroniqueur entre Bourgogne et Angleterre, et ses homologues bourguignons face à la guerre des Deux Roses”, *Le Moyen Âge*, 112, 2006, p. 507-527; and H. Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1550)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, p. 472-479.
 - 2 On the work of this artist, see P. Schandel, “Le Maître de Wavrin et les miniaturistes lillois à l’époque de Philippe le Bon et de Charles le Téméraire”, PhD dissertation, 3 vols, Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, 1997; F. Johan, “Le Maître de Wavrin: Étude codicologique et stylistique”, mémoire de licence [BA thesis], 3 vols, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1999; and P. Schandel, “Le Maître de Wavrin”, *Miniatures Flamandes 1404-1482*, ed. B. Bousmanne and T. Delcourt, Paris/Brussels, Bibliothèque nationale de France / Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, 2011, p. 358-366.
 - 3 For key studies of manuscript painting in late medieval France and Burgundy, see P. Durrieu, *La miniature flamande au temps de la cour de Bourgogne (1415-1530)*, Brussels/Paris, G. Van Oest & Co., 1921; L. M. J. Delaissé, *La miniature flamande à l’époque de Philippe le Bon*, Milan, Electra Editrice, 1956; F. Winkler, *Die flämische Buchmalerei des XV und XVI Jahrhunderts. Künstler und Werke von den Brüdern van Eyck bis zu Simon Bening*, second edition, Amsterdam, B. M. Israël B. V., 1978; G. Dogaer, *Flemish Miniature*

found their way into the library of the duke, Philip the Good, who probably received them as gifts from Jean de Wavrin. These books thus attracted the attention of a reader at the very summit of Burgundian society who could pick and choose the contents of his library from the finest centres of medieval manuscript production and whose tastes were shared and influenced by many of the other bibliophiles at his court¹.

For most modern commentators on the Wavrin Master's work, the appeal of these miniatures to medieval reader/viewers was the way in which his stylised images, with their angular, almost "cartoonish" figures, offer an ironical visual commentary on the supposedly outdated romance narratives which they illustrate². The main problem with this critical assessment of the artist's work, which has largely been arrived at by scholars who, as art historians, have not necessarily studied the actual narratives themselves in great detail, is that it is by no means clear that the contemporary audience *did* regard such romances as outmoded. As literary scholars have increasingly pointed out in recent years, these texts were being put into prose in this period precisely so as to cater for a group of nobles who were avid consumers of chivalric tales³. The heroes

Painting in the 15th and 16th Centuries, Amsterdam, B. M. Israël B. V., 1987; C. Sterling, *La peinture médiévale à Paris (1300-1500)*, 2 vols, Paris, Bibliothèque des Arts, 1987; F. Avril, "Le dessin colorié dans le nord de la France", *Les manuscrits à peinture en France 1440-1520*, ed. F. Avril and N. Raynaud, Paris, Flammarion / Bibliothèque Nationale, 1993, p. 98-103; M. Smeyers, *L'art de la miniature flamande du VIII^e au XVI^e siècle*, trans. M. Verboomen, Tournai, La Renaissance du Livre, 1998; *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, ed. T. Kren and S. McKendrick, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2003; *Flemish Manuscript Painting in Context: Recent Research*, ed. T. Kren and E. Morrison, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2006; and *Miniatures Flamandes 1404-1482*.

1 Wijsman, *Luxury Bound*.

2 See, for example, P. M. de Winter, "Manuscrits à peintures produits pour le mécénat lillois sous les règnes de Jean sans Peur et de Philippe le Bon", *Archéologie militaire. Les Pays du Nord. Actes du 101^e congrès national des sociétés savantes*, Lille, 1976, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, 1978, p. 233-256; Smeyers, *L'Art de la miniature flamande*; P. Charron, *Le Maître du Champion des dames*, Paris, CTHS/INHA, p. 243-257; and Schandel, "Le Maître de Wavrin".

