

ERIKA PIHL

Mirrored Voices

The Rhetoric of Experientiality in Medieval Literature

Tampere University Dissertations 421

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The Rhetoric of Experientiality in Medieval Literature

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<i>Responsible supervisor and Custos</i>	Professor Sari Kivistö Tampere University Finland	
<i>Supervisor</i>	Docent Teemu Ikonen University of Helsinki Finland	
<i>Pre-examiners</i>	Professor Frank Brandsma Utrecht University Netherlands	Docent Susanna Niiranen University of Jyväskylä Finland
<i>Opponents</i>	Professor Sophie Marnette University of Oxford United Kingdom	

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I dedicate this work to Petri. *Bel ami, si est de nus: Ne vus sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus.*

Tampere, 15 April 2021

Erika Pihl

ABSTRACT

The dissertation investigates the rhetoric of experientiality in medieval literature. Derived from cognitive narratology, the term *experientiality* refers in the study to a) fictional consciousness representation, b) the impression created by narrative texts of an embodied presence reacting to the told on the level of the telling, and c) the cultural and literary background shared by authors and audiences that is made use of in the texts' consciousness representation. What kind of functions does the description of medieval characters' inner experiences perform? Who, or what, is eventually described, when medieval texts relate their characters' joys, fears and heartbreaks? The research questions are answered with a contextualising approach which brings together modern narratology and medieval poetics influenced by classical rhetoric.

A central area of inquiry in multidisciplinary narrative research, consciousness representation has been dominated by two notable theoretical approaches: the linguistics-based approach, which seeks to categorise thought based on the level of directness, and which is traceable to ancient literary criticism, has in recent years been supplemented by cognitively oriented frameworks modelling different aspects of narrative on certain real-life parameters. Both perspectives have been applied in previous research to the representation of characters' thoughts, perceptions and emotions in medieval narrative. However, the dissertation takes as its point of departure the observation that these theoretical models, derived principally from the modern novel, do not completely manage to cover the nature of consciousness representation in medieval literature, which leans heavily on the rhetorical tradition, favours oral-aural transmission and essentially recycles the story material.

This hypothesis is tested in the study through a close reading of three canonical texts from the High and Late Middle Ages, representing different linguistic regions and based around the genre of romance. Heldris of Cornwall's *Le Roman de Silence* (ca. 1270–80), Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1380–87) and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* (ca. 1343–44) are placed in the text-specific analysis chapters in a double perspective formed by narratology and medieval poetics, with the intention of thus illuminating the texts' narrative strategies of consciousness from the perspective of their own era, and at the same time to illustrate the limited historical scope of the dominant paradigms of consciousness representation. Since the results obtained are based on a small corpus of texts, the

dissertation does not seek to develop a systematic poetics defining the exact principles governing the medieval representation of experiencing minds, but rather presents its tentative readings of the case studies as proposals whose generalisability can subsequently be assessed in medieval texts of different genres from different linguistic regions.

The dissertation argues that the representation of consciousness in the case studies is centrally concerned with the rhetorically inspired involvement of the audience's perspective, which is also linked in the study to the oral performance of medieval narrative and the act of portraying and generating emotional states through the human voice. The analyses demonstrate that the depictions of characters' emotions, thoughts and perceptions make conscious and varied use of the audiences' experience as human beings in the text-external world, on the one hand, and as connoisseurs of recycled story material, on the other. The first analysis chapter (Chapter I; *Le Roman de Silence*) focuses on experientialising rhetoric consisting of narratorial commentary, which, instead of characters' consciousness, models and shapes the audience's emotional reactions, and which constructs the characters' minds in a self-consciously conventional manner, while also re-negotiating them in collaboration with the audience. The second analysis chapter (Chapter II; *Troilus and Criseyde*) examines repetition and frequency as narrative devices of manipulation creating the effect of inevitability with regard to certain conventional emotional patterns. The final analysis chapter (Chapter III; *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*) analyses coercive narration, which demands the audience to unconditionally share the narrator-protagonist's view according to which her experience of falling in love is solitary and unique. These narrative strategies are read in relation to the re-definition of the role of the medieval author against *auctores* and the literary tradition that has been argued was taking place from the twelfth century onwards. It is suggested that the case studies push the limits of time-honoured, cumulative experiences of literary characters, while encouraging the recipients of these narratives to practice critical reading which does not unquestioningly adopt any viewpoints offered as givens.

In addition to underlining the role of the audience, the dissertation proposes that the case studies underline the nature of the characters' minds as consciously layered, communal and exhibitory artefacts by writers well-versed in poetics. In Chapter I, the man-made, fabricated nature of the characters' minds is illustrated by analysing the use of figurative language focusing on composition and reception as a means of conveying the characters' experiences. Chapter II shows how the characters' ostensibly private experience is made to loop back to the author and tradition through metaleptic echoing strategies and muddling the discursive structures which

lead to anticipate direct discourse; in this chapter, the medieval manuscript culture serves as another contextualising factor which aids to see how manuscript methods of speech marking, very different from the modern system of punctuation, open up pathways of interpretation that can radically diverge from the readings based on modern printed editions and the theoretical frameworks for consciousness representation. Likewise, Chapter III challenges one of the central concepts of narratological research, the unreliable narrator, by reading the conventional signs of narratorial unreliability not as indications of a troubled psyche, but as a game of interpretation between author and audience, one that is defined by the deliberate, author-revealing transparency of the narrator's discourse, and which leans on readerly familiarity with rhetoric, poetics and the conventional elements of the literary experience of loving.

The outcome of the study suggests that the three case studies frame the characters' minds as allegories of composition and reading. The texts tend to sideline the characters' experiences in favour of depicting the construction of those experiences: instead of representing the characters' minds, the focus turns to their processual generation in the act of narration. The study thus re-evaluates the psychological dimension of medieval romance that has been said to anticipate the modern novel. Instead of a naturalising method of reading, it is productive to consider the experiencing minds of medieval literature as functional, self-consciously artificial and communal creations which expose their own conventionalism and serve as platforms for negotiating thematic, didactic and literary historical questions.

Key words: audience, consciousness representation, experientiality, medieval literature, medieval poetics, narratology, orality, rhetoric, romance

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirja käsittelee kokemuksellisuuden retoriikkaa keskiaikaisessa kirjallisuudessa. Kognitiivisesta narratologiasta periytyvällä *kokemuksellisuuden (experientiality)* käsitteellä viitataan tutkimuksessa a) kaunokirjalliseen tajunnankuvaukseen, b) kertovien tekstien välittämään vaikutelmaan subjektiivisen kokijan läsnäolosta kerronnan tasolla sekä c) kirjailijan ja yleisön jakamaan kulttuuriseen ja kaunokirjalliseen kokemustaustaan, jota tajunnankuvausjaksoissa hyödynnetään. Millaisia tehtäviä on keskiaikaisten henkilöhahmojen sisäisen kokemuksen kuvauksella? Ketä tai mitä lopulta kuvataan, kun kerrotaan henkilöhahmojen iloista, peloista ja sydänsuruista? Tutkimuskysymyksiin vastataan kontekstitietoisella teoreettisella otteella, joka tuo dialogiin modernin narratologian ja keskiajan oman, klassista retoriikkaa hyödyntävän runousopin.

Kaunokirjallinen tajunnankuvaus on monitieteisen kertomusentutkimuksen keskeinen osa-alue, jossa vaikuttaa kaksi merkittävää teoreettista lähestymistapaa: kielitieteeseen pohjaava, kertojan ja henkilöhahmojen ääniä jaottelemaan pyrkivä strukturalistinen tarkastelumalli, jonka perusta luotiin jo antiikin Kreikassa, on viime aikoina saanut rinnalleen kognitiivisesti painottuneen, ajattelun sosiaalisia ja ruumiillisia ulottuvuuksia korostavan näkökulman, josta kertomusmuodon eri aspekteja tulkitaan tiettyjen tosielämän parametrien kautta. Molempia lähestymistapoja on aiemmassa tutkimuksessa sovellettu myös keskiaikaisten kertomusten sisältämiin tunne- ja aistikokemusten kuvauksiin. Väitöskirjan lähtökohtana on kuitenkin havainto, että nämä voittopuolisesti modernin romaanin pohjalta abstrahoidut teoreettiset mallinnukset eivät täysin riitä kattamaan retoriikan perinteeseen nojaavan, suullista esitystapaa suosivan ja tarina-aineksen kierrättämiseen perustuvan keskiaikaisen kirjallisuuden tajunnankuvausta.

Tätä hypoteesia testataan väitöskirjassa analysoimalla tajunnankuvausjaksoja kolmessa kanonisessa sydän- ja myöhäiskeskiajalta peräisin olevassa tekstissä, jotka edustavat eri kielialueita ja ovat luokiteltavissa romansseiksi. Heldris de Cornuällen *Le Roman de Silence* (n. 1270–80), Geoffrey Chaucerin *Troilus and Criseyde* (n. 1380–87) ja Giovanni Boccaccion *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* (n. 1343–44) asetetaan tekstikohtaisissa käsittelyluvuissa narratologian ja keskiajan poetiikan muodostamaan kaksoisperspektiiviin, joka valottaa kohdetekstien kerrontateknisiä ratkaisuja oman aikakautensa näkökulmasta ja samalla havainnollistaa fiktiivisiä mieliä teoretisoivien nykyparadigmojen rajallista historiallista ulottuvuutta. Koska tutkimuksen tulokset

perustuvat määrällisesti rajalliseen aineistoon, väitöskirja ei pyri laatimaan keskiaikaisen kaunokirjallisen kokemuksellisuuden periaatteita systemaattisesti määrittelevää poetiikkaa, vaan esittää kohdeteksteistään luentoja, joiden johtopäätösten yleistettävyyttä on mahdollista jatkossa arvioida eri kielialueita ja kirjallisuuden lajeja edustavissa keskiaikaisissa teksteissä.

Väitöskirjassa esitetään, että kohdetekstien tajunnankuvauksessa keskeiseen rooliin nousee antiikin retoriikasta periytyvä yleisön näkökulman vahva painotus, mikä kytketään tutkimuksessa myös keskiaikaisen kirjallisuuden suulliseen esitystapaan ja ihmisäänen avulla tuotettavaan tunnetilojen kuvaukseen ja luomiseen. Analyysit osoittavat, että henkilöhahmojen tunteiden, ajattelun ja havaintojen esitykset hyödyntävät tietoisesti ja monin eri tavoin yleisön kokemustaustaa todellisen maailman toimijoina ja kierrätettyjen kaunokirjallisten kertomusten tuntijoina. Ensimmäisessä käsittelyluvussa (luku I; *Le Roman de Silence*) kohdennetaan kertojan kommentaariin (*experientialising rhetoric*), joka henkilöhahmon tajunnan sijaan mallintaakin kertomusten vastaanottajien tunnekokemusta sekä rakentaa henkilöhahmojen tunnetiloja itsetietoisella konventionaalisella otteella ja toisaalta neuvottelee niitä uusiksi yhteistyössä yleisön kanssa. Toisessa käsittelyluvussa (luku II; *Troilus and Criseyde*) tutkitaan toistoa ja frekvenssiä kerronta- ja manipulaatiokeinoina, joiden avulla luodaan vaikutelma tiettyjen konventionaalisten tunnekaavojen välttämättömyydestä. Viimeinen käsittelyluku (luku III; *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*) analysoi pakottavaa kerrontaa, joka vaatii yleisöä ehdoitta jakamaan kertoja-päähenkilön näkemyksen rakastumisen kokemuksestaan ainutlaatuisena. Nämä kerrontatekniset piirteet kytketään väitöskirjassa 1100–1300-lukujen ajankohtaisiin kirjallisuushistoriallisiin kysymyksiin keskiaikaisen kirjailijan roolista auktoireiden ja tradition taustaa vasten. Kohdetekstien tulkitaan koettelevan tradition vakiinnuttamien, kumulatiivisten kaunokirjallisten kokemusten rajoja sekä kannustavan yleisöä kriittiseen lukijuuteen, joka ei ota annettuna itsestään selvinä tarjottuja näkökulmia.

Yleisöpainotteisuuden lisäksi väitöskirjassa esitetään, että kohdetekstit korostavat henkilöhahmojen mieliä runousopin tuntevan kirjailijan taidokkaina luomuksina ja yhteisöllisinä, tietoisien kerrostuneina artefakteina. Luvussa I tätä mielen konstruktio- ja luonnontietä lähestytään analysoimalla luomisprosessiin kohdistuvaa vertauskuvien käyttöä henkilöhahmojen tunnekokemusten välittämisessä. Luku II näyttää, kuinka henkilöhahmojen yksityinen kokemus palautetaan tekijään ja tradition metaleptisen kaiutuksen ja suoraa esitystä ennakoivien rakenteiden hämmentämisen avulla; tässä yhteydessä myös havainnollistetaan, miten keskiaikaisten käsikirjoitusten modernista välimerkkien käytöstä poikkeavat

merkitsemistavat avaavat tajunnankuvausjaksojen osalta nykymallinnusten tuottamista luennoista eriäviä tulkinnallisia mahdollisuuksia. Niin ikään luvussa III haastetaan narratologiassa keskeisen epäluotettavan kertojan käsitettä lukemalla epäluotettavan kerronnan konventionaalisia merkkejä psyyken ilmentämisen sijaan tekijän ja yleisön välisenä tulkinnallisena pelinä, jota määrittää kertojan diskurssin tarkoituksellinen, tekijään viittaava läpinäkyvyys, ja joka nojaa runousopin ja kaunokirjallisen rakastumisen kokemuksen konventionaalisten elementtien tuntemukseen.

Väitöskirjan lopputulemana todetaan, että keskiaikaisten kohdetekstien tunnekuvauksia voidaan ymmärtää kaunokirjallisten kertomusten laatimisen ja vastaanottamisen allegorioina. Henkilöhahmojen kokemuksen sijaan itse kokemuksen rakentumisprosessista ja kertovasta äänestä tapaa tulla ensisijainen kuvauskohde: mielten esittämisen sijaan kyse on mielten prosessimaisesta luomisesta kerronnassa. Tutkimus arvioi näin uudelleen keskiaikaisten romanssitekstien jo modernia kertomakirjallisuutta ennakoivana pidettyä psykologista ulottuvuutta. Luonnollistavan lukutavan sijaan keskiaikaisten kertomusten kokevia mieliä on hedelmällistä tarkastella funktionaalisina, tietoisien keinotekoisina ja yhteisöllisinä luomuksina, jotka osoittavat omaan konventionaalisuuteensa sekä toimivat temaattisten, didaktisten ja kirjallisuushistoriallisten kysymysten työstöpaikkoina.

Tutkimuksen avainsanat: keskiajan kirjallisuus, kokemuksellisuus, narratologia, retoriikka, romansi, runousoppi, suullisuus, tajunnankuvaus, yleisö

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AP</i>	<i>Ars poetica</i>
<i>AV</i>	<i>Ars versificatoria</i>
<i>De inv.</i>	<i>De inventione</i>
<i>De orat.</i>	<i>De oratore</i>
<i>Elegia</i>	<i>Elegia di madonna Fiammetta</i>
<i>EMF</i>	<i>The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta</i>
<i>Etym.</i>	<i>Etymologiae</i>
<i>Inst. orat.</i>	<i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>PN</i>	<i>Poetria nova</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Parisiana poetria</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>Le Roman de Silence</i>
<i>TC</i>	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates experiencing minds and experientialising rhetoric in medieval literature. I use the generic terms “medieval” and “literature” in the title and throughout the study for convenience;¹ more precisely, I will concentrate on a specific selection of three fictional narratives ranging from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century and representing different language areas. These include the verse narrative *Le Roman de Silence* (ca. 1270–80) by Heldris of Cornwall, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1380–87), likewise composed in verse form, and the prose work *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* (ca. 1343–44) by Giovanni Boccaccio.² The first two texts represent the genre of romance in a more classical sense; the third develops romance elements in an innovative manner.³

¹ On the problematic notion of medieval “literature,” see Jauss (1979) and Zumthor (1984; 1992, 46). According to Jauss, the modern understanding of literature is profoundly different from the medieval one in that it rests on visual rather than aural reception, conceives of authorship as singular, and of texts as autonomous works. In addition to such conceptual differences, Zumthor calls attention to the variants generated by the non-mechanical means of reproduction in the manuscript tradition. The scribal transmission, involving modifications of words or transposing stretches of text, led to linguistic and semantic alterations potentially affecting the interpretation of the text. What comes down to us in print, then, is by necessity a heavily revised version of several different sources and shaped by editorial choices. However, in literary studies, which aim to formulate theoretical statements on narrative techniques through informed close readings of texts, it is customary to rely on modern critical editions, despite their being so far removed from the texts’ original mode of existence. In keeping with this tradition, the term “medieval literature” thus appears in this study as a practical byword for the explored texts, and it is employed with full knowledge of its anachronistic flair and the caveats related to it.

² There is debate whether the works of Boccaccio belong to the Middle Ages or to the Renaissance, with some scholars underlining what they see as his revolutionary mimetic storytelling practices and critique of contemporary society (e.g., Auerbach 1953/2013; Scaglione 1963; Mazzotta 1986), and others viewing him more as a medieval moralist upholding medieval values (e.g., Hollander 1977; Smarr 1986; Kirkham 1993a). For a more atypical suggestion of Chaucer as a Renaissance writer, see Waswo (1983).

³ Medieval romance, originating in the mid-twelfth century royal and feudal courts of France, is not a monolithic genre, and a single definition is simply impossible to pin down (see, e.g., Gaunt 2000). Roberta L. Krueger offers a loose designation, speaking of “fictions, written first in verse and then in prose, that recounted the exploits of knights, ladies, and noble families seeking honor, love, and adventure” (2000, 2), and usually placed in an Arthurian or Classical setting. Attempts have been made to distinguish romance from other contemporary modes of writing (e.g., epic, saints’ lives, short tales) based on typical structural features (e.g., Bruckner 2000), such as emphasis on the role of the storyteller, reliance on topical description and recurrent patterns (ibid.), or the explicit pact of fictionality between author and audience (Green 2002). These features are central to all of my case studies, and they also exhibit a strong interest in the psychological processes within the characters’

By “experiencing minds” I mean, on the one hand, fictional minds in the traditional narratological sense of consciousness representation: I am interested in how characters’ mental processes and states of mind are conveyed in language, either by themselves or by narrators. On the other hand, I mean minds outside fiction – those of authors and audiences –, insofar as versions of them can be constructed from the texts. By “experientialising rhetoric” I refer, in a narrow sense, to a commentary on the unfolding tale, which evokes a sense of an embodied presence reacting to the told on the level of the telling. In a broader sense, the “rhetoric of experientiality” designates a mode of telling which consciously engages audiences’ experiences as human beings and as connoisseurs of recycled story material, which is made use of in the texts’ consciousness representation. It will be argued that my three case studies view characters’ experiences as collaborative, conspicuously poeticised and cumulative artefacts, the representation of which builds on audiences’ familiarity with earlier cases and foregrounds an awareness of the writer’s craft.

The term “rhetoric” is understood in this study in two senses. First of all, it refers to a conception of narrative as an internally persuasive discourse that is directed towards what the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin calls a “responsive understanding” (1981, 280). Rhetorical forms, Bakhtin writes, are constructed in such a way as to take into account the recipient: every word “provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction” (ibid.). Accordingly, as literary scholar Meir Sternberg notes, the recipient of a narrative discourse, whether in the sense of a text-internal narratee or a hypothetical construction, is not a passive “noncontributor,” but can be said to affect the formulation of the text along with its producer, “impos[ing] on it their voices and perspectives” (Sternberg 1986, 296).

Second, rhetoric is conceived of in this study in terms of skilful expression, as defined by medieval grammarians. According to the early medieval encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), rhetoric was “the art of speaking well in civil cases” (“bene dicendi scientia in ciuilibus quaestionibus”; *Etym.* II. 1.1).⁴ For John of Garland (ca. 1185–ca. 1272), who taught grammar at Paris University, rhetoric “teaches how to speak elegantly” (“docet ornate dicere”; *PP*, 1.6–10) when writing letters, poetry or prose.⁵ It was through the canon of style, which medieval rhetorical and poetic theory inherited from Roman textbooks on oratory, that the medieval poet could produce various aesthetic, emotional and didactic effects in the audience.

minds, which is another genre-defining feature (Vinaver 1971; Hanning 1977). I return to the psychological element of romance in more detail below.

⁴ All English translations of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* are from Barney et al. (2006).

⁵ All Latin quotations and English translations of the *Parisiana poetria* are from the Lawler (1974) edition.

In connection to the experiencing minds explored in this study, stylistic adornment becomes, among other things, a practical tool for introducing unconventional emotions and for teaching interpretive skills, while it also serves to turn characters' inner experiences into poets' exhibitory arenas, thus contributing to the heightened sense of artifice that I claim to be involved in these represented experiences.

In this capacity, the rhetoric of experientiality, as it is understood in this study, is not so much concerned with the notion of an author communicating a solid vision to a reader who attempts to decode it, which is the cornerstone of contemporary rhetorical narratology (e.g., Phelan 2005, 2007: narrative as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened"). Rather, it operates on the basis of the uncertainty of truth, working through suggestion and negotiation, in a language liberated from the confines of literacy (cf. Purcell 1996, 17–18). As Robert M. Jordan puts it, the medieval writer-rhetor is an "ambiguous authority" (1987, 13), choosing and shaping verbal material that is typically described by grammarians in terms of a garment, a veil or malleable wax: "since human choice inevitably introduces a dimension of arbitrariness, the question of correctness – or truth – is always open" (ibid.) and negotiable with the audience. The three case studies bring this capricious and collaborative poetic process into focus, and by highlighting the process itself, they ultimately question the primacy of represented consciousnesses over the act of representing them.

In what follows, I will situate this dissertation in the existing conversation on fictional minds and narrative experientiality, and introduce my three case studies. I will also identify the aims of the study, clarify some central concepts which feature prominently in the analysis sections (audience, romance memory) and discuss some challenges presented by premodern texts. The introduction concludes with a brief outline of the subsequent analysis chapters.

1 Narrative and Experience

1.1 (Dis)Embodied Illusions

For over two decades, the term "experientiality" has been one of the central concepts of narratological studies. It was first introduced by Monika Fludernik in her groundbreaking study *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, where it is defined as a "quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" (1996, 12). By this she means that conversational ("natural") as well as artistic storytelling is defined by certain cognitive

parameters which contribute to the human tendency to understand the construction and reception of stories in terms of “representational mimesis” (ibid. 10). The most basic of these cognitive parameters is our embodied experience of an “existence which always has to be situated in a specific time and space frame, and the motivational and experiential aspects of human actionality likewise relate to the knowledge about one’s physical presence in the world” (ibid. 22). Fludernik underlines that in literature this aspect is most clearly conveyed by the presence of a human protagonist who reacts emotionally and physically to events: “since humans are conscious thinking beings,” she writes, “(narrative) experientiality always implies and sometimes emphatically foregrounds the protagonist’s consciousness” (ibid.).

Fludernik’s natural narratology takes a radical and controversial⁶ departure from the customary view of narrative by abandoning such concepts as time and event sequencing, and by equating experientiality with narrativity; as Fludernik boldly states, “there can . . . be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level” (ibid. 9). In a similar vein, though not equating experientiality with narrativity, narratologist David Herman has suggested that narratives are centrally concerned with *qualia*, “the sense of ‘what is it like’ for someone or something to have a particular experience” (2009, 14). The more a given narrative foregrounds the impact of the represented events on an experiencing mind, the more it corresponds to a prototypical instance of the category “narrative,” which also includes situatedness, event sequencing and world disruption as basic elements (ibid. 137–38).

The centrality of embodied, experiencing consciousness to narrative insisted upon by Fludernik and Herman bears interestingly on my three case studies, which, as stated above, can be designated as representatives of the multifarious genre of romance. Medieval romance, which originated in twelfth-century France, has been described as a form of writing which places a heavy emphasis on individual perception of the narrated world. In his classical study *The Rise of Romance*, the distinguished medievalist Eugène Vinaver argued that the romantic genre imposed on the narrated events a causal scheme that was missing from early French epic poetry aiming to impress rather than to explain (1971, 13–14). By contrast, the romancers’ analysis of their characters’ feelings provided a perspective that linked narrative progression to human motivation, giving credibility to the represented events and imbuing the work with a sense of meaning and coherence (ibid. 68, 100). In another important study *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, Robert W. Hanning discusses the chivalric romance as a genre in which “one of the central

⁶ For a critique of Fludernik’s theory, see, e.g., Sternberg (2001); Alber (2002); Caracciolo (2012).

motivating forces of the twelfth-century Renaissance . . . a new desire on the part of literate men and women to understand themselves as single, unique persons” found literary expression (1977, 1). An innovative narrative technique was the representation of “limited perspective,” the effect of which, according to Hanning, “is to suggest that each person experiences and understands reality from within perceptual limits peculiar to him and imposed on him by his position in space or time, his previous history, attitudes, expectations, or relationship to others” (ibid. 14). As Norris J. Lacy, the leading scholar on Arthurian studies, puts it in his analysis of regulated viewpoints in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*, this technique shifts emphasis from actions to reactions, thus replacing narrative suspense with character psychology (1980, 45).⁷

In the following centuries, verse romance moved even deeper into psychological territory, so that in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* – loosely adapting Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s twelfth-century *Roman de Troie* through Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* – the outward marvels of Arthurian romance can be said to be thoroughly internalised in the protagonists’ “marvellous inward adventure of love” (Windeatt 1988, 131). Take, for instance, this scene which lets us into Troilus’s thoughts when he has fallen in love at first sight with the beautiful Criseyde:

And whan that he in chambre was allone,
 He doun upon his beddes feet hym sette,
 And first he gan to sike, and eft to grone,
 And thought ay on hire so, withouten lette,
 That, as he sat and wook, his spirit mette
 That he hire saugh a-temple, and al the wise
 Right of hire look, and gan it newe avise.

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,
 In which he saugh al holly hire figure,
 And that he wel koude in his herte fynde.
 It was to hym a right good aventure
 To love swich oon, and if he dede his cure
 To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace,
 Or ellis for oon of hire servantz pace.

Imagenynge that travaille nor grame
 Ne myghte for so goodly oon be lorn
 As she . . .
 (TC, 1.358–74)

⁷ See also Spence (1996) on how vernacular authors of the twelfth century create in their texts a space for the self through language rooted in the body.

At the crux of these stanzas is Troilus's mental experience: his inner turmoil, his memory of Criseyde, his eventual decision to pursue the lady. Traditionally, narratologists have gauged the "what is it like" quality of mental experience with a linguistically based approach which categorises fictional speech and thought acts in terms of direct, indirect and free indirect discourse (e.g., Chatman 1978; Cohn 1978; Genette 1972/1980; McHale 1978; Leech and Short 1981/2007), and the triad has been applied to medieval narrative as well (e.g., Cerquiglini 1981; Fleischman 1990; Fludernik 1993 and 1996; Marnette 1998 and 2005; Moore 2011). In her seminal study on fictional consciousness representation, narratologist Dorrit Cohn (1978) named the basic techniques as *quoted monologue* ("a character's mental discourse" cited by the narrator), *psycho-narration* ("the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness") and *narrated monologue* ("a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse") (ibid. 14). Based on this, the above example would be classified as psycho-narration, with the narrator indirectly conveying the contents of the character's mind.

According to Fludernik's natural narratology, such an identification is the result of the application of basic embodied storytelling schemata by which we "narrativize" a given text, that is, treat it as a narrative by falling back on our real-life experience of spontaneous oral storytelling (Fludernik 1996, 235). This experience leads us to conclude that someone must be telling the story; *ergo*, we hypothesise the existence of a "narrator" (Fludernik 2001, 622). Because of the explicit narratorial presence,⁸ it could then be said that the *Troilus* excerpt offers itself to be narrativized within a *telling* frame ("teller-mode narrative"), which Fludernik sees as the primary frame for medieval narrative employing the "figure of the bard" (2003, 246). The other frames of constituting consciousness in her model are *experiencing* ("reflector-mode narrative"), *reflecting* ("experimental self-reflexive fiction") and *viewing* ("neutral narrative") (Fludernik 1996, 32–38). These scripts are taken as a given in Fludernik's model, and she offers her definition of narrativity as universally applicable to all types of narration – including, she states, medieval narrative, which has long gone neglected in narratological studies (2003c, 248). The claimed universal scope has raised some eyebrows concerning the model's possible ahistoricism: do we *always* and *by necessity* judge texts based on these exact cognitive parameters, as Fludernik suggests, regardless of time and space?⁹

⁸ Chatman (1978, 196–252) discusses different markers of narratorial visibility.

⁹ See especially Alber (2002); also Nielsen (2011). See Fludernik (2003c) for her response to the critique regarding the ahistoricism and universality of her model.

In the context of medieval literature, an opposite view has been expressed by Anthony Spearing (2001, 2005, 2012 and 2015) in a series of remarkable studies on the “subjectless subjectivity” of medieval narrative, from which the experientialising rhetoric explored in this study takes its inspiration. Spearing’s theory pertains to the intermittent first-person interventions in medieval texts otherwise classifiable as heterodiegetic narration.¹⁰ For instance, *Troilus and Criseyde* famously begins with “The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen, / That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye, / In lovyng, how his aventures fellen / Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie, / My purpos is, er that *I* parte fro ye” (TC, 1.1–5; emphases added). Such commentary in the grammatical first person tends to create an illusion of presence, yet Spearing underlines that this presence, although resembling “a living person in being the *origo* or center of perception from which deictic proximality and distality are measured,” should not be confused with any biographical observer: “What matters here is not the distinctive consciousness of an identifiable experiencing subject, but *the claim to experientiality itself, the experience effect*” (2012, 29–30; emphasis added). In other words, experientiality means, for Spearing, the “literary illusion of experience separable from any individual experiencing consciousness” (ibid. 20) – a view which is fundamentally different from the premises of natural narratology. According to Fludernik’s model, the above citation from *Troilus*, conveying a desire on the part of the “I” to relate the tragic events of Troilus’s life, would be read as expressing the consciousness of the teller, to whom the “events become tellable precisely because they have started to mean something to the narrator on an emotional level” (Fludernik 2003c, 245). For Spearing, however, this kind of reading would commit the modern error, caused by our compelling fascination with the psychology of tellers, of placing consciousness before stories (2005, 26). Hence, instead of modelling the “I” of medieval narrative on real-life instances of narrating, Spearing’s theory invites us to take it as a device in the rhetoric of storytelling seeking to engage audiences imaginatively and emotionally in the narrative process (e.g., Spearing 2001, 733).¹¹

¹⁰ According to Genette (1972/1980, 244), a heterodiegetic narrator does not take part in the story he tells. Sophie Marnette (1998, 77) illuminatingly describes the constitution of medieval narrative in terms of Genette’s distinction between *histoire* (story), *récit* (narrative) and *narration* (narrating) (Genette 1972/1980, 27): the *récit* produced by the narration in medieval literature typically consists not only of the events represented in the *histoire*, but also of narratorial commentary on those events and on the status of the *récit* itself.

¹¹ Spearing recommends abandoning the term “narrator” entirely for its misleading anthropomorphic connotations (e.g., 2001, 736). I do employ the term in my analysis of the heterodiegetic texts by Heldris and Chaucer, but I use it there as defined by David Lawton in his discussion of medieval

Likewise, Eva von Contzen, who in recent years has called for and sought to develop a “medieval narratology” (2014), proposes a less referential take on the medieval “I.”¹² In her four-fold model of medieval experientiality (2018), experience is understood to be present in medieval narrative in four senses: *processual* (the characters’ experiences within storyworlds), *resultative* (the knowledge gained from the narrative as an abstraction, such as in “a tale about proper behaviour towards women”), *reception-oriented, processual sense* (the reading process evolving in time) and *reception-oriented, resultative sense* (acquiring knowledge from the narrative in a wider sense). By analysing how the “I” may appear both inside and outside the narrated world, she suggests that for the medieval reader the question was not the traditional “who is speaking” (the author or the narrator), but rather “who is experiencing.” The text, in other words, is received as “someone’s experience” with pedagogical value: “It is not real life that is the benchmark of narrated events, but the conclusions to be drawn, the potential lessons to be learned” (2018, 77).

Significantly, von Contzen’s model involves the reader’s experience of the text, which is given less attention in Fludernik’s character-centred model of experientiality, and which is extremely important when discussing a historical period that saw literature as, amongst other things, an arena for salutary lessons.¹³ My take likewise gives audience a central place, but on a more concrete level. Besides tracing their influence on narrative techniques conveying inner experiences, I investigate the ways in which audiences are quite *literally* present in the texts, either by way of being directly addressed by the narrators, or else through an incorporation of their voice into the narration. In this capacity, I understand “voice” in the broad Bakhtinian sense of perspective, rather than the specific idiom of a particular individual. What further distinguishes my approach from von Contzen’s is that, whereas she emphasises the future applicability of the insights gained from reading (the

narrative: “a fluid, almost neutral, term, designating precisely a voice – that structurally drives the poem through its many changes – rather than a stable *persona*” (2017, 131). Moreover, Lawton distinguishes between “closed” and “open” *personae* (1985, 6–7) to account for, on the one hand, those narratorial voices that are named and developed in more detail (most first-person narrators of modern fiction, but also, for instance, the dreamer in medieval dream poetry), and those who merely mediate between the text and readers. For instance, the narratorial voice in *Le Roman de Silence* tends to move towards the “closed” end of the scale in projecting a *commentator persona* for didactic effects, whereas Boccaccio’s *Elegia* gives us, at least ostensibly, a thoroughly closed *persona* in presenting a narrator with a “biography.”

¹² On the fragmented nature of the medieval textual “I,” see also the classic discussions by Spitzer (1946) and Vitz (1989, 38–63).

¹³ See Olson (1982) on medieval attitudes towards the Horatian principle that poetry gives pleasure and profit. Allen’s (1982) classic study discusses the medieval critics’ view of poetry as a branch of ethics.

resultative sense), I also concentrate on how my case studies consciously make use of readers' *past* experiences, and especially their past experiences *as* readers, for certain aesthetic and didactic aims.

This study furthers the ongoing discussion on the functions of the "I" as a rhetorical device, rather than a "natural" entity, in medieval narrative. As will be seen, especially with regard to *Silence*, experientialising rhetoric (conveying the impression of an embodied presence reacting to the told on the level of the telling) in many ways complicates and resists the operation of "narrativization" according to natural storytelling schemata – despite the fact that the text conventionally stages an oral performance *by* a prelector *to* recipients,¹⁴ and was, very probably, performed in this manner (more on this in Section 2 below). My emphasis is on how experientialising rhetoric can be employed for pedagogical purposes in at least two distinct manners: by modelling and shaping the audience's emotional reactions, and by constructing the characters' minds in a self-consciously conventional manner, while also re-negotiating them in collaboration with the audience.

This aspect of familiarity and re-negotiation is related to how the characters' minds in my case studies tend to be showcased as poetic *materia*: their joys and heartbreaks are put forth as products of language. This will be seen in, for instance, how Chaucer's text thwarts the classification of narrative voices according to the three traditional categories of consciousness representation that are anchored on a natural yet illusionary view of increasing psychological authenticity in direct and free indirect discourse (cf. Sternberg 1982; Mäkelä 2013a, 162). Likewise, Boccaccio's *Elegia* questions the productivity of a naturalising approach to its narrative voice. Though it is a text which appears to most emphatically foreground the suffering narrator-protagonist's consciousness, thus inviting its narrativization as a combination of "telling" and "experiencing" frames, such a reading misses out on how the work discloses Fiammetta's so-called experiential voice as the poet's exhibitory experiment in flawed ethos-building and poetic amplification.