3 See R. Morse, "Historical Fiction in Fifteenth-Century Burgundy", *Modern Language Review*, 75, 1980, p. 48-64; M. Zink, "Le roman", *Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. 8/1, *La Littérature française aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, Heidelberg, Carl Winter Verlag, 1988, p. 197-218; M. Abramowicz, *Réécrire au moyen âge: mises en prose des romans de Bourgogne*, Lublin, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii-Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1996; J. H. M. Taylor, "The Significance of the Insignificant: Reading Reception in the Burgundian *Erec* and *Cligès*", *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 24, 1997 [1998], p. 183-197;

of these romances, such as Gérard de Nevers and Jean d'Avennes, were presented as being the putative ancestors of actual Burgundian families, as also were figures of Saracen origin or classical antiquity such as Saladin and Florimont, supposed grandfather of Alexander the Great, to whom they wished to lay genealogical claim¹. As pseudo-historical fictions, these works thus strove not only to evoke a world recognisable to the audience through a certain degree of psychological and topographical realism (with far less emphasis given to the supernatural characters and otherworldly landscapes familiar from Arthurian romance)², but also to deliver moral lessons about chivalric and courtly conduct for the benefit of their noble readers. Moreover, the seriousness of the issues addressed in these romances, which include repudiation, incest, infanticide and rape³, as well as legal matters such as just war and judicial combat⁴,

R. Brown-Grant, *French Romance of the Later Middle Ages: Gender, Morality, and Desire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008; and *Mettre en prose aux XIV^e-XV^e siècles*, ed. M. Colombo Timelli, B. Ferrari and A. Schoysman, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010.

- 1 See G. Doutrepont, *La littérature française à la cour des Ducs de Bourgogne: Philippe le Hardi, Jean sans Peur, Philippe le Bon, Charles le Téméraire*, Paris, Champion, 1909; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1970; G. Doutrepont, *Les mises en prose des épopées et des romans chevaleresques du XIV^e au XV^e siècle*, Brussels, Palais des Académies, 1939; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1969 and 2011; Y. Lacaze, "Le rôle des traditions dans la genèse d'un sentiment national au XV^e siècle. La Bourgogne de Philippe le Bon", *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 139, 1971, p. 303-385; J. Lemaire, *Les visions de la vie de cour dans la littérature française de la fin du moyen âge*, Brussels/Paris, Palais des Académies/Klincksieck, 1990, p. 183-238; and *The Ideology of Burgundy. The Promotion of National Consciousness, 1364-1565*, ed. D'A. J. D. Boulton and J. R. Veenstra, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2006.
- 2 The only two romances in the Wavrin manuscript corpus to contain any significant degree of supernatural elements are the *Roman de Buscalus* (Paris, BnF fr. 9343/4) and the *Roman d'Olivier de Castille et d'Artus d'Algarbe* (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek 470). See the article by R. Dixon in this volume on the first of these texts.
- 3 On the depiction of rape, see R. Brown-Grant, "Le rapt et le rapport texte/image dans les manuscrits du remaniement bourguignon de *La Fille du Comte de Pontieu*", *Rapts. Réalités et imaginaire du Moyen Âge aux Lumières*, ed. G. Vickermann-Ribémont and M. White-Le Goff, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2014, p. 49-70.
- 4 On the depiction of just war, see R. Brown-Grant, "How To Wield Power with Justice: The Fifteenth-Century *Roman de Florimont* as a Burgundian 'Mirror for Princes'", *Textual and Visual Representations of Power and Justice in Medieval France: Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. R. Brown-Grant, A. D. Hedeman and B. Ribémont, Farnham/Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2015, p. 43-64; and on judicial combat, see R. Brown-Grant, "Pour une lecture juridique du texte: le *Roman de Gérard de Nevers* vu par le Maître de Wavrin", *L'art du récit à la cour de Bourgogne: l'activité de Jean de Wavrin et de son atelier*, ed. Matthieu Marchal and Jean Devaux, Paris, Champion, forthcoming. I am currently preparing a monograph on the representation of law, power and justice in the complete romance corpus illuminated by the Wavrin Master.

militates strongly against seeing the hundreds of images produced by the Wavrin Master as being intended merely to amuse.