Thus, in addition to questioning the sufficiency of naturalising reading strategies, the analyses in this study will illustrate, in a related vein, that the three case studies do not yield themselves all that easily to a psychologising framework, despite the fact that they are customarily seen in this light. This psychological strain is one reason why these particular texts by Heldris, Chaucer and Boccaccio were chosen – a selection which I admit may seem quite eclectic at first blush. I already mentioned

¹⁴ I adopt the term "prelector," which will be employed throughout this study, from Coleman (1996). In her discussion of *chansons de geste*, Marnette (2005, 196) uses the term "staged orality" to account for the ways in which these texts allude to listeners and readers to simulate a sensation of orality, while also making clear their status as written texts.

how emphasis on the embodied psychophysical experience of characters tended to replace action with reaction in French chivalric romance. According to Simon Gaunt, the period ca. 1150–ca. 1170 laid the foundations for the horizon of expectations for romance (2000, 52).¹⁵ Chrétien de Troyes’s major works, composed approximately between 1165 and 1191, were crucial in solidifying genre expectations. They developed the theme of love, already present in earlier romances, as an experience connected to spiritual progress, yet imbuing their “analysis of the psychology of love” (ibid. 52) with an ironic tone (ibid.). Often, this analysis is conducted through interior monologues echoing those of Ovid (cf. Vinaver 1971, 23–25).

Such monologues are also present in Heldris’s *Roman de Silence*. The work was composed after Chrétien’s time, although there is no exact consensus on the dating. The chronology of European romance in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (2000, xiii–xix) dates it to 1270–80, and references to certain thirteenth-century events within the text, as well as the variant of French used in the only surviving manuscript of the text, would make it probable indeed that it was composed towards the second half of the century (Keene 2004; Kinoshita 2002; Roche-Mahdi 1992, xi), about a century after Chrétien and the first romancers. Due to its subject matter (a girl raised as a boy), many critics have investigated the text’s take on gender and power (e.g., Clark 2002; Gaunt 1990; Lasry 1985; Sturges 2002). Less attention has been paid to its narrative voice and rhetorical devices (e.g., Kocher 2002; Ryder and Zaerr 2008). Those are in focus in this study, with a particular emphasis on how the text presents its characters’ inner experiences – love, but some other emotions as well – as products of recycling and accumulation, constructing their crises and emotional upheavals through audience-involving, collaborative rhetorical strategies which self-consciously draw on the romance horizon of expectations consolidated through Chrétien’s legacy.

As for my other two case studies, the fourteenth-century *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* have both attracted enthusiastic commentary on their psychological aspects. In their classic study *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg assert that *Troilus and Criseyde* revives interior monologue that had gone into hiatus after ancient narrative (for some reason, they skip over the twelfth-century romance) and considerably develops it by displaying inner thought “more psychologically oriented than anything yet presented in

¹⁵ Basing his view on medieval literature, Jauss coined the term “horizon of expectations” (1982) to describe the relation of an individual text to the other texts constituting a genre. A new, unfamiliar text is approached by readers with a set of rules and assumptions that may be reproduced or altered in the course of the reading.

narrative monologue,” allowing us to “see rhetoric fading into psychology” (1966/2006, 187–88). “By psychology,” they explain, “we mean a real attempt to reproduce mental verbal process – words deployed in patterns referable not to verbal artistry but to actual thought, focusing not on the audience but on the character” (ibid. 185). Several other critics have made statements along similar lines, celebrating *Troilus* as a text where the “drama is in the movements of the mind” (Gaylord 1979, 32) and which undertakes a “dazzling exploration of subjectivity” (Aers 1992, 185).

Boccaccio’s *Elegia*, for its part, takes the psychological inheritance of romance the furthest. Mirroring the events of Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, which, as stated earlier, is a reworking of *Le Roman de Troie* (cf. Smarr 1986, 132), the text identifies itself in the very first pages as a tale of love consisting of sighs, tears and stormy thoughts (“lagrime . . . sospiri . . . tempestosi pensieri”; *Elegia*, 3–4) by the self-narrating protagonist portraying herself as an avid reader of French romances. There are very few external events in the book, as it concentrates almost exclusively on Fiammetta’s inward exploration of her experience of abandonment and heartbreak; in this sense, the text comes across as a book-length amplification of the Ovidian self-analyses that romance characters engage in. Due to this intense inward focus, the *Elegia* is traditionally acknowledged as one of the first psychological and realistic novels in Western literary history (e.g., Branca 1976, 68), and has inspired some witty and evocative characterisations, with Pamela Waley describing the work as “the total recall of the analyst’s couch” (1969, 21) and Mariangela Causa-Steindler as “an early attempt at creating an image of a self becoming conscious of its uniqueness, ambivalence, and multiplicity” (1990, xvii).

My intention is not to deny the psychological aspects of any of the three case studies. Rather, I wish to underline the fact that an intense focus on how they give us psychologically compelling characters may overshadow the ways in which these texts focus precisely on verbal artistry over actual thought; how they objectify and functionalise the characters’ minds, using them as springboards for exploring, on the one hand, thematic and didactic questions, and the composition and reception of literary works, on the other.

The other reason for selecting these three particular texts is the thematic-didactic link between them. I have detected in all of them a concern with skilled readership and critical reception – a concern which is by no means exclusive to them, but of which, at least to my mind, these texts are illustrative representatives. The analyses will attempt to demonstrate how these aspects are played out in relation to the texts’ experiencing minds and experientialising rhetoric. It is suggested that the case studies

push the limits of time-honoured, cumulative experiences of literary characters, while encouraging the recipients of these narratives to practice critical reading which does not unquestioningly adopt any viewpoints offered as givens.

1.2 Exceptional, Unexceptional, Conventional?

In the *Troilus* passage quoted above, Chaucer performs one of the most enduring, and, undoubtedly, one of the most fascinating tricks of the novelist's trade. As Käte Hamburger writes in the *Logic of Literature* (1957), "epic fiction is the sole instance where third-person figures can be spoken of not, or not only as objects, but also as subjects, where the subjectivity of a third-person figure *qua* that of a third-person can be portrayed" (1957/1993, 122). For Dorrit Cohn, this kind of epistemological privilege – the "penetrative optic" which "allows the narrator to know what cannot be known in the real world . . . the inner life of his figures" (1999, 16) – is what most clearly distinguishes fiction from reality, since in our everyday lives we do not have direct access to another's subjectivity.

Or do we? In the wake of the so-called "cognitivist turn" (Jahn 1997) in narrative theory, this traditional view has been challenged by many theorists drawing on fields of study concerned with real minds, such as social psychology and philosophy of mind (e.g., Butte 2004; Herman 2002; Palmer 2004 and 2010; Zunshine 2006). In his introduction to the anthology *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (2011), which traces the strategies of mind-representation in English literature from the early medieval period (ca. 700) to the present, David Herman takes a stand against the "Exceptionality Thesis" originated by Hamburger and Cohn, arguing instead that we are, in fact, perfectly capable of reading each other's minds in the real world based on folk psychological explanations of observable behaviour (the "Accessibility argument"). Furthermore, this human capacity is also put to use in the context of fiction, where the minds of characters are mediated and decoded by the same operations that apply to everyday minds (the "Mediation argument") (Herman 2011, 18). According to the cognitivists, this process of mental attribution is undertaken both inside and outside the world of fiction, as characters seek to read each other's minds and readers, in turn, the characters'.

This shift of perspective has broadened the view of what counts as consciousness representation in fictional narrative. Criticising the "speech category approach" (Palmer 2004, 13) introduced above, which classifies character thought with the help of discourse analysis, Palmer remarks that this traditional approach is biased towards

verbalised consciousness and, moreover, focuses solely on the private, solitary and introspective aspects of thought. This restricted “internalist perspective,” according to Palmer, must be combined with an “externalist” one stressing those aspects of fictional minds that are “outer, active, public, social, behavioural, evident, embodied, and engaged” (Palmer 2010, 39; see also Palmer 2004, 130) – in other words, the aspects which correspond to our real-world perception of actual minds. Thus, an analysis of the “whole minds” of fictional characters (Palmer 2004, 87–129), previously neglected in narratology, involves such features as intermental thought and visible thought (i.e., actions indicative of mental states, nonverbal communication). From this perspective, then, it could be argued that the *Troilus* stanzas quoted above do not give us information about the character’s mental workings simply by way of describing the contents of his mind, but rather presents, to follow Palmer’s phrasing, “the social mind in action” (2004, 62): as readers, we engage in “mind-reading” and draw additional conclusions about Troilus’s mental state from the profuse sighs and groans that issue from his chest (“And first he gan to sike, and eft to grone”).

The bifurcation internalist / externalist has met with some resistance.¹⁶ For instance, Jens Brockmeier (2011), building on Bakhtinian dialogism, remarks that the “narrative mind socializes itself in the very process of narrating” (ibid. 261): even autobiographical narratives, by definition most “internalist” and private, are acts of communication enmeshed in “a thick fabric of interrelated and interrelating social coordinates” (ibid. 263), such as genres and plot models.¹⁷

Bakhtinian dialogism is commonly accepted as an inherent feature of medieval literature.¹⁸ In an oft-quoted passage, Bakhtin himself writes:

The relationship to another’s word was . . . complex and ambiguous in the Middle Ages. The role of the other’s word was enormous at that time: there were quotations that were openly and reverently emphasized as such, or that were half-hidden, completely hidden, half-conscious, unconscious, correct, intentionally distorted, deliberately reinterpreted and so forth. The boundary lines between someone else’s speech and one’s own speech were flexible, ambiguous, often deliberately distorted and confused. Certain types of texts were constructed like mosaics out of the texts of others. (1981, 69)

According to medievalist David Lawton (2017), this mosaic-like method of textual construction was deployed by medieval writers with “high level of conscious

¹⁶ For a critique of Palmer’s ideas, see the special issue of *Style* 45.2 (2011). Also McHale (2012).

¹⁷ Palmer, in fact, readily admits this by pointing out that interior monologues may show “evidence of Bakhtinian dialogicality” (2010, 40).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Farrell (ed.) (1995).

rhetorical intention” (ibid. 8), as they creatively quoted and revoiced authorities for intellectual, moral or political purposes (ibid. 7.) My study takes the self-conscious practice of quotation one step further still, arguing that this practice itself tends to become the object of representation in the construction of experiencing minds within storyworlds. In this way, Palmer’s “social minds” are brought to the level of author–audience interaction and intertextuality, uniting them in a game of “I know that you know that I know,” which is an aspect of which Palmer himself pronouncedly wishes to steer clear.¹⁹

The widening of perspective entailed by Palmer’s “whole mind” approach has also drawn some critique. As Brian McHale puts it, if almost everything in a text is treated as consciousness representation, turning narrative into “wall-to-wall mind” (2012, 119), the very category of “representation of consciousness” is basically rendered useless. There are special risks involved in this with texts from earlier eras. In her contribution to the above-mentioned volume on the historical development of consciousness representation, Fludernik (2011a, 75–76; see also Fludernik 2011b) delineates seven categories of consciousness representation in Middle English narrative. Taking her cue from Palmer, she suggests that because of the penchant for verbalised thought, and also because of the “plot-centered bias of narratology” (ibid. 75), we have not previously realised that categories such as “narrative indexes of interiority” (i.e., descriptions of outward behaviours “indicative of emotional disturbance” [2011a, 72], such as Troilus’s sighs and groans above) or “narratorial empathy” might actually count as consciousness representation. The other categories named by her are the traditional direct discourse, psycho-narration and free indirect discourse, as well as the new additions “collective or group consciousness” and “virtual direct speech.”

However, precaution should be taken with regard to the new categories identified by Fludernik. As we shall see in the course of this study, “narratorial empathy” and “virtual direct speech” may have less to do with characters’ minds and consciousness representation than with the act of representing them and amplifying a didactic point; likewise, what she calls “narrative indexes of interiority” may not require the activation of our folk psychological mind-reading abilities, despite the fact that the

¹⁹ The title of George Butte’s (2004) book on “intersubjectivity” is *I Know That You Know That I Know*, which refers to the empathetic interchange of thoughts and feelings between two subjects. As for his decision to not discuss social minds of authors and narrators, Palmer states that the “most urgent need is to establish the existence of social minds *within* storyworlds” (2010, 14; emphasis original), which, I think, is a fitting indication of how narrative fiction as an author’s craft, so crucial to the medieval concept of literature, is perhaps seen by modern novel readers as less interesting than the psychological workings of mimetic characters.

pre-Cartesian connection between mind and body informing the medieval understanding of the self does often lead to outward manifestations of emotion in medieval texts (Brandsma et al. 2015, 2–6).²⁰ All in all, it will be stressed that a contextless approach to *any* of the categories of medieval consciousness representation formulated by Fludernik, or, for that matter, consciousness representations as a whole, might end up defective.²¹

One important contextual factor is precisely the rhetorically-oriented concept of narrative, which frequently draws attention to how characters' experiences are a) discursively made rather than transmitted, and b) become ossified with time through repetition, so that these artefact experiences can be used as springboards for various aesthetic and didactic aims. This has the effect of shifting focus from the experiencing characters to the composing authors, their *materia* – language – and their audiences; in other words, to the art of storytelling itself. In an evocative passage from his composition manual *Poetria nova* (ca. 1208–1213), the grammarian Geoffrey of Vinsauf pits art against nature, describing artistic practice in terms of the tupsy-turvy craft of a magician:

. . . ludit [ars] quasi quaedam praestigiatrix,
Et facit ut fiat res postera prima, futura
Praesens, transversa directa, remota propinqua;
Rustica sic fiunt urbana, vetusta novella,
Publica privata, nigra candida, vilia cara.
(*PN*, 121–25)²²

Art plays, as it were, the conjurer: causes the last to be first, the future to be present, the oblique to be straight, the remote to be near; what is rustic becomes urbane, what is old becomes new, public things are made private, black things white, and worthless things are made precious. (Nims, transl., 20)

These sleight-of-hand effects are produced by a wide range of stylistic devices designed to draw a line between the natural and the artificial, the trite and the innovative, so that the aspiring poet's language might avoid the worn-out (“vias

²⁰ There has been a rising interest in medieval narrative as a means of studying “past emotionologies” (Rider 2011, 5). See also Brandsma et al. (2015); Larrington (2001); Rosenwein (2006). My interest, as must have become clear by now, lies less in what my case studies can reveal of medieval selfhood than in the constructed and conventional nature of literary emotions.

²¹ Von Contzen (2015) has likewise taken a critical view of Fludernik's categories, suggesting that passages of “group consciousness” in medieval literature are not concerned with expressing intermental thought, but rather with evoking certain emotions in the audience. I will return to this matter in due course.

²² All Latin quotations of the *Poetria nova*, cited by line number, are from Faral (1924).

tritas”; *PN*, 987) and smooth roads of nature (“stratam naturae”; *PN*, 88), treading instead the high path of art, the *limite artis* (*PN*, 87). For there is delight to be found in the unusual, as Geoffrey remarks in a passage about the use of metaphor: relocated to a new environment as a “novel guest” (“novus hospes”; *PN*, 762), the word manages to “give pleasure by its very strangeness” (“placeat novitate sua”; *PN*, 763).

This commitment to the pleasant oddness of poetry – not entirely dissimilar, one might note, to the Russian Formalists’ idea of defamiliarization (Shklovsky 1917/1965) – essentially permeates the medieval *artes poetricae* which surfaced in the twelfth century and of which Geoffrey’s *Poetria* is one of the most influential representatives. Deriving their doctrine principally from Horace’s *Ars poetica* (ca. 18–19 BCE) and Ciceronian rhetoric, these composition manuals effectively blur the distinction between rhetoric and poetics, with both disciplines taking as their foundational theoretical standpoint the persuasive and contrived – versus the “natural” – use of language.²³ In this context, the poet emerges as an expert craftsman, indeed a magician or, as Geoffrey also puts it, a physician (*physicus*) reviving a hackneyed patient (*PN*, 757–58). Writing poetry is conceived of, first and foremost, as a specific skill to be obtained and admired.²⁴

Juxtaposing this notion of poetry with the cognitivist vogue for real-life heuristics, it could be suggested that the medieval outlook fundamentally runs counter to the latter already at the outset. As will be seen, some tools introduced by cognitivists do have undeniable analytical value with medieval texts (e.g., metarepresentations), albeit for other reasons than bringing into focus the intricacies of mental functioning. What do *not* have analytical value, however, are the universalist claims that any text is narrativized with the help of storytelling schemata based on real-life communication, that we approach texts with the “default assumption” (Palmer 2010) about the similarity of fictional to real minds, and that “[f]ictional narrative is, in essence, the presentation of mental functioning” (ibid. 9). In sum, I argue that to take the everyday ethos of cognitive narratology as the *primary* key into medieval fictional minds is to take a dramatically erroneous turn. The justification of this claim is one of the main objectives of the readings I am about to present.

An important component of my approach, as stated, is the rhetorical constructedness and pronounced conventionalism of medieval fictional minds. Of

²³ A comprehensive history of rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages is provided in Murphy (1974). Purcell’s (1996) study focuses on six seminal *artes poetricae* and their rhetorical roots. Mehtonen (1996) analyses the adaptation of inherited rhetorical concepts in the development of poetics into an independent discipline in the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century theoretical discussion.

²⁴ Rhetorical and poetic treatises underlined the significance of theory, practice and imitation of models for successful speaking or writing (e.g., *RH*, I.2.3: *ars, imitatio, exercitatio*; *PN*, 1709–12: *ars, usus, imitatio*).

course, conventionalism is not characteristic only of medieval literature. Criticising the use of the term “exceptionality” with regard to traditional narratological accounts of consciousness representation, Brian McHale submits that “representations of consciousness in fiction depend upon *literary conventions* . . . these conventions are to some degree arbitrary . . . they are not part of our natural endowment of everyday experience, but must be learned through exposure to texts, literary or otherwise; and . . . they change over time, differing from one era to the next” (2012, 121; emphasis added). This is something that cognitivist models treating the “evocation of real-life experience,” as Fludernik puts it, as the cornerstone of literary representation tend to overlook. For all their valuable insight into the process of reading, the cognitive approaches may all too easily fail to address the distinct specificity of fiction, its essential “unnaturalness” (e.g., Richardson 2006; Alber and Heinze 2011; Alber et al. 2010 and 2013).²⁵ Marco Caracciolo makes an important observation when he notes that embodied experiences are not “stand-alone things” (2012, 192) that could be straightforwardly “represented” in narrative. In fact, it could be claimed, as Caracciolo does, that the linguistic mediation of experience by necessity entails a “loss of part of the perceptive and affective texture of our contacts with the world” (ibid. 181), which writers seek to partially retrieve through metaphors and other such constructions that make use of readers’ “experiential background” – that is, their “dense web of presuppositions and memories of past interactions with the world” (ibid. 184), including, for instance, bodily experience and perception, but also socio-cultural practices, such as literary conventions (Caracciolo 2014, 56–63). In other words, the experiences of characters are the result of a collaborative procedure between the two instances that Fludernik’s model of experientiality disregards; they stem from the “experiences that are *really* brought to bear on a story – the story producer’s and the recipients” (Caracciolo 2012, 182; emphasis original).

These insights into the conventional, constructed and collaborative nature of literary experiences bear importantly on the rhetorical perspective on medieval fictional minds adopted in the present study, where it will be argued that the procedure of experience-making itself becomes, at times, the primary object of

²⁵ While the label “unnatural” can be given to such narratives that are consciously experimental and violate the boundaries of realism (Alber & Heinze 2011, 2–5), it has also been argued that unnatural elements are present also in the most conventional of works (e.g., Nielsen 2004; Richardson 2011, 37). In the specific context of consciousness representation, Maria Mäkelä has made a case for the denaturalisation of the fictional mind (2013a), and sought to demonstrate, in a series of studies reaching as far back as *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) by Madame de La Fayette, that instead of the dichotomy natural/unnatural, readers’ encounter with fictional minds is characterised by a constant fluctuation between “naturalization and denaturalization – assimilation and estrangement” (2013b, 236; see also Mäkelä 2011; 2018).

narration. Exposure to conventions, as McHale describes it, as well as Caracciolo's "experiential background" are not all that different from the concept that figures significantly in my take on medieval experientiality: *romance memory*. I adopt this term from Carol Dover, who describes it as a competence created over time in medieval readers. As romance audiences would, for the most part, have consisted of unscholarly lay persons, this faculty of imagination,

had not been trained by book learning, but by their own cultural identity and "education" in the sense of previous experiences of hearing romances read over and over. Such a memory would be stocked with many similar and differentiated memories of topics relevant to its owner's experience and imagination, all of them engraved large in memory by the sheer delight of hearing romances read time and time again. (Dover 2003, 91)

Many scholars have underlined the advanced level of literary competence medieval texts require of their audiences. According to Mary Carruthers, "the *memoria* of the composer and the *memoria* of the audience are . . . bound in a dialogue of textual allusions and transformations" (1990/2008, 272). In his pivotal essay "The Audience as Co-Creator of the First Chivalric Romances" (1981), Robert Hanning characterises what he calls the "reciprocal self-consciousness" of romance audiences and writers:

In fact, we may without exaggeration speak of the appearance at the courts of twelfth-century France and England of two new, significant, and inextricably linked literary phenomena: the virtuoso poet and the virtuoso audience, each able to "perform" in a wide variety of literary situations. Furthermore, their continuous interaction fostered a reciprocal self-consciousness that found its most mature expression in a literary type the characteristic effect of which resulted from an act of *mutual creation* by artist and audience. This is the literary type that I have been calling chivalric romance. (ibid. 9; emphasis original)

This "reciprocal self-consciousness," Hanning argues, would fundamentally shape the chivalric poet's writing as well as the audience's expectations. In their capacity as co-creators who were "ready, willing, and able to provide interpretive responses" (ibid. 28), courtly audiences would come "to each performance of a new romance 'waiting to be created': aware that it must follow cues and strategies in the work to define itself fully. The audience-pressure on a chivalric poet is therefore the pressure *to be created*, that is, to be involved fully in the decipherment and valuation of the text it is about to share with him" (ibid. 16; emphasis original).²⁶

²⁶ For similar descriptions on the literary competence of Chaucer's audience, see, e.g., Mehl (1974); Reiss (1980); Strohm (1989, 63); Mann (1991). On Boccaccio's audiences, see, e.g., Usher (2003) and Daniels (2015).

These notions of mutual creation and acquired romance memory are the defining factors in the audience-involving techniques that my case studies put to use in the depiction of characters' experiences. As a preliminary example, we might once again turn to the mirror stanzas from *Troilus*. Instead of merely thinking of Criseyde, Troilus is said to "make a mirour of his mynde." On the one hand, the metaphor may suggest a subjectively coloured gaze on reality, with a tight focus on Troilus's individual perception.²⁷ On the other, it may produce an alienating effect. By its striking figurativeness, the expression draws attention to the act of narrating itself, and, consequently, to the author who is ultimately responsible for fabricating and orchestrating each sigh and every thought that passes through Troilus's *mynde*. As for the images that play out in his mental mirror, they constitute a conventional courtly affair: becoming the lady's servant, if not winning her grace, would be reward enough for the prince, in spite of the pain and trouble – the "travaille" and "grame" – involved in the process.²⁸ What for Troilus is a unique set of events contemplated upon in the privacy of his mind is for the reader of the book a recycled affair, and the mirror of his mind reflects the experience of a multitude of romance characters with their similar aspirations. Whose experience, then, is the passage primarily concerned with: the character's (foregrounding the psychological element), the author's (the compositional element), or the audience's (their romance memory)? It is not only the contents of Troilus's mind that are described, but also the process of bringing this mind – a layered rhetorical construct – into being.

²⁷ See Lucas's (1998) rich exploration of the symbolic implications of the mirror metaphor in Chaucer. On Troilus's mirror, see Moore (1999).

²⁸ "Courtly love" is traditionally used to designate the mode of love present in chivalric romances and the lyric poems of the troubadours from the twelfth century onwards, and codified in Andreas Capellanus's late twelfth-century treatise *De amore*. It was influentially defined by C.S. Lewis (1936, 2) as a "love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love," best exemplified in such pairs as Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Isolde, and Troilus and Criseyde. The concept, however, is a controversial one because of its monolithic nature, subsuming in research literature various types of writing and diverse manifestations of the experience of love (Lazar 1995, 64). It is, moreover, a modern term, originally coined by Gaston Paris (*amour courtois*) in 1833, and used only once in Occitan love lyric (*cortez' amor*) (Lazar, *ibid.*), whereas the designation *fin'amor*, though no less clear-cut, appears frequently (as it does, for instance, in *Le Roman de Silence*; see Chapter I: Section 3.1.1 of the present study). Whenever I refer in this study to the characters' "courtly" behaviour or the "courtly" patterns manifested in their thought, it is to be understood as a reference to the literary tropes of love established in the preceding literary tradition as well as Capellanus's manual. For a thorough discussion of courtly love, see Boase (1977). Robertson (1968) and Donaldson (1970) offer critical remarks on the concept as a modern invention. Niiranen (2009, 109–14) provides a discussion of *fin'amor* as a social, moral and literary system informing the poetry of the troubadours.

2 Aims, Method and Outline of the Study

This study asks: What is experientiality in medieval literature, which is based on the idea of re-creation rather than creation (cf. Spearing 2005, 22), on recounting pre-existing tales about pre-existing, “referential” characters, according to a fixed set of stylistic devices and compositional rules?²⁹ What is experientiality when, true to the rhetorical legacy, authors and perhaps audiences as well are arguably more concerned with the *handling* of the story material than the material itself (cf. Vinaver 1971, 34)? What is experientiality in the context of oral performance, with authors/prelectors and audiences physically present in the transmission of the tale which unfolds through the live human voice?

It will be argued that the modes of experientiality rising from these specific features of medieval literature cannot be satisfactorily addressed by the dominant theoretical approaches to fictional consciousness representation discussed above (the speech-category approach and the cognitively oriented frameworks modelling different aspects of narrative on certain real-life parameters). The analysis chapters explore the hypothesis that *the representation of consciousness in the case studies is centrally concerned with the rhetorically inspired involvement of the audience’s perspective*, both as a discourse-organising influence and as an element that can be concretely represented in the text. The second hypothesis, closely related to the first one, is that the case studies *underline the nature of the characters’ minds as consciously layered, material and exhibitory artefacts generated by romance memory and fabricated by writers well-versed in classical rhetoric and contemporary poetics*. As such, the characters’ minds serve as platforms for negotiating certain thematic, didactic and literary historical questions. This connects to the larger question concerning experientiality as the central defining feature of narrative in Fludernik’s, Herman’s and Palmer’s models. The case studies show that the attempt to read these medieval texts as experiential in the sense of prioritising the experiencing minds within the storyworlds misses out on the complexity of the ways in which they engage the audiences’ previous experience as readers of texts and human beings in order to make didactic points. The characters’ inner workings, as focal points in this process, are approached in the texts through techniques that are not entirely covered by the basic frameworks for consciousness representation.

²⁹ According to Phelan (2005, 12–13), fictional characters are a combination of *mimetic* (characters as representations of real people), *thematic* (as representatives of ideas) and *synthetic* (as artificial constructs) components. Von Contzen (2017) adds a fourth category, *referential*, to account for the fact that medieval characters frequently do not appear within a single text only, but have other incarnations in other tales.

“Audience” is a key term that has already come up frequently in the course of this Introduction. Oral delivery – the “vocality” of medieval narrative (Zumthor 1984) – has long been accepted as the primary mode of reception for medieval literature (e.g., Crosby 1936; Coleman 1996; Vitz 1999; Vitz et al. 2005; Reichl 2009). This poses many unanswerable questions, such as: *how* were romances performed (read from a manuscript, delivered from memory?); who did the performing (the author? a special entertainer?); were musical instruments involved? (Reichl 2009, 133) One thing that *is* certain is that oral delivery questions the narratological view of audiences. The ruling model is that of Phelan, who draws on Rabinowitz (1977), distinguishing between *actual audience* (the “flesh and blood reader”), *authorial audience*, *narrative audience*, *narratee* and *ideal narrative audience* (Phelan 2007b). In this study, I am concerned with actual and authorial audiences, as well as the narratee, the “someone whom the narrator addresses” (Prince 1980, 7), whether a text-internal character or an inferred presence. The narratee should not be confused with “authorial audience,” more commonly known as the “implied reader” (“impliziter Leser,”; Iser 1974, xii). This virtual entity is the recipient for whom the author designs the text and who is therefore able to understand its every nuance.³⁰ Since authors have no control over how widely and in which circumstances their texts will be read, there is always a gap between authorial audience and the actual one (Rabinowitz 1977, 12).

Such, however, was not the case with medieval authors, who wrote for a much more exclusive audience with whom they likely came in contact; the oral performance context, in other words, leads to an overlapping between narratees, implied readers and actual recipients of the texts. Thus, when I alternate between the terms “audience,” “reader,” “listener” and “recipient” (or even “we”) in this study, I mean it in similar terms to Dieter Mehl (1974), who suggests that direct addresses to audience in medieval literature are best understood as addresses to both the “actual” or the “primary audience,” in the context of aural reception, as well as the “fictional audience” (Strohman 1983), that is, the future “anonymous reader” who takes the place of the primary audience once the original social occasion has already become “fossilized” and turned into a literary motif (Mehl 1974, 174). (When, in other words, the text-internal “narratee” no longer overlaps directly with the aural recipients who in live performance could be linked with the narratee by, for instance, gesticulation.)

³⁰ Wayne C. Booth’s term for the image of the reader created by the author is “postulated reader” (1961/1983, 249) that the real reader must seek to become, in order to enjoy the work (ibid. 137–38). See also Chatman (1978, 150: “the audience presupposed by the narrative itself”); Genette (1988, 149: “the implied reader is the idea, in the real author’s head, of a possible reader”).

The analyses in this study suggest that it is perhaps in order to add another audience category, one that could be described as *simulated audience*, to describe the ways in which medieval narrative ventriloquises hypothetical audience perspectives, either to support or influence the sentiments of the present audience. Whereas in Phelan's model the (modern) actual reader is an inaudible element in the narrative communication, someone whose task is to attempt to smoothly enter the authorial audience in the reading process (Phelan 2005, 19), medieval texts confront the actual reader by frequently coaxing her to react to the told, sometimes even antagonistically, through text-internal prompts.

By seeking answers to the questions I formulated above, and by evaluating the two outlined hypotheses, I contribute, in a manner, to the "diachronic" investigation of fictional minds called for by Alan Palmer (2004, 240–41) and advanced by Herman's (2011) edited anthology, but I nonetheless hesitate to align my approach with this paradigm, for reasons I will now explain. Herman states, echoing Fludernik's (2003a) original demand for the "diachronization of narratology," that "a diachronic perspective focuses on the evolution, or changing distribution, of the strategies for mind representation" (Herman 2011, 23–24). As Steinby and Mäkikalli (2018, 14–16) note, Fludernik and Herman's take on diachronic study is "system-immanent": it takes for granted the existence of a universal theory where "historical" change consists of the redistribution of certain paradigmatic options, without consideration of contextual factors. The aim of diachronic study is therefore not to question the system itself, but to trace the emergence, presence or absence of the theoretically, rather than historically, founded narrative concepts at a certain moment in history.

I have already mentioned the possibility of misidentification that arises with such a contextless perspective which approaches texts with certain theoretical constants that are, moreover, derived from the eighteenth-century novel at the earliest, with Palmer's readings of Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) serving as the basis for the later cognitively oriented developments. In addition to misidentifications, there is the threat of interpretative *losses* involved in the application of theoretical concepts that are familiar to us, regardless of historical period. My study attempts to illustrate that medieval literature provides us with the perfect opportunity to do precisely that which "historical" diachronic narratology does not at present do, that is, to question the system itself. When contextual factors are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that medieval narrative resists in various ways the application of those narrative concepts that have become quite automatised in our thinking about storytelling. Hence, medieval texts can provide us with an illuminating perspective which can

encourage awareness of the time-boundedness of theory, advising caution against any totalising statements (e.g., “[f]ictional narrative is, in essence, the presentation of mental functioning,” Palmer 2010, 9; “the representation of human experience is the central aim of narrative,” Fludernik 1996, 27) and urging us to rethink whether our notions of what constitutes a “narrative” have validity in a different context.

Taking the texts themselves, rather than existing theory, as the starting point is also the premise of Eva von Contzen’s “medieval narratology” inspired by Fludernik’s historicising call. The first step in this project would be the establishment of “a useful and flexible set of narratological tools” (2014, 7), the identification of which should proceed from texts to theory instead of the other way around. Here our paths converge. However, I find it difficult to accept this part of her mission statement: “By [medieval narratology] *I do not mean a theory of narrative that is (re)constructed from medieval discussions about how to compose and structure texts*, but rather a narrative theory that seeks to explain the forms and functions of medieval practices of narration” (ibid. 1; emphasis added). As I see it, the medieval discussions on the topic are one of the key contextualising factors that may help to mitigate the “blind modernism” – the fact that the “alterity” of the Middle Ages is by necessity diluted as it is filtered through our own historical standpoint –³¹ informing any creation of new narrative concepts based on medieval texts. In the present study, some new concepts are suggested (such as *iterative metalepsis* and *apophatic mediacy*), but they are formulated strictly in dialogue with the most important rhetorical treatises (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *De inventione*, Horace’s *Ars poetica*) and the medieval *artes poetricae* that drew on them to form the prescriptive basis for poetry-making in the medieval period.

This kind of double perspective as a method of text analysis is, for me, practically the only method by which one may attempt to see, as it were, beyond the system. Narratology, as the field of study where experientiality and consciousness representation have been mostly discussed, provides the vocabulary for formulating the arguments of this study; it also serves as a tool for asking questions of the case studies and evaluating the validity of the answers when they are placed in dialogue

³¹ “By ‘blind modernism,’ I mean a more subtle phenomenon, resulting from conceptual tools and methods at our disposal in 1978, following the extensive use of analytical perspectives in the last twenty or thirty years. On the one hand, it would be impossible to renounce recourse to these tools and methods, since they are, for us, as academics dedicated to texts, the essential of *our* culture. It is only with their aid that *we* succeed in knowing the Other. ‘To read’ a medieval text can in effect only signify for us the following: to render it comprehensible for the mind and sensibility of the twentieth century, conditioned by its own culture” (Zumthor 1979, 371). Hans Robert Jauss used the term *Alterität* (“alterity”) to describe the “otherness of a departed past” arguably pervading the literature of the Middle Ages (Jauss 1979, 182).

with contextual factors. My readings are thus propelled by a *conscious attempt* to read the texts through familiar narratological concepts, while at the same time the historical context – the rhetorically-based conception and theory of narrative, the practice of revoicing, the orality of performance, even the methods of manuscript speech marking – serve as correctives that bring to light the limited scope of these concepts and models. In other words, the contextual factors guard against misidentifications, or, in a more positive vein, against one-sided conclusions potentially missing the mark.

My aim, therefore, is *not* to contribute to a “medieval narratology” with the expectation of “incorporat[ing]” my “findings into a diachronic framework” (von Contzen 2014, 7), at the end of which looms “a truly wide-reaching diachronic narratology” (ibid. 2), but rather to offer three descriptive, inquisitive readings, with a full appreciation of the fact that the findings may simply turn out to be *not incorporable*. Moreover, since the corpus of this study is small, the aim is not to put forth a comprehensive poetics of medieval experientiality, but to test the hypotheses in a tentative manner in three well-known texts by three accomplished authors.

The first analysis chapter (Chapter I), focusing on *Le Roman de Silence*, begins with a brief overview of the cultural shift in the role of the human author in the twelfth century, which has repercussions also for the later generations of writers of fiction, including Chaucer and Boccaccio. Under scrutiny will be experientialising rhetoric consisting of narratorial commentary, which, instead of characters’ consciousness, models and shapes the audience’s reactions through an emotionally loaded rhetoric. I will concentrate on those types of intervention by the *jo* (“I” in Heldris’s Picardian dialect) that John L. Grigsby (1979) has simply called “exclamations” and “rhetorical questions,” and ask if there is some other way of looking at them than just treating them as “an identifying sign of the *narrator’s* appearance” (ibid. 267; emphasis added),³² while at the same time speculating as to how these might complicate, in the context of oral performance, the application of real-world storytelling schemata. I will also discuss the ways in which Heldris’s experientialising rhetoric constructs and re-imagines the characters’ inner states in explicit collaboration with the audience. The fabricated nature of the characters’ minds is illustrated by analysing Heldris’s use of *enargeia* as a component of the collaborative *mind-making process* between himself and his audience.

³² Grigsby’s (ibid.) categories “based on implicit or explicit first-person presence,” drawn from the works of Chrétien de Troyes are *announcements; exclamations; exhortations, imperatives and vocatives; formulaic; opinions; protestations of insufficiency and claims of sufficiency; assertions of fidelity to truth; reminders; refusals; rhetorical questions and allusions or attributions to source.*

Chapter II turns to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, moving from experientialising rhetoric to the experiencing minds of the characters as what I suggest calling *pseudo-experiential* constructions. The analysis focuses on *authorial signposting* techniques, by which the characters' ostensibly private experience and subjective voice is made to loop back to the author and tradition through metaleptic echoing strategies and muddling the discursive structures which lead to anticipate direct discourse. In this chapter, the medieval manuscript culture serves as another contextualising factor which aids to see how manuscript methods of marking speech, very different from the modern punctuation, opens up pathways of interpretation that can radically diverge from the readings based on modern printed editions and the theoretical frameworks for consciousness representation. The final section of the chapter discusses repetition and frequency, as well as rhyme and metre, as narrative devices of manipulation creating the effect of inevitability with regard to certain conventional emotional patterns. All in all, the chapter shows that putting to use audiences' natural cognitive abilities can be made to highlight the "unnaturalness" of the narrative.

Chapter III analyses coercive narration in the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, which demands the audience to unconditionally share the narrator-protagonist's view according to which her experience of falling in love is solitary and unique. The chapter takes up one of the most discussed aspects of narrativizing a text through real-life parameters, *unreliable narration*, which is traditionally understood in narratological studies as the discursive expression of a troubled psyche. Rather than asking "is this now the first instance of unreliable narrator in Western literary history" (as I gather the "system-immanent" diachronic narratology would do), I ask if there is such a concept as unreliable narrator to be gleaned from Boccaccio's work. The analysis seeks to challenge the narratological concept by reading the conventional signs of narratorial unreliability as a game of interpretation between author and audience, one that is defined by the deliberate, author-revealing transparency of the narrator's discourse, and which leans on readerly familiarity with rhetoric, poetics and the conventional elements of the literary experience of loving. Although the *Elegia* is not chronologically the latest of my case studies, it is discussed last because of its different mode (first-person prose narration *versus* third-person verse narration in the texts by Helldris and Chaucer). In the Conclusion, I elaborate on the theoretical reflections drawn from the analyses and discuss their implications for the theorisation of fictional minds and experientiality in the medieval context.

I MAKING UP MINDS: *LE ROMAN DE SILENCE*

For a total of 1650 lines, which comprise the first section of *Le Roman de Silence*, the poet identifying himself in the very first line as “Heldris de Cornuälle” keeps quiet about the tale’s eponymous protagonist, focusing instead on the courtship between Silence’s parents Cador and Eufemie.³³ It is only when he has finished relating how these two exceedingly accomplished and remarkably attractive courtiers were joined in marriage after a series of difficulties that he turns to the major storyline conveniently induced by the conception and birth of the hero/ine. At this central point in the romance, we come to a passage riddled with self-contradictory statements about the unfolding tale and its manner of narration:

[1] Huimais orrés conte aviver,
 Sans noise faire et estriver.
 De Cador, de s’engendreüre
 Comence chi tels aventure
 C’ainques n’oïstes tele en livre.
 Si com l’estorie le nos livre,
 Qu’en latin escrite lizons,
 En romans si le vos disons.
 (*RS*, 1655–62)

[From now on you shall hear a lively tale, without <making noise or argument.> Of Cador and his offspring begins such an adventure as you never heard of in any book. <Just as the story conveys it to us, which we read written in Latin, we will tell it to you in French.>³⁴

Playing with the juxtaposition of voice and silence, of imitation and novelty, the intervening voice that directly addresses the audience sets out to present quite an impossibility: here is an extraordinary *conte*, an unheard-of adventure in French that nonetheless has been told before in Latin; a tale that is palpably voiced, as it is read aloud to a listening audience, and yet, at the same time, manifestly mute and

³³ On the presumed male gender of the author, and how the text of *Silence* may challenge this notion, see Stock (1997). Following common practice, I will use masculine pronouns to refer to the author as well as the character Silence, who is throughout the romance referred to in the masculine by the narrator and the other characters (cf. Ryder and Zaerr 2008).

³⁴ All quotations and translations of *Le Roman de Silence* are from the Roche-Mahdi edition, with facing-page translations. I have at times slightly modified the translation to make it more literal. I indicate these modifications with <>.

recounted “sans noise” – all inaudibly, without making any sound. This absence of noise, however, turns out to be an authorial ruse. The following analysis will argue that *Le Roman de Silence* is, at its core, all about “noise and argument,” about *voicing a critical attitude towards clear-cut consensus*. More specifically, I aim to demonstrate that, through its experientialising rhetoric, the work sets up a poetics of dubiety, taking an ideological stand against the kind of assertive discourse that seeks to stabilise and fix, while propagating a critically argumentative readership that is called for to “break the silence,” as it were – the hegemony of the existing, solidifying patterns of literary practice – and to form a mature interpretation of the textual whole.

In order to deal with these arguments, it is, however, first necessary to briefly consider the literary historical context in which the text was born. As seen in the key passage [1] above, Heldris purports to be translating into his vernacular French (“Qu’en latin escrite lizons / En romans si le vos disons”) a Latin text to which he alternately alludes to as *estorie* (“a story,” “a tale”; ll. 1660, 2657, 3138, 6678) and *escriture* (“writing”; ll. 1661, 2690). These terms are never used to refer to the French rendition, which is called *conte* (e.g., l. 81) or *uevre* (e.g., ll. 77, 82), to distinguish it from the Latin book.³⁵ Of course, one is immediately tempted to ask: which book would that be? Douglas Kelly (1992, 129) speculates that several sources are subsumed in *Silence* under the singular term *estorie*, as indeed seems to be the case:³⁶ the romance has been shown to bear obvious similarities to, for example, the story of the gender-bending Grisandole told in the *Estoire Merlin* included in the early thirteenth-century *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, as well as the popular hagiographic tales of Saint Alexis (Dahmen 2002).

What interests me in this study, however, is not the exact identification of Heldris’s sources, but rather the emblematic function that the *estorie/escriture* will here be argued to serve in *Silence*. From this point of view, the *estorie* becomes more than just a book – it becomes a way of thinking, one that has been impressively described by Jesse M. Gellrich in his all-important work *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (1985). According to Gellrich, medieval thought was structured around the “myth of the Book.” Reminiscent of archaic societies, it was an outlook grounded “in fixed meanings validated in a definite origin – the Bible, nature, tradition, God” (ibid. 27) and thus fundamentally driven by a mythologizing desire for “oneness, totality, and the presence of meaning as absolute” (ibid. 41). In the context of composing poetry, this impulse arguably translated into a methodology of replication, which determined

³⁵ See Ollier (1974) on the use of *livre*, *conte* and *estoire* in the works of Chrétien de Troyes. In Chrétien, too, *estoire* is distinguished from the *conte* and serves to guarantee the authenticity and credibility of the source (ibid. 27–28).

³⁶ For an overview of Heldris’s sources, see Roche-Mahdi’s introduction to *Silence* (1992, xii–xvii).

the contemporary poets' agency, at least nominally, in terms of their classic predecessors, the great Latin *auctores*, who were consciously imitated as authorities on style and expression. For contemporary writers, it was practically impossible to meet the qualifications required of an *auctor*; indeed, as Alastair Minnis humorously puts it, "the only good *auctor* was a dead one" (Minnis 1984/2010, 12).

Yet, as Gellrich's readings of Dante and Chaucer demonstrate, vernacular literature was also the place where this monolithic outlook was contested, providing an arena where the authority of the past began to be replaced by a vision of the reader as the authority on meaning (Gellrich 1985, 27). This movement, I suggest, is made explicitly visible in Heldris's *Silence*, where the *estorie* stands, as I will argue, as a token of the mindset governed by Gellrich's "principle of determinate center" (ibid. 91); it serves, in short, as a narrative device meant to evoke the idea of a story of ultimate authority whose imagined attributes – written in Latin and physically contained in a book – allow Heldris to pull out all the stops to render its truth status doubly impressive. The medieval view of books and truth as inherently connected was facilitated primarily by the written status of Holy Scripture and historiography documenting God's plan of salvation; apparently, this equation was so prevalent that insisting upon a written source for a statement would verify it also in the context of secular literature, and even more so if that source was written in Latin, the language of literacy (Green 2002, 69; see also Spiegel 1993, 61).

So, at a time when the fables of the poets were more often than not regarded by religious writers as dangerous fabrications, and the poets themselves as hardly better than liars,³⁷ Heldris's references to a Latin original can be read as a traditional authority topos giving credence to his vernacular tale (cf. Dahmen 2002, 115), very much in the style of Chrétien's allusion to an old and written book, likewise referred to as *estoire*, in Saint Peter's Cathedral in Beauvais from which his *Cligès* is supposed to have been taken (ll. 18–26). However, I believe it is productive to take the exploration further beyond topos and consider the convention from the standpoint of disputation that lies at the heart of *Silence*. The narrative strategies discussed in the following pages will show that Heldris imbues his fabricated *estorie* with a particularly commanding force as an "authentication device" (Agapitos and Mortensen 2012, 18), only to tear it down by entering into an argumentative dialogue with this Latin book, thus abandoning the stability it symbolises and turning instead to his readers

³⁷ On the authority of poetic fables, see Minnis (1984/2010, 11). On differentiating between history and fiction in the Middle Ages, see Fleischman (1983) and Beer (1981). Spiegel (1993) discusses the association of prose with truth and moral gravity.

as authorities on truth, for better or for worse, when it comes to the matter of emotions and experiences undergone by the characters.

The artistic confidence evident in such a narrative mission set on transcending the confines of tradition (which Gellrich likewise detects in the much later writings of Dante and Chaucer) can be traced back to the tremendous influence exercised by Chrétien on the subsequent generations of French romance writers. In a series of studies on what he calls the twelfth-century literary self-consciousness (“conscience littéraire”), Michel Zink (1981; 1985/1999; 1987) has famously argued that Chrétien’s deliberate positioning of himself as the author of his works marked a revolutionary shift in the conceptualisation and practice of authorial performance as well as the status of fictional writing itself. Commenting on Zink, Gabrielle M. Spiegel (1993, 62–63) concludes that Arthurian romance celebrated its status as a an “autonomous literary invention,” the existence of which was not justified by the transmission of antecedent texts of superior authority, but rather by the desire to showcase the virtuosity of the writer, as illustrated by Chrétien’s boast that his *Erec et Enide* will be remembered throughout Christianity’s endurance.³⁸

This self-assured stance, which exchanges submission to the authority of the past for artistic innovation in the present, is something that the post-Chrétien verse romancers, including Heldris, arguably inherited and shared, exercising their authority particularly through various types of narratorial interventions in the grammatical first person (Krueger 1987, 129–30). Of course, this authorial emancipation was not a straightforward chronological process: many romance texts dating from roughly the same period hold inconsistent attitudes towards the question of authorship, with some poet-narrators professing to be mere translators submitting to authority, and others appealing to the audience’s evolving taste for innovation by representing themselves as independent creators in their own right (Fein 1993, 535).³⁹

³⁸ Although new in the context of twelfth-century romance, poetic boasts about eternal fame was, of course, a well-known topos in the classical writers, such as Horace and Ovid. See, e.g., Kivistö (2014).

³⁹ The new sense of poetic agency that Chrétien had arguably set in motion or at the very least accelerated, was further facilitated in the very different context of scholastic scriptural exegesis where, starting from the early thirteenth century, the so-called “Aristotelian prologue” came into use as a new and fashionable method of commentary. As Minnis has demonstrated, this method conceived of scriptural authorship in terms of a *duplex causa efficiens*: while God was still self-evidently regarded as the primary *auctor*, the human writer was now being increasingly considered as “both moved (by God) and moving (in producing the text)” (Minnis 1984/2010, 79), which consequently led to an interest in the various narrative strategies formerly obscured by the heavy emphasis on allegorical interpretation. This *translatio auctoritatis*, which saw the relocation of *auctoritas* from the divine to the human realm and from the past to the present (ibid. xxviii), extended its influence outside the immediate scholastic

As already indicated, I take as my point of departure the argument that both these attitudes are written into the texture of *Le Roman de Silence* which, through its interjectory comments in the first person, basically captures this historical process while it is running. In her investigation of the functions of the discursive “je” (“I”) in a collection of twelfth- and thirteenth-century French romances, such as *Ipomedon* and *Partonopeu de Blois*, Roberta L. Krueger (1987) speaks of a “mode of authorial consciousness” determining the chivalric poet’s way of establishing rapport with his or her audience: it is through narratorial interventions that the poet can influence the interpretation of the work’s ideological significance in the “narrative performance” in which the author and audience are engaged (ibid. 118).⁴⁰ As stated in the Introduction, I will investigate such interventions in Heldris’s text which evoke certain emotional stances and reactions, and which, I argue, *model different kinds of readerly positions*.⁴¹ Building on this, I explore how, through a rhetoric of experientiality, Heldris’s romance *stages its own reception* by simulating two opposite modes of interpretation: one consisting of an *uncritical submission to authority and a penchant for superficial interpretation satisfied with surfaces*, and the other representing the thoughtful responses of a *readerly consciousness well-versed in allegory and romance aesthetics*. Furthermore, I will argue that this strategy is driven by a didactic impulse to train the actual audience in careful and skilled reading.

At the same time, while exploring different aspects of readership, Heldris’s experientialising rhetoric is concerned with the poet’s relation to tradition. As already mentioned, the romance’s ideological trajectory arguably takes form through the presence of the *estorie* as a symbol for authority; it is therefore pertinent to ask how the *jo* positions itself with regard to the text that is supposedly being translated. I propose that this relationship, imagined as a constant fluctuation between affirming and negating tendencies, between stability and crisis, reflects the different poles of readership identified above. Before exploring these aspects in more detail in the analysis sections below, a few more prefatory remarks remain to be made.

Some of Heldris’s first-person remarks and observations strictly enhance the illusion of a word-for-word correspondence between the vernacular reproduction and the Latin version (see Example [1]: “*Si com l’estorie le nos livre . . . si le vos disons*”): the illusion is that everything will be told and nothing omitted (e.g. “Or vos

context to the contemporary secular writers as well, shaping their ideas of literary creation and their own role in it (ibid. 160).

⁴⁰ Menegaldo (2005) offers a book-length study on the different functions of the *jongleur* in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century French narrative.

⁴¹ In order to avoid such cumbersome constructions as “reader or listener,” I use the terms *reader*, *recipient* and *audience* interchangeably in this study, to allow for both aural and visual reception of texts.

ai jo dite la some, / L'oquison de ceste aventure”, *RS*, 2252–53; “Now I have told you everything: how this strange turn of events came to pass”), and that no extra details will be added which the audience might find interesting, but which the poet as translator is not able to provide (e.g. “Ne sai que conte la despense, / Car plus i ot que nus ne pense”, *RS*, 251–52; “I don’t know how much it cost – more than anyone could imagine”). Yet the faithful translator also admits that some of the things we are hearing might in fact be his own additions – *lies*, according to his definition – to the original text:

[2] Jo ne di pas que n’i ajoigne
 Avoic le voir sovent mençoigne
 Por le conte miols acesmer:
 Mais se jel puis a droit esmer
 N’i metrai rien qui m’uevre enpire
 Ne del voir nen iert mos a dire
 Car la verté ne doi taisir.
 (*RS*, 1663–69)

[I’m not saying that <I do not often mix lies with the truth in order to better embellish the tale:> but if I am any judge of things, <I will not put in anything that will spoil my work,> nor will there be any less truth in it, <for I should not silence the truth.>]

Heldris strikes a pose as a humble and cautious *commentator*, purporting to mute his own voice and encouraging the audience to view his occasional additions as no more than secondary embellishments to the *estorie*.⁴² Such embellishing was an integral part of the art of medieval romance. In practice, it meant rhetorical amplification through which romancers sought to bring to light the core meaning of the inherited *materia* they put to new use in their works, thus raising their texts “to a level of distinction which no straightforward narration could ever reach” (Vinaver 1971, 16–17). Heldris’s embellishing commentary pretends to be understated and taciturn, presenting itself, for the most part, as a faithful echo whose additional glosses allow the truth of the original to shine. Yet the analysis will show that the narration of *Silence* is structured to eventually invert this hierarchy which places the Latin *estorie*

⁴² According to the four-fold model of literary activity advanced in St Bonaventure’s thirteenth-century discussion on Peter Lombard’s *Libri Sententiarum*, the moderate level of input distinguishes the *commentator* from the other types of bookmakers. Since the commentator’s task consists of elaborating on certain features of a text, his agency as a writer is not as limited as that of the *scriptor* (“scribe”) and the *compilator* (“compiler”) who merely copy and arrange together the words of others, yet it is less limited than the agency of the *auctor* (“author”) who writes independently, supporting his or her own views by drawing on the statements of others (Minnis 1984/2010, 94–95).

above Heldris’s commentary in terms of truthfulness; as we shall see, the so-called *mençoigne* of the Commentator-I emerges in the course of the romance as a worthy rival for the original Latin tale, transforming from a conceding into a contradicting voice that will not be silenced by the authoritative *estorie*. This kind of voicework, consisting, on the one hand, of respect for authority, and, on the other hand, of rebellion against it, permeates, according to David Lawton, the vernacular literary culture of the Middle Ages (2017, 4–5).

In *Silence*, the counterweight voice tells, as it were, another tale running parallel to the primary one and offering a subversive take on romance conventions. In this process, the audience plays an important role, as it is called upon, through a set of collaborative rhetorical strategies, to construct the other tale together with the poet. It is made clear already in the opening lines that the upcoming tale is exclusively restricted to audiences of exquisite literary tastes, who also happen to be inclined to show a monetary appreciation for the artist’s labours. In contrast to this group, we have people who do not fathom that the telling and the reception of a tale is a two-way street, in more senses than one:

[3] A çals qui sunt comande et rueue,
 El commencier dé suns qu’il trouve,
 Que cil quis avra ains le arge
 Que il a tels gens les esparge
 Que, quant il oënt un bon conte,
 Ne sevent preu a quoi il monte.
 Ne violt qu’espars soiënt par gent
 Qui proisent mains honor d’argent,
 N’a gent qui tolt voellent oïr
 Que si n’ont soing c’om puist joïr
 De gueredon qu’il voellent rendre.
 (*RS*, 3–13)

[As for those who possess them [ie. the lines and the manuscript], he commands and requests, right here at the beginning of the work he is creating, that anyone who has them should burn them rather than share them with the kind of people who don’t know a good story when they hear one. He does not wish to have his verses circulated among those who prize money more than honor, or among people who want to hear everything but do not care to make a man happy with some reward they might wish to give.]

The passage very clearly distinguishes between those who recognise and those who do not recognise a good tale (“tels gens . . . Que, quant il oënt un bon conte, / Ne sevent preu a quoi il monte”), thus raising the question of skilled readership. Furthermore, through the references to greed and avarice, the lines introduce the

romance's overarching moral debate revolving around Nature's superiority over Nurture, and the question of whether it is at all possible for human beings to resist their true essence. Introducing the theme of the romance and defining its ideal audience, the prologue works to build an inclusive sense of community between poet and audience: to be sure, *we* are savvy enough to catch the tale's underlying message, which is something of which *they* – the rude and greedy folk of the opening harangue about the avarice of man (*RS*, 14–101) – are evidently incapable. In general, glosses invite reflection on the meaning of the story (Kelly 1992, 255). This is a practice that is highly flattering to the recipient. Not just anyone could write romance or discern its true value: embracing the *san* (“meaning; “signification”) required from both writer and audience a special kind of mental acumen “to express and understand a significant subject matter” (ibid. 113). *Silence*, I claim, is centrally concerned with this capacity and the related issue of skilled interpretation: from the point of view that I propose to read the romance, it basically shows itself as a series of *traps* set up for the vigilant reader by the poet who brings us voices hovering between innocence and experience, and in so doing outlines the processing of a romance narrative as a choice between passive reception and active engagement with the text.

Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter focus on the first of these two positions. I will first discuss a type of commentary that occurs with high frequency in *Silence*: including both curses and appeals for divine protection, these interventions convey intense reactions to the told, indicating a strong emotional engagement with the events and characters of the tale. Expanding upon Richard Walsh's (1997, 2010) theory of voice as “interpellation,” I propose that such experientialisation of the discourse through emotional interjections, the effect of which could further be enhanced by the prelector's vocalisation, seeks to simulate a sentimental and mimetically oriented audience position for didactic purposes. In its rhetorical emphasis, my reading thus proposes an alternative interpretation to Fludernik's (2011a) analysis of similar instances in medieval narrative as “narratorial empathy” for the characters' situation. From there, I move on to explore Heldris's use of the rhetorical question, which, rather than directly generating a sentimentally overstrung audience position, depends on rhetorical pathos in attempting to lure the reader into the trap of unsuccessful readership that is blind to the tale's thematical and allegorical meaning. Section 2 takes this discussion further by investigating how such emotionally overstrung interpretation is embodied in a selection of the romance's characters, whose reactions the experientialising rhetoric places under critical scrutiny.

In Sections 3 and 4, the focus shifts more fully to the experienced romance reader, with an eye on how the characters' emotions are openly constructed so as to underline the reader's participatory role in the development of conventional romance representations. If the previous sections explore the means by which the audience's minds have been made up for them by the poet, now the attention turns to characters' *made-up minds* in the sense of their conspicuous artificiality. Starting with an analysis of what could be called the "enargetic mind," the discussion then proceeds to explore Heldris's method of challenging the verisimilar through the rhetorical devices of *occultatio*, *dubitatio* and *sententia* that ground their force of persuasion on an audience-based coercion. On the one hand, Heldris gives us characters that are pointedly literary figures acting out their part in a fictional romance; on the other hand, these characters occasionally come across as tentatively authentic representations of reality, whose fears and desires seem to be reaching beyond the confines of conventional expression. Even as Nature and Nurture battle for supremacy in Silence's mind, Heldris the Commentator engages in his own battle against the *estorie* that he purports to be translating, his interjections about the protagonist's – and the other characters' – emotional ordeals surreptitiously challenging their original representations allegedly put forward in the fabricated source material.

This dispute is centrally concerned with the intertwined question of authenticity and authority with regard to interiority: who has the right to decide what a character should be feeling in a given situation, and what should be said about these inner experiences in order to give a truthful representation? These questions tie up with the overarching argument of the current study about the functionality of medieval fictional minds. Although moving towards a subjective and mimetic vision, the minds of the characters are ultimately seen to serve as strategic tools in the negotiation of readerly and writerly agency that is informed by the larger literary-historical debate about the contemporary poet's voice.

1 Staged Reception I: The Affected Reader

1.1 Anxiety Ventriloquised: Oaths and Prayers in the Dark

I will begin my exploration of *Silence's* emotional interventions with a passage describing the protagonist's ordeal at the hands of the French king's wife. Never knowing that Silence is in fact a woman, Queen Eufeme falls madly in love with the

fair-faced youth and promptly launches an aggressive campaign to lure him into her bed.⁴³ The commentary accompanying the narration of these dramatic events pleads for the Lord himself to shield Silence from the evil Eufeme, while expressing severe moral indignation at the Queen's conduct:

[4] La roïne est de maint porpens:
 Ne cuide ja veïr le tens, /
 S'il violt u por son cors deduire
 U s'il ne violt por li destruire.
 En le vies derverie rentre.
 Maldis soit li cuers de son ventre!
 Mar le vit ainc Silences nee!
 ...
 Mais Silences ainc ne forfist
 Ne ne fesist, se il vesquist
 .m. ans, les mals que li violt faire
 La dame, *cui Dex doinst contraire.*
 Piuls Dex, et plains de pasience,
 Or Te soviegne de Silence!
 Car il ne se set preu gaitier.
 Eufeme le cuide afaitier
 D'aspre dit, ans que il anuite,
 Se ses espoirs ne li afruite.
 (RS, 5657–63; 5695–704;
 emphases added)

[The queen was obsessed with thoughts of Silence: she could not wait to find out whether he would agree to be her lover or choose his own destruction. Her old mad passion was renewed. *Damn her, body and soul! It was a sad day for Silence when she set eyes on him!* . . . But Silence had never committed, nor would he, even if he lived to be a thousand, commit the sins that the lady, <may God> confound her, wanted him to. *Merciful, patient God, may you now be mindful of Silence, because he's defenseless in this situation.* Eufeme plans to dispose of him in a most unpleasant way if her hopes don't come to fruition before nightfall.]

Emotions run high in the scene, all but overshadowing action – but whose emotions are they? Analysing similar kinds of interjections in a selection of Middle English texts, Monika Fludernik (2011a) suggests a narratorial source, consequently calling attention to the fact that such “empathetic assumption of a protagonist's feelings by the narrator or bard” escapes the traditional narratological frameworks for representing consciousness. The incongruity arises from the logic-defying (or rather,

⁴³ Notice that the depraved Queen Eufeme is a different character from Eufemie, Silence's virtuous mother.

convention-defying) construction of these emotional interjections which seem to point to the narrator's rather than the characters' consciousness: "A character's supposed verbal mind-content has always been taken to be prior to its narrative representation. Yet in the empathetic exclamations . . . it is impossible to tell whether the narrator is reporting the feelings of a character, expressing his own analogous emotions, or fantasizing about what the character might have felt in the circumstances" (ibid. 84). The provisional readings Fludernik then gives of a handful of extracts, including *King Horn*, *Sir Orfeo* and Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, would seem to support the conclusion that the writers are making the characters' experiences known to their readers via detour, as it were, by compassionately aligning themselves with the characters' emotions.

These valuable findings, suggesting as they do that vicarious narratorial empathy potentially *prioritises* the act of representation itself as well as the emotions of the reporting instance over those of the characters, complement the central hypothesis of the present study about the externalisation of character interiorities in medieval romance. However, an exploration of the exclamations in Heldris's *Silence* shows that they can perform other functions than just the identificatory one proposed by Fludernik, and that the emotional stance conveyed by them need not necessarily be limited to a narratorial alignment with the *characters'* mindset. For it should be noted, in the above example, that in addition to, or instead of, a show of empathy for the harassed Silence, there is an indication of concern in the short prayer that the story is headed for disaster, unless God himself finds it fit to intervene and see the narrative safely through to its conclusion. Similarly, the explosively angry outbursts towards Eufeme do not merely convey candid emotional responses, but in doing so generate the point of view of someone who is in the dark as to how things will eventually play out for her and the other characters. The exclamations, in other words, shift focus to an element which Fludernik's account does not take into consideration: the *audience*.

This claim perhaps strikes a strange note in the modern reader accustomed to the traditional narratological model of voice, according to which narrative texts consist of the narrator's and the characters' discourse. In Fludernik's natural narratology, this theoretical doctrine is based on an illusionary desire, on the part of the reader, to project a realistic communicative schema on a text by reading "any passage as being, basically, *either* the narrator's *or* the character's focalization" (ibid. 635; emphases added). In other words, there seems to be only two options available, and a choice between them during the reading process is, Fludernik states, "a simple fact" (ibid. 622). Following this line of thought, one would therefore have to own that in

the above passage the hostile exclamations (“Maldis soit li cuers de son ventre!”; “La dame, cui Dex doinst contraire”) could perhaps be read as emulating the point of view of the anguished Silence, whereas the pleading lines asking for God’s protection and referring to Silence in the third person (“Mar le vit ainc Silences nee!”; “Piuls Dex, et plains de pasience / Or Te soviagne de Silence!”) should perhaps more plausibly be assigned to the narrator’s language and consciousness. While such an interpretation certainly is possible, I nonetheless suggest that to settle for this conventional explanation is to perpetuate, in an unprofitable way, the modern narratological doctrine of voice that isolates the reader’s point of view, reducing her to an outside disentangler of the voices of narrator and characters constituting the fabric of a fictional text. By contrast, the exclamations in *Silence* bring the recipient, presumably *actually* present in the original performances of the romance, directly into the text by emulating her spontaneous reactions to the told.

In thus arguing that the prayers and curses in *Silence* should be taken as narratorial alignment with the audience rather than the character, I am with Marnette (1998, 82–87), who observes that in *chansons de geste* the hopeful appeals to God and the expressions of admiration or disapproval pertaining to the characters, as well as the hypothetical statements suggesting better courses of action, could be simultaneously attributed to the narrator and the recipient. After all, the poets *do* know the stories they are telling: are we therefore given to understand that they are simply lying to our face by pretending ignorance or bewilderment every once in a while? Surely a more sensible way of looking at this contradiction, Marnette suggests, is to think of these interjections in similar terms to the imperfect subjunctive (*oïssiez, veïssiez*) which is often employed in the descriptions of battles and intense emotions, arguably in order to incorporate the audience point of view into the narrative, as if they were witnessing the drama with their own eyes and ears (ibid. 60).⁴⁴ In this communally oriented storytelling practice, the audience is thus promoted from a mere recipient of the narrative act (“ceux à qui l’on raconte l’histoire”) to an actively engaged listener (“ceux qui l’écotent”; ibid. 66–67), whose sometimes surprised and baffled reactions to the events and the decisions made by the characters are integrated into the *récit*, thereby positioning the audience on an almost equal footing with the poet, in the sense that their voice too is being metaphorically heard in the narrative (ibid.

⁴⁴ An example from *Silence* would be the combat between Silence and the thirty Frenchmen: “Quant vint as lances abasscier / .m. en covint a mort quasscier. / Dont *veïssieés* tronçons voler, / Tamainte jovente afoier, / Escus estoër et percier” (RS, 5445–49, emphasis added; “When it came to lowering of lances, a thousand were determined to strike a fatal blow. *You could see* shattered fragments fly, and many young men in battle-frenzy, and shields pierced and perforated”).

86). This tendency, however, is more markedly characteristic of the historiographical genres (*chansons de geste* and chronicles) than of fictional romance, where narratorial interjections frequently emphasise the status of the chivalric poets as the sovereign masters of their tales (ibid. 74–75; see also Marnette 2005, 205).

If we accept the argument that the voice of the audience is encoded in the text of *Silence*, we must take this hypothesis further and ask what kind of voice it is precisely; moreover, its function in the overall composition of the romance must be determined in order to understand the mode of “authorial consciousness,” to borrow Krueger’s terminology, that Heldris seems to be establishing with his audience. I already indicated that, in their candid spontaneity, the prayers and curses uttered in [4] above take us directly into the viewpoint of a reader who can only hope for the best and prepare for the worst, not knowing whether the wicked Eufeme will eventually succeed in her seduction attempt or not. Similar moments of insecurity are dispersed throughout the text, for instance when Silence risks his life on the battlefield (“Se Dex Silence nen a chier / Que il le mece en noncaloir, / Ne li pora gaires valoir / Elmes, ne brogne, ne escus”, *RS*, 5594–97; “If God is indifferent to Silence’s plight, neither helm nor cuirass nor shield can help him!”), and when he sets out into the woods to seek out the wizard Merlin (“Silences s’en fu a estruit. / Or l’en doinst Dex venir a fruit,” *RS*, 5987–88; “Silence went about his preparations, may God bring them to fruition!”). In another passage, dealing with Silence’s premonitory dream about his demise in the hands of the two deceitful *jongleurs* acting as his mentors, the interjection follows after a direct addresses to the audience:

[5] *Et cuidiés qu’a tols .iii. n’anuit
 Qu’il ne pueënt dormir la nuit,
 Li doi qui pensent le mal faire,
 Li tiers de cho qu’il se crient traire?
 Car il a songié hisdeus songe,
 Mais Dex li vertissce a mençoigne.
 (RS, 3381–86; emphases added)*

[<And do you not think that all three of them were exhausted> from not being able to sleep that night – the two because of the evil they were planning, and the third because of the evil he feared<?> He has had a terrible dream; *may God prevent it from coming true!*]

It has been suggested that the modern reader is inclined towards coherence and unity as hallmarks of verbal art,⁴⁵ whereas the medieval reader would have regarded inconsistencies, ambiguities and “loose-jointed structures” as sources of literary pleasure (Spearing 2012, 257). Our attempts to resolve medieval texts according to some unifying principle might therefore be considered alien to medieval readership, driven by the desire to “save” these texts for modern readership by some familiar narrative device (cf. Spearing 2001, 725). Applying a coherent “telling” frame to [5] may be just such a saving attempt blocking significant and fertile interpretive paths opened up by the passage. Due to its explicit second-person reference, the interrogatory “Et cui diés qu’a...” introducing the passage quite forcibly invites the modern reader to conceive of the discourse as taking place in the “telling” frame which, according to Fludernik’s model, “employs the prototype of the human teller, the ruling consciousness of a narrator, to mediate story experience” (Fludernik 1996, 36). Attaching oneself to the “telling” frame potentially leads to a kind of *slipstreaming effect* that automatically makes us think of the subsequent wish (“Mais Dex li vertissce a mençoigne”) as also belonging to the narrator figure, as a natural consequence of the preceding second-person address.

This slipstreaming effect, I believe, is particularly unavoidable in the pages of a modern edition, typically read quietly and by oneself, without the guiding presence of a prelector’s living voice. Paul Zumthor accordingly speaks of the irretrievable losses of which printed versions of medieval texts make us aware, in presenting us “with nothing but an empty form that is without a doubt profoundly distorted from what was, in another sensorimotor context, the whole potential of the spoken word” (1984, 70; cf. also footnote 1 in the Introduction chapter of the present study). What we have, opening a modern edition or consulting an old manuscript, “is only a scrap of the past, immobilized in a space that is reduced to the page or the book” (ibid. 71). This loss of vocality also concerns perspectives and characterisation: in oral performance, unlike on page, the shift from the reporting instance to some other point of view could be powerfully communicated through vocal manipulation (e.g., Levy 2005). Geoffrey of Vinsauf addresses the importance of tone and gesture in recitation in his *Poetria nova*:

Ira, genus flammae materque furoris, ab ipso
Folle trahens ortum, cor et interiora venenat;

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Vinaver (1971, 46), who refers to Cleanth Brooks’s (1974) view of poetry as the working out of tensions and contradictions. Zumthor (1984) likewise comments on the absence of unity in medieval texts that he describes as multifaceted and contradictory, and on the “desire for an intrinsic, recognizable likeness” shaping the modern discussion on medieval literature.

Pungit folle, cremat flamma, turbatque furore,
Exit in hac ipsa forma vox fellea, vultus
Accensus, gestus turbatus; et interiorem
Exterior sequitur motus, pariterque moventur
Alter et alter homo. Personam si geris ejus,
Quid recitator ages? Veras imitare furores.
Non tamen esto furens: partim movearis ut ille,
Non penitus; motusque tuus sit in omnibus idem,
Non tantus; sed rem, sicut decet, innue. Gestum
Praesentare potes agrestis et esse facetus.
Vox vocem, vultus vultum gestusque figuret
Gestum per notulas.
(PN, 2045–58)

Anger, child of fire and mother of fury, springing up from the very bellows, poisons the heart and soul. It stings with its bellows, sears with its fire, convulses with its fury. Under its emotion, a caustic voice speaks; an inflamed countenance and turbulent gestures accompany it. The outward emotion corresponds with the inward; outer and inner man are affected alike. If you act the part of this man, what, as reciter, will you do? Imitate genuine fury, but do not be furious. Be affected in part as he is, but not deeply so. Let your manner be the same in every respect, but not so extreme; yet suggest, as is fitting, the emotion itself. You can represent the manner of a rustic and still be graceful: let your voice represent his voice; your facial expression, his own; and your gesture his gesture – by recognizable signs. (Nims, transl., 90)

Geoffrey’s account reminds us that medieval characters come to life through modulations of voice in a more than just the metaphorical sense of the term. *How* a voice speaks and is different from other voices matters, as indeed it does in modern literature (cf. Aczel 1998), but rather than differences of idiom and diction, medieval texts create their points of view through what Evelyn Birge Vitz calls “auditory showing” (1999, 162). By this, she means that the reciter, as Geoffrey too indicates, could achieve varying dramatic effects by conjuring up different accents and emotional cadences to capture the characters’ moods and personalities, or to suggest his own level of emotional investment.