In fact, as I will argue in this study, where the artist *does* undeniably employ humour in his images, this pictorial strategy can be seen to be in perfect keeping with these romance narratives themselves, rather than serving to ridicule them as outmoded. Just as the tales leaven their treatment of more serious subject matter with the occasional use of comedy, so the Wavrin Master also uses visual humour, most frequently for the purpose of making mild fun of the hero during a crucial stage of his sentimental and chivalric education. Thus, far from adopting a critical distance that would be necessary for laughing *at* the text, the artist invites us to laugh *with* it in a variety of different ways. If, at times, he simply provides a pictorial equivalent of a verbal description in the text, at other times he “translates” this verbal content into visual codes such as gesture, clothing, and animal symbolism, incorporating details into the miniature that have no obvious source in the narrative. As we shall see, amusing though these images undoubtedly are, they too play a vital role in helping to impart the important didactic message that the noble male reader must learn to rule himself, by taking control of his passions and proving his worth to the wider community, if he is to perform his proper, allotted role of ruling others.

VISUALISING NARRATIVE HUMOUR

As an example of a romance in which the visual humour of the image arises directly from the narrative, rather than being at the expense of it, we can look at the *Roman d'Olivier de Castille et d'Artus d'Algarbe*¹. After a series of adventures which include fleeing the incestuous advances of

1 There is no modern critical edition of this text, apart from a somewhat inaccessible doctoral thesis (D. Régnier-Bohler, “*L'Histoire d'Olivier de Castille et Artus d'Algarbe (1445–1465)*”, PhD dissertation, 6 vols, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1994) and a translation of the text into modern French (*Histoire d'Olivier de Castille et Artus d'Algarbe*, trans. D. Régnier-Bohler, *Récits d'amour et de chevalerie XI^e-XV^e siècle*, ed. D. Régnier-Bohler, Paris, Éditions Robert Laffont, 2000, p. 985-1087), hence all quotations from this text will be from the Wavrin manuscript (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek 470). This manuscript can be

his own stepmother, surviving a shipwreck and losing all his goods to a gang of brigands, the eponymous hero makes his way to London to compete in a tournament where the prize is the hand of the beautiful Elaine, daughter of the king of England¹. In the first of three images devoted to this tournament (Figure 5) in the Wavrin Master's version of the text (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek 470), the artist offers a straight visual equivalent of the humorous account given in the text of how Olivier (dressed in black) is completely thrown by the princess's beauty when he catches sight of her in the royal tribune from which she and her ladies are watching the combat. Failing to restrain his emotions, he misses his opponent altogether and instead strikes a tremendous blow with his lance against a rickety stand which promptly collapses from the impact, throwing all of its occupants onto the ground. This deed provokes the merriment of the heralds who delightedly laud the excellence of this "aventureux habillié de noir qui d'un seul [coup] a abatu cent personnes" (fol. 58^v).

The effect of the artist's choosing to illustrate this comical moment in a chapter which goes on to recount how the hero manages to pull himself together is that it establishes a low point from which Olivier will rise in glory, as is seen in the image of the combat on the third and final day which marks his victory in the tournament as a whole (Figure 6). Repeating the same compositional structure as that of the earlier miniature, the Wavrin Master now depicts the hero in full control of himself as he leaps forward in front of the ladies' stand and towards the right-hand side of the scene, brandishing his lance against his opponents, who all either fall or flee before him. This image is the

consulted online: http://adore.ugent.be/?q=olivier+de+castille&submit=zoek&confirm_search=1&language=nl. Accessed 10 July 2014.

- 1 For studies of this text, see D. Régnier-Bohler, "Le monarque et son double: la *Légende des Deux Frères* à la cour de Bourgogne: l'*Histoire d'Olivier de Castille* et d'*Artus d'Algarbe*, récit en prose (entre 1430 et 1460)", *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 183, 1981-1983, p. 109-123; D. Régnier-Bohler, "Traditions et structures nouvelles chez Philippe Camus: la genèse de l'*Histoire d'Olivier de Castille* et d'*Artus d'Algarbe*", *Études littéraires sur le xv^e siècle: Actes du V^e Colloque international sur le Moyen Français* (Milan, 6-8 mai 1985), 3 vols, Milan, Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1986, vol. 3, p. 73-88; D. Régnier-Bohler, "David Aubert et le conte des deux frères: L'*Histoire d'Olivier de Castille* et *Artus d'Algarbe*", *Les manuscrits de David Aubert "escripvain" bourguignon*, ed. D. Quérueu, Paris, Presses Universitaires de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, p. 53-68; and Brown-Grant, *French Romance*, p. 63-76.

equivalent of the narrative description of how “Olivier ne s’y espargnoit pas, car il donnoit cops sy merueilleux et pesans qu’il n’y avoit sy hardy qu’il ne sortist devant lui” (fol. 68^v).