The Zumthorian “empty form” in the emotionally charged Examples [4] and [5] is certainly heavily invested with potential for such auditory showing, but I maintain that the emotions that are being auditorily shown are the audience’s rather than the characters’ or the narrator’s. The poet *knows* the outcome – Silence will not wind up in Eufeme’s bed, nor will his premonitory dream come true – and even openly flaunts his superior knowledge by dropping proleptic hints at strategic points (e.g. “Mais ainz qu’il voient mais .ii. vespres, / Orront voir canter altres vespres / Dont plus dolans sera li sire / Que s’il veïst son fil ochire”, *RS*, 2771–74; “But before two nights have passed, they will truly hear different tunes being sung, and the seneschal

will be as sorry as if he had seen his son get killed”).⁴⁶ In their accuracy regarding future events, these anticipations differ from the catastrophic imaginings triggered by the *jongleurs*’ increasing murderous jealousy towards their young protégé:

[6] Li bontés a l’enfant acroist,
 Li vilonie a çals aïist.
 Silences croist moult en francise,
 Li jongleör en culvertise,
 Tant com li buens tent a l’onor
 Et malvais a le deshonor.
 Oiés mervellose descorde!
 Se Dex, par cui li mons s’acorde,
 N’aïe l’enfant qu’il escape,
 Icil le prendront a le trape.
 Por bien fait col frait li rendront,
 S’il pueënt, cho li atendront.
 (RS, 3199–210; emphasis added)

[As the youth’s goodness increased, his masters’ villainy grew. As Silence grew more and more admirable, his masters became more and more deceitful, just as a good man always tends toward honor, and an evil one towards dishonor. *Now you’ll hear of a terrible breach of trust. If God, from whom the world derives its order, doesn’t help the youth to escape, they will catch him in their trap; they will give him a broken neck for his trouble, that’s what they’ll do if they get the chance.*]

Again, the second-person reference in the formulaic “*Oiés mervellose descorde!*” is likely to kick-start the slipstreaming effect which arguably makes us adhere to the frame of “telling” throughout the subsequent lines that, to my mind, would nonetheless make more sense if taken as expressing the consciousness of the recipient. As stated, this potential shift of perspective, which would force the modern reader to relinquish the established frame, is lost in printing; it is achieved through a voice that is physically heard. An atmosphere of threat has been simmering for well over sixty lines, presumably evoking in the auditors a sense of dread and apprehension that the poet (or the prelector, who likewise presumably knows the outcome) could impersonate in recitation; he or she could, for example, decelerate the pace of delivery to really dwell on these feelings of anxiety that the extended five-

⁴⁶ Genette defines *prolepsis* as “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later” (1972/1980, 40). For similar proleptic passages in *Silence*, see ll. 3964–65, 2778.

line duration of the imagined worst-case scenario with its visions of violence (broken necks, traps) is already bound to exacerbate.⁴⁷

In a nutshell, by putting into words the sentiments likely felt by the engaged listeners (and likely further enhanced by skilful recitation), the poet momentarily brings to the fore the consciousness of the recipient, thus seemingly expanding the natural cognitive frames of telling and experiencing into the realm of the “unnatural”: that is to say, the narration fleetingly creates the curious effect that you, the listener, are *telling the tale to yourself, although in somebody else’s voice*. As with such textual elements as rhythmic patterns, dialects and suggestive intonations that are most successfully actualised *only* through living voice (Vitz et al. 2005, 4), this effect remains dormant on page, to the extent that we modern readers may be hard-pressed to realise it is there in the first place.

This reading, which looks at Heldris’s prayers and curses from the audience’s point of view, therefore helps to solve the apparent contradiction that emerges from a twentieth-century readerly attempt to arrive at a definitive consciousness-based “narrativization” of the unfolding discourse, an effort that is constantly undermined by the way that the narratorial voice seems to arbitrarily fluctuate between proleptically omniscient and ignorant perspectives. Abandoning the desire for an ontologically coherent narrator figure that would be represented by the *jo* shows that in fact there *is* no contradiction to be solved. The prolepses and the uncertain conjectures are, quite simply, two separate things; they are two different devices of experientialisation designed to trigger different responses from the audience for different narrative aims, the former for creating suspension and the latter, to a greater degree, for ideological ends that require, as will soon be explained in detail, bringing the tale’s reception process into focus. (I will return to the fluctuation between contradictory stances further on.)

For Spearing, one of the most important “experience effects” generated by the various first-person interventions in medieval narrative is the sense of “writing itself as a form of experience” (Spearing 2012, 177). In Bokenham and Chaucer, the proximal deictic “now,” as well as the brief interjections conjuring the image of a poet making sense of his sources (in the style of “as I doo wryten fynde”), are devices that, rather than characterising a particular narrator, evoke the present of narration alongside the past of the narrated events, thereby calling attention to the storytelling and writing process (ibid. 234–35; see also Spearing 2005, 126). Based on what I have

⁴⁷ Cf. Levy’s evocative description: “A professional user of the voice to maximum effect, the jongleur may slow down his delivery, in order to build up tension or to underscore a necessary detail, and then speed it up to convey rapid of vigorous activity” (2005, 131).

been saying above, with Heldris's curses and prayers one could analogously claim that *they evoke the current present of reception* alongside the narrated past, drawing attention to *reading/listening* as a form of experience. However, as the discussion above has sought to illustrate, it is not just any act of reading that the exclamations characterise, but an inaugural one. In short, I suggest, still following Spearing's terminology, that the experience effect evoked in the passages involving candid emotional reactions – the *as if* subjectivity they project – is the experience of a *prima vista* recipient, or, perhaps more correctly, a *primo udito* recipient, who is hearing the tale *for the very first time*. Furthermore, I suggest that the discourse is thus experientialised from the point of view of the first-time reader for didactic purposes: in impersonating the virginal recipient, the emotional interjections seek to seduce the actual recipient into a readerly position that the romance ultimately asks her to resist.

Such invitations to the readers to align themselves with a certain subject position are discussed in the modern context by narratologist Richard Walsh, who identifies three different perspectives on narrative voice (2007, 89–102; 2010). By “instance,” he refers to “the sense of voice as an act of narrative representation, which is to say the sense in which the emphasis falls upon communicative agency in narration” (2010, 55). Secondly, as “idiom,” voice serves to characterise a particular speaker, thus “bringing to the fore the mimetic dimension of the narrative discourse, its capacity for representing the discourse of another” (ibid. 48). Finally, when understood as “interpellation,” as in the cases of focalisation and second-person narration, voice “relates to a representational subject position rather than to a represented or actual subject as such” (ibid. 56). In other words, it does not objectify a representational subject (idiom) nor foreground the notion of a communicating agent (instance), but generates a subject position “with which an individual reader may engage, responsively, or resistantly, in a more or less conscious exercise of perspectival alignment” (2007, 99); insofar as this alignment is “unconscious, it has the ideological effect of making the implied subject position seem to constitute the authentic selfhood of the narrative recipient” (2010, 53).⁴⁸ Thus, it can be said that voice as interpellation holds the potential to inveigle readers into a position where their minds have been, as it were, made up for them by the author.

Such an effect arguably takes place through *Silence's* emotional interjections. To recapitulate my point in terms of Walsh's interpellation: rather than representing the characters' emotions or empathetic narratorial alignment with these emotions, the experientialisation of the discourse through prayers and curses constructs the

⁴⁸ Here Walsh takes his inspiration from Louis Althusser's (1971) theory of “hailing,” by which individuals internalise a culture's values.

hypothetical perspective of the first-time reader with which the actual recipient is tacitly invited to imaginatively align herself. There is a level of unconscious enforcing involved: for while these interjections purport to mirror the audience's actual sentiments, they also simultaneously *create* these sentiments, offering them to the audience in a well-defined, ready-made form. So, although the discursive strategy perhaps makes it look like as if the recipient's voice is being heard in the narrative, this voice, as a matter of fact, is nothing but a rhetorical projection of a collective interpretative consensus that the narration represents as self-evident, enforcing it upon the reader through a rhetorical act of ventriloquism. In other words, the interjections manage to create the impression that there is *one correct interpretation* and *one acceptable emotion* for each situation: everyone fears and prays for Silence, everyone hates and curses Eufeme.

This observation carries obvious ideological import. Accordingly, Walsh points out that voice as interpellation has a scope beyond the discursive and the perspectival in the restricted perceptual sense, in that it can become an "organizing concept for ideology" (Walsh 2010, 53). Due to this ideological bent, the conceptualisation of voice as interpellation can be interpreted as a hypernym for the means by which a given text invites the recipient to embrace a certain value system or to act out the role of the "implied reader." In Wolfgang Iser's original definition, the implied reader "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (1974, xii). While this hypothetical entity, standing for the ideal reader response, is always a construction inferred from certain textual features, narratives can and frequently do openly guide the reader towards their desired readerly stance, for instance by incorporating text-internal narratee-characters who respond to the tale within the fiction (Chatman 1978, 150). Spearing (2005, 43–44, 58–60), in fact, suggests reading emotional interjections in Middle English texts exactly as models of response for readers or listeners, inviting them to empathise with the heroes while condemning the villains.

However, when read in the context of the whole work, the function of these interjections in *Silence* as a device of interpellation seems to be performing this guiding procedure in reverse: rather than the stance of the ideal reader, Heldris's emotional interjections can be argued to generate the position of the reader to whom the romance is decidedly *not* addressed. Simply put, here the emotionally charged spontaneous reactions can be interpreted as presenting themselves less as models of response for the audience, as Spearing would have it, and more as expressions of *potentially hazardous readership* that stands in ideological contrast to its more

enlightened and successful counterpart established by the other types of experientialising commentary, which will be addressed shortly. A *prima vista / primo udito* reception may be involved and raw, indeed it may be allowed such indulgence, but it can also represent a kind of emotionally overstrung readership which abandons sense for sensibility, focusing on surfaces at the expense of losing sight of the tale's thematic and didactic concerns, to which I will next turn.

1.2 The Dark Mirror: Exemplarity, Aggression and Enhanced *Interrogatio*

In addition to the emotional interjections, there is another frequent type of commentary in Heldris's romance: direct questions rhetorically addressed to the audience. The *Sourcebook on Rhetoric* defines rhetorical question as "a query posed by an advocate for which a response is not expected" (Jasinski 2001, 494). In classical Roman rhetoric, such strategy of *interrogatio* (known in the Greek tradition as *erotema*) operated as a means of elegantly reinforcing one's argument against the adversary (e.g., *RH*, IV.15.22), whereas medieval arts of poetry, such as Geoffrey's *Poetria nova*, treated the device as part of the "rhetorical colours" or "ornaments of style" that guaranteed a simple yet adorned mode of expression, a style that was easily understandable and pleasant, yet, as Geoffrey makes sure to point out, "of a simplicity that does not shock the ear by its rudeness" (Nims, transl., 56).⁴⁹

Heldris seems particularly fond of this modest mode of ornamentation: the number of rhetorical questions in his tale amounts to thirteen in total. On four occasions, these questions pertain to the act of narration itself, serving as a kind of conventional catalyst for narrative progression, such as "Volés oïr con s'a deduit?" (*RS*, 3366; "Shall I tell you what he did?") and "Volés savoir que il lor fait?" (*RS*, 3117; "Do you want to know what he did to them?"). The other nine instances, formulaically expressed as "cuidiés que X," are more precisely concerned with the events and figures that the narration creates: once, the inquiry is associated with a character's actions ("Cuidiés que moult biel ne s'atort?" *RS*, 2222; "Do you think he did a good job?"), and eight times with their emotions and states of mind in a specific situation.⁵⁰ Consider, for example, the following excerpts addressing the insomnia suffered by Silence and the *jongleurs* [7], and the joy felt by Cadour and Eufemie, as they witness Silence's remarkable progress in learning [8]:

⁴⁹ "Si sermo velit esse levis pulchrique coloris, / Tolle modos omnes gravitatis et utere planis, / Quorum planities turpis ne terreat aures" (*PN*, 1098–100).

⁵⁰ Lines 326, 2261, 2405, 2588, 3152, 3154, 3274, 3381.

[7] *Et cuidiés qu'a tols .iii. n'anuit*
Qu'il ne pueënt dormir la nuit,
Li doi qui pensent le mal faire,
Li tiers de cho qu'il se crient traire?
(RS, 3381–84; emphasis added)

[<And do you not think that all three of them were exhausted> from not being able to sleep that night – the two because of the evil they were planning, and the third because of the evil he feared<?>]

[8] *Li senescals a tolt conté*
Al pere et mere sa bonté.
Dist lor qu'il a par Deu tel grasce.
Cuidiés que baitiés ne les face?
Oïl! onques si lié ne furent
Quant le verté en aparçuent!
(RS, 2401–6; emphasis added)

[The seneschal told the father and mother all about the child's good qualities; he told them his gifts were due to God's grace. *Don't you think that made them happy?* Indeed, they had never been so glad as when they were able to see for themselves that it was true<!>]

While such questions in the second-person plural are certainly characteristic of Old French narrative, it is Heldris's recurring application of the device that renders his strategy somewhat anomalous – in Marnette's corpus, surprisingly, there are only two occurrences in total between *Raoul de Cambrai* and *La Prise d'Orange*, one in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*, with *Le Roman de Tristan* by Béroul once applying the equivalent form "Pensez que" (Marnette 1998, 64). Whereas in Chrétien the interrogation concerns the act of narration, in the rest of Marnette's cases, as in *Silence*, the narratorial voice seems to be enquiring the auditors' opinion on whether a certain emotion – exasperation or eagerness – was present or not in the character's mind. However, Marnette underscores that these interrogatives should be understood precisely as rhetorical questions seeking to underline the intensity of the characters' sentiments, rather than as candid probings of the auditors' take on the matter (*ibid.*).

In *Silence*, *interrogatio* does similarly serve as an intensifier, drawing attention to the characters' emotions with more force than a mere unobtrusive statement could do. I would, however, be inclined to shift focus from character to audience again. In other words, I suggest in the following analysis that the intensifying effect generated by the pattern "cuidiés que X," while evidently partly used as a method of

characterisation, is nonetheless more concerned with the emotions felt by the auditors – or, to put it more accurately, the emotions surreptitiously *enforced* upon them by the use of this device. Although the strategy is in many respects similar to how the emotional evaluations were seen to generate a readerly position grounded in a sentimental ethos, there is one central difference: *interrogatio* can be understood as a form of coercive discourse *disguising* itself as negotiating dialogue. I argue that Helderis makes use of this potential in order to lure the reader into the trap of unsuccessful readership, which ultimately has repercussions of doctrinal dimensions related to humanity’s fallen condition.

To develop this hypothesis of quiet enforcement, I must start from the notion of collective consciousness existing between author and audience as inhabitants of the same extra-textual world. According to Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (1983), such intermental ethos defines especially the realist novel, the whole project of which is to confirm “the uniformity at the base of human experience and the solidarity of human nature” (ibid. 65). Resting on the fundamental premise that an objective world exists, realism thus postulates a kind of “total consciousness” that “is always *potentially* the same, interchangeable among individuals, because it is consciousness of the same thing” (ibid. 66; emphasis original). For this reason, Ermarth characterises the realist narrator as “nobody,” not a corporeal individual but a “collective result, a specifier of consensus” (ibid. 65–66), which embodies the overlap between different minds, including the reader’s (ibid. 67).

The experientialising rhetoric employed in the pattern “*cuidiés que X*” works in a somewhat similar manner, specifying a consensus that it consequently uses as a point of reference for evaluating the characters’ actions and motivations – it is in relation to this shared experiential sphere that the *interrogatio* in [7] and [8] constructs the characters’ emotions, incorporating into the narrative the audience’s acquaintance with the mental states it seeks to portray. Here the common ground evoked is of the most basic kind: it simply consists of the rudimentary physiological and psychological understanding that lack of sleep tends to make one weary and that it is natural for any parent to feel proud of their child. That is to say, as human beings we do know – *nos cuidons* – and more or less possibly through first-hand experience, that this is what these characters would have probably felt in the described circumstances. The interrogative pattern, in other words, converts into question form what Grigsby (1979, 268) calls romance “claims of sufficiency” and Kelly (1992, 249) “ad hominem appeals” – statements that serve as a means of abbreviation, as there is basically no need to describe in detail that which can be collectively referenced (Grigsby 1979, 270). An example cited by both is the line

“Bien poez antendre et gloser, / Vos qui avez fet autretel” (ll. 4550–51; “you can well understand and gloss, you who have done likewise”) in Chrétien’s *Lancelot*, which delegates the glossing to the recipient presumed to be familiar with the protagonist’s impatience before his meeting with Guinevere. For Kelly, these appeals additionally serve cooperative purposes in representing a “whimsical wink to the audience” (1992, 249) – the poet *knows* that you know, and there is no arguing with this. Through question form, this inclusive effect is achieved more circuitously. Indeed, as Jasinski suggests, rhetorical questions can be a subtle and effective means of making *indirect* claims: although ostensibly allowing for multiple answers, the situatedness of the utterance basically establishes the answer implied by the advocate as the only correct one (Jasinski 2001, 494). To be sure, it would be quite inane for Heldris’s reader or listener to oppose the notion that the parents were delighted and the sleepless fatigued, although this opportunity is in theory present – but only in theory. In this way, *interrogatio* cunningly masks fixity as malleability, generating an illusion of genuine dialogue while surreptitiously leading the audience to agree.

Such forced compliance is hardly problematic in [7] and [8] which, as noted, deal with emotions and sensations that are simply neutral or highly positive in nature, displaying natural easy-to-agree human reactions to physical deprivation and filial success. In the latter case, one may even presume that the audience would have been flattered to be admitted into the company of heroes, who by convention served as models for imitation. As a matter of fact, Kelly (1992, 249) observes that *ad hominem* appeals “achieved credibility through the topical investment of character, adventure, and marvel with exemplarity,” which I take to mean that these inclusive statements served, or at least pretended to serve, as a kind of self-fulfilling behavioural prophecy; simply put, they present the mimicker (reader) emulating the emotions of the mimicked (character), encouraging this behaviour in a similar real-life situation by taking for granted that the reader is capable of such emotional sophistication. As a subtype of *ad hominem* appeals, Heldris’s *interrogatio* becomes an ornately elegant method of such exemplary reinforcement. Who would not wish to be like Cadour the Brave or Eufemie the Beautiful? Through *interrogatio*, which connects the reader’s and the courtly pair’s emotional landscape, the poet indirectly tells his audience that *they already are like these heroes*.

Rhetorical questions, then, can provide a means to foster a positive sense of community between the poet and the audience. But what if the mental states depicted through *interrogatio* are less than admirable and far from neutral, thus inducing the audience to confirm an alliance that is morally suspect and dishonourable? What if, instead of positive exemplary reinforcement, the device is

used in such a way as to make the audience feel *bad* about themselves? It is noteworthy that, notwithstanding the two occurrences considered above, Heldris’s use of the pattern “cuidiés que X” as a form of experientialisation is consistently illustrative of the aggressive end of the emotional spectrum. In the following scene, it has just begun to dawn on the two *jongleurs* that their musical skills do not even begin to compare with their prodigious protégé:

[9] Por quant si ont moult grant engagne
 Que nus d’als ne set que il face:
 Et por cho qu’il a gregnor grasce
 Que il nen aient mais en cort,
 Criement que l’enfes ne s’en tort
 Et qu’o als mais estre ne voelle;
 Et que il de cho s’en orguelle
 Qu’il seus set plus qu’il doi ne facent.
Cuidiés que granment ne l’en hacent?
Oïl, qu’il criement le damage.
Cuidiés qu’es cuers n’aient grant rage,
Que ne lor tort a moult grant bonte
Quant il sunt devant roi u conte,
Qu’il harpe et viiele a plaisir
Et c’on les fait por lui taisir?
Oïl! dont ont si grant anguissee
Nus ne se[t] que il faire puissee.
 Trestols li frons lor en degotte
 C’on por un garçon les debotte.
 (RS, 3144–62; emphasis added)

[They were so humiliated by this that they didn’t know what to do. And because he found much greater favor at court than they ever had, they were afraid that the youth might change his mind and not want to stay with them any longer; that he might become vain because he alone could outdo the two of them. *Don’t you think they hated him for this? Yes, indeed, for they feared financial ruin. And don’t you think their hearts were filled with rage? Can’t you imagine how deeply ashamed they felt, when, in the presence of king or count, he was asked to play harp or viele as much as he pleased, and they were silenced so people could hear him? Oh, yes, they felt such jealous rage that neither of them knew what to do.* Their foreheads dripped with sweat at the thought that they were slighted because of a serving-boy.]

If this is a wink to the audience, it is a wink of a decidedly bleak and glacial nature, holding up a dark mirror to humanity. Faced with extraordinary talent, the *jongleurs* react with anger, jealousy and vengefulness that are also subtly ascribed to the recipients through the firework-like accumulation of the interrogative pattern which, to follow Fogelin’s (1988/2011, 12) definition of the rhetorical question, gains its

“force by making the questioner’s indirect speech act the respondent’s direct speech (or, at least, thought) act.” As is often the case with rhetorical questions, the audience is thus led “to acknowledge something (in speech or thought) that is to his or her discredit” (ibid. 14), the “something” in this equation being an identification with the negative emotions of two despicable characters. By thus manipulating the audience into answering in the affirmative, the *interrogatio* basically makes the readers incriminate themselves, while this awkward recognition, curiously enough, is also openly voiced in the passage (“Oil!”). An affirmative statement is also found in the scenes where Nature and Nurture, the two fundamental forces at large in the human soul, respond aggressively to personal defeat:

[10] Quant Noretüre cho oï
Cuidiés qu’ele s’en esjoï?
Nenill! anchois fremist et groce.
 Enviers Nature se coroce
 Et si l’esgarde surement.
 Puis li a dit moult durement
 “Lassciés ester ma noreçon,
 Nature, a la maleÿcon.
 (RS, 2587–94; emphasis added)

[When Nurture heard this, *do you think she was overjoyed? Hardly!* on the contrary, she quivered and scolded. She was furious with Nature. She looked her straight in the eye and said most severely, “Nature, leave my nursling alone, or I will put a curse on you<!>]

[11] Quant Nature s’est aperçute
 Qu’il l’ont enganee et deçute,
 Que s’uevre li ont bestornee
 De si come l’ot atornee,
Cuidiés que forment ne s’en duelle,
Et que grant mal ne lor en voelle
De cangier sa fille por fil,
Et que ne l’ait moult en porvil?
Oïl! cho sachiés entresait!
 (RS, 2257–65; emphasis added)

[When Nature realized that they had tricked and deceived her by turning her work into the opposite of what she had turned out, <can’t you imagine> *how disturbed she was and how much she wanted revenge upon them for changing her daughter into a son, and how much she despised their plan<?>* Oh yes! You can be sure of that right now!]

Here, indeed, we seem to be faced with the kind of bad-tempered “anti-narrator” figure Suzanne Kocher (2002, 352) finds in *Silence* and especially in its prologue: instead of a conventional introduction to the tale and the identification of a patron, the narrative opens with an incensed rant on avarice serving “as therapy for the grouchy and possibly inebriated narrator, whose personality appears in full force from the beginning” (ibid.) and who constantly contradicts himself by “saying one thing and showing another” (ibid. 357). It is certainly possible to read [9], [10] and [11] in these terms, as a revelatory account of the narrator and his psychological state: repeatedly, this figure appears to rain on his own parade by following the carefully conducted applications of *interrogatio* with an almost over-enthusiastic affirmation, which tends to demolish even the tiniest semblance of choice provided by the question form; moreover, his jubilatory affirmation of the negative feelings seems to be instilled with an unmistakable sense of audience-repelling glee. However, it is quite a stretch to blame these on inebriation. Rather than reading the aggressive notes in the excerpts above as a means of fleshing out the personality of the narrator, I am inclined to think of them as yet another deliberate pose by the poet Heldris, a pose that is now designed to give voice to the worse angels of our nature. In other words, Heldris’s enhanced *interrogatio* is a gesture in service of the work’s overarching theme revolving around the notion of Nature’s superiority over Nurture, and the question of whether it is possible to resist one’s true essence.

This is a claim that transforms the pattern “cuidiés que X” from a mere subtly incriminating rhetorical trick into a kind of test of the audience’s moral judgment and, once again, their competence as romance readers. It is a test that Heldris seems determined to make his auditors fail, and to achieve this he rather nastily seeks to make them respond to emotional manipulation known in rhetoric as *pathos*. Introduced by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (I.2, 1356a1) as one of three principal modes of rhetorical persuasion, alongside *ethos* and *logos*, *pathos* is generally defined as an appeal based on passion or emotion which is instrumental in impelling an audience to act (Jasinski 2001, 421–29). By triggering emotional responses in the hearers, the speaker seeks to put them in a certain frame of mind favourable to her cause – in this capacity, *pathos* can be used to cloud rational thought through addressing emotions before facts (Sloane 2001, 555). I argue that such an effect is sought by Heldris’s rhetorical questions repeatedly amplified by the rabble-raising affirmations: the *interrogatio* viciously attacks the audience’s integrity, in the hope of tantalising us into succumbing to our fallen nature and allowing ourselves to be provoked, like the vile *jongleurs*, into rage by what we hear. If, as the *Herennium* author declares, goodwill is secured from the auditor “if we set forth the courage, wisdom,

humanity, and nobility of past judgements they have rendered” (*RH*, I.5.8; “*si res eorum fortiter, sapienter, mansuete, magnifice iudicatas proferemus*”),⁵¹ then Heldris seems to be doing exactly the opposite, insinuating that his hearers might be a little less than admirable, and thus stoking up an atmosphere of strife by trying to provoke a spontaneous negative response that could at worst grow into a dispute with the prelector.⁵² Of course, such interruptions of the performance need not have been spontaneously initiated by the audience. They might have been conscious decisions by the prelector, who would have been able to regulate the flow of the narration in order to offer the audience opportunities to consider and discuss the matters put forth in the tale.⁵³

The continuation of the passage dealing with Cador and Eufemie’s parental pride explicitly dramatizes an incensed reaction on the part of the recipients, whipped into anger not by *interrogatio*, but by a subordinate clause so fleeting as to be practically unobservable (again, its audibility could be regulated at will by different prelectors):

[12] Li senescals la les enmainne
 Et l’enfes plus et plus se painne
 De faire bien, quant il le loent.
 Mais li malvais, quant il cho oent
 Que on les prise, don’t s’orguellent
 Et grant folie en auls acuellent,
 Que il ne valent un pie.
 L’orgiols lor valt une pepie;
 Torgent les cols, *cho sachiés vos.*
 Con di me tu? Qui somes nos?
 Segnor, de moult legier empire
 Ki tent a malvaistié et tyre,
 Si com jo puis a droit esmer.
 (*RS*, 2407–19; emphases added)

[The seneschal brought them [Cador and Eufemie] there, and the child took more pains to do well when they praised him. But the wicked, when they hear that they are being praised, become so full of vanity and folly, that they are not

⁵¹ All English translations of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are by Caplan (1954).

⁵² Adrian P. Tudor (2005), in his discussion of the performance of twelfth- and thirteenth-century entertaining pious narratives, likewise imagines audiences responding vigorously to the texts by, for example, actually answering rhetorical questions and by cheering or booing or crossing themselves. Thus, the medieval experience of what it meant to be the recipient of a narrative text may have been, as Frank Brandsma puts it, a truly “emotional roundabout” (2006, 282), and in ways that cannot easily be reconciled with the modern conceptions of reception and readership.

⁵³ See Nykrog (1996) on Chrétien as a “romancier discutable.” Nykrog argues that Chrétien’s ambiguity deliberately invited his audiences to debate and discuss the issues his romances raised, furnishing grounds for rewriting and explanation. My analysis of *Silence* suggests Heldris’s commitment to similar goals.

worth a magpie. Pride is like a pip to them – it strangles them, *as you well know*.
“*What are you saying? Who do you think we are?*” Lords, he who tends and is drawn
to wickedness becomes worse for no reason at all, as far as I can rightly judge.]

The kind of short interruptive questions following the nearly undetectable statement (“cho sachiés vos” – “as you well know”) are found in other verse romances as well, for example Chrétien’s *Yvain*, where a disbelieving “Comant?” (“What?”) occurs with the drastic implication that the noble Yvain, not knowing his opponent’s identity, wishes to murder Sir Gawain (ll. 6072–3). Discussing this episode and another one like it in the same work, Marnette (1998, 71) remarks that they constitute a polyphonic situation *par excellence* by showing us two consciousnesses coming together as equals, with the narrator posing the questions *qua* members of the audience.⁵⁴ Likewise, the interjected questions that Heldris puts in his auditors’ mouths seemingly work to establish such polyphony, incorporating as they do into the narrative the recipients’ outraged voice. Yet we might ask whether this is in fact monophony disguising as polyphony, outwardly reminiscent of the latter, but in the end hardly serving any emancipatory objectives and dedicated rather to advancing thematic signification. In view of this, it would perhaps be more appropriate to state, in Heldris’s case, that the interjected questions do not represent an acknowledgement of another consciousness in the Bakhtinian sense that would allow the authentic incorporation of the recipient’s voice into the romance; this is not the representation of a particular human experience, but rather a representation of human nature as it is, pathetically prone to wrath that in this particular case is ignited by the suggestion that *you* – in other words, *we* as readers and human beings – are entirely susceptible to yet another cardinal sin – that is, pride.

Hanning mentions that unexpected narratorial turnabouts are part and parcel of romance aesthetics: “A chivalric poet might, through suspense and plot-development, manipulate his audience into a position of full involvement, only to pull the rug out from under it by means of sudden changes in tone and in the emotional pressure exerted by the fiction” (1981, 21). Describing Heldris’s technique above, we might say, in equally figurative if less eloquent terms, that the poet suddenly sticks out his leg to emotionally trip the audience. The flattering consensus is gone, as if it had never even been there: from looking upon the recipients as peers to the courtly couple, fully able to imagine and empathically respond to their pride for their child (“Cuidiés que haitiés ne les face?”; Example [8]), the lines all of a

⁵⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin defines polyphony as a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (1984, 6), which he saw realised in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s prose.

sudden move on to suggest that the auditors may just have direct experience of the kind of suffocating pride of *li malvais*, the wicked ones, which is a complete opposite of its humble and healthy counterpart shown by the protagonists – not only Cador and Eufemie, but also Silence whose refined sense of achievement never grows into vanity but rather makes him work even harder to be worthy of the received praise (“Et l’enfes plus et plus se painne . . .”; Example [12]). This fast-paced oscillation between flattery and vituperation tears a yawning gap between the literary and the real: by drawing a scathing contrast between the two opposing attitudes – the heroic and exemplary represented by the characters, and the immoral and mundane represented by the audience – the lines rather coldly suggest that, no matter what the poet might have led you to believe just now, you will in fact *never* be like Cador and Eufemie or their prodigious daughter-son Silence.

A similar double-crossing effect is perceived near the beginning of the work where, following the flamboyant flattery directed the audience’s way in the opening lines (cf. Example [3] above), the poet goes on in a similar vein to address the recipient in confiding tones – “Volés esprover gent avere?” (RS, 23; “Do you want to see what stingy people are like?”) – and then adds a colourful apostrophe to the avaricious that describes the said misers’ shortcomings:

[13] Avere gent, honi et las,
 Ja n’est cis siecles c’uns trespas.
 Vos le paravés desjué
 Q’or n’i a maos ris ne jué,
 Que vos en vivrés mains assés
 Quant vos, caitiff, tant amassés.
 Jo n’ai preu dit, car n’est pas vivre
 D’avere gent, car tolt sont ivre,
 Que, envebré en Avarisse,
 Qui est lor dame et lor norice,
 Honor lor est si esloignie
 Que il n’en ont une puignie.
 (RS, 31–42; emphases added)

[You greedy, nasty, petty people, this world is but a transitory place: *you have so robbed it of all pleasure that there is no play or laughter anymore. You’ll profit far less from it while you pile up riches, you fools.* No, I haven’t got it right – one can’t call that living, what stingy folk do; they are all drunk, intoxicated with Avarice, their sovereign lady and wet nurse. Honor is so scarce with them that they haven’t a fistful of it.]

With all the trickery of a trained orator, the poet at first proceeds to unite the team against a common adversary: through a vicious slandering of the implied opponents

who are thus brought into “hatred, unpopularity or contempt” (*RH*, I.5.8.; “in odium, in invidiam, in contempionem”), the intervening voice seeks to make the audience well-disposed for the reception of the tale by complimenting their sense of moral superiority. Yet there is a certain deceptive potential in the apostrophe “which expresses grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object” (*RH*, IV.15.22; “doloris aut indignationis alicuius per hominis aut urbis aut loci aut rei”), and in doing so employs the grammatical second person. Indeed, one may ask if the apostrophic address directed at the avaricious in general does not in fact go some way towards absorbing the present listeners into the ranks of the wealth-amassing wretches (“*Vos* le paravés desjue . . . Que *vos* en vivrés mains assés / Quant *vos*, caitiff, tant amassés . . .”). Again, the audience is damned and redeemed in rapid succession, almost in the same breath, and in a move so abrupt that it hardly allows them to even realise what hit them.

Such methodical backstabbing carried out in [12] and [13] conspicuously demonstrates the impossibility (or at least the absurdity) of treating the grammatical first person in the text as a representative of a consistent human being, and, consequently, of narrativizing the text within the “telling” frame: the only way around the rapidly varying moods witnessed in the excerpts would be to characterise a narrator of perhaps borderline personality, thereby committing the modern mistake of placing consciousness before narrative that Spearing warns against. Indeed, as Spearing insists, “we need to think not of any consistent fiction of a narrator within a text, but rather of a poet moving flexibly from one textual role to another as he tells his story” (2005, 57). Sometimes, as the passages from *Silence* show, the shifting between these roles can occur within the scope of only a small number of lines, and from one extremity to the other.

In its abusive extremity, the voice projected by Heldris serves, as stated, thematic purposes: the enhanced *interrogatio*, as well as the text-internal modelling of an incensed reaction and the questionable apostrophe all experientialise the discourse in a highly personal and insulting manner in order to test the audience’s integrity and readerly competence through pathos. Accordingly, Edmund Reiss writes about the medieval author as a trickster whose relationship with the audience was defined by a sense of almost antagonistic yet, at bottom, congenial play, in which the pleasure of reading and listening to poets would have in part consisted of recognising the poet’s attempts at deception: “Understanding is the means of avoiding deception, but deception is the means of provoking understanding” (Reiss 1989, 127). Heldris, too, disciplines with harshness: as with the sentimental interjections, the purpose of the aggressive interventions is to lull the recipients into letting down their guard, to

talk them into feeling the emotions associated with the cardinal vices, to induce an argument that is all noise and no perception – that is to say, not critical but blinded by emotion. In a more sophisticated rhetorical form, they, in essence, ask the audience: Do you take these insults personally and respond with rage to superficial provocation? Or do you calmly consider the narrative in its entirety to appreciate its allegorical import? Do you, in short, choose to become the “unimplied” reader, that inexperienced and uncritical recipient to whom the romance is decidedly *not* addressed, or are you skilled enough to play the trickster-poet’s game?

To read allegorically is to understand that no one person is singled out by the accusatory devices; instead, it is humanity itself that is singled out, and insofar as we are human beings, we are all of us equally implicated in the frailty of human nature. Compared to the tacitly accusatory *interrogatio*, this state of affairs is represented in another passage by a more leniently abstract designation “many a man” (“mains hom,” “maint hom”), whose reprehensible if natural actions are commonly known and witnessed by *I* and *we*:

[14] Segnor, par Deu, Nature a droit!
 Car nus hom tel pooir n’aroit
 Qu’il peüst vaintre et engignier
 Nature al loig, ne forlignier.
 Jo sai tres bien, par Noreture
 Fait mains hom bien contre Nature
 U por efforcement de gent,
 U faire ne l’oze autrement.
 Et ki fait bien par estavoir
 Ne por crieme de pis avoir,
 Cho n’est pas naturels faintize,
 Ainz est paors qui le justize.
 Et quant il est fors de la crieme,
 Cuidiés que sis cuers ne l’enprieme?
 Oïll car il li dist et conte
 Que moils valent .m. mars a honte
 C’un denier mains a grant honor.
 Miols valt li graindres del menor.
 Nos veomes maint home enbatre
 Un an, u .ii., u .iii., u quatre
 En bon us tolt par noreture
 Mal gré u non sa vil nature:
 Et puis apriés si s’en repent,
 De son bienfaire se reprent
 Et s’achieve sa felonie,
 Ki le renbat en vilonie.
 (*RS*, 2295–320; emphases added)

[Lords, by God, Nature is right! No man has the power, in the long run, that he can vanquish and outwit Nature, or betray heredity. *I know very well that many a man* acts contrary to his nature, does the right thing because of nurture, whether somebody forces him to, or whether he doesn't dare to do otherwise. But a man who does the right thing out of necessity, or for fear of coming off badly – this is not natural restraint; it is fear that keeps him straight. *And when he is not governed by fear, don't you think his heart will put its stamp on him? Yes!* for it will tell him that a thousand ill-gotten marks are worth more than a denier less earned honorably, that more is worth more than less. *We have seen many a man* do the right thing for one, two, three or four years, only because of nurture, whatever his foul nature wants, and then afterwards repent of it, go back on his fine behavior; thus his wicked nature wins out by plunging him back into villainy.]