Through this amusing juxtaposition of “before” and “after” images, which complements the text’s own tracing of the hero’s narrative arc, the artist concentrates our attention on how Olivier eventually achieves victory in the tournament in both chivalric and amorous terms, thereafter obtaining marriage and accession to a kingdom whose interests he will prove himself committed to defend¹. Miniature and narrative thus unite to underline the didactic point that, at key moments in their chivalric careers, knights must ensure that their thoughts of love inspire them to perform deeds of valour rather than rendering them incapable of achieving such deeds in the first place².

“TRANSLATING” VERBAL INTO VISUAL CODES

If the Wavrin Master’s treatment of this tournament sequence from *Olivier de Castille* reveals him to be an attentive and sympathetic reader of the text in creating images that correspond closely to an amusing but instructive episode from the narrative, his interpretation of a similar phase in a young hero’s sentimental education in the *Roman de Florimont* shows him to be an inventive translator of verbal codes into visual ones for the purposes of producing comedy³. In this text, the duke of Albania has a

1 For a discussion of this text which compares the treatment of the narrative by the Wavrin Master and another artist who illustrated it twenty years later, see R. Brown-Grant, “Personal Drama or Chivalric Spectacle? The Reception of the *Roman d’Olivier de Castille et d’Artus d’Algarbe* in the Illuminations of the Wavrin Master and Loyset Liédet”, *Text/Image Relations in Late Medieval French and Burgundian Culture (Fourteenth-Sixteenth Centuries)*, ed. R. Brown-Grant and R. Dixon, Turnhout, Brepols, 2015, p. 123-139.

2 On the seriousness with which lovesickness was viewed in the medieval period, see M. F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; and for a study of the literary treatment of this malady in early romances, see T. Adams, *Violent Passions: Managing Love in the Old French Verse Romance*, Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

3 For an edition of this text, see H. Bidaux, “Le *Florimont* en prose. Édition critique du manuscrit bourguignon B.N. 12566”, PhD dissertation, Université de Lille III, 2007. For

dream-vision that his son, Florimont, is destined to become a king through marriage and ruler of a vast empire through conquest. After making an illustrious debut in a number of military campaigns, Florimont nonetheless falters in his chivalric vocation when he is separated by his tutor, Maistre Flocart, from his first love, the fairy-like Dame de l'Isle Celee, on the grounds that she selfishly wants her lover to abandon his country and live with her on her secret island. This separation causes Florimont to sink into a depression for three years, during which time he gives away all of his father's wealth and takes on a new identity, that of the "Povre Perdu".

The Wavrin Master's miniatures in his version of the text (Paris, BnF fr. 12566)¹ that are devoted to the seduction of Florimont by the Dame de l'Isle Celee and his subsequent bout of lovesick alienation bring out the tragi-comic nature of these textual episodes through the language of gesture and clothing. In the first of these images (Figure 7), we see the somewhat astonished-looking hero being embraced by the lady whose physical and emotional dominance over him is signalled through her greater size and higher status, as seen in her sumptuous brocaded robes and elaborate *boudin*-style headdress. Further adding to the humorous character of the scene, while at the same time hinting at the lady's potentially threatening supernatural power, is the fact that she manages to get her arms round him at all, given that he is still wearing the special razorblade-studded armour he has just used for fighting a vicious winged beast that has been ravaging the country. In the second image (Figure 8), after their secret relationship has been discovered by Flocart and Florimont's own mother, causing the lady to abandon her lover, the humour of the hero's anguished plight is seen in the contorted position of his splayed limbs and the way in which his head is entangled in his clothing as he lies prostrate on his bed. His father, meanwhile, shows his frustration at his son's listlessness by his kicking gesture and Maistre Flocart pulls back the bed curtain to point an admonishing finger at him.

studies of the text, see C. Cannon Willard, "A Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Version of the *Roman de Florimont*", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, new series 2, 1971, p. 21-46; M.-M. Castellani, "Romains et Carthaginois dans les deux versions du *Florimont*. Pour une lecture politique du *Florimont* en prose", *Mettre en prose*, p. 187-195; and Brown-Grant, "How to Wield Power with Justice".