Again, the *interrogatio* touching upon the common experiential sphere demands us to acknowledge our understanding of the ways of the wicked. But whether this general culprit is you or someone you know at court does not matter; these are actions characteristic of humanity, and as such they need no further explanations:

[15] Ne sai que dire des haïs
 Por cui cis siecles est traïs –
 De honte ont mais lor cort enclose.
 Chi n'a mestier metre de glose,
 Car jo n'i fas nule sofime.
 Jal savés vos tres bien meïsme:
 Losenge est mais en cort oïe,
 A mee i est et conjoïë.
 (RS, 65–72; emphases added)

[I don't know what to say of those hateful men who thus abuse earthly life – they have enclosed their courts with shame forever. *There's no need to supply a gloss for this, for I don't deal in sophistry. Indeed, you yourselves know very well* that False Praise is preferred at court, she is cherished and enjoyed there.]

The “hateful men” are the avaricious whose greed for material gain manifests itself at royal court where performers are heaped with praise but nonetheless denied a reward. David A. Fein (1993, 537–38) remarks upon the commercial dimension of the poet-audience relationship in chivalric romance, suggesting that perhaps the most powerful motive for the composition and performance of tales was personal gain. One might argue that Heldris's narrative strategy is highly efficient in terms of commercial success. Deception provokes understanding, but it may also provoke generosity: if you read correctly and understand the allegory about fallen human nature, then you also understand that you are given the opportunity in some measure

to redeem yourself in your own eyes and (perhaps more importantly) the eyes of others by rewarding the poet or the reciter in the end.

In sum, if the observations made above carry any weight, they suggest that the narration of *Silence* carries out its didactic and exemplary function through an experientialising strategy of voice which inspires the audience to act by showing them an unpleasant reflection of themselves in the dark mirror of the narrative. To explore this reflection with a studious intent rather than being personally affronted by it requires perception and restraint: one cannot very well see with tears of agitation or anger in one's eyes.

The next section will explore how such emotionally overstrung reactions are embodied by the characters in the tale, and how, on the other hand, these reactions are challenged by the experientialising rhetoric.

2 Staged Reception II: The Detached Reader

2.1 How (Not) to Read: Cadore's Myopia and the Cloak of Silence

As stated in the Introduction, chivalric romance brought sharply into focus the individual's embodied existence in time and space. When Urrique encounters Partonopeu on the shore in the anonymous *Partonopeu de Blois* (ca. 1180), we are made to experience that moment from Urrique's limited perspective, her slow discovery of the man's identity becoming the central point of interest in the scene:

Facts emerge gradually, moment by moment, across a diminishing distance of space, and emerge from personal observation and revelation, not from "objective" data given us by the narrator at the beginning of the encounter. . . . the scene itself begins to achieve its meaning from the perceptions, and consequent actions of the participants: *it has no other meaning*. (Hanning 1977, 95; emphasis original)

The new perspectival strategy, witnessed in the scene from *Partonopeu*, allows the chivalric poets to distance themselves from the early medieval narratives, such as epics and saints' lives, that depicted exemplary actions founded on absolute, unnegotiable values; contrastingly, by showing us human beings "who variously, incompletely, or even incorrectly perceive what is happening to them" (Hanning 1977, 14), romance narratives suggest that reality is a sum of individual outlooks: there is no one true story.

In *Silence*, too, we find a recognition scene that draws its dramatic force partly from the character's restricted point of view on the situation. After four years of touring with the *jongleurs*, Silence returns home to England. When he is brought to Count Cadore, the father at first fails to understand that his son is right there before his eyes:

[16] Li cuens violt bien cel plait celer.
 Le jogleör fait apieler
 En moult priveëment l'enmainne
 Od lui en sa cambre demainne.
 L'uis de la cambre apriés lui serre.
 Halt s'est assis et cil a terre.
 Son fil a saisi par la destre,
 Si enquierit u ses fils converse.
Son fil demande et il le tient;
Il le convoite et nel voit nient!
Li cuens est en dure sentence,
Qu'il ainme plus son fil Silence
Qu'altre richoise n'altre avoir,
Et por quant ne le violt avoir!
Il va ja ravisant sa chiere:
Com plus l'esgarde, plus l'a chiere.
Une hore pense: "Et Dex, est cil!"
Et en apriés: "Par foi, nenil!"
Ses cuers tamaint pense et requelt,
Que iols ne voit, et cuers ne velt.
De cho qu'il n'a son fil si pleure.
 (RS, 3611–31; emphases and underlining added)

[The count wanted to keep this interview private. He had the minstrel summoned and brought him in strictest secrecy to his private chamber and locked the door behind him. He sat on a chair, the boy, on the floor. He took his son by the right hand and asked where his son was living. *He asks for his son while holding him; he wants to have him and can't see that he's there! The count is serving a harsh sentence, for he loves his son Silence more than any wealth or possessions, and yet he doesn't want to have him! Now he examines the boy's face carefully: the more he looks at it, the dearer it is to him. One time he thinks, "My God, it is he!" But an instant later: "I'd swear it's not!" His heart is receptive to many things that his eyes don't see and his mind can't accept. He weeps because he doesn't have his son.]*

The underlined section shows that the scene takes some care to capture the revelatory moment from Cadore's standpoint: the indirect representation of his dawning realisation as he examines the youth's face is followed by direct thought wavering between belief and doubt. It is the kind of "temporal continuum of

experience” that Hanning (1977, 96) writes about, with the time-related adverbs (“ja,” “une hore,” “Et en apriés”) heightening the impression that we are being offered a progressively emerging individual view of the situation, a flawed view stemming indeed from a “failure of vision” that “is at bottom a matter of reading,” as R. Howard Bloch puts it in his discussion of the scene: “the count (as well as the tale) is blind to his (its) own progeny (or meaning)” (1986, 98). Emphasising *misinterpretation* as the driving force of *Silence*, Bloch argues that the romance is “all about misreading” (ibid. 98) and consequently “about the writer’s relation to writing” (ibid. 93): the mistaken identities and the debilitating effects of desire in the world of the fiction find their counterpart in the poet’s desire for correct expression – a successful *naming* of things – which nevertheless dissolves into linguistic indeterminacy that obscures and distorts rather than makes plain, thus turning the romance itself into a representative of “the systematic refusal of univocal meaning” (ibid. 88).

However, it should be noted that the blind spot in the scene under discussion is only the count’s. The point of view that ultimately dominates the scene is not Cador’s, but a point of view that *does* see and can unerringly put a finger on where the count goes wrong. This commentary, italicised above, is starkly contrasted with Cador’s failure to recognise his own child: if within the fiction the count (almost) falls victim to an outrageously embarrassing misreading, at the level of narration such a blunder is made impossible from the start, due to the explicating commentary that precisely points out the univocal meaning of the scene. Although the audience knows perfectly well that it is his son whom Cador is holding, Heldris goes the extra mile to spell out the classic dramatic irony resulting from this superior knowledge (“Son fil demande et il le tient; / Il le convoite et nel voit nient!”), as if set on hammering home the point even to the less perceptive reader by stating the obvious.⁵⁵ The move seems somewhat puzzling in its redundancy. But what may seem like a show of distrust towards the audience’s powers of perception may actually be an expression of confidence, which is to say that, instead of the poet taking the audience in hand, the lines are perhaps more fruitfully understood as an act that makes the irony itself or, more accurately, *the ability to perceive it*, the object of narration.

Such a double vision, simultaneously discerning several levels in a single object, was essential to a learned medieval readership. Ruth Morse (1991), in her all-important work on the habits of reading and writing engendered by rhetorical education, submits that the tendency to interpret the literal sense as a representative

⁵⁵ On irony as the distinguishing feature of romance, separating it from epic and saints’ lives, see, e.g., Haidu (1968) and Green (1979).

of something else was inculcated in the medieval mind from a very young age, through classroom exercises on such staple items of the curriculum as Avianus's versions of Aesop's *Fables* (ibid. 40–44). In Morse's view, detecting the moral behind the talking animals encourages a method of analogical reading that eventually would become "a habit of mind" characterised by a "self-conscious alertness to a whole range of possible effects" providing, in turn, a "source of great pleasure to readers who were able to appreciate the challenge of making the apparently simple into something witty, pithy, and forceful" (ibid. 44). Of course, this habit of analogical reading, initially practiced with fables, would have ultimately prepared the students for the more difficult texts, such as Virgil and Scripture, that were charged with allegorical and symbolic meaning.⁵⁶ In what is known as Fulgentius's commentary on the *Thebaid* by Statius, the writer takes care to establish that superficial interpretation is what distinguishes immature readings from the sophisticated ones:

Non incommune carmina poetarum nuci comparabilia uidentur; in nuce enim duo sunt, testa et nucleus, sic in carminibus poeticis duo, sensus literalis et mysticus; latet nucleus sub testa: latet sub sensu literali mystica intelligentia; ut habeas nucleum, frangenda est testa: ut figurae pateant, quatienda est littera; testa insipida est, nucleus saporem gustandi reddit: similiter non littera, sed figura palate intelligentiae sapit. (*Super Thebaidem*, ed. Helm, 180)

Just as there are two parts to a nut, the shell and the kernel, so there are two parts to poetic compositions, the literal and the allegorical meaning. As the kernel is hidden under the shell, so the allegorical interpretation is hidden under the literal meaning; as the shell must be cracked to get to the kernel, so the literal must be broken for the allegories to be discovered; as the shell is without taste and it is the kernel which provides the tasty flavor, so it is not the literal but the allegorical which is savored on the palate of the understanding. (Whitbread, transl., 239)

The description of the interpretative method is in itself heavily allegorised: whereas a child is content to play with the whole nut (i.e., the literal meaning), a wise adult cracks open the shell to discover the tasty flavour contained within the kernel (i.e., the allegorical meaning). In a similarly symbolic vein, the literal sense was frequently characterised as a veil covering the hidden meaning. John of Garland writes: "If a whole narrative is obscure, it may be made plain by means of a suitable story or fable, through the device known as Integument, which is truth cloaked in the outward form of a story" (*PP*, 1.392; "Si narratio fuerit obscura, per fabulam appositam uel per appologum clarificetur, per Integumentum quod est ueritas in specie fabule palliata"). The truth of a narrative is thus envisioned in terms of a body covered by

⁵⁶ On the order of reading recommended in the *accessus ad auctores*, see Wheeler (2015, 5–8).

a cloak: there is something underneath the surface that escapes the eye if one is not careful. The analogy with Silence’s dual nature is obvious. The romance frequently makes mention of the protagonist’s clothing as a means of disguise: “Quant li enfes pot dras user, / Por se nature refuser / L’ont tres bien vestu a fuer d’ome / A sa mesure, c’est la some” (RS, 2359–62; “When the child was of an age to wear clothing, in order to deny her nature, they took care to dress her in male clothing made to her measure”). And again: “Quanque on en voit est trestolt malles. / El a en tine que ferine: / Il est desos les dras mescine” (RS, 2478–80; “Whatever one could see was certainly male. But there’s more to this than meets the eye – the he’s a she beneath the clothes”). Beyond Silence’s *dras* lies the true meaning of things, of which the weeping youth reminds the father who remains sceptical about his identity:

[17] “Jo sui,” fait il, “nel mescréés,
 Com li malvais dras encrées
 Ki samble bons, et ne l’est pas.
 Si est de moi! N’ai que les dras,
 Et le contenance et le halle
 Ki onques apartiegne a malle.”
 (RS, 3641–46)

[“I am,” he said, “believe me, like an inferior piece of cloth powdered with chalk, that looks good, but isn’t. That’s what I am! I have only the clothing and bearing and complexion that belong to a man.”]

This reminder comes at a crucial point in the narrative, appearing in close proximity to the commentary explicitly pointing out the irony of the situation. By thus forcefully recalling the analogical habit of reading that is able to perceive multiple and simultaneous meanings at the same time, the narration of the recognition scene forms a counterweight to Cador’s myopia. In other words, through experientialising the discourse from an all-seeing standpoint in [16], Heldris juxtaposes Cador’s limited perspective with a point of view that that is *ne plus ultra* in terms of correctness and perception, and grounded in the capacity to consider a given situation from all sides. This enlightened perspective is one that grasps the thematic orientation of the aggressive *interrogatio* and stands in contrast to the emotionally affected reactions ventriloquised elsewhere – instead of being abruptly vehement or deeply affected by the narrated events, it comes across as coolly detached; it is the voice of a level-headed interpreter, who is able to see the bigger picture without sentimentally throwing herself into the unfolding drama, who explores the kernel and not only the shell, looking, unlike Count Cador, under the veil. Thus, by simultaneously creating an image of a skilled reader (the experientialised point of view) as well as a less skilled

one (embodied by Cadore), the scene effectively teaches the audience how (not) to read.

These two opposite interpretational positions generated by the text are brought together also in a passage that is included in a set of scenes quite fittingly revolving around reading and interpretation. Furious over the king's decision to not have Silence hanged for the sexual assault of which she maliciously accuses him, the vengeful Queen Eufeme intercepts the letter Silence is supposed to carry with him into exile, and rephrases its contents to make it look like an execution order from the king. So, as the time comes for Silence to leave for France,

[18] Li canceliers puis ne s'atarge.
 Il vient al roi, le brief li charge,
 Et il le balle al vallet donques, –
 Se Dex nel fait, quil mar vit onques! –
 Et don't l'a fait bien atorner.
 Cil n'i ose plus sejourner.
 Se harpe et sa viiele enporte,
 Si s'en ist plorant de la porte.
 Bien doit plorer et avoir ire
 Car sa mort porte escrite en cire,
 se Dex n'en pense, quil cria
 Et fist el monde quanque il a.
 (RS, 4365–76; emphases added)

[Without further delay, the chancellor went to the king and gave him the letter, and he handed it over to the youth, *who is doomed if God doesn't help him!* With that, he had given the youth everything he needed. Silence didn't dare postpone his departure. He took his harp and vielle and went forth weeping. *He had every reason to weep and be upset, for he carried his death sealed with wax, unless God, who created him and made the world and all the things in it, is mindful of him.*]

Here the experientialising commentary evokes the sentimental point of view and the perceptively critical point of view within the same passage: whereas Cadore was viewed solely from the latter perspective, Silence's misreading of his own situation (he weeps, but, as the audience knows and is explicitly told, not entirely for the right reasons) is explored from both standpoints. The concurrency fosters a divided attitude towards Silence as a character – an effect which Hanning sees as essential to romance aesthetics: being constantly engaged in an alternating or simultaneous “involvement in and detachment from a story (and characters) that veered with unsettling ease between a symbolism recalling moral allegory and parodic excesses of behaviour and rhetoric, the audience for whom the romances were intended could not afford to be complacent in its response to them” (Hanning 1981, 21). The

experientialisation in the letter scene openly addresses this malleability of response, encouraging, on the one hand, a mimetic and sentimental involvement in the character's emotions, yet focusing, on the other, on the narration itself as a form of art. The scene, in other words, superimposes what Hanning calls the "artistic perspective" over the mimetic one; this perspective, Hanning claims, is employed by chivalric poets to disengage the audience's sensibilities from the emotions of the characters by heightening the awareness of the poet's artifice (Hanning 1977, 99). Yet the double perspective provided by Heldris's commentary, while bringing about an alienation effect, also seems to strongly resist this kind of disengagement by inviting an empathetic response – metaphorically speaking, one could say that the passage exhibits a desire to break and yet to preserve the shell of the nut.

Discussing the Horatian maxim, current in the Middle Ages, according to which the task of the poet was to provide either profit or pleasure, or else a combination of the two,⁵⁷ Glending Olson suggests that literary pleasure was obtained by medieval audiences from formal features (such as style, metre and rhyme) as well as the literal level of the plot and details; so, while the profit may well lie in the allegory, the pleasure may have consisted in simply learning about the animals, as an *accessus* to the Latin bestiary *Physiologus* explains (Olson 1982, 32). Likewise, several contemporary statements suggest that mimetic appreciation and empathy for literary characters was an important part of the early modern reception of stories. Coleman (1996, 29) revealingly quotes from fifteenth-century clerical sources levelling critique at the tearful reactions for romances and *gestes*: "One who is left unmoved by the story of Christ's Passion read in the Gospel for Holy Week, is stirred to tears when the tale of Guy of Warwick is read aloud to him." As Horace's original statement indicates, it is perhaps the golden mean between the two extremes – pleasure *and* profit combined – that is to be pursued, and which Heldris's letter scene seems to inspire by introducing both the ability of being emotionally invested and yet of maintaining a certain critical and reflective distance.

In sum, Heldris's strategy of evoking two different interpretational positions – the critically perceptive versus the superficial reader – in the scenes representing misreadings on the plot level shows that *Silence* is as much about *successful* construction of meaning as it is, as Bloch would have it, about flawed one. Kocher (2002) likewise insists that Heldris's romance is designed to give its readers methodological "lessons in interpretations." For Kocher, these lessons are carried

⁵⁷ "Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae" (*AP*, 333–34; "Poets wish to benefit or to please, or to speak / What is both enjoyable and helpful to living"). All English translations of the *Ars poetica* are by A.S. Kline (2005).

out in the text's depictions of its characters acting in ways worthy and not so worthy of imitation, including the "not so sophisticated" and "curmudgeonly" anti-narrator (ibid. 349), whose "superficial digressions" (ibid. 355) are meant to make readers aware of the gaps between the story and the narrator's commentary on it, for instance by underlining his own excessive talkativeness of which he accuses some of the female characters. The narrator therefore represents an example, or rather, an anti-example, of bad judgment.

To put it briefly, Kocher suggests that the readers may learn the lessons in interpretation *Silence* provides by going against the grain of what the narrator has to say about his tale. Although I wholeheartedly agree with Kocher about Heldris's didactic aim to educate his audience about competent interpretation, I cannot, however, endorse her insistence on an unreliable narrator figure that could be used as a yardstick for evaluating various narrative effects, and whose discourse as a whole must therefore be read with suspicion. For one, the notion makes it difficult to account for scenes such as [16] and [18], where the interpretive difficulties experienced by Cador and Silence are contested on the diegetic level by the authorial asides that, far from comprising a superficial commentary by a grumpy and incoherent anti-narrator, alternately represent the virtues of informed readership and the pleasures of the more sentimentally indulgent one. Rather than the voice of the narrator, then, the experientialisation of the discourse from these two opposite points of view can be understood as a poet's way of establishing didactic points of contact with his audience, challenging the recipients to reflect on their own relationship to the tale and thereby advancing their capacity for critical reading.

In this procedure, the characters' experiences are relegated to a secondary and subordinate position. Instead of Cador's or Silence's psychology, the focus is on the reader and the process of reception: by making us experience the scenes, almost as if in slow motion, from our own epistemologically privileged or emotionally involved perspectives rather than the characters' limited one, Heldris brings the art of storytelling to the fore. The limited human perspective and the opportunities it provides for irony – the technical novelty that separates the chivalric romance from the previous medieval tradition – supersedes the emotional experiences by Cador and Silence as the poet's object of interest; their experiences are all but pushed out of the picture for the readerly perspective to emerge. A similar effect is created by *interrogatio*: although the rhetorically elicited acknowledgement of the characters' emotional states through the pattern "cuidiés que X" does serve to explain their motivations and consequently the subsequent events of the plot, the principal point of Heldris's rhetorical questions, as I hope to have shown, is nonetheless to make

indirect claims about the audience. In sum, it would seem that *Silence's* experientialising rhetoric uses the characters' emotions as leverage to focus on the reader as the principal experiencer not *in* but *of* the tale. This pattern, pointing to the functionalisation and externalisation of the characters' interiorities, will come out more clearly in the subsequent sections of this chapter. The next section, however, will take a closer look at some other embodied misreadings and their commentarial glosses in a group of scenes where the situation *is* understood by the characters, but understood erroneously.

2.2 Sham Mirrors: The Seneschal's Error and Collective Misreadings

At the age of twelve, Silence experiences an identity crisis that drives him to run away to Brittany with the two touring *jongleurs* (ll. 2497 ff.). As he fails to return home by nightfall from his habitual hunting trip, the seneschal in charge of the child realises that his ward is gone:

[19] Et quant il voit que il demeure
 Plus c'onques mais ne siolt nule eure,
 Set que li menestrel, *ahyi!*
 L'ont de son damoiseil traÿ.
 (RS, 2993–96; emphasis added)

[And when he saw that the youth was staying out later than had been his custom before, he knew that the minstrels, *alas!* had robbed him of his young lord.]

The indirect discourse dispassionately reporting the seneschal's perceptions and thoughts is momentarily interrupted by an emotional “*ahyi!*”, which signals, according to the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, physical or moral suffering (“une douleur physique ou morale”). The exclamation readily offers itself to be read in terms of “narratorial empathy” (cf. Fludernik 2011a; Section 1.1 above) for the character's desperate situation, but it also seems to serve as an “expressive device” conveying the character's distressed point of view at the awful discovery. In her landmark study on representation of speech and thought in narrative fiction, Fludernik (1993, 154–60, 234–35) catalogues an exhaustive number of these devices, which, for her, are by and large the reason for the traditional “dual voice” hypothesis

regarding free indirect discourse (FID), in which the voice of the narrator and that of the character seem to intermingle.⁵⁸

Although in narratological studies this strategy has sometimes been seen as a latecomer to the scene (e.g., Cohn 1978, 112–13), its presence in medieval French narrative has always been acknowledged by medievalists.⁵⁹ Marnette documents the developing shift from direct and indirect discourse preferred in *chansons de geste* towards increasing free indirect discourse in verse romance characteristically preoccupied, more than any other medieval genre, with the characters' inner thoughts (Marnette 1998, 174–84; 2005, 188). It is the particular features of these discourse strategies that form the basis of the different genres (Marnette 2005, 189): whereas the underlying ideology of *chansons de geste* and prose romances envisions a historical and religious truth relying “on clearly identifiable discourses” and thus allowing, “(in principle) only for one point of view, that of the narrative voice, to which the characters' discourses are clearly subordinated” (ibid. 213), verse romances, on the other hand, deal in ambiguity, giving room to the characters' perspective and allowing “for more ambiguities as to what is the point of view of the narrator and that of the characters” (ibid. 188).

This is exactly the classic “dual voice” effect that can also be argued to be at work in Heldris's disruptive “ahyi!”, inasmuch as it imbues the lines with expressive force that seems to evoke the seneschal's own distressed standpoint. It is certainly true that the effect is very short-lived and local, which is one of the reasons why Fludernik in her analysis of *King Horn* and two saints' legends is sceptical about free indirect discourse as a method of rendering consciousness in medieval narrative:

What one can observe here are simply first traces of a technique used extensively in conversational narrative, preponderantly for the representation of utterances . . . *It is hard to see such examples as a deliberate device chosen for a particular effect.* As in conversational narrative, FID passages first arise from more convenient ways of continuing the previous clauses – from a *perhaps inadvertent mixing* of narratorial discourse and the performatively enhanced projection of the protagonists' utterances or thoughts. (Fludernik 2011a, 89; emphases added)

If I understand correctly, Fludernik seems to be suggesting, rather peculiarly to my mind, that the use of FID in medieval narrative counts as some kind of an *accident* caused by the forces naturally at work in oral storytelling. True, Heldris's “ahyi!” may

⁵⁸ The narratological “dual voice hypothesis” is formulated and discussed by Pascal (1977).

⁵⁹ Besides direct, indirect and free indirect discourse, Marnette adds to these three basic categories the less traditional categories “direct discourse with que” and “indirect discourse without que” that are found in medieval French narrative (2005, 182–88).

not give us a nuanced picture of the seneschal's troubled psyche, but this does not necessarily mean it is not at all deliberate, or, again, categorisable merely as narratorial empathy. For what matters here is not only the intensification of the scene's emotional force, but precisely the *discrepancy* between the seneschal's restricted point of view and the fact, known to the audience, that Silence has not been abducted, but left with the *jongleurs* of his own free will to become their apprentice. The seneschal simply *knows* ("Set que . . .") the minstrels are to blame, with no evidence whatsoever to support this conclusion – quite the contrary, he welcomes the *jongleurs* to his household with open arms and spends the evening listening to their performances (ll. 2757–74), which makes his defective conclusion-drawing the next morning especially perplexing for the reader. If Cador fails to see, the seneschal for his part sees all too well, to the extent of reading *too much* into the situation.

The incorporation of subjective language into objective narration may enhance the emotional tone of a scene, but it can also ironically underline the "false notes" struck by the character's mind (Cohn 1978, 117). The false note struck by the seneschal is quickly and effectively generated by the exclamation, with the kind of forward effectiveness that Fludernik ascribes to expressive devices in naturally occurring speech: in oral discourse, she claims, there is a tendency to exaggerate the expression for maximum effect, whereas literary narrative enables a subtler and more precise evocation of another's language and the accompanying personal characteristics (1993, 262). While Heldris's narration may not be designed to capture the precise tone of the psychological workings leading to the seneschal's error, such tones are by no means excluded from it: the *ahyi!* roughly conveying the seneschal's horrified realisation opens up a world of possibilities for the prelector, who could choose to either underline the seneschal's foolishness or settle for a more lenient tone. In this sense, as with the audience's viewpoint discussed in an earlier section, the seneschal's point of view – in other words, his inner experience of the catastrophic situation – is subject to Zumthor's *mouvance*, the fundamental instability of medieval texts (Zumthor 1992, 46–49). According to Zumthor, the term "work" in its modern sense, indicating a stable identity, cannot be applied to medieval narratives: "The 'work' floats, offering not a fixed shape of firm boundaries but a constantly shifting nimbus" that would be modified by each successive "author," including scribes and reciters, whose interpretative choices would send "shock waves" through texts (1992, 46).⁶⁰

The concept of *mouvance* can be applied, as suggested, not only to the works themselves, but to the "minds" and "voices" of medieval characters. This is one

⁶⁰ See also Cerquiglini (1989/1999) on the instability of medieval works.

significant factor separating them from the modern constructions determining the narratological theorisation of fictional minds. The *mouvance* of the mind works directly against what Maria Mäkelä (2011; 2013a) decries as narratology’s “easy-access fallacy,” an inclination to presume that there is a character’s “actual” self – an “inside” – to be found through a dissection of narrative voices and / or real-world processes of mind-reading (Mäkelä 2013a, 162). The oral performance context, where the character’s emotional reaction depends on the prelector’s choice, makes it clear that there is no character essence that the narration would seek to reveal. This goes hand in hand with the “referentiality” (von Contzen 2018) of medieval characters: as reincarnations of previous characters, transcending the boundaries of a singular text, they inhibit closure (ibid. 90). Likewise, the vocality of medieval narrative invites us to see character as a flexible process, the contours of which could be defined *ex tempore* based on contemporaneous feedback during performance. The live audience, in other words, must be considered an active force in the customisation of medieval texts (cf. Coleman 1996, 29), also in the sense of what kind of personality is ascribed to a given character in a particular performance.

Whichever way the prelector of *Silence* chooses to bring the seneschal’s standpoint to life, with sympathy or with irony, one thing is certain: its incorporation into the narrative explicitly draws attention to the seneschal’s error, his lack of good sense and the rashness of his conjectures, and the fact that he draws the wrong conclusion in front of the audience who knows how the events have actually played out. For the seneschal, there is only one true story where the audience sees several. This state of affairs is further underlined in the crowd scenes following the news about the child’s disappearance. The seneschal’s misinterpretation starts a chain reaction of grief, beginning with himself and his own household:

[20] Ki donc veïst larmies espandre,
 Et ces cevials tirer et tandre,
 Tordre ces puins, batter poitrines,
 Plorer ces dames, ces mescines,
 Rontent ces anials de ces mains
 Al tordre qu-il funt, c’est del mains!
 Car li sires et cele dame
 Ki nori l’avoit don’t se pasme.
 (*RS*, 2997–3004)

[Then you could see tears shed and pulling and tearing of hair and wringing of hands and beating of breasts. Ladies and girls wept loudly, they wrenched the rings from off their fingers with the wringing they did; that’s the least of it, for the lord and lady who had raised the youth fainted.]

From the seneschal's household,

[21] Noviele arore et si acort
Et vient moult tost corant a cort
Que perdu est li damoisials
Ki ert si prols, si gens, si bials.
Et quant l'entent li cuens se pere,
Et Eufemie, quist sa mere,
As cuers en ont tel dol, tel ire,
C'on nel vos puet conter ne dire.
Non, certes, la centisme part:
Enaizes que lor cuers ne part.
Moult poi en falt que il ne crievent:
Sovent pasment, sovent relievment,
Et li baron qui les sostienent
De pasmer moult envis s'astienent.
(*RS*, 3009–22)

[The news traveled very fast, and soon the entire court knew of the disappearance of the youth who was so charming, handsome and brave. And when his father, the count, heard the news, and Eufemie, his mother, their hearts were filled with such <pain and anger as cannot be described.> No, not even one-hundredth of it. Their hearts were nearly breaking; they were very close to death. They kept on fainting and being revived, and the nobles who came to their assistance were scarcely able to keep from fainting themselves.]

Eventually, Silence's disappearance is known all over the realm:

[22] Trestols li país plaint Scilence.
Cil ki est de povre abstinence
Ki ne se puet tenir de plor,
Icil ne fait la nul demor.
Loin gen sus d'als s'en vait mucier,
Plorer son dol, plaindre et hucier.
Moult demainnent grant dol, por voir,
De cho qu'il ont perdu lor oir.
(*RS*, 3087–95)

[The entire country mourned Silence. Those who had little self-control and couldn't hold back their tears left quickly. They went to hide themselves far from the parents to moan, to grieve and wail aloud. Truly, they mourned long and deeply because they had lost their young lord.]

In all three scenes, the effects of despair are described in detail: amongst the staff members of the two households and Silence's countrymen, there are episodes of

loud wailing, hair-pulling and breast-beating. Some ladies, we are told, wring their hands with such energy that the rings fly off their fingers, whereas Silence's foster parents and proper parents are said to pass out, the latter pair repeatedly. These are embodied collective expressions of extreme mental strife, yet, as Eva von Contzen (2015) rightly reminds us, the modern reader would do well to resist the desire to read such conventional instances as representatives of "social minds," in the sense that Alan Palmer uses the term. This is because the primary aim of these emotional displays in medieval literature is *not* the representation of the characters' psychology per se, or the depiction of a sustained group consciousness, but rather the establishment of an "evaluative screen," as Frank Brandsma puts it in his important discussion of what he calls "mirror characters" of medieval courtly romance. These mirror characters arguably serve as embodied emotional triggers in the narrative: their purpose is to make the audience react to the described events in a similar way (Brandsma 2006, 275). In the case of *Silence*, however, one is tempted to ask whether the opposite is, in fact, true: instead of emulating the reactions of the grieving crowds, is Heldris's reader not meant to evaluate their behaviour with critical detachment, since it is so clearly at odds with what the audience knows?

A similar point has been made by Carlyne Larrington in her discussion of the different levels of knowledge between characters and audiences in Arthurian literature: since the audience knows that Gawain is alive, lamentations for his presumed death generate an alienating effect of dramatic irony (2015, 138). It is precisely this kind of alienation effect that is produced by *Silence's* scenes of collective mourning. But in addition to the ironic function, they can also be understood as *baits* seeking to turn the disengaged reader into a sentimental one, alluring her to let go of the observed discrepancy and to simply go along with the tide of emotion that sweeps over the country.

This reading is further supported by Silence's speculation about his parents' reaction to his surprise departure: "Que dira donc li cuens tes pere? / Que devenra donques ta mere? / Que diront il quant le savront? (RS, 2853–55; "What will your father the count say? What will happen to your mother? What will they say when they find out?"). These lines seem to function as an "advance notice" (Genette 1972/1980, 73): by conspicuously drawing attention to Cador and Eufemie's future reaction, they encourage the audience to anticipate the said reaction, the description of which some hundred lines later will hopefully be appraised with a critical eye in light of the audience's broader perspective on the events. Thus, despite the fact that Silence's words are charged with psychological drama, they arguably prioritise the didactic impulse over the mimetic one, which holds true also for Cador's disbelief,

the seneschal's distress and the sense of loss experienced by Silence's countrymen. They all become functional tools to mediate not primarily the "what-it's-like properties" of the characters' experiencing consciousnesses, but rather the poet's and the audience's own agency in commenting on and deciphering these experiences from an enlightened standpoint.

On balance, the two emotional highpoints of the romance's plot – Silence's departure and return – are connected by an alienation effect that engenders functionalised minds serving ideological ends – that is, the advancement of informed readership – which explains why the audience is not left to work out the discrepancies on their own (as the modern reader might hope), but is instead provided with what might be called red-flag passages that are sometimes tacit (as the classic "dual voice" effect in the scene with the seneschal) and at other times more explicit. An example of the latter would be the scene depicting the crowds' reaction – again misinformed – to the news that baby Silence is dying, which in fact is a scheme cooked up by Cadour and Eufemie in order to manoeuvre an ignorant chaplain into performing an emergency baptism, without ever checking under the cloth wrapped around the child's hips (ll. 2121–26.):

[23] [P]latolt tresvole la noviele
 Que l'enfes muert: ne lor fu bieles,
 Car il orent bien oí dire
 Que moult l'ot fait bel nostre Sire.
 Por cho si en font gregnor plainte.
 La ot mainte gent de dol tainte.
 Dient qu'il ert et gens et bials;
 Ja s'il fust lais, bochus, mesials,
 Si tost la vie ne rendist.
 Mais cho est bien voirs que l'on dist:
 Li buen, li biel el siecle muerent,
 Li lait, li malvais i demeurent. /
 Es vos por nient gens esmaris.
 L'enfes, qui mal n'ot, est guaris.
 (RS, 2127–40; emphases added)

[The news spread rapidly everywhere that the child was dying. No one was pleased, for they had heard it said that our Lord had made the child very beautiful. That only increased their lamentation. Many people were pale with sorrow; they said that he was graceful and beautiful, and that if he had been ugly, hunchbacked or leprous he wouldn't be dying so young. <It is certainly true what is said:> the good and the beautiful die young in this world; the wicked and ugly remain alive. But here you have people upset for nothing, for the child who wasn't sick was cured.]

Again, the news is said to spread with speed, as if underlining the escalating hysteria; moreover, the statement expressing as a universal fact that the good die young can be attributed to the anxious crowds interpreting the events as non-gainsayable evidence of this generalising maxim (“cho est bien voirs que l’on dist”). But, as the Commentator so scathingly remarks (“Et vos por nient gens esmaris”), their *voirs* is an illusion – a phrase by which Heldris seems to be making sure none of his readers stumble into the trap. Similarly, Cador’s drastic decision to banish all minstrels from his lands on pain of death (ll. 3118–26), based on the seneschal’s account of the child’s disappearance, is critically glossed in the narration, confirming what the audience has, if they have been paying any attention, known all along:

[24] Oï avés, cho est la some,
 Que .m. gens muerent par .i. home:
 Et par .ii. d’als, quant sunt falli,
 Avient que .m. sunt malballi.
 Mais avis m’est, que c’on en die,
 Que cist ne font a blasmer mie
 Qual qu’ait li cuens damage un honte;
 Car nel sevent pas fil a conte.
 (*RS*, 3127–34; emphasis added)

[What you have heard all comes down to this: a thousand people were doomed on account of one man; because of two, whatever they might have done, it happened that a thousand were persecuted. *I don’t care what anyone says; in my opinion, those minstrels were not at all to blame* for whatever loss the count had suffered, because they didn’t know he was the count’s son.]

The “one man” (“.i. home”) can be either Cador or the seneschal, whose *folie à deux* kind of moment leads to the banishment order. The count forces the reluctant seneschal to give a word-for-word truthful rendition of what happened to his son:

[25] Il n’en set preu venir a conte,
 Tant que li cuens a lui le mande.
 Voelle u non, se li conmande
 Que il le verté li descuevre,
 Tolt si com est alee l’uevre,
 Et cil nen oze mot celer.
 (*RS*, 3106–11)

[He was scarcely able to give an account, no matter how much the count asked for one. Whether he wanted to or not, he was ordered to disclose the truth, exactly as it happened, and he didn’t dare omit a word.]

We never get to hear the seneschal's explanation, but trusting the man's word, Count Cadour too simply *knows*, like the seneschal before him, that the minstrels are to blame, and in perfect counterpart to the scene of Silence's return, misreads the child's departure: "Li cuens *set que* li jogleór / Ont pris del mont le mireór" (*RS*, 3115–16, emphasis added; "The count knew that the jongleurs had taken the mirror of the world"). Kocher perceptively writes that Cadour's hasty decision is based on a rigid *either/or* type of thinking that fails to observe situational subtleties – this makes Cadour the very opposite of the French king Ebain, who explores the forged execution order carried by Silence at great length with his wisest courtiers. In Kocher's view, Ebain thus presents a more successful model of interpretation than Cadour or the narrator, who both lack Ebain's sense of "proportion and deliberateness" (Kocher 2002, 356). By contrast, my interpretation of the authorial interventions (representing, for Kocher, the "narrator's" voice) sees them as consciously fluctuating between unsuccessful and productive models of interpretation. By pointing out, more or less explicitly, the discrepancy between what the audience and the characters know, the experientialising commentary shines a critical light on the kind of consensus that leaves no room for doubt and takes things for granted without due deliberation. In the storyworld, such an attitude by Cadour results in human persecution of horrifying dimensions, ranging from expulsion to execution of innocent men ("Il le fera ardoir u pendre", *RS*, 3122; "would be burned or hanged"). Outside the fiction, it is a readerly attitude which corresponds to the form of reception that Heldris in the beginning of his tale purports to demand from his audience: a quiet acceptance of the author's word, a surrender to unequivocal meaning *sans noise faire et estriver*, which, rather than encouraging critical thinking, turns the recipient into a passive receiver of the voice that throughout the romance tells them to listen (e.g., "Oiés mervellose aventure"; *RS*, 2659) (cf. Marnette 1998, 63).

In assuming the readerly position aware of the dramatic irony, Heldris also evokes, at the same time, the Commentator's experience as a translator reacting to the events and emotions he finds written in the fabricated *estorie*. By presenting the *jo* as openly showing dislike for the characters' actions and delivering a differing opinion with ringing confidence (Example [24]: "avis m'est, que c'on en die..."), Heldris poses as a translator who consciously distances himself from his source. I will now move on to explore how this dissociation is played out in the hyperbolic description of the characters' emotional reactions.

2.3 Unreined Hyperbole and the Weary Commentator

The hyperbolic descriptions of the misguided mourners display the traditional fascination with the experiential superlative in romance narration (Kelly 1992, 175). Kelly suggests that the engagement with the absolute as a literary ideal led French romancers to self-consciously play with the idea of ultimate romance which would realise the poet's mental conception of his work in its entirety (the *status archetypus*, as Geoffrey of Vinsauf describes it; *PN*, 47–48) (ibid. 134–44). When viewed from this perspective, such characteristic narrative features as false starts and incomplete digressions, or refusals to elaborate for reasons of limited time and space, become tacit admissions of imperfection betraying “an awareness of the goal of potential perfection” (ibid. 143) in the form of a total narrative that is nonetheless left for the reader to imagine or for another poet to develop.

The traditional “inexpressibility topos” – “the author's assurance that he sets down only a small part of what he has to say” as a way of emphasising his or her inability to tackle the subject (Curtius (1953/2013, 159–60) – can also be understood as such an imaginative prompt towards the ultimate romance. In *Silence's* scenes of collective mourning, the anguished rage felt by Cadour and Eufemie at the loss of their child is conventionally described as being beyond words and the poet's reach –

[26] As cuers en ont tel dol, tel ire,
 C'on nel vos puet conter ne dire.
 Non, certes, la centisme part:
 Enaizes que lor cuers ne part.
 (*RS*, 3015–18)

[<T>heir hearts <are> filled with <such pain and anger as cannot be described.> No, not even one-hundredth of it: their hearts <are> breaking from it.]

[27] Longe est et griés lor pasmisons –
 Plus que nos, certes, ne disons –
 (*RS*, 3049–50)

[<Long and painful is their prostration from grief – Much more so, certainly, than we describe –>]

– with the playful indication being that the heartache and the duration of the parents' lifeless swoon *could* potentially be represented somehow, somewhere, but as it is beyond the human tongue, only a fraction of it is conveyed; in a show of “affected

modesty” (Curtius 1953/2013, 83–85), the poet allows us to see him at the height of his expressive powers, yet still failing to grasp the characters’ unbearable pain in its entirety.

But another interpretation offers itself as well: what if the sum total of Cadour and Eufemie’s grief *is* expressed in the original *estorie* that Heldris purports to be translating? In other words, what if Heldris is inviting his audience to imagine that the whole truth of the matter is documented in pristine form in his fabricated Latin source? In that ultimate romance we can perhaps find every gesture of confusion and every wail of despair, whereas the *conte* that we are currently reading or hearing in French is a mere summary which leaves out much of the detail – and entirely on purpose. If so, Heldris’s strategy would represent an inversion of yet another method of implying perfection through imperfection, that is, the traditional indication of lacunae in the source material (Kelly 1992, 141). There are such lacunae in *Silence*, for instance the Commentator’s admissions that he does not know the number of animals onboard King Ebain’s ship (“Et maint cheval avoec morois, / Et ors et ostoirs et lyons. / Ne sai que plus vos en dions”, *RS*, 232–34; “and many black horses as well, and bears and fowlers and lions, too. I don’t know what else to tell you”) nor the cost of the wedding feast (“Ne sai que conte la despense, / Car plus i ot que nus ne pense (*RS*, 249–52; “I don’t know how much it cost – more than anyone could imagine”). But if Heldris finds such lacunae in his source, he also *creates* them. In other words, I propose to read the inexpressibility topos in [26] and [27] not in terms of admission of incapacity, but as heavily abbreviated paraphrases of the so-called original descriptions contained in the *estorie* from which Heldris *qua* Commentator imagines himself to be translating.

From this standpoint, the inability to do justice to the emotions the poet seeks to convey transforms into the exact opposite of affected modesty, morphing instead into a sober resistance against the source that says too much where it should in fact fall silent. When Cadour finally manages to recognise his son in the reunion scene, the Commentator makes the following remark:

[28] Sor diestre espaule li ensegne
 Une crois qu’il ot a ensegne.
 Ormais le puet li cuens bien croire:
 Donc a baisié son fil en oire.
De joie qui en lui fuïsonne
Li cuens dont tant baisier li done
Que jo en ai perdu le nombre,
Por le grant fuïson qui m’encombe.
 (*RS*, 3649–54; emphasis added)

[<He shows him the birthmark shaped like a cross on his right shoulder.> Now the count <must> believe him; <with haste he kissed his son. *Bursting with joy, the count kisses him so many times that> I lost track of the number, overwhelmed by such profusion.*]

Following Spearing, it could be said that the experience effect in this passage is one that brings into focus the limits of poetic art and “its inevitable failure to correspond precisely to the contours of reality” (2005, 126). However, I would like to propose that, instead of bemoaning his own lack of artistic scope, Heldris the Commentator is rather *putting boundaries to limitlessness*, in a move which once again juxtaposes the sentimental reader with the level-headed interpreter. Perhaps the Commentator fails to count the number of kisses recorded in the *estorie*, because he is so caught up in the moment and emotionally involved in the story – or perhaps he does not even care to count them, frustrated and utterly *encombré* by the exaggeration and therefore settling instead for a crisp paraphrase of the touching moment. Support for this interpretation is to be found in a passage addressing the grief caused by Silence’s presumed abduction:

[29] Segnor, oï avés la plainte.
 De teles funt cascun jor mainte.
 Et si n’est fors joer et rire
 A cho que l’on vos poroit dire;
 Mais ki demainne trop le voire
 As gens, l’en fait sovent mescroire:
 Por cho ne voel jo pas trop dire.
 (RS, 3095–101; emphasis added)

[Lords, now you have heard how they lamented. Every day there were fresh displays of grief. And this is like play and laughter, compared to what I could tell you. *But those who tell people too much of the truth often destroy their credibility, and so I don’t want to say too much.*]

As Heldris the Commentator pointed out at the beginning of his tale (see Example [2]), he might insert some additional lies for the sake of embellishment, but never “put in anything” that would “spoil” the truth of the work (“N’i metrai rien qui m’uvre enpire”). Now he makes good on that promise, literally: *he will not put in anything*, skipping hyperbolic ornamentation in order to retain credibility. The lamentations are indeed inexpressible, but for reasons other than humility; if some were to be added, the Commentator would end up making his narration *less truthful*, in the sense that these embellishments would only duplicate the seneschal’s error,

expanding upon his faulty judgment. Interestingly, it is pointed out in [25] that the seneschal himself does not “dare omit a word” (“Et cil nen oze mot celer”), as a truthful explanation of Silence’s disappearance, pointedly referred to as “l’uevre,” is demanded from him by Count Cadour (“Que il le verté li descuevre, / Tolt si com est alee l’uevre”). The seneschal destroys his credibility and spoils the *uevre*: the more he talks, the more his misjudgement gains ground within the fiction. By pressing pause on the excessive lamentations, Heldris refuses to give any more room for the seneschal’s misreading, suggesting that truth in this case is achieved through omitting and not adding words – through falling silent.

This brings me back to the *estorie* as the ultimate romance: the Commentator’s omitting of words can be interpreted as a refusal to invent, but, more importantly, it can also be interpreted as a refusal to copy out the words that we may pretend can be found in their totality in the original Latin book. It is through this wilful obmutescence, I claim, that Heldris *qua* poet in fact speaks the loudest, for to refuse to go along with the *estorie* is nothing short of an act of resistance against the tradition of which the original tale stands as a symbol. Discussing the romance practice of glossing, Bloch (1986, 91) visualises this fundamental process in terms of a poet’s search for “the text’s points of resistance – the holes or silences that have through time become elusive and obscure.” My reading of *Silence* detects an opposite movement: the desire to fill in gaps in the source is counterbalanced by a desire to *tear* holes where none exist but perhaps should. Through *abbreviatio*, the *conte* – the translation that was supposed to be a faithful translation with some self-depreciatively mendacious ornamentations occasionally thrown in – becomes more truthful than the *estorie*, at the same time allowing Heldris to surreptitiously indicate himself as the true poet in this array of voices, a skilled craftsman carefully following Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s constructive reminder that hyperbole may be a good servant, but is a bad master:

Currat yperbolicus, sed non discurrat inepte
 Sermo: refrenet eum ratio placeatque modestus
 Finis, ut excessum nec mens nec abhorreat auris.
 (PN, 1017–19)

Give hyperbole rein, but see that its discourse does not run ineptly hither and yon. Let reason keep it in check, and its moderate use be a source of pleasure, that neither mind nor ear may shrink from excess. (Nims, transl., 52)

To be sure, Geoffrey’s perspective on restrained hyperbole as a poetic virtue is not all that easily reconciled with the desire for the extreme in romance, where it generally

serves to provoke surprise and amazement as a form of “exaggeration not meant to deceive,” but rather to focus attention through magnification (Kelly 1992, 161–62); thus, hyperbolic description provides a means for topical amplification, whereby even the most outlandish events and actions can obtain narrative verisimilitude, inasmuch as they are shown to be founded on credible human emotions and sentiments (ibid. 147). This, of course, harks back to the notion of *sensus communis* as the basis of the orator’s art. In classical oratory, verisimilitude (or plausibility) was considered one of the three virtues of narration alongside brevity and lucidity (“ut brevis, ut dilucida, ut veri similis sit”, *RH*, I.9.14; “ut brevis, ut aperta, ut probabilis sit”, *De inv.*, I.20.28). Both the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero’s *De inventione* – the two central authorities on rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages – stated that adherence to the norm was paramount to obtaining verisimilitude. This meant that in order to persuade, narration had to observe the requirements of “the usual, the expected, and the natural” (*RH*, I.9.16; “Veri similis narratio erit si ut mos, ut opinio, ut natura postulat dicemus”). In other words, it had to conform to reality in the sense of beliefs and values commonly held by the community:

Probabilis erit narratio, si in ea videbuntur inesse ea, quae solent apparere in veritate; si personarum dignitates servabuntur; si causae factorum exstabunt; si fuisse facultates faciendi videbuntur; si tempus idoneum, si spatii satis, si locus opportunus ad eandem rem, qua de re narrabitur, fuisse ostendetur; si res et ad eorum, qui agent, naturam et ad vulgi morem et ad eorum, qui audient, opinionem accommodabitur. Ac veri quidem similis ex his rationibus esse poterit. (*De inv.*, I.21.29)

The narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life; if the proper qualities of the characters are maintained, if reasons for their actions are plain, if there seems to have been ability to do the deed, if it can be shown that the time was opportune, the space sufficient and the place suitable for the events about to be narrated; if the story fits in with the nature of the actors in it, the habits of the ordinary people and the beliefs of the audience. Verisimilitude can be secured by following these principles. (Hubbell, transl., 61)

Verisimilitude was the most essential aspect of the orator’s art: as Cicero points out, “the very cardinal sin is to depart from the language of everyday life, and the usage approved by the sense of community” (*De orat.*, I.3.12; “in dicendo autem vitium vel maximum sit a vulgari genere orationis, atque a consuetudine communis sensus abhorrere”). In a nutshell, this *communis sensus* consists of all the assumptions and values that the orator can take for granted when addressing an audience (Schaeffer 2004, 278).

In the medieval period, the notion of verisimilitude as conformity to public opinion found new and complementing interpretations, as rhetorical virtuosity moved from persuasive speaking into the realm of eloquent writing. Tracing the processes by which poetics evolved into a practice independent of rhetoric in medieval arts of discourse, Päivi Mehtonen explores in her key study *Old Concepts and New Poetics* (1996) how rhetorical verisimilitude, originally concerned with forensic and public speaking, was transformed into a more “poetologically’ inspired law of verisimilitude” through influence from Horace whose *Ars poetica* was viewed as the authoritative treatise on fictional composition (ibid. 100). In the medieval commentaries on this work, two passages especially were widely circulated: the recommendation that “[f]ictions meant to please should be close to the real” (“*ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris*”; *AP*, 338) and the advice for poets to “[e]ither follow tradition or invent what is self-consistent” (“*Aut famam sequere aut sibi convenientia finge*”; *AP*, 119).⁶¹

From the terminology used in the glosses on the latter passage, Mehtonen concludes that whereas the understanding of the Horatian *fama* associated the “idea of poetological truthfulness” with the existing literary tradition as the source of authority and consensus values, his notion of “*sibi convenientia*” was linked in medieval thinking to the rules of poetic composition entailing “non-contradictory presentation and verisimilitude” (ibid. 104). In the context of poetry, verisimilitude should therefore not be conceived of in terms of factual but rather of poetic realism generated by established methods of narration (ibid. 106). On balance, the truth of poetry thus depended on the authority of tradition and on the poet’s ability to make use of this tradition, of conventions and generic expectations, which in verse romance would pertain to, for instance, such questions as what courtly love should be and how should the related feelings be described (cf. Marnette 2005, 213).

This Horatian decree underlies Heldris’s ambiguous attitude towards hyperbole. As a conventional device, the hyperbolic description of the sorrow caused by Silence’s departure *overpoeticises*, which is, indeed, the basis for obtaining verisimilitude: if judged by the criteria of *fama* and *convenientia*, the depicted emotions are rendered more truthful the more they are homogenised. But, as we have seen, the validity of these descriptions is critically questioned by Heldris in his role as Commentator. Much like Cadour and the seneschal, who either fail to perceive the situation as a whole or fall into the error of one true story, the *estorie*’s treatment fails to take into account nuances of interpretation. It is against this kind of myopia and uncritical reception that Heldris’s experientialising rhetoric sounds a critical voice,

⁶¹ The English translations are by Fairclough (1929).

constantly hinting at the possibility that the *conte* is telling the truth and that it is, in fact, the *estorie* that is the liar.

In Section 4, we shall see how the commentarial additions further suggest that, if the characters' emotions are evaluated according to poetic principles, their veracity might as a matter of fact decrease. But, since the rules have to be mastered in order to successfully break them, I wish to first examine the ways in which these rules are encoded in Heldris's text and the way that it depicts the characters' emotions, and how conventional representation plays into the romance's central concern with questions of readership.

3 Staged Reception III: The Accomplished Romance Reader

Reflecting on the purposes of figurative language, Cicero suggests that it can, in a sense, be viewed as an admission of defeat in the face of the inexpressible:

Nam ut vestis frigoris depellendi causa reperta primo, post adhiberi coepta est ad ornatum etiam corporis et dignitatem, sic verbi translation instituta est inopiae causa, frequentata delectationis. . . . Quod enim declarari vix verbo proprio potest, id translato cum est dictum, illustrat id quod intellegi volumus eius rei quam alieno verbo posuimus similitudo. (*De orat.*, III.38.155)

For just as clothes were first invented to protect us against cold and afterwards began to be used for the sake of adornment and dignity as well, so the metaphorical employment of words was begun because of poverty, but was brought into common use for the sake of entertainment. . . . The explanation is that when something that can scarcely be conveyed by the proper term is expressed metaphorically, the meaning we desire to convey is made clear by the resemblance of the thing that we have expressed by the word that does not belong. (Rackham, transl., 121–23)

In its abstractedness, mental experience likely qualifies as “something that can scarcely be conveyed” in language. The following section (3.1) will discuss two passages from *Silence* which seek to convey the physical and emotional complexity of desire and anguish through metaphorical language. A special feature of these poetic pictures is their *embeddedness within the audience's imagination*, as the narration gives particular attention to *how they are formed in the mind's eye*.

In classical rhetoric, the encouragement of vivid mental images was considered among the most fundamental skills of the orator. Based on the Hellenistic concept of ἐνάργεια (*enargeia*), the Latin rhetoricians referred to this technique as, for example, *evidentia*, *demonstratio* and *sub oculos subiectio*, which all stood for a stylistic use of

language that would appeal to the audience's senses and engage their imagination through detailed description (Zanker 1981; Webb 2009; Plett 2012). The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* gives the following definition: "It is Ocular Demonstration when an event is so described in words that the business seems to be enacted and the subject to pass vividly before our eyes" (*RH*, IV.55.68; "Demonstratio est cum ita verbis res exprimitur ut geri negotium et res ante oculos esse videatur."). Quintilian provides the example of a sacked city – "we shall see the flames pouring from house and temple, and hear the crash of falling roofs and one confused clamour blent of many cries" (*Inst. orat.*, VIII.3.68; "apparebunt effusae per domus ac templa flammae et ruentium tectorum fragor et ex diversis clamoribus unus quidam sonus") –, underlining the pathos involved: "For the mere statement that the town was stormed, while no doubt it embraces all that such a calamity involves, has all the curttness of a dispatch, and fails to penetrate to the emotions of the hearer" (*Inst. orat.*, VIII.3.67; "Sine dubio enim, qui dicit expugnatam esse civitatem, complectitur omnia quaecumque talis fortuna recipit, sed in adfectus minus penetrat brevis hic velut nuntius").⁶² As Quintilian suggests, by expanding upon a plain statement through added detail and description, including metaphors and other figures of speech, the speaker can create an emotionally impressive mental image, transmitting it to the recipients who may then form a kind of a moving painting in their imagination (Webb 2009, 96). In forensic oratory, this turning of the audience into virtual eyewitnesses of the events described by the speaker had obvious value in convincing them (*ibid.* 90), but the importance of vivid description for poetic representations as well was equally acknowledged by the classical rhetors drawing their examples from Homer and Virgil (Zanker 1981, 298–300). Accordingly, the medieval arts of poetry treated *demonstratio* as a means of artistic amplification, echoing the descriptions by the authorities on rhetoric, emphasising vividness and the impression of the object being actually present before the reader's eyes.⁶³ All in all, figurative language provided medieval poets with an efficient means of amplifying their discourse in a manner that would allow them, as Geoffrey of Vinsauf puts it, to travel the wide path of artistic expression ("vel ampla"; *PN*, 206), as if drawing great rivers from tiny springs ("Flumina magna trahunt ortus de fonte pusillo"; *PN*, 693).

⁶² All English translations of the *Institutio oratoria* are by Butler (1920).

⁶³ *PN*, 1276–77: "modo res ita se demonstrat aperte, / Ut quasi sit praesens oculis" ("the subject is revealed so vividly that it seems to be present to the eyes"; Nims, transl., 62). *PP*, 6.388–89: "Demonstratio est quando res exprimitur ut ante oculos videatur" ("Ocular Demonstration uses language to put an object before our very eyes").

As the definitions of *enargeia* and its Latin equivalents indicate, enargetic description is usually associated with concretely observable phenomena rich in sensory detail (such as Quintilian’s destroyed city with its flames and cries).⁶⁴ The following analysis takes an alternate approach, proposing *enargeia* as a conceptual key to Heldris’s treatment of abstract mental events in the two scenes serving as test cases. It will be argued that, while figurative language aids to illustrate the characters’ inner processes, its enargetic framing shows these processes in a blatantly artificial light, thus turning description itself into a meta-device, the sought-for effect of which is emotional alienation rather than engagement.

3.1 The Mind Within the Mind’s Eye

3.1.1 Embers in the Wind: Overstating the Verisimilar

The first of the two scenes analysed in this section deals with Eufemie’s growing emotions for Cadour. Already secretly attracted to one another, the pair are brought into close contact as Cadour pulls off a mind-blowing feat of arms by slaying a dragon, and Eufemie, the most skilled physician in the land, is called to nurse his wounds. Due to her daily visits to the sickbed, the physician falls even more deeply in love with his ailing patient:

[30] De la meschine vus voel dire.
 Esté li ot en liu de mire.
 Sovent rala, sovent revint
 Por veür com li mals li tint.
 S’anchois l’ama, or l’ainme plus,
 Ne mervalt ja de cho nus.
 Vos avés veü bien sovent
 Fus et estoppe avec le vent
 Vient assés tos a esprendre
 Que n’i estuet ja painne rendre.
 Altretels est d’Amor l’orine.
 (RS, 733–43; emphases added)

[Now I want to tell you about the girl who served as his physician. She came and went often to see how the patient was doing. If she loved him before, she

⁶⁴ In the following discussion, the device will, for reasons of fluency and readability, be referred to by the Greek term (“enargetic”), which must be understood as a generic term for vivid description, including the Latin equivalents that were used in the Middle Ages.

loved him more now – *no one should be surprised at this! You've seen so many times before how embers and stubble can catch fire without the slightest effort, where there is wind.*
Such is Love's origin.]

The growth of love witnessed in the *estorie* drives the Commentator-I to craft this mental process into a simile – “a manner of speech that carries over an element of likeness from one thing to a different thing” (*RH*, IV.45.59; “*oratio traducens ad rem quampiam aliquid ex re dispari simile*”) – comparing Eufemie's flaring emotions to smouldering embers erupting into a full-blown blaze through a breath of wind. This image is an additional ornamental element that is not strictly necessary for the narration of the scene – instead of advancing the plot, its significance lies in the way that it engages the audience's imagination by inviting them to visualise the embers in the wind and, by consequence, to perhaps better grasp the intensity of Eufemie's love.

Yet it is noteworthy how this figurative image is effectively rendered redundant: after informing the audience that Eufemie's feelings for Cadour deepened (“*S'anchois l'ama, or l'ainme plus*” – “If she loved him before, she loved him more now”), the Commentator states that there is, in fact, nothing special in such a turn of events – “*Ne mervalt ja de cho nus*” (“no one should be surprised at this”) – that basically, in its regularity, falls outside the scope of narrative interest. As Kelly (1992, 151) points out, romance literature tends to deal in events and emotions worthy of wonder, as indicated by the frequently occurring compound expression *aventure merveilleuse* (a designation that Heldris, too, applies to his *estorie*, e.g., “*Oiés mervellose aventure*”; *RS*, 2689). The *merveilleuse* in romance designates anything unusual and remarkable, whereas the negation *n'est merveille* points to the opposite, to the fact that the object or event under discussion is expected and no cause for astonishment since it has a meaningful place in the world (Kelly 1992, 168). For example, a father mourning the loss of his son is no marvel, because it is entirely expected within the ken of human experience; indeed, it would rather be a marvel if the person responsible for killing the son would be the one feeling grief (*ibid.* 153).

As with the mourning father, the lack of surprise with regard to Eufemie's emotions seems to point to the availability of Eufemie's experience to the common run of humanity: it indicates that as human beings we understand through personal experience that familiarity breeds attraction, and therefore we should not be astonished if a person should fall even more deeply in love through constant exposure to the object of their desire. Whereas this shared experiential sphere that enables understanding existed only at the level of implication in Heldris's use of rhetorical *interrogatio*, here it finds more explicit expression in the line “*Vos avés veü*

bien sovent” (“You’ve seen so many times before”) directly addressing a commonplace experience. Yet Heldris chooses to amplify this *ad hominem* appeal with the simile of the embers, thus creating a kind of chimeric fusion of two opposite modes of expression – usually considered a device of abbreviation precisely because of the normativity it references, the *ad hominem* appeal now allies itself with metaphorical *amplificatio*, in a passage which seems at once resolved to set itself *against* any need for additional embellishment and yet, on the other hand, forcefully draws attention to this rhetorical ornamentation through direct audience address. The structure indicates that the amplification serves other purposes than elucidation here; as Kelly (1992, 169) suggests, emotions and events that are not marvellous but make perfect sense can nonetheless have narrative value in that they may perform certain social functions within a given text.

The form of the simile gives an idea about what this function could be in Heldris’s case. By explicitly evoking an act of perception, the simile effectively enhances its own enargetic visuality, including, as it does, within itself a commentary on its ability to summon up a detailed mental image, as if *ante oculos videatur*. Significantly, it is rather this metaphorical image with which the audience is presumed to be familiar: that is, instead of saying that you, the reader, have personally experienced Eufemie’s state of mind, the poet seems to imply that you have recurringly witnessed the phenomenon used as a vehicle for its expression (“Vos avés veü bien sovent / Fus et estoppe avoec le vent...” – “You’ve seen so many times before how embers and stubble can catch fire...”). This may have happened in real life, to be sure, but even more so, the lines seem to hint at a literary referent. We may recall, for example, the reunion between Medea and Jason in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

Erubuere genae, totoque recanduit ore,
 utque solet ventis alimenta adsumere quaeque
 parva sub inducta latuit scintilla favilla
 crescere et in veteres agitata resurgere vires,
 sic iam lentus amor, iam quem languere putares,
 ut vidit iuvenem, specie praesentis inarsit.
 (VII.78–83)

[H]er cheeks reddened, and a suffusing glow
 spread across her countenance completely,
 as when a spark that has been hidden under
 a crust of ash is nourished by a breeze
 and comes to life again as it’s stirred up,
 regaining all the vigor it once had;
 just so her smoldering love, which you’d have thought
 was almost out, came blazing up anew,

to see the young man standing in her presence . . .
(Ovid 2004, 226)

A self-designated teacher of love, Ovid exerted tremendous influence on the poetic representations of affection and desire in the Middle Ages. The Roman poet's corpus of works became part of the canon of school authors in the middle of the eleventh century, serving, along with other pagan poets such as Horace and Virgil, as a model of Latin grammar and style, but also as a source for moral cogitation. To aid their students in understanding the ancient poets, medieval schoolmasters wrote commentaries on canonical texts. The most authoritative ones on Ovid's works were produced in Orléans in central France near the end of the twelfth century by Arnulf of Orléans, William of Orléans and Fulco of Orléans, and in the mid-thirteenth century the French school commentary tradition was complemented by the widely disseminated, anonymous Vulgate Commentary on the *Metamorphoses* (Coulson 2011, 49). These commentaries were anthologised during the thirteenth century (ibid. 58), yet according to James G. Clark (2011, 12), it was the late twelfth-century manual *De amore*, where the Frenchman Andreas Capellanus lays out thirty-one rules of love for aspiring lovers to observe, that served as a transitory text which "conveyed schoolroom Ovidianism to an extra-mural audience." From Capellanus's manual, as well as Ovid's original Latin texts and their commentaries, chivalric poets, including Heldris, inherited the Ovidian "amatory discourse" (ibid.) that they developed further in their own poetic narratives.

The simile of the dormant flames of love stirring into life as if embers in the wind, found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and also in his satirically didactic manuals *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*, is a stock image of this inherited amatory discourse, present in my other two case studies as well. It embodies a recurring emotional pattern in courtly love. To be close to the fire is to burn, as Heldris and other romancers show: for instance, Chrétien's Alexandre, like "all lovers" ("Mes de toz amanz est costume", *Cligès*, 590), continues to gaze on his beloved, although "the man who draws near the fire burns himself more than he who stands back from it" ("Qui au feu s'aproche et acoste, / Que cil qui arrieres s'an oste", *Cligès*, 597–98). Likewise, Sir Yvain's "wound of Love worsens the nearer its physician" ("Et la plaie d'Amors anpire / Qant ele est plus pres de son mire", *Yvain*, 1375–76). In these lines, the knights' experiences give rise to universalising generalisations about the nature of love; similarly, in Example [30] from *Silence*, Eufemie's flaring emotions are framed with a concluding remark suggesting that her behaviour as a lover conforms to rules

that hold true without exception: “Altreiels est d’Amor l’orine” – “Such is Love’s origin.”

But do they hold true in life or in literature? While it could be argued that Heldris here is simply aligning himself with the didactic amatory discourse of Ovid and Chrétien, laying down the inherited law in a schoolmasterly manner, I nonetheless prefer to think of his figurative and generalising treatment of Eufemie’s love primarily as a *commentary* on that discourse, a commentary which remains highly conscious not only of the tale’s repetitive quality, but also of the audience’s awareness of this literary echolalia. We may presume that the simile of the embers and the entailing maxim about love deepening from exposure to one’s object of affection would have been elements stored in the medieval reader’s “romance memory” – that faculty constituted by long-term exposure to romance conventions. There are several other such elements to be found in *Silence*: one could mention, for instance, the lovers’ lack of courage to express their budding feelings for one another (“Cil l’aime et dire n’oze, / Ainz a s’amor si fort enclose / Que nuz ne l’aperçoit en lui”, *RS*, 405–7; “He loved her and did not dare to say it. He hid his love so deep inside that no one could perceive it in him.”), and the severe insomnia caused by the irony grip of desire (“Quant il parvint a l’anuitier / Adonc estut Cadore luitier, / Vellier la nuit, jaindre, pener, / Qu’Amors le prent a demener, / Fai le fremir, suer, tranbler”, *RS*, 717–21; “Every night, when it grew dark, that’s when Cadore’s struggles began. He was awake all night, suffering, groaning, for Love had seized control of him, made him shiver, sweat and tremble.”). The Commentator’s remark that to him it seems that Eufemie and Cadore are “giving a fine demonstration of courtly love” (“Sans dire font, si com moi sanble, / De fine amor moult bone enseigne”, *RS*, 1094–95) is therefore highly accurate, as the lovers’ emotions and behaviours are *by the book* in more senses than just one: set in a tale purporting to be a word-for-word French translation of the symbolic Latin *estorie*, they recall to mind how the verisimilar in the context of medieval poetics depended on the poets’ mastery of tradition and their ability to fulfil the audience’s genre expectations.

This thinking is not all that dissimilar from Gérard Genette’s definition of a verisimilar narrative (*récit vraisemblable*) in the modern tradition as “a narrative where the actions answer . . . to a body of maxims accepted as true by the public to which the narrative is addressed” (Genette 2001, 242). These maxims include the norms and values of a given culture as well as conventionalised generic rules that basically function to secure narrative intelligibility, yet often in an imperceptible manner precisely because of their self-evident nature. In other words, the social and conventional rules are applied without explanation, because they are “part of the

tacit contract between a work and its public” (ibid.). Such implicit motivation underlies the lovers’ sweating and trembling in *Silence*: these symptoms, perhaps a tad mystifying to the modern reader, do not require an explanation, since they are so thoroughly conventional as to be transparent to the medieval recipient. To put the point in another way, Heldris’s text naturalises itself intertextually: Cador and Eufemie’s emotions become verisimilar, because they conform to a representational standard – in other words, to *fama* and *convenientia* – that guarantees their veracity. Writing about the “programmatically intertextuality” inherent to the medieval idea of poetic creation, Cesare Segre (1997, 391–92) asserts that “[w]orks of fiction quoted in another work of fiction create an effect of reality, but at the same time evoke a reality related to the original fiction: a sort of *trompe l’oeil*, if not of *mise en abyme* of literariness.” Cador and Eufemie certainly become *mis* in this literary *abyme*: this is love as it is learnt from books, and these lovers have appeared in several tales. Accordingly, an intertextually verisimilar emotional landscape implicitly motivates the growth of Eufemie’s love: her state of mind is perhaps unsurprising, because it is relatable on a human scale, but more importantly, it is no marvel because this is what is expected of a courtly lady in a courtly narrative.

The passage under discussion thus seems driven by an impulse, also in the poetic sense, to explain the explained, as it were: although Eufemie’s emotional response to Cador’s presence follows a well-established courtly pattern, it is nevertheless further examined with the help of metaphorical language which in itself, as we have seen, echoes Ovid. In this sense, the strategy can be argued to create a kind of tautological variation of what Genette calls “motivated narratives” (*récit motivé*). In contrast to the implicitly motivated ones, motivated narratives produce an “artificial verisimilitude” by explicitly making visible the general maxims according to which they function. An example of this type is Balzacian narrative punctuated with moralistic evaluations and universalising statements, as well as explanations for the actions of characters, which for Genette is ultimately motivated by a deviation from convention that calls for authorial self-defence; yet while detaching itself from the common opinion, this type of narrative is

at the same time too attached to the consent of opinion to impose upon itself without commentary any actions the reasons for which would then run the danger of escaping it: a narrative still too original (perhaps too “true”) to be transparent to its public, but still too timid, or too compliant, to assume its opacity. Such a narrative ought then to seek to give itself the transparency that it lacks by multiplying its explications, by supplying for every purpose the maxims, unfamiliar to the public, capable of accounting for the actions of its characters and the interconnections of its plot, in short of inventing its own conventions and in simulating in every work and for the needs of its purpose an “artificial

vraisemblance” that would be the theory – this time, and perforce, explicit and declared – of its own practice. (Genette 2001, 243)

A narrative of artificial verisimilitude thus creates its own set of rules: it “naturalises” itself on its own terms, while at the same time insisting on the universality of its explanations (cf. Culler 1975/1988, 144). But, if in Balzacian narrative these naturalising operations seek to justify the narration in the face of what might seem overwhelming freedom from convention, in *Silence* the opposite seems to be the case: the simile, enhanced with the *ad hominem* appeal, functions to overtly *restate that which is already known* to the romance memory of the accomplished reader. Kelly (1992, 249) suggests that, in addition to abbreviatory functions, *ad hominem* appeals provide a tool for constructing a certain type of audience, which is usually an audience of lovers, as in Kelly’s example of Lancelot’s nervousness familiar to “those who have done likewise” (“Vos qui avez fet autretel”). In a similar vein, [30] can be said to construct an audience personally familiar with lovers’ sentiments, but this familiarity is to be understood in a more literary way as familiarity with romance conventions; in sum, Heldris’s *ad hominem* appeal, together with the intertextually loaded simile, seeks to construct an *audience of romance readers*. The fact that the simile of the embers is recycled from previous instances and carries with it echoes of codified literary behaviour establishes the *vos* not merely as members of the same species sharing the same world and the same emotional make-up, but as consumers of tales who have witnessed – “veü bien sovent” – these exact passions and situations play out in countless of other stories besides the present one. Unlike the “old orators” who, according to Quintilian, would preface their enargetic descriptions with statements such as “Imagine that you see” (“Credite vos intueri”; *Inst. orat.*, IX.2.41), Heldris is not asking us to see, but to *recall* that which has already been seen time and again. In other words, his simile triggers the audience’s romance memory and invites them to visualise their own history of romance readership. Once again, *Silence* stages its own act of reception through experientialising discourse: what passes before the audience’s eyes in vivid detail is a metaleptic image of *themselves* reading or listening a tale, with the lack of surprise referring to recurring literary conventions.⁶⁵

Here, then, the “artificial verisimilitude” that Genette saw as a feature of texts that in their originality would risk running contrary to the consent of opinion is not motivated by the need to compensate for a lacking transparency. Quite the contrary, the narrative of *Silence* transforms its conspicuous transparency – its *overstated*

⁶⁵ Metalepsis is here understood in Genette’s sense as the transgression of the boundaries between story and discourse (1972/1980, 234–35). I will return to metalepsis in Chapter II: Section 5.1.

verisimilitude – into a means of discussing the very process that produces this transparency; in other words, Heldris’s simile of the embers shows us verisimilitude as the consequence of a process of accumulating poetic representations in readerly and writerly consciousness.