1 The complete set of miniatures in this manuscript can be viewed via Mandragore on the website of the BnF. Accessed 10 July 2014.

The unmistakably comic visual elements of these two scenes serve nonetheless to illustrate the quite serious lesson of the text about the destabilising effects of love on both the individual and his wider community. Only when Florimont is sufficiently recovered from his lovesickness to go off with a group of other young knights to serve Philip of Macedon in his various wars is he able to fulfil the glorious destiny that was predicted for him by marrying Philip's daughter, inheriting the throne of Macedon, and conquering Carthage.

The Wavrin Master's inventive deployment in these romance manuscripts of pictorial devices such as gesture and clothing, in the aim of casting an ironic light on a hero's predicament in love which matches that employed in the text itself, also includes the use of animal symbolism. This can be seen most clearly in the *Roman du Comte d'Artois*, a tale featuring a married knight, Philippe, who, unable to have children by his wife, abandons her and his subjects to go off and seek adventure, ending up at the court of the king of Castile where he performs countless acts of valour but also conceives an undeclared passion for his lord's daughter¹. The abandoned wife, determined to win back her errant husband by meeting the three seemingly impossible conditions that he had imposed on her on his departure – becoming pregnant by him, obtaining his finest horse, and winning his best diamond, all without his knowledge – disguises herself as a valet and works her way into his household. As his most trusted servant, she shares his bedroom and discovers the secret love for the king's daughter that is destroying him, whereupon she vows not only to restore her would-be adulterous husband to health by appearing to engineer a nocturnal tryst with the object of his affections but also to serve her own ends by substituting herself for the lady and getting herself pregnant by him.

What the miniatures of the Wavrin Master's version of this text (Paris, BnF fr. 11610²) bring out is the irony of the situation whereby the wife, out of an exemplary conjugal loyalty, dupes her husband into thinking that his extra-marital passion has been requited when in fact he is paying the conjugal debt to his own lawful spouse. In the first

1 For a study of this text, see Brown-Grant, *French Romance*, p. 143-154; and for an edition of it, see *Le Roman du Comte d'Artois*, ed. J.-C. Seigneuret, Geneva, Droz, 1966.

2 The complete set of miniatures in this manuscript can be viewed via Mandragore and the Banque d'images on the website of the BnF. Accessed 10 July 2014.

of two juxtaposed bedroom scenes (Figure 9), we see the potentially life-threatening condition of the hero, Philippe, as he thrashes about in his bed on the right-hand side of the image, while his disguised wife lies motionless on the left-hand side listening to his cries of lovesick anguish. What also catches our attention in the centre foreground of this miniature is the detail of the large cat chasing a mouse, a detail that is wholly the artist's invention since it appears nowhere in the narrative itself, but which could be taken here as a visual metaphor with two possible, and not incompatible meanings. On the one hand, it can be read as echoing the hero's own complaint about how cruelly Love has treated him ("qui sy estrangement me tourmentez")¹, just as the cat does with the mouse once it has caught it. On the other hand, the detail could be seen to suggest the way in which the wife herself is, effectively, – but out of the noblest of motives – stalking her husband whom she will catch through her use of ruse.

Indeed, in the second of the two bedroom scenes in this manuscript (Figure 10), it is the ironic humour of the trap into which the hero unwittingly falls that is shown through his delighted body language as he throws open his left arm to welcome into bed the naked woman whom he thinks is his lady-love, when in fact her matronly head-covering signals clearly that this is his chaste and devoted wife who is slipping under the sheets². On succeeding in getting herself pregnant by him and obtaining the favourite horse and diamond as parting gifts from him, all the while maintaining her male disguise, the triumphant wife returns home and sends messengers to demand that the hero take up once more his responsibilities as her spouse and lord of Artois. As in the romances of *Olivier de Castille* and *Florimont*, then, where we saw how the artist uses elements of visual comedy to draw out the serious matter of how a hero's failure to control his passions can threaten his ability to accede to power or to fulfil a destiny, so too the miniatures of the *Comte d'Artois* make the point that an errant husband, momentarily blinded by an illicit love, can be brought back to acceptance of his proper marital and social roles.