With this suggestion in mind, one may consider the significance of the passage announcing the onset of the major storyline (see Example [1] in the beginning of this chapter) not only as a traditional reference to authority, but also from the standpoint of collective romance readership (“en latin escrite *lizon*s” – “which *we* read written in Latin”), with the Latin now acquiring connotations of the Ovidian amatory discourse as the basis of romance truth, in addition to the more general association of this language with veracity and prestige. The first-person plural of “lire” (“to read”) resurfaces in a later passage in the context of Queen Eufeme’s unsuccessful attempt to seduce Silence:

[31] Car onques Tristrans por Izelt,
 Ne dame Izeuls por dant Tristan
 N’ot tele angoisse ne ahan
 Com eult Eufeme la roïne
 Por le valet ki ert meschine;
 N’onques Jozeph, ki fu prisons
 Rois Pharaöns, *si le lison*s,
 N’ot tele angoisse ne tel mal
 Par la mollier al seneschal,
 Comme ut icis par la roïne.
 (*RS*, 3700–9; emphasis added)

Tristan never suffered such anguished yearning for Isolde nor Lady Isolde for Lord Tristan as did Queen Eufeme for this young man who was a girl; nor did Joseph, who was imprisoned by King Pharaoh, <*as we read*,> suffer such trials and tribulations at the hands of the captain’s wife as did Silence because of the queen.

The narratorial first-person plural is rare in French verse romance: when it does occur, it usually indicates a shared ideological and cultural understanding (for instance, theological or geographical) that exists between the speaker and the audience (Marnette 1998, 51–53, 57–58).⁶⁶ In the modern context, narratologist Uri Margolin (2000, 613) has likewise pointed out that a certain kind of “we” narration, which he dubs “textbook” narration, uses the grammatical plural to promote a didactic-ideological sense of group identity between the narrator and the

⁶⁶ An example from *Silence* would be “Mais *nostre* sire Jhesu Crist / Le set tres bien” (*RS*, 5688–89, emphasis added; “This is because *our* lord Jesus Christ knows very well . . .”).

extradiegetic narratee. It could be argued that the “textbook” narration in the above passage (as well as Example [1]) puts a particularly literary spin on this group function: in both its occurrences, “lizons”/”lisons” creates an inclusive space uniting the poet and his audience into a collective of readers and listeners familiar with a wide range of tales encompassing romance and biblical narration, with the *estorie*, according to my interpretation, standing as the symbol for them all. Therefore, far from being mere inconsequential asides, the lines referring to the act of reading in the first-person plural carry important social value by subtly suggesting that the audience’s literary competence – their romance memory – is right on par with the poet’s, whose discourse is enabled by and crafted through this collective literary capital, or, indeed, “reciprocal self-consciousness,” in Hanning’s parlance.

Interestingly, if one wishes to carry this line of interpretation even further, it should be noted that Heldris, in Example [1], rhymes *lizons* with *disons*, which visualises not only the listening, but also the act of *telling* as a communal effort (“En romans si le vos *disons*?” – “*we will tell* it to you in French”). No doubt this is in part due to the demands of the octosyllabic metre, but is it not tempting to at least consider the possibility that when Heldris asserts, at the crucial junction of his poem, that *we* will tell the story of Silence, he is in effect positioning his audience as a discursive force alongside himself, imagining the act of composition as a collaborative effort? I will now turn to a passage in which this question of collaboration is addressed through another enargetic simile.

3.1.2 Letters on a Slate: The Reader as Writer

Having finally mustered up the courage to come clean about their feelings for one another, Cador and Eufemie are now said to be “burdened with the fear” (“Tols ont les cols cargiés de soing”; RS, 1162) that the king should go back on his promise and deny them the spouse of their choice:

[32] Car ki bien aime n'est sans dote,
 Ne se puet tenir droite rote,
 Ne cho qu'il set ne puet savoir.
Bone provance en puis avoir:
Escritzies moi ens en le cire
Letres que om bien puisse lire.
Faites le cire dont remetre.
Enne perist donques la lettre?
Oil, par Deu! par le calor.
Nient plus n'a cuers d'amant valor

*De bien retenir s[a] mimorie
 Que cire encontre fu victorie
 De retenir la lettre escrete.
 Qu'angoisse d'amor n'est petite,
 Car cho qu'est voirs cho fait mescroire,
 Et tenir fause coze a voire;
 Et met por poi en esperance.
 Amans est por nient en dotance.
 Or saciés que cil sunt en painne
 Et que griés tormens les demainne,
 Qu'il ont le baisier trovet tel
 Qu'il n'i a trop ne peu de sel.
 Si en sunt moult en grant batalle
 Que al sorplus ne facent falle.
 Dont devisent que il iront
 Al roi, et let bon li diront.
 (RS, 1165–90; emphasis added)*

<For one who loves is not without doubt,> and cannot keep things straight, <and does not know what he knows. *I have a good example of this: Write on a piece of wax some letters that can be easily read. Then make the wax melt. Do not the letters vanish? Yes, by God! because of the heat. No more able is the heart of a lover to retain its memory than a piece of wax is victorious in retaining the written letter.* > Love's anguish is no trifling matter, for that which is true is not believed, while false things are taken to be true. A lover hopes with scant cause, and doubts for very little reason. Now I must tell you they are suffering, and grievous torments are their lot, because they found their kiss so well-seasoned – neither too much nor too little salt. They are in agony for fear of missing the next course. Therefore, they agree to go to the king and tell them of their desire.

Capellanus's rule number twenty, "Amorosus semper est timorosus" ("A man in love is always apprehensive"),⁶⁷ underlies the enargetic description which expands the familiar courtly credo into an arresting simile, with the *comparandum* being the irrational dread caused by the "angoisse d'amor" ("love's anguish") and the *comparans* a wax tablet losing the letters engraved in it due to increased heat. So, if Cador and Eufemie appear somewhat absent-minded and inattentive in the heat of their passion, they cannot help it any more than wax can help melting under flame ("Nient plus n'a cuers d'amant valor . . . *Que cire encontre fu victorie . . .*").

Heldris here resorts to the traditional metaphor familiar from Greek and Latin rhetoricians picturing mind and memory as a wax writing tablet inscribed with notes.⁶⁸ Unlike the four-line simile of the embers, this image is slowly developed

⁶⁷ All English translations of *De amore* are by Parry (1960).

⁶⁸ E.g., RH, III.17.30; *De orat.*, II.88.360. Jager (2000, 2–10) provides an overview of the metaphor's historical development.

over a number of lines, in a manner reminiscent of the so-called epic or Homeric simile. Defined by Theodore F. Brunner (1966), in his work on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as a "long, detailed and extended poetic picture," this type of sustained simile performs several functions (ibid. 354–62).⁶⁹ Most pertinently to the present discussion, Brunner shows that they are often found at emotional highpoints to underline, for example, "intense amatory ardour" and other various passions from excitement to fear; additionally, they can serve to clarify such abstract emotions by borrowing their vehicle from the concrete world. Besides intensifying and clarifying, the extended simile creates suspense by interrupting the action, while it also enlivens the narrative through its ornamental qualities. In these capacities, it rather forcefully, almost distractingly, calls attention to itself as a poetic image that is highly specific and developed by the poet "more or less for its own sake" (Addison 1993, 416), so that one could almost speak of a "mini-narrative drawn from everyday life, embedded into the main narrative" (ibid.). Heldris goes one step further when it comes to this arresting effect: he makes sure to *flag* his intricate simile with a statement that makes it impossible for the audience to overlook its constructed quality: "Bone provance en puis avoir." By thus explicitly framing the comparison as a "good example," the poet forces attention to the figure of speech itself that forks out into two independent lines of narration: one describing Cadour and Eufemie's conventional courtly anxiety, the other evoking an image of letters appearing and disappearing on a wax tablet. As with the simile of the embers, the audience is drawn straight into this picture: directly commanding the recipient in the second-person imperative ("*Escritzjés moi en le cire . . . Faites le cire dont remetre . . .*"), the lines powerfully demand her to recall a set of embodied actions in the actual world (carving letters with a stylus, erasing them with fire) that are, in effect, assigned to the reader herself.

What kind of an impact does it have on the audience to be so forcefully reminded of the tale's artificiality as well as their own reality infiltrating into the fictional world? Analysing the metaphorical image of a horse's hooves crushing stones like a millstone in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, Hanning (1977, 65) suggests that the formulaic *Ez vos* ("Behold") specifically constructs the picture in a manner which requires imaginary participation from the audience, thereby making them "discreetly but

⁶⁹ Fludernik (2011a) discusses extended similes as a medieval mode of consciousness representations under the heading of "virtual direct speech," because her example from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* includes a fictive soliloquy in the source domain. She argues that such complex similes describing characters' emotions already point towards later Elizabethan descriptions of characters' emotions. My analysis of the extended simile instead suggests that it might not have primarily to do with representing the consciousness of the characters at all.

undeniably . . . aware of Chrétien's artfulness in creating and presenting his emblem." Hanning finds specific shock value in such self-consciously artful moments which "by calling our attention to the illusory power of a beautiful but unreal creation . . . reminds the audience that it, too, is being 'tricked' into participating in the imagined world of the poetic artifact" (ibid. 109). Thus the "trickster-poet," as the master and commander of his fictional world, seeks applause for his art rather than involvement in the story (ibid.). This may indeed be part of the effect that Heldris too is trying to achieve, but it should nevertheless be pointed out that the simile of the writing slate does not solely address the readers' role as passive recipients of the poet's fictional creation, but their *collaborative* role in that creation: by projecting an image of the reader as a writer, actively working on a wax tablet with a stylus, Heldris seems to acknowledge her complicity in the creation of the poetic illusion that is his tale, but also, in a sense, the audience's tale.

This is not always the case in Heldris's genre. Marnette's extensive corpus studies show that the second-person pronoun occurs twice less frequently in verse romance than the first-person singular, typically in connection with such verbs as "ouïr" ("to hear", "to listen"), "croire" ("to believe") or "cuider" ("to think"), or phrases such as "ne pas douter" and "ne pas se merveiller," both roughly translating as commands to not doubt or be amazed at the events presented in the narrative (Marnette 1998, 70). According to Marnette, these phrases appear to be pointing to a desire, on the part of the poet, to make the audience *believe* the tale in addition to merely listening to it, which, in turn, ultimately implies the existence of a hierarchical structure of communication at play in the narrative situation:

The first-person narrator was also more prominent, with less importance given to the listeners-readers. What was thus underlined was the composition and recitation of the text by the first-person narrator rather than the perception of the events from the listeners-readers perspective. The audience was required to believe the narrator and to accept his/her choices of narrated events (i.e. shortcuts or lengthy descriptions of specific events rather than the others). In short, the narrator did not describe himself/herself only as a good teller of pre-existing stories (as in *chansons de geste*) but rather as an excellent composer and the master of his/her tale . . . (Marnette 2005, 205)

The truth is decidedly the poet's vision, articulated by the almighty and omnipresent first-person voice ("la position à la fois toute puissante et centrale du narrateur") to the audience occupying a subjugated position ("la position plutôt secondaire") at the receiving end of the tale (Marnette 1998, 74). The tendency can be observed, for example, in Chrétien who, as Norris J. Lacy (1980, 36) writes, overbearingly commands us to read as he wants us to, and his use of the first-person pronoun

seems to forcibly separate him from “poetic collectivity” (ibid. 128). In a scene from *Cligès*, Chrétien addresses his audience in a didactic voice that teaches its lessons from above and brooks no resistance from the recipient:

Vos qui d'Amors vos feites sage,
Et les costumes et l'usage
De sa cort maintenez a foi,
N'onques ne faussastes sa loi,
Que qu'il vos an doie cheoir,
Dites se l'en puet nes veoir
Rien qui por Amor abelisse,
Que l'en n'an tressaille ou palisse.
Ja de ce contre moi n'iert nus,
Que je ne l'en rande confus.
Car qui n'en palist et tressaut,
Et sans mmoires li faut;
En larrecin porchace et quiert
Ce que par droit ne li afiert.
(*Cligès*, 3819–32)

[You who are learning about Love, who faithfully observe the customs and practices of his court, who have never broken his law regardless of the consequences, tell if you can see any pleasure from Love that does not cause trembling or paleness. I shall never fail to throw into confusion anyone disagreeing with me. Anyone who does not tremble and turn pale, who is not bereft of wit and memory, seeks and pursues, like a thief, what is not his by right.] (Staines, transl., 134)

The audience's point of view is evoked only to subsume it into the authorial voice stating that any contradictions will be promptly refuted (“Ja de ce contre moi n'iert nus / Que je ne l'en rande confus”). Heldris's enargetic similes seem to exhibit an opposite tendency, resonating interestingly with his employment of the pair *lizons/disons* in the key scene in Example [1]. In Marnette's view (1998, 57–58), the scarcity of the first-person plural in references to the act of narrating in verse romance is explained by the threat this grammatical form poses to lines of demarcation: the *nos* would tend to place the storytelling participants on more equal footing and thereby reduce the impression of the *je*-narrator as the sole commander of his tale. By contrast, the effacement of narratorial presence was entirely desirable in contemporary chronicles where the verbs referring to the act of narration occur frequently in the plural form, such as in Geoffrey of Villehardouin's thirteenth-century *De la Conquête de Constantinople*: “Or vos *lairons* de cels et *dïrons* des pelerins” (“Now we will leave them and we will speak about the pilgrims”). Together with the

absence of references to the first-person narrator, the plural in the chronicles serves, according to Marnette, to “camouflage” individual agency, thus facilitating the impression that what is being conveyed is an “impersonal, single, immanent truth” of religious and historical authority far removed from the writer’s personal concerns and fancies (Marnette 2006, 119; 1998, 53–54).

If read as this kind of camouflaging move, the *disons* in *Silence* shows that the disguising first-person plural can be made to serve not only the transmission of an impersonal religious truth divorced from human involvement, but also of a poetic truth that has become similarly impersonal in the sense of being sanctified by convention. An authoritative discourse, in other words, is created not through a singular voice attributable to any authorial figure envisioned as a poet-narrator, but through a collective romance memory literally evoked in *lizons / disons* and figuratively recalled in the enaretic similes. It is our imaginative collaboration, engendered by the direct address, that calls forth Cador and Eufemie’s emotional turmoil, while at the same time exposing its (shocking) literariness. The strategy thus exploits to the fullest the specific character of the simile as a device that partly derives its aesthetics from coming apart at the seams, as it were, and from making things obvious: as a form of overt comparison (*collatio aperta*), the simile reveals its points of juncture (“nodum juncturae”) through words such as *more*, *less* and *equally* (PN, 246). By contrast, the metaphor (“hidden comparison,” *collatio occulta*) connects the elements “as if the hand of nature had joined them rather than the hand of art (Nims, transl., 25; “quasi non manus artis / Junxerit, immo manus naturae”, PN, 261–62) and in its imperceptibility is deemed more elegant of the two.

I believe it is no coincidence that Heldris’s choice between *collatio occulta* and *collatio aperta* falls on the one that flaunts its own artificiality and especially so when inflated into an extended form, allowing him to reveal the mechanics of his smoothly running compositional clock. In a word, by openly framing his simile as a *bone provance* that underlines the role of the audience in the construction of the illusion, Heldris creates an enaretic mini-narrative about *the poet, the reader and the intertwined processes of poetic creation and interpretation*, in which every juncture is deliberately allowed to show. I will now move on to consider the consequences of this process for its presumed principal actors, Cador and Eufemie.

3.1.3 A Well-Seasoned Kiss: Perspectival Dislocations

In addition to the writing slate, Example [32] seeks to convey the lovers’ mental turmoil through culinary similes: it is said that the two are now “in agony for fear of

missing the next course” (“Si en sunt moult en grant bataille / Que al surplus ne facent falle”; *RS*, 1187–88), because there was “neither too much nor too little salt” in their first kiss (“Qu’il ont le baisier trovet tel / Qu’il n’i a trop ne peu de sel”; *RS*, 1185–86). This kiss – certainly “not a comradely kiss of mother to son, of son to father” (“Car n’est pas baisier de conpere, / De mere a fil, de fil a pere”; *RS*, 1099–100) and offering the couple a tantalising foretaste of the marital pleasures that might be available should the king grant them their wish – has been more thoroughly described in a previous passage:

[33] Bon keu ot al mangier saler:
 N’i ot ne peu ne trop de sel,
 Ne ne savore point de mel.
 Car si l’amer lor savorast,
 Ja nus d’als tant ne demorast.
 Tant com li savors est plus dulce
 Del baisier ki lor cuer atolce,
 Tant croist lor amors plus adés.
 (*RS*, 1112–19)

[A good chef has seasoned the dish; there wasn’t too much or too little salt, nor did it taste bad to them at all, for if it had tasted bitter to either of them, they wouldn’t have stayed at table so long. Just as the savour of the kiss that touched their hearts grew sweeter, just so their love grew after that.]

Again, in a masterful display of rhetorical *amplificatio*, the physical sensations as well as the emotions kindled in the pair by the kiss are expressed entirely in figurative terms. From first likening the kiss itself to a tasty dish seasoned by a skilled chef, the lines move on to develop this image by openly comparing the pair’s deepening desire to appetite coming with eating: their love grows *just like* the taste of the dish grows sweeter every moment (“*Tant com li savors est plus dulce . . . Tant croist lor amors . . .*”). But is it only the *amors* of the courtly couple that is on the increase, and is their kiss the only dish that is being described in these lines? There is an interesting parallel between Heldris’s figurative take on the lovers’ desire and Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s depiction of the effects of apostrophe as a means of amplified narration:

Delecteris ea, sine qua satis esset abundans
 Coena, sed egregiae sic crescunt fercula mensae.
 Pompa dapum veniens numerosior et mora mensae
 Tardior est signum sollemne. Diutius aures
 Pascimus ex variis et ditius, hic cibus auri
 Quando venit sapidus et odorifer et pretiosus.
 (*PN*, 266–71)

Take delight in apostrophe; without it the feast would be ample enough, but with it the courses of an excellent cuisine are multiplied. The splendour of dishes arriving in rich profusion and the leisured delay at the table are festive signs. With a variety of courses we feed the ear for a longer time and more lavishly. Here is food indeed for the ear when it arrives delicious and fragrant and costly. (Nims, transl., 25–26)

A poet is implicitly compared here to a cook preparing an array of delicious dishes that are the various rhetorical ornamentations; in a figurative sense, the poem thus becomes a banquet and the reader an eater.⁷⁰ With this passage in mind, it might therefore be suggested that Heldris’s gustatory imagery participates in the creation of the other tale underlying the primary one, the tale of the poet and the reader that the similes of the embers and the writing slate were also seen to reinforce. It is Heldris himself who is the “bon keu” of words, cooking up poetic images that he believes will taste sweet to his audience and win their approval:

[34] *Bone sanblance en puis mostrer:*
 Ki faim a don’t n’oze goster
 De cel mangier qu’il tient as mainz,
 De tant l’agoisse plus li fainz.
 El baisier don’t ont lor voloir
 Gist moult de cho quis fait doloir,
 Ki les tormente, et qui les paine.
 (RS, 1125–31; emphasis added)

[I can give you a good analogy for this: he who is hungry and dares not taste of the food he has in his hands is all the more tormented by hunger. From the kiss they both desired comes much of their sorrow, their torment and their pain.]

Expanding upon the analogy between hunger and sexual desire, the lines equate Eufemie and Cadore’s “sorrow . . . their torment and their pain” (“cho quis fait doloir, / Ki les tormente, et qui les paine”) caused by the necessary abstinence to the distress of a hungry man at the sight of forbidden food. The flagging device is again in operation in the first line: the explicit framing of the comparison as a *bone sanblance* not only forces attention to the poetic picture itself, but also to the poet’s skill in drawing that picture according to the recommendations put forward in poetic treatises. Classical rhetoric saw clarity as a signal of competence, and for Geoffrey, too, it is lucidity which guarantees the success of a trope:

⁷⁰ On alimentary metaphors in medieval narrative, see Curtius (1953/2013, 134–36), and reading as digestion, Carruthers (1990/2008, 207–9).

Quae clausum reserent animum sunt verba reperta
Ut quaedam claves animi: qui vult aperire
Rem clausam, nolit verbis inducere nubem;
Si tamen induxit, facta est injuria verbis:
Fecit enim de clave seram. Sis claviger ergo,
Remque tuis verbis aperi.
(PN, 1069–74)

Words are instruments to unlock the closed mind; they are keys, as it were, of the mind. One who seeks to open what is closed does not set out to draw a cloud over his words. If indeed he has done so, he has done an injury to the words, for he has made a lock out of a key. Be the bearer of a key, then; open up the subject readily by your words . . . (Nims, transl., 54–55)

Because poets should always consider the audience's capacities instead of their own (PN, 1080–85), their use of metaphors should favour easy intelligibility and clarity of expression over obscure bombast (PN, 834–47). These are certainly characteristics of Heldris's modest image of the hungry man hankering after food – we might say that in its lucidity the simile tastes as pleasant to the audience as the passionate kiss to Cadour and Eufemie. The pleasure of the kiss is the pleasure of the tale: the figurative narration of the characters' loving bliss becomes intertwined with the narration of poetic bliss, with the implication perhaps being that, like the courtly couple's love for one another, the audience's appreciation of the poet increases the more skilfully and lavishly he serves them his rhetorical dishes.

To recapitulate the discussion presented here and in the two previous sections, Heldris's enigmatic similes – the embers in the wind, the writing on the slate and the chef's delicacies – all invite the audience to visualise a series of images that are ostensibly meant to convey the characters' abstract mental states, but which on a closer examination seem also to tell the tale of romance memory as well as the reciprocal act of imagination in which poets and audiences are engaged in composing and deciphering a given narrative. This leads to a fundamental question of which tale is, in fact, the primary one – the characters' or the readers'? Whose viewpoint is the dominant one?

In her discussion of Middle English saints' lives, Fludernik argues that medieval hagiographic narratives differ from novelistic narration in their penchant towards "erased central experientiality" (1996, 73). In practice, this means that these narratives substitute the saint's private experience for the audience's external one: "The saint provides a *spectacle* for the audience, an exterior without psychological interiority, and this scenario corresponds to, and is constituted by, a *spectator's* point

of view” (ibid.; emphases original) that is frequently encoded in the narrative by means of a set of witnesses representing a model reaction to miracles (ibid. 73). The strategy therefore has didactic and exemplary aims. As Eva von Contzen (2015, 149) further argues, it conceives of reading as social action that collectivises the hero’s singular experience by turning it into an exemplary experience to be incorporated into the audience’s memory. For this reason, von Contzen suggests, “[i]n the medieval period . . . experience and experientiality are transferred, beyond the text, to the audience” (ibid.).

A similar kind of dislocation, I suggest, can also be observed in the enargetic treatment of the characters’ experience of love in *Silence*. Webb (2009, 97) comments on the threefold structure of *enargeia* when it is employed to convey a character’s perceptions: the poet’s mental image, accessed through the text, is also a representation of the character’s mental image; thus, the description of Orestes’s hallucinations and Antores’s dying vision of Argos can be said to consist of “a chain of images” that allows the reader to simultaneously admire the poet’s skill and to share in the character’s experience. Webb thus seems to be of the opinion that enargetic descriptions involving the characters’ inner processes can serve to bridge the gap between audience and character in a way that inspires empathy and understanding. But as for Heldris’s similes of the embers and the writing slate, is it not rather the case that these figurative images in fact *widen* that gap, allowing, as it were, the two lovers to drown in the “great rivers” (“flumina magna”, PN, 693) of amplification called forth by the inflated, audience-driven similes? As the *what* of Cador and Eufemie’s emotional inner state is virtually replaced with *how* their desires and fears are conditioned and generated by the poet’s and the audience’s collective romance memory, one may argue that the tale is *not at all* about the characters’ experience of being in love – it is, rather, about the construction of those feelings through language in a shared act of imagination between poet and audience, who are thus positioned as the main actors in the poetic discourse. In this sense, by relocating narrative experientiality from character to audience – *beyond* the text, in von Contzen’s phrasing – Heldris’s figurative narration seems to work, quite discordantly, *against* what we may feel should by rights be its principal object of representation.

This observation resonates with those of Mary Ellen Ryder and Linda Marie Zarr (2008), whose stylistic analysis of *Silence* reveals a systematic reduction of the protagonist’s agency through certain narrative choices. Focusing on Heldris’s use of acceleration and deceleration, they claim that the narrative grants more descriptive space to situations where Silence takes little initiative or is simply reduced to the

status of a mere object, such as his attempted seduction by Eufeme and his creation by Nature. By stretching the narration of these events over a considerable number of lines, Heldris compels his audience to spend “more time experiencing a Silence who is acted upon by others than a Silence who initiates action” (ibid. 25). So, on the contrary, whenever Silence *is* active in the masculine roles of knight and minstrel, his agency is subverted by generic expressions blurring the specifics and accelerating the flow of events to such an extent as to make it impossible for the reader to clearly visualise them; this, in turn, dramatically diminishes the audience’s perception of the character as a powerful agent in his own right (ibid. 28–29).

My analysis of the three similes suggests that the programmatic reduction of agency in *Silence*, as argued for by Ryder and Zaerr, is not limited only to the protagonist and the description of physical actions. It suggests, in other words, that the figurative language used in [30], [32], [33] and [34] should be understood as a specific method of deceleration that has the same “muted impact” (ibid. 29) on the audience that Ryder and Zaerr ascribe to accelerations. Contrary, though, to generic expressions and the other methods of acceleration, Heldris’s extended similes trigger the distancing effect through opposite means, by indeed allowing the reader to develop a detailed visualisation of the told. But herein precisely lies the similes’ agency-reducing mechanism: they inflate the narration in such a way that it becomes *too detailed from the “wrong” point of view* – the audience’s own. This strategy involves a shift of perspective also in the sense that it promotes figurative language from an ancillary to a primary role. For when the *comparans* is developed in such detail that the *comparandum* is all but superseded by the vehicle used for its illustration – or, to follow Geoffrey, by the verbal key that unlocks the mind – the *end turns into the means*: rather than conveying experiences that the poet cannot really get his hands on, Heldris’s similes give us *hands-on experiences* that become crutches for an exploration of the craft itself. It bears repeating that figurative language is not primarily employed here to aid readers to visualise through mental simulation what it is like for the courtly pair to be in love, but, again, to make them forcefully aware of their own process of poetic interpretation and of the engendering of the verisimilar in romance memory.

Thus further playing into the tale’s self-conscious linguistic concern with the impossibility of correct naming (cf. Bloch 1986), Heldris’s *enargeia* of the mind shows us that we should not think of the embers and the writing slate as simply compensatory acts by which the impotent poet desperately seeks to capture that which escapes language, but rather as a way of readily admitting and even celebrating this ineffability (“poverty,” as Cicero puts it) that produces its own kind of truth

through habit and convention. Like the saints in Fludernik's corpus, Cador and Eufemie become spectacles for the audience, but spectacles of a decidedly artificial kind. If there is a certain kind of pedagogy involved in this, it is quite the opposite to the exemplary function propagated by saints' lives: instead of encouraging imitation, the perspectival dislocation, as it is realised in the similes, reminds the readers *to keep their distance*. What the poet presents is, quite literally, a collaborative *mind-making process* between himself and his audience that consequently turns the representations of the characters' inner states into glosses of their own conventional nature. Next, we shall see how this happens *literally* in Heldris's tale.

3.2 The Count of Chester and the Textualised Body

As has become clear by now, the romance of *Silence* constructs at least two readerly positions that tend to stand in opposition to one another: counterbalancing the emotionally overstrung and less perceptive *prima vista* reader, there is the competent and critical romance reader who knows the (t)ropes and is altogether well-versed in romance aesthetics. In Section 2 of this chapter, I discussed Count Cador and the seneschal as embodied representatives of the first category. Now, it is time to consider how skilled readership is likewise personified in the tale.

All atremble from their new-found love and palatable kisses, Eufemie and Cador fail to notice a man approaching from the shadows. This man is the Count of Chester, who, observing the couple "talking and taking counsel privately and whispering" ("Voit les parler et consellier / Priveement et orellier"; *RS*, 1391–92) forthwith arrives at the correct conclusion:

[35] Li cuens de Cestre est moult voiseous:
 Ainc nen oïstes mains noiseus.
 Voit les cluignier et lor esgart:
 Dés r n'a il mais nul regart
 Qu'il n'ait trestolt lor vol seü.
 Fait quanses qu'il ne l'ait veü.
 Estosse. "Eheul!" fait il, qu'il voient,
 Car cortois est, si violt qu'il l'oient:
 Ne violt d'als faire pas lonc conte
 Si sutilment qu'en n'ainte honte,
 Qu'il ert en amor associés,
 Si ot esté moult asociés.
 Set bien qu'en amor a vergoigne.
 (*RS*, 1399–411)

[The count of Chester was very prudent; you never heard of anyone less rash. He saw their lowered eyes, their looks: he didn't need a second glance, he saw at once what they wanted, but he acted as if he hadn't noticed. He coughed. "Ahem," he said, so they would see him, for he was courteous, he wanted them to hear him. He didn't want to observe them for a long time unobserved, so that they would feel ashamed, for he knew much about love; he had had much experience with love. He knew very well that lovers are easily shamed.]

This is a kind of textbook example of the "Accessibility argument" (Herman 2011, 15–18) around which the cognitivist narratological perspective on fictional minds revolves. As we recall, this "externalist perspective," as Palmer (2010, 39–40) calls it, works from the post-Cartesian assumption that thought is social and publicly available, in fiction as well as the real world: "In any communicative encounter, I can experience another's I-originaryity by engaging with the propositional content of that person's utterances as well as his or her facial expressions, bodily orientation, gestures, and so forth – and also with the way our encounter is situated within a broader material and social context" (Herman 2011, 11). Since literature tends to deal with representations of human beings, narratives frequently show us characters speculating on each other's motivations and inner thoughts, like the count of Chester does in successfully drawing conclusions from Cadour and Eufemie's "lowered eyes, their looks" ("les cluignier et lor esgart"). There could be a scientific basis for the Count's observations. As mentioned in the Introduction, the medieval understanding of the self was informed by the pre-Cartesian connection between mind and body, and Hippocrate's theory of four humours, prevalent in the period, facilitated an understanding of emotion as consisting "of affective and cognitive elements, written on the body and felt on the mind" (Saunders 2015, 36). This understanding, Saunders suggests, also underlies the writing of inner psychology, especially love-sickness, on the body in courtly romance (*ibid.*). The fact that courtly lovers' inner turmoil is characteristically displayed in gestures and inscribed on the body (as witnessed by Cadour and Eufemie's flustered looks) can also have comic potential. For instance, in Chrétien's *Cligès*, Queen Guinevere frequently sees Alexander and Soredamor "changing color and turning pale" ("Descolorer et anpalir"; l. 541), but mistakes this for seasickness. Capellanus's *De amore* indeed teaches us that such colourings and discolourings are an essential part of a courtly lover's mind-body continuum,⁷¹ and are also observed by Heldris's count, as the narration takes what can only be described as a tongue-in-cheek turn:

⁷¹ "Omnis consuevit amans in coamantis aspectu pallescere" ("Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved"; Parry, transl, 185).

[36] Cador l'entent, de li s'eslogne.
 Muent andoi moult tost color
 Com cil qui ont al cuer dolor.
 Cho que viermel fu en la face
 Devint assés plus pers que glace.
 Le pers remue en color blanche
 Plus que n'est nois desor la brance:
 Et quell verté que on roioigne,
 Por cho qu'il ont si grant vergogne,
 Si vient del blanc colors vermelle.
 Et jo si ai moult grant merveille
 S'ainc fu en terre tainturieres,
 S'il onques fu nus painturieres,
 Ki seüst si tost un drap taindre,
 Ki peüst tant tost un fust paindre /
 Tantes colors en si poi d'eure
 Com li vrgoigne a fait ambeure,
 Primes vermel, puis piers, puis blanc;
 Et sunt puis plus vermel de sanc.
 Or sachiés que sans grant dolor
 N'ont pas mué si tost color.
 (RS, 1412–32)

[Cador heard him [the Count of Chester] and moved away from her [Eufemie]. They both changed color rapidly, like those whose hearts are filled with sorrow. He whose face was crimson became much bluer than ice. The blue changed to a white whiter than snow upon the branch. However one tunsures the truth, they were so embarrassed that from white they turned to crimson again. And I would be very surprised if there were dyers in the land or if there were painters who could dye cloth so quickly or paint a beam so speedily with so many colors in so short a time as shame has done with the two of them, first red, then blue, then white, and then more red than blood. You should know that without great suffering they wouldn't have changed color so fast.]

The temperately “realist” frame is turned on its head, replaced by an outrageously hyperbolic description of the range of colours flooding the lovers’ faces. Emotion is not merely written on the body – it is basically *overstated* there, pointing to the extreme artificiality of the signs that the count of Chester reads, subsequently following this peculiar display with a dry remark “You certainly don’t need my advice” (“Ciertes, mes consals ne vus falt”; RS, 1434). While there may be a scientific base for the lovers’ physical reaction, Heldris’s treatment of these externalised emotions nonetheless makes their conventional nature exceptionally clear.

Eric Jager suggests that medieval culture envisioned inward experience “in terms of the manuscript codex and the related tropes of reading, writing, erasure, and

interpretation” (2000, xiv). Besides the classical wax tablet metaphor discussed above, a popular image put forth in troubadour lyric was a lover’s heart inscribed with an image of the beloved, which from the early thirteenth century onwards began to transform into a print of the beloved’s name, with the heart also carrying a written transcript of the lover’s thoughts and feelings at times compared to a book (ibid. 69–71). This popular self-as-text metaphor, I think, underlies Heldris’s exaggerated passage: the romance bodies of Cadour and Eufemie are literally texts deciphered by the Count of Chester who, unlike Queen Guinevere in *Cligès*, is shown to be an apt interpreter of these conventional signs. In fact, it is stated that the count has been on to the couple for a long time – “Jo m’en sui bien aperceüs, / Encor m’en soie jo teüs” (RS, 1443–44; “I’ve seen it quite clearly all along, but I have kept it quiet until now”) – and his discernment is explained in Example [35] by personal experience: “Qu’il ert en amor associés, / Si ot esté moult asociés . . .” (“for he knew much about love; he had had much experience with love . . .”). More than just temporary perception, the count’s observations thus seems to stem from a long-term involvement in the matters of the heart, an involvement which might alternatively be understood as literary expertise characteristic of accomplished romance readership; it could be said that he emerges as a self-reflective image of the reader who has mastered the romance conventions and deposited them in his romance memory. Thus, the “narrative indexes of interiority” (Fludernik 2011a) decoded by the count may be indicative of emotional disturbance, but more than that, they are indexes of standard romance emotion, with the entire scene strongly implying that expressions of emotion in medieval narrative are, at least in part, driven by aesthetic rather than psychological motivations.⁷²

Example [36] makes full use of this expectedness stemming from exposure, and together with the en energetic mind discussed in the previous section, it goes to illustrate that with medieval minds we do not get far enough if we choose to exclusively rely on the “Accessibility” and “Mediacy” arguments when interpreting them, and if we continue to insist with Palmer that the reader uses existing knowledge of *actual* minds to process fictional mind presentations (2010, 11). Even though medieval characters, like contemporary ones, do in certain ways resemble real people in action and thought, we often need our *literary* rather than folk-psychological abilities in decoding

⁷² This point about preference for aesthetics is also made by Sif Rikhardsdottir, who speculates most interestingly on the presence of identical gestures, such as tearing out of hair or beating one’s breast, in romances of different language areas: as courtly romances were translated from one language into another, we may expect that “such ritualised (and possibly generic) sequences of emotional behaviour may have been transmitted along with the material to its new audience and established new conventions for the literary depiction of emotion” (2015, 174).

their outward behaviour and determining its interpretative significance. So, even if the count's social sensitivity – his “Ahem!” arising from not wanting “to observe them for a long time unobserved” – may be interpreted as revealing something of the count as a human being, and even if Eufemie and Cadour can probably be said to be startled and embarrassed by the sudden interruption, the primary object of the passage is, I think, not to deep explore the characters' psyche, but rather the reciprocal literary process behind these psyches that only at a much later date become the crucial point of novelistic interest – again, stories indeed seem to come before consciousness, at least when the consciousness in question is that of the characters. But considering how these scenes engage the *audience's* romance memory in a self-reflective and reciprocal play of readership, one might perhaps wish to slightly modify Spearing's consequential dictum, for the present purposes, in the following manner: the stories *are* the consciousness. As in saints' lives, Chester's response models an ideal reaction not to miracles, but to the more mundane mode of romance narration: the trio becomes a spectacle showing us a skilled reader reading the book of love encoded on the lovers' bodies.