As a final example of the pictorial devices used by the Wavrin Master to develop the humour of the texts which he was given to illustrate, we can

1 *Comte d'Artois*, p. 113.

2 See D. Wolfthal, *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe*, Yale, Yale University Press, 2010.

cite the way in which he provides a kind of visual gag running through a cycle of images in parallel to a motif in the narrative itself. This device is particularly in evidence in the *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre* which, like all the other tales we have been looking at, deals with an important underlying issue¹. In this instance, the narrative recounts how, in a fit of rage, the lord of Gavre disowns his own son, Louis, and repudiates his wife due to an unfortunate joke that she has made about the child's paternity. The young Louis, keen to prove himself worthy of his intemperate father's name, embarks on a glittering chivalric career that will culminate in his being crowned duke of Athens, this apotheosis allowing him eventually to bring about the reconciliation of his estranged parents.

The motif foregrounded in both text and image in the Wavrin Master's version of this tale (Brussels, KBR 10238)² is the battered old felt hat which the adolescent Louis, on a rare visit to his father, requests from him as a present. This hat is adopted by the hero as part of his battle cry, "Gavre au chappelet!", and is fastened to the top of his helmet as his crest (*cimier*), which he proudly wears in all his combats whether in the tournament yard or on the field of battle. Narrator and artist alike thus showcase this lowly object as an amusing detail that functions as an important symbol of the discrepancy between the hero's given status as a disowned son and the illustrious reputation that he goes on to forge for himself as a knight who not only comes to the rescue of slandered ladies and wounded travellers, but also takes up the cause of embattled rulers against foreign invasion³.

The comic value of the hat is clearly displayed in the image of the episode where Louis requests it from his father (Figure 11), to the latter's evident bemusement and disdain judging from his backwards-leaning posture away from the boy, the hawk on his hand suggesting that his attention lies elsewhere than on giving his son a proper hearing. Similarly, in the following image where he shows the hat to his mother (Figure

1 For a discussion of the text, see Brown-Grant, *French Romance*, p. 162-177. For an edition of this text, see *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre*, ed. R. Stuip, Paris, Champion, 1993.

2 The complete set of miniatures in this manuscript is reproduced in P. Schandel, "Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre. Un roman de chevalerie en images", *Art de l'enluminure*, 3, 2003 (Hors-série de *Art et Métiers du Livre*).

3 For an interpretation of this hat as a "motif de farce", see D. Kelly, "La norme et l'anomalie dans le roman au milieu du xv^e siècle", *Du roman courtois au roman baroque*, ed. E. Bury and F. Mora, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2004, p. 352-366, at p. 358.

12), his smile of pleasure and his arm gesture of proud possession on receiving this minimal token from his father are met with little evident enthusiasm on the face of the long-suffering lady and even, it has to be said, his own male companion. Thereafter, the hat becomes part and parcel of his chivalric identity, which the hero also constructs for himself by wearing his father's coat of arms (a rampant red lion on a gold background), these having been given, as the text explains, to the original lord of Gavre by none other than Roland himself¹.

The hat thus acts as a kind of decoy, confusing Louis's opponents into thinking that its shabby appearance must mean that the person wearing it is of little worth. This is certainly the case in the judicial duel where Louis fights Cassiodorus, a villainous knight who has accused the countess of Istria of poisoning her own sister, a murder for which he has framed her in revenge for her having rebuffed his amorous advances. Mocking Louis for wearing the tattered old hat on his helmet at the same time as a gorgeous coat of arms on his body, Cassiodorus remarks: "Mieulx te fust affreant que sur ton blason le portasses [i.e. the old hat], non pas le lyon que dessus y as fait paindre"². In the image accompanying this episode (Figure 13), the funny hat is highlighted not only by its providing such a sharp contrast with the hero's sumptuous coat of arms, but also by the fact that the gaze of the king seen at the centre of the stand is focused intently on it.