On balance, Heldris's similes as well as his hyperbolic treatment of conventionalised outward signs reveals, once again, the mechanism of verisimilitude. In employing these strategies that arguably make us acutely aware of the characters' emotions as specifically discursive constructions, as artefacts that the poet imagines into being together with his audience, the narration generates the impression of Eufemie and Cadour themselves sliding out of focus. This impression may be somewhat disturbing to the modern reader whom the consciousness novel, with its “realism of perception and subjectivity” (Fludernik 2001, 625) and a mission to reveal “the hidden depths of the individual psyche” (Cohn 1978, 56), has arguably trained to expect an “authentic” view into literary characters' inner experience. Owing to the fact that narratology has derived its models principally from post-seventeenth century literature, it is not only the reader who is haunted by this spectre of authenticity, but also narrative theory. In the area of speech and thought representation, this bias seems to have translated into a set preference for the “showing” over the “telling” mode of narration: contrary to the “showing” modes of direct and free indirect discourse, which seem to present characters' speech and thought in an unadulterated form, the “telling” mode of indirect discourse tends to be seen “as a linguistically and ideologically distortive medium” impeding access into characters' experience (Fludernik 1993, 459).

This distrust of narratorial interference coincides with the rise of the so-called reflectorial narrative at the end of the nineteenth century, which, as literary theorist

Franz Karl Stanzel (1984, 4–5) famously puts it, replaces the overt mediacy (*Mittelbarkeit*) of authorial narration with “the illusion of immediacy” taking the reader directly into the perspective of a “reflector-character,” whose consciousness thereby becomes the medium through which the fictional reality is perceived. Genette, though underlining the impression of the narrator’s absence as mere illusion, has no qualms to designate this historical process in evaluative terms; for him, “one of the main paths of *emancipation* of the modern novel has consisted of pushing this mimesis of speech to its extreme, or rather to its limit, obliterating the last traces of the narrating instance and giving the floor to the character right away” (Genette 1972/1980, 173; emphasis added).

From the historical point of view, Genette’s statement characterising the development of fictional consciousness representation as an emancipatory narrative is rather questionable, and the situation becomes even more problematic if “the quasi-mimetic evocation of ‘real-life experience’” (Fludernik 1996, 12) is used as a yardstick for measuring narrativity itself. Under such conditions, Fludernik is able to nominate the English writer Aphra Behn (1640–1689) as “the first real novelist” (ibid. 37) and view the modernist consciousness novel as “the climax of a technical achievement” that is “truer to life than the realist and naturalist novel could ever hope to be: truer, that is, to the very experientiality of people’s subjective involvement with their environment” (ibid. 170). What Fludernik seems to suggest here is that it is only when the “experiencing” frame (“figural” or “reflectorial” narration in Stanzel’s parlance) becomes the dominant cognitive frame that narrative fiction reaches its full potential.

This raises several issues. First, if one chooses to live by the conviction that the level of narrativity of a given text is measured by how raw, immediate and life-like a view it offers into the characters’ minds, then one is forced to draw the conclusion that medieval stories are somehow *not* as narrative as post-seventeenth century novels are; in fact, one is forced to draw the rather bizarre conclusion that they are hardly narratives at all. Second, it reduces the Middle Ages and its literature to a waypoint towards the victory achieved around the late nineteenth century, when the representation of human experience arguably reaches its highpoint.

Heldris’s text, as well as the other two texts explored in this study, questions the idea of a literary historical strive towards greater experientiality. To adapt C.S. Lewis’s playful thought experiment, a medieval reader might have asked, if presented with a

Joyce or a Woolf, “Surely the post-medieval world is not reduced to *that?*”⁷³ In other words, he or she would likely not have seen these texts as narratives, which leads to another question. What, for a medieval reader, *would* have constituted a narrative? This, of course, is a question of such scope that it cannot be satisfactorily assessed within the confines of this study. I can, however, connect my analysis of *Silence* to what has been said about the topic by scholars of medieval literature.

In his work *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (1971), William W. Ryding investigates the ways in which the medieval practice diverged from the Aristotelian ideals of artistic unity put forth in his *Poetics* (ca. 335 BCE). Ryding suggests that the classical idea of a self-subsistent work consisting of a logically connected beginning, middle and end stands in contrast to how the prequels, additions and rewritings by medieval romancers present themselves not as complete works, but rather as reactions to the existing narrative corpus (Ryding 1971, 53). Likewise, the techniques of repetition and the multiplication of episodes introduce chronological strangeness alien to the classical tradition (ibid. 71–82). According to Eugène Vinaver, this type of “intervoven narrative,” which consists of references to previous and future events, indicates that medieval readers conceived of narrative as an enjoyable exercise of memory (1971, 128–29), which would allow them to witness, in the course of the tale, the development of a “complex moving tapestry of interlocked themes” (ibid. 138).

Heldris’s take on the characters’ experiences can be understood in similar terms. As the preceding analyses have illustrated, *Silence*’s figurative language pushes mediacy into overdrive, exhibiting the characters’ states of mind as poetic *materia*. Bypassing the “actual” experience of Eufemie and Cadon, the minds of the lovers are shaped into stabilised literary images for the Count of Chester and the audience to read. As I have argued, this deliberate and tautological transparency focuses attention on how stories and the emotions presented in them depend upon convention learnt by repetition. *Silence* thus extends its memory exercise beyond itself, cross-linking different texts in the audience’s romance memory and embedding its fictional minds in an ever-expanding romance canvas, which consists of recycled verisimilar emotions not confined within the beginning and the end of *Silence*.

Thus, *Silence* foregrounds forms of experientiality that have less to do with anchoring the narration (or the concept of narrative itself) to a mediating centre of

⁷³ Lewis’s original phrasing has to do with how medieval writers would have derided our demand for originality: “If you had asked Laȝamon or Chaucer ‘Why do you not make up a brand-new story of your own?’ I think they might have replied (in effect) ‘Surely we are not yet reduced to that?’” (Lewis 1964, 211)

consciousness than with taking pleasure in poetry as a craft that flatters its audiences in their capacity as literary connoisseurs, whose knowledge can be played upon in the cooperative creation of poetic illusions. The narration does not primarily seek to represent Cadour and Eufemie's experience, and the "telling" instance, instead of representing a coherent, human-like consciousness, rather serves to prompt the audience's romance memory.

In addition to flattering and exercising the audience's romance memory, the experience of learning is present throughout *Silence*. As seen earlier, the romance educates its audience in skilled interpretation and invites debate on the themes it introduces. The next section continues this discussion. Whereas above I have concentrated on the characters' verisimilar emotions, I now turn to emotions that are *not* expected, reaching towards the kind of originality that in Genette's wording could be "too true" and therefore needing to be smoothed out rhetorically. Continuing the discussion started in Section 2.3 about the Commentator's differing views on the characters' conduct as described in the *estorie*, I will look at some instances where the narration is likewise locally experientialised from this first-person point of view, fluctuating between agreeing and disagreeing with the descriptions of the characters' mental and physical attributes. In between these two vocal positions, convention is occasionally breached to allow for fleeting visions of the leading ladies Silence and Eufemie as suffering human beings to emerge.

4 What If They Were Afraid and Unhappy? Experientialising Rhetoric as a Mimetic Gesture

4.1 Silence Confirmed: A Case of Literary Amnesia

After his birth Silence is immediately whisked away from his father's court to be raised in isolation in the woods, where the seneschal will train him in such male pursuits as wrestling, jousting and skirmishing ("a le palaistre / A boholder, n'a l'escremir"; *RS*, 2494–96). From the eulogising account on the child's period of education, we learn about his outstanding prowess in morals and learning, as well as his remarkable physical beauty:

[37] Li enfes est de tel orine
 Que il meïsmes se doctrine.
 Ceste vos est sovent retraite

Que bons oisials par lui s'afait.
 Et cis par soi meïsmes aprent
 Moult plus qu'a son eë n'apent.
 Enfans ot donc ens el país
 De la tiere et d'allors nais
 E[t] cis a cestui s'aparelle;
 Mais nus a cest n s'aparelle,
 Na de bonté, ne de science.
Itant vos dirai de Silence:
 Tant com il est plus bials de tols,
 Tant es il plus vallant et prols
 Que il ne soient tolt ensamble.
Or vos ai dit cho que m'en sanble.
 (RS, 2385–400; emphases and underlining added)

[The child's innate qualities were such that he taught himself. You have often been told that a good falcon trains itself, and *this child learned more by himself than anyone else his age*. There were children in the country, both foreign-born and native, and they were all alike, but *none was like this one in goodness or in learning*. I will tell you this much about Silence: just as he was the most beautiful of all, he was more valiant and noble than all the others put together. Now I have told you how I see it.]

The description places Silence firmly within the rhetoric of medieval romance that typically gives us heroes and heroines who are simply, as Douglas Kelly (1992, 174) so comprehensively puts it, “always extraordinary.” Indeed, as Evelyn Birge Vitz has famously theorised, *quantity is preferred over quality* in medieval characterisation; that is, instead of the “horizontal axis” of differentiation dealing with the particularity and uniqueness of a certain physical trait or mind-set, romance heroes and medieval characters in general tend to move along the “vertical axis” of hierarchical evaluation exclusively concerned, in Vitz's words, “with what set them *above* or *below* – but not *apart* from – the common run of men” (Vitz 1989, 15–16; emphases original). The above passage takes this narrative strategy to the extreme through virtually presenting Silence's relation to the others as an arithmetical operation: in his physical and moral perfection, Silence is *plus bials* and *plus prols* – more beautiful and more valiant – than “all the others put together” (“Que il ne soient tolt ensamble”).

Quite paradoxically, this claim of supremacy when it comes to beauty and bravery is also made of Silence's parents and in several other romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries characteristically exhibiting a “*literary* propensity to repeat marvels” that are nonetheless said to be unique by their “consummate exemplariness” (Kelly 1992, 170–71; emphasis original). The recurring designation of Cador as “the bravest knight of all, the best-loved and most valiant” (“Il ert li plus

vallans de tols, / Li plus amés et li plus prols”; *RS*, 393–94”; also e.g., ll. 392, 1209, 1517) finds numerous predecessors in, for example, Chrétien’s valiant Yvain (“li cortois, li preuz, li buens, Messire Yvains”; *Yvain*, 3194–95) and Alexander (“Alixandres li biax, li preuz”; *Cligès*, 83). As for Eufemie, “Not a woman in the realm was her equal. She was . . . the most beautiful girl in the world” (“N’a feme el regne qui li valle./ . . . Qu’el mont n’avoit plus bele mie; *RS*, 398–401), which is also said, for instance, of Medea, Polyxena and Helen in Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s highly influential *Roman de Troie*.⁷⁴ It is only fitting that these two idealised figures of romance, Cador and Eufemie, should act out a conventional courtly affair that produces a conventionally perfect heir with a twist: in addition to being the “ideal romance heroine” (Lasry 1985), Silence is also the perfect knight who gives stellar performances on the battlefield, thus combining his/her parents’ literary heritage in one chimeric body. Indeed, as Kathy M. Krause suggests, commenting on the romance’s description of Silence as the “mirror of the world” (e.g., “Ki mireöirs estoit del mont”; *RS*, 3063), Heldris gives us a character constructed of allusions and tropes, in whose mirror we see a combination of precious heroes and heroines (Krause 2002, 90–91).

This repetitiveness casts the Commentator’s remarks, underlined in [37], in an ambiguous light. Although the passage makes no explicit references to the original *estorie*, the illusion that we are reading or hearing a rendition of a previously existing piece is nevertheless retained in the accompanying documentation by the *jo* of his own interpretive responses that he wishes to share with his audience (“Itant vos dirai de Silence”): from what the “I” reads about Silence’s childhood, it *seems* to him that the child is indeed far superior to his peers in every respect (“Or vos ai dit *cho que m’en sanble*”). A similar evaluative response is elicited elsewhere by Silence’s beauty: “Ainc belizors voir ne vesqui / De li el monde, ne nasqui / *Al plus droit que jo puis esmer*” (*RS*, 1947–49, emphasis added; “never a more beautiful one, truly, lived in this world or was born, *as far as I can estimate*”). Likewise, the “I” is implicitly present also in the two statements emphasising the novelty of Silence as Nature’s creation: “Ainc de mellor n’ovra Nature” (*RS*, 1866; “Nature never made anything better”) and “Ainc n’ovra mais si bien Nature / A rien ki morir doive vivre” (*RS*, 1956–57;

⁷⁴ According to Benoît’s description, “there was no more beautiful lady in the country or the realm” than Medea (“el país ne el regné, / N’aveit dame de sa beauté”; ll. 1247–48), and similarly, “[w]ith regard to manners or worth, or beauty and valour, no one in the realm was more highly endowed” than Polyxena (“D’afaitement ne de proëise / Ne de beauté ne de valor / N’aveit mieuz guarnie en l’onor”, ll. 5568–70). Helen’s looks, on the other hand, exceed “any human ever born” (“Sormonta la beauté Heléine / Tote rien que nasqui humaine”, ll. 5129–30). See Colby (1965, 15–19) for a listing of beautiful men and women and their attributes in twelfth-century French literature.

“Nature will never work so well on any mortal being again”). The lines rephrase Chrétien’s descriptions of Enide and Fenice as Nature’s masterworks, whose beauty she cannot ever duplicate (cf. Krause 2002, 88): “Since that time, despite all her possible efforts, there was no way in which she could reproduce her own model” (“Car puis tant pener ne se pot / Qu’ele poïst son essanplaire / An nule guise contrefaire”; *Erec et Enide*, 418–20); “never again could Nature succeed in creating her equal” (“C’onques a sa paroille ovrer / Ne pot Nature recoverr”; *Cligès*, 2692–94). For the reader, such intertextual binding poses an interpretative problem: are we meant to agree with the evaluative remarks – to remain silent, as it were – or knowing that they are by nature paradoxical, resist the Commentator?

Although Silence’s dual nature as both male and female is the one distinguishing feature which, according to Kelly (1992, 171), all romance characters have, and which could then be said to basically remove the paradox as it makes Silence different in one particular aspect from Enide and Fenice, I however do believe that, instead of resolving the apparent ambiguity, the romance as a whole seems rather bent on holding up the contradictory claim of uniqueness in order to play on romance memory. So, the answer to the question posed just now is, according to the reading that I have been arguing for, that the Commentator’s evaluations should, once again, be read as textual baits: the readerly position they beguile the recipient to occupy is the one emulated by Count Cadour and the seneschal’s short-sighted reactions defined by an incapacity for seeing several levels – the shell *and* the kernel – at once in order to form a sober interpretation of the whole. But instead of intratextual blindness, this simulated recipient, here represented by the Commentator as the reader of the original tale, is rather blind to *the relations between texts* – in other words, as the Commentator documents his reactions, he documents, at the same time, a *failing romance memory*. Unlike the accomplished reader, a recipient suffering from such literary amnesia would neglect to perceive that “cho que m’en sanble” might not be the whole truth (as so blatantly demonstrated by Cadour’s, the seneschal’s, and the grieving crowds’ misinterpretations), and that in their belief in Silence’s singularity, the evaluations could in point of fact stand for *any* number of romance narratives which paint a picture of their respective heroes as physical and moral prodigies. If literary pleasure is to be drawn from this conformity to convention, as Horace’s notion of pleasing fictions as being *proxima veris* indicates, one might perhaps characterise this pleasure as being of a specifically cynical kind, inviting the wry smile of the reader who has read her Chrétien and Benoît, and is therefore able to detect the irony of their incomparably superior heroes and heroines whose *never* is in fact *always*. Again, it might be added that a skilled prelector could play into this sense of

irony and transform the Commentator's docile and somewhat listless evaluations of Silence into cynical observations by sheer tone of voice.

It is against this background that I propose to read the key scene consisting of a lengthy description, running over a hundred lines, of Silence's conception (*RS*, 1795–957). Borrowing from Chrétien the notion of Nature as an artisan who creates human beings out of body parts,⁷⁵ Heldris takes the concept a step further than his predecessor by carefully delineating the manufacturing process itself. Before proceeding to the details, Nature must carefully mould her precious material, as would a person baking a “beautiful white bread” (“blanc pain e biel”; *RS*, 1810) and using different kinds of sieves (“un crible, / U tamis, u un buletiel”; *RS*, 1808–9) to separate the wheat from the chaff (“Et fait adonc un entreclos / Entre le fleur blanche et le gros”; *RS*, 1815–16):

[38] Tolt si com cis fait sans dotance
 Que chi ai mis en la sanblance,
 Si fait Nature, c'est la some,
 Quante faire violt un vallant home
 Que voelle ovrer par majestyre.
 Premierement prent sa matyre.
 Avant tolte ouvre si l'esmie,
 Et moult l'espurge, et esniie;
 Et quant l'a moult bien esmiie
 Si oste del gros le delié.
 De cel delié si fait sans falle
 Les buens, et del gros la frapalle.
 (*RS*, 1823–34)

[<]ust like this, without a doubt, like the one we have depicted here, does Nature, to be brief, proceed when she wants to create a noble human being that she wants to be a masterpiece. She first prepares her raw material. Before starting to work, she breaks it up and purifies it and cleans it, and when she has broken it into little pieces, she separates the fine from the coarse.]

According to Ryder and Zaerr, this metaphorical likening of Silence to a baker's product shows how Heldris hopes to underscore Silence's passivity by demoting him to the “status of created object” (*ibid.* 33), which in turn reinforces the systematic reduction of the protagonist's agency predominating the work as a whole. But it should be noted that, besides bakers, this is also how a poet proceeds: in repeatedly

⁷⁵ The long-standing topos of “*natura artifex*” was first used by Chrétien in the context of Old French verse narrative (Colby 1965; qtd. in Krause 2002). On Nature's forge as a metaphor for poetic creation and musical composition in the medieval period, see Leach (2010).

comparing Silence to an *oeuvre* (see also, e.g., ll. 1807, 1866 and 1956) emerging from the initial *matyre* through a careful selection and deliberation by Nature, Heldris explicitly makes use of the terminology common to the paradigm of invention that the medieval *accessus ad auctores* and the arts of poetry and prose had inherited from classical oratory. According to this paradigm, a literary work of art was constructed through a gradual development of the subject matter, the *materia*, into a coherent whole, proceeding from the work as a mental conception (*status archetypus*) through verbalisation, arrangement and amplification towards the actualised work (Kelly 1992, 66–67). Geoffrey of Vinsauf compares this process to an initially resistant piece of wax eventually yielding to the warmth of human hands – a pragmatic analogy that is very much reminiscent of Heldris’s down-to-earth notion of Nature as a skilled baker kneading her bread dough to perfection:

Formula materiae, quasi quaedam formula cerae,
 Primitus est tactus duri: si sedula cura
 Igniat ingenium, subito mollescit ad ignem
 Ingenii sequiturque manum quocumque vocarit,
 Ductilis ad quicquid.
 (PN, 213–17)

[The material to be moulded, like the moulding of wax, is at first hard to the touch. If intense concentration enkindle native ability, the material is soon made pliant by the mind’s fire, and submits to the hand in whatever way it requires, malleable to any form.] (Nims, transl., 23–24)

These details linking the protagonist’s conception with the compositional process undertaken by verse-makers support the notion that the objectification of Silence emphasised by Ryder and Zaerr must be read in a specifically poetic framework. The narrative truth that Silence’s creation process is said to contain (ll. 1800–4) is the truth of convention: the hero/ine conceived by two equally idealised characters emerges as a poet’s work of art, as a deliberately constructed and thoroughly textualized being, a product of *fama* and *convenientia*. Silence’s birthing process thus makes clearly visible the status of the medieval poet as an adapter and re-writer who, in Stephen G. Nichols’s eloquent phrasing, appears as “a palimpsest in the manuscript, one voice among several, and indeed a voice that, not unlike Echo’s . . . can only repeat the last words of the scribe’s discourse or the artist’s vision” (Nichols 2006, 97). This is also what the Commentator’s affirmative statements in [37] and similar passages seem to do. As with the overstated transparency of the simile of the embers, the experientialisation of the discourse from a conceding standpoint draws attention to the mechanism which, like an echo, generates conventions and generic

expectations through constant reiteration. Together, these strategies arguably create the impression of a narrative locked in a loop, with the affirmative interventions emulating a readerly position which, blind to the other texts shining through the protagonist, fails to break out of this circle and which, consequently, exemplifies a reading strategy resulting in a kind of poetic dead-end – or indeed a disintegration of meaning that Krause claims for the work, pointing out that, by giving us an idealistic protagonist who nonetheless fails to motivate moral improvement within the work, the romance reveals an essentially pessimistic attitude towards the “vacuity” of romance tradition (2002, 91).

My interpretation of *Silence* agrees with this conception of the work as a failure of literary ideals. However, I would argue further that the “vacuity” of romance tradition should be understood as a feature of the symbolic *estorie* alone. Silence as a romance character may be sanctified by tradition, but he is also embalmed by it: by turning him into another instance of a perfect protagonist – a “paragon of virtue” (Lasry 1985, 228) –, the *estorie* is writing him, literally, *into silence*. While at points the rhetoric of experientiality seems to confirm this procedure by imagining the relationship between the *estorie* and the Commentator as unidirectional, and by generating the position of a reader or listener who uncritically absorbs the statements put forth in the *estorie*, this voice of innocence is elsewhere balanced by a voice of experience that finds a way out of the dead-end of stabilised poetic creations, giving a very different answer to the question that the twelve-year old Silence, deeply troubled about his ambiguous role as a boy who is a girl, poses to Nature:

[39] Et cil respond: “Tel n’oï onques!
 Silencius! qui sui jo donques?
 Silencius ai non, jo cui,
 U jo sui altres que ne fui.
 Mais cho sai jo bien, par ma destre,
 Que jo ne puis pas altres este!
 Donque sui jo Scilentius,
 Cho m’est avis, u jo sui nus.”
 (RS, 2531–38)

[A]nd he replied: “I never heard that before! Not Silentius? Who am I then? Silentius is my name, I think, or I am other than who I was. But this I know well, upon my oath, that I cannot be anyone else! Therefore, I am Silentius, as I see it, or I am no one.]

It will be argued in the next section that Silence’s question “qui su jo donques?” embodies the tension between being true to life and true to fiction. It is in the *estorie*,

so Heldris implies, where we find these conventional practices and standardised descriptions which time and again claim the impossible by insisting on singularity in repetition. Working against the hegemonic voice of tradition, Heldris does exactly what he feigns not to do: raises an argument. Developing Krause’s notion of failed mirrors, I suggest that the argumentative perspective on the emotions represented in the *estorie* offers the audience mirrors that *do* work, in the sense that it does not model an ideal to be imitated, but rather shows that the *estorie*’s answer to Silence’s question, correct in terms of verisimilitude, is precisely the wrong one if judged with the standard of human nature. Alongside the *estorie*’s Silence, another version of the character comes into existence simultaneously with his tale: as Nature creates Silence out of fragments, so does Heldris the craftsman create from his inherited material (“ma matyre”; *RS*, 276, 2344) a new piece of work (“m’uevre”; “muevre”; *RS*, 77, 105, 1667). This new *uevre* suggests the possibility that quality might, after all, matter more than quantity, and this possibility is one that, as will be seen, is negotiated in collaboration with the audience.

4.2 Silence Contested

4.2.1 The Mendacious *Estorie*

Silence’s identity crisis, introduced at the end of the previous section, is portrayed in a characteristically medieval fashion as a battle between personified forces of the psyche, with Nature appealing to the child’s inborn femininity and Nurture to his lifelong experience of being raised as a boy. Despite Nature’s efforts, it is Nurture who for the time being comes out victorious, as Reason manages to convince Silence that exchanging horse and chariot for needlework (“Told perdrés cheval et carete”; *RS*, 2621) would be an act of sheer folly leading to a considerable drop in social status. Besides, out of filial duty Silence does not under any circumstances wish to prove his father a liar by revealing his actual gender (“Ne voel mon pere desmentir”; *RS*, 2653), no matter what his heart might be telling him. For all these reasons he therefore makes the painful decision to continue to repress his identity – “Car vallés sui et nient mescine” (*RS*, 2650; “for I’m a young man, not a girl”) – and it is at this point that the Commentator breaks in, pointing out that Silence is said, in the *estorie*, to bear the consequences of his decision with nothing short of stoic self-command:

[40] Si est li voirs, cho dist l’estorie
 Ki de Silence fait memorie,

C'onques ne fu tels abstinence
Com poés oïr de Silence.
(RS, 2657–60)

[If what the story that keeps alive the memory of Silence tells us is true, you never heard of such forbearance as was to be found in Silence.]

The Silence of the *estorie* is, indeed, a perfectly *composed* heroine in both senses of the word, remaining calm in the face of adversity and thus representing, once again, a quintessential example of a protagonist whose experience is defined in terms of its comparative intensity – forbearance has surely been shown and witnessed before, but never quite to *this* degree (“*C'onques ne fu* tels abstinence...”). However, the passage is peculiar in its contradictory drive: for even as the role of tradition is acknowledged through the superlative rhetoric as well as the open reference to the *estorie*, at the same time this tradition seems to be undermined through a subtle manipulation of the conventional “the story tells that X” formula. As Kelly (1992, 95–96) and Marnette (2005, 203) both point out, this traditional formula is characterised by referential ambiguity, as it might be understood as a self-referential statement indicating the unfolding narration which creates itself at the moment of its dictation, or alternatively as a reference to a pre-existent tale which guarantees the veracity of the current narrative.

In *Silence*, the latter is clearly the case, since the narrating entity indicated in the romance’s use of the phrase is always the *estorie/écriture*, whose words Heldris claims to faithfully copy out in their totality in his native French. The *estorie* recounts, for example, the arrival of the *jongleurs* at the seneschal’s household – “Oiés mervellose aventure / Si con nos conte l’écriture” (RS, 2689–90; “<Hear now the marvellous adventure that the writing relates to us>”) – as well as the marriage between Silence and King Ebain of England at the end of the tale: “Li rois le prist a feme puis – / Cho dist l’estorie u jo le truis –” (RS; 6677–78; “Then the king took her to wife – <this is what is said in the story where I find this –>”). As already noted in the introduction to this chapter, the framing of the *estorie* as a written Latin text gives it particular power as an authentication device; therefore, due to these attributes, “the story tells that X” formula serves as an impressive reminder that this French *conte* is worth listening to, as it is not just any fabrication by a contemporary poet called Heldris, but revoices a venerable Latin source.

Such traditional truth assertions, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. According to Jeanette M. Beer, the conventional insistence on the truth of narration progressively came to be associated with a “tradition of manipulation” (1981, 11), so that by the fourteenth-century Guillaume de Machaut, in his *Livre du Voir-dit*, is

repeatedly seen undermining his truth guarantees by immediately reversing them and by juxtaposing dogmatic assertions with hypothetical statements (ibid. 83). In other words, the truth guarantee as a means of expressing a clash between convention and authorial intent has in itself become a convention in Machaut (ibid. 9), a convention engaging “a highly sophisticated audience in a literary game” (ibid. 85). Undoubtedly, this development has its roots in an earlier era. Heldris, at least about half a century before Machaut, manhandles the truth assertion in [40] in a much similar manner, at once seeming to both confirm and question the *estorie*'s representation when it comes to the protagonist's mental state: “*Si est li voirs, cho dist l'estorie*” – *if* what the story says is true, then Silence was calmly reconciled to his lot in life, with all the emotional calm befitting a romance hero. In addition to the conventional actions of *conter* and *dire* (cf. Burns 1985, 14), there is then another type of speech attributed to the source, one that the humble Commentator originally claimed for himself: *mentir*. The suggestion that the *estorie* could in fact be less than truthful in its representations is addressed more explicitly, if still quite circuitously, in the description of Silence's supposedly astonishing learning speed: “*Et se l'estorie ne me ment, / Il a des estrumens apris / Car moult grant travail i a mis, / Qu'ains que li tiers ans fust passes / A il ses maistres tols passes*” (RS, 3138–42, emphasis added; “<*And if the story does not lie*, he learned to play instruments. Because he worked hard at it, before three years had passed he had surpassed all his teachers>”). By thus bending the formula almost, but not quite, to the breaking point, Heldris subtly robs the device of its safety: the appeal to authority that would theoretically work to safeguard the narrative against indeterminacy of meaning loses its power as an authentication device, transforming instead, in Heldris's hands, into a tool for generating insecurity as to the validity of the source material.

This breaking of the formula can be seen to form a counterweight to the verdicts pronounced in [37], where I suggested the conceding commentary stood for a kind of readerly failure to grasp the ironies involved in repetitive singularity, which, in turn, resulted in a consonance between the voices of the *estorie* and the Commentator. In [40], by contrast, the evaluative slant is at odds with the source tale, seemingly implying that the only thing that the allusion to the *estorie* authenticates is, quite circularly, the romance tradition itself. Plunging the narration into a state of uncertainty, the intervention tacitly asks whether an opposite mindset to the one represented in the source might have been involved: was there perhaps a lesser amount of fortitude in Silence than would be poetically correct, or indeed no fortitude at all? To suggest that Silence, the protagonist of a courtly romance, was less than perfect, that he was perhaps afraid and confused, is a deviation that

challenges the verisimilar and requires an indirect approach through a carefully selected set of rhetorical strategies that will be explored next. I will return to Silence’s fortitude, or the possible lack thereof, after first discussing a similar instance involving the tale’s other consummate exemplar of beauty and wisdom, Silence’s mother Eufemie.

4.2.2 *Dubitatio* and *Occultatio*: The Commentator’s Refusal to See

In Section 3.1.1, I mentioned the courtly trope of concealed emotions that was at work also in Cadour and Eufemie’s courtship. The fact that the lovers fail to express their desire gives the Commentator pause:

[41] Car cho fait Eufemie irer,
 Que cascun jor voit que desire
 Et de son desir se consire.
 Ele desire qu’il seüst
 Qu’ele altre ami que lui n’eüst:
 Mais qu’en li tant de cuer n’a mie
 Que die a lui qu’ele est s’amie.
Dirai jo dont qu’ele ait delit
Quant el ne fait, grant ne petit,
De quanque li siens cuers desire,
Fors lui amer sans ozer dire?
S’ele a delit en son amer
En la sofrance a tant d’amer
Que jo nen os nomer delit.
S’ele en a rien, cho est petit.
 De la dolor qui dont le tient
 Et de l’amor dont li sovient
 Gemist, fremist et dist: “Caitive!
 Jo ne sui mortre, ne bien vive.
 (RS, 760–78; emphases added)

[<This upsets Eufemie, for every day she sees the one she desires yet is deprived of her desire.> She desires him to know that she would have no other lover but him: <but in her heart she lacks the courage to tell him that she is in love with him.> *Shall I say that she is happy, when she does absolutely nothing with regard to her heart’s desire, <but instead loves him without daring to speak?> If she finds happiness in loving, she finds such bitterness in suffering that I dare not call this happiness. If she’s getting any out of it, it’s not much!* In the grip of sorrow, thinking only of love, she moans and shudders and says, “Wretched me! I am neither dead nor alive.]

At least from our modern viewpoint, the lines seem to display a self-contradictory impulse indicating the simultaneous existence of two basically incompatible storytelling positions: on the one hand, we have the omniscient authorial voice of novelistic discourse providing an unobstructed view into Eufemie's private thoughts and motivations ("Car cho fait Eufemie irer..."), and on the other, there is the hesitant tone more reminiscent of the "anti-exceptional" voice of everyday oral communication. The poet's "penetrative optic" (Cohn 1999, 16) has a limited reach: he sees inside Eufemie's mind, but is not entirely certain about which one of the most characteristic emotions of courtly love (cf. van Horen Venhoosel 2011, 132) he sees in there – *delit* or *dolor*.

One solution to this dilemma (if one wishes to view it as such) would be to conceive of it as an instance of muted omniscience, which Fludernik sees as characterising the status of the *jongleur* in medieval French narration. Since the embodied presence of the *jongleur* in oral performance – projected, according to Fludernik, even onto the written romance text as "a *persona* of salient textual status" – establishes a frame of "telling" rooted in natural epistemology, we do not find in the epic the kind of full-blown narratorial omniscience typical of the later realist tradition; instead, we find a voice that hovers between "a verisimilar distribution of knowledge" and a display of omniscience "in muted form" (Fludernik 1996, 123). In line with this argumentation, then, it would have to be claimed that, as Eufemie's "actual" state of mind is something that the live *jongleur* or his textual projection could not possibly know, its representation needs to be moderated through explanations and hesitations that tend to characterise oral communication in our everyday social reality.

To my mind, the problem of such an approach is precisely the one Jonathan Culler (2004) mentions in the context of modern fiction. That is to say, the notion of omniscience (whether in full-blown or muted form) places the narrative voice firmly in the anthropocentric framework through the insistence on human consciousness as the source of the telling; moreover, since the information possessed by this invented person is outside the boundaries of ordinary human knowledge, this person is imagined to be "godlike, omniscient" (ibid. 28). Medieval narration, even though delivered by a human voice, does not easily lend itself to this idea of voice as issuing from a singular point of origin, let alone being controlled by natural epistemic limitations. First of all, it must be remembered that fully developed omniscience, in our theoretical understanding of the term, is entirely typical of romance discourse, as shown, for example, by Lacy (1980, 38–66) in his powerful analysis of narratorial distribution of knowledge in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*. That epistemological

disturbances were not considered problematic in the period is also underlined by Spearing, who suggests that such moments even in homodiegetic narration are a source of confusion only for the modern reader.⁷⁶ All in all, medieval poets and narrators *do* seem to know what is going on in the other mind, and in *Silence* this basic convention is at times even vigorously underlined, for instance when Queen Eufeme's plan to seduce Silence is introduced with "Or oiés qu'ele a en corage" (*RS*, 3978; "Wait till you hear what she had in mind"). From this it follows that the indecision regarding Eufemie's state of mind in Example [41] must be explained in some other way than in terms of postulating a poet wary of pronouncing "impossible" judgements on a character's inner life, judgments that the text's oral and embodied performance would, in other words, throw into a dubious light, according to Fludernik's view. Instead, the epistemological turnabout witnessed in the scene must rather be approached as a deliberate pose adopted by the poet at this particular point in the narrative to produce a certain narrative effect.

Technically, the indecision simulated by Heldris goes by the name of *dubitatio* which, according to the brief definition in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, "occurs when the speaker seems to ask which of two or more words he had better use" (*RH*, IV.29.40; "Dubitatio est cum quaerere videatur orator utrum de duobus potius aut quid de pluribus potissimum dicat"). Belonging to a group of rhetorical devices that seek to shape the audience's thought to the speaker's advantage (Purcell 1996, 19), the deployment of *dubitatio* can thus be seen as an ethos-saving move that, according to Quintilian, "