In similarly comic vein, both text and image (Figure 14) show how, in the final chivalric episode of Louis's career, when he returns to his native Picardy to compete in a royal tournament at Compiègne, the incongruous sight of his helmet with the shabby hat coupled with the colourful shield bearing his illustrious arms next to others more splendidly arrayed in a display of helms causes spectators to joke that it looks like something worn by some outlandish character from Arthurian romance or *chanson de geste*³. Against all appearances, however, Louis wins the tournament and, when news of this knight wearing the Gavre arms and shouting a Gavre battle-cry reaches his father's ears, it provokes a meeting that will lead to the parent's recognition of his child, and reconciliation between the husband and wife.

1 *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre*, p. 51.

2 *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre*, p. 54.

3 *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre*, p. 198.

Through the humorous motif of the hat, as brought out strongly by both verbal and visual means, this romance thus teaches the need for knights to prove that the nobility of their blood is matched by the nobility of their deeds, a topic that was an important subject of debate at the contemporary Burgundian court¹. It likewise reinforces the point that, unlike his tempestuous father who was unable to control his emotions, causing him to repudiate his own wife and child and effectively jeopardise the continuation of his own dynasty, Louis de Gavre shows exemplary self-mastery and single-mindedness of purpose in pursuit of his quest for paternal recognition.

CONCLUSION

This reassessment of the relationship between text and image in various manuscripts illustrated by the Wavrin Master has aimed to show how this artist has been rather unfairly – and anachronistically – caricatured by art historians as being akin to a modern cartoonist in casting only a mocking eye on the late medieval romance narratives that he specialised in illuminating. As I hope to have demonstrated here, this artist can in fact be seen to be sensitive to the text in all its aspects, highlighting its seriousness where called for, and bringing out its humorousness where called for, and often revealing how closely the two are interlinked. Whether providing direct pictorial equivalents to amusing episodes in the narrative or “translating” these episodes into the visual language of clothing, gesture and symbolism, the Wavrin Master is clearly laughing *with*, rather than *at* the text in these tales that recount how their heroes overcome the crippling pains of lovesickness that are so injurious to the self and to others, how they channel illicit desire into licit payment of the conjugal debt, and how they prove

1 See C. Cannon Willard, “The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court”, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14, 1967, p. 33–48; A. J. Vanderjagt, *Qui sa vertu anoblist: The Concepts of Noblesse and Chose Publicque in Burgundian Political Thought (Including Fifteenth Century French Translations of Giovanni Aurispa, Buonaccorso da Montemagno, and Diego de Valera)*, Groningen, Jean Miélot & Co., 1981; and *The Ideology of Burgundy*, ed. D’A. J. D. Boulton and J. R. Veenstra.

themselves worthy of belonging to a noble lineage. Enhancing the texts' ability to inculcate in their noble readers the art of being emotionally responsible and socially useful, through a combination of both serious example and comic interlude, the artist too plays his part in using the power of the image not only to teach but also, just as crucially, to sugar the pill of didactic instruction, thus offering his aristocratic reader/viewers, in the words of Danielle Quérue!l, "une fête des yeux en même temps qu'une fête de l'esprit"¹.

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1 D. Quérue!l, "Formules narratives, rubriques et enluminures: l'exemple de l'histoire de *Renaut de Montauban* de David Aubert (xv^e siècle)", *Lecture, représentation et citation. L'image comme texte et l'image comme signe (x^e-xvii^e siècle)*. Institut Programme Erasmus (M. S. H. Nord/Pas de Calais). Programme de recherche *La Pensée du regard* (Centre Artes). Actes du colloque du 13 décembre 2002 à l'Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille 3, ed. C. Heck, Lille, Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille 3, 2007, p. 131-145, at p. 132: "Illustrés par des peintres de métier, dans des ateliers où travaillent les 'historieurs' professionnels, les manuscrits de cette époque sont faits pour être lus et regardés tout à la fois. Le texte et l'image se complètent, s'éclairent et s'enrichissent réciproquement. Repères textuels et repères iconographiques se rejoignent pour offrir aux lecteurs *une fête des yeux en même temps qu'une fête de l'esprit*" (my emphasis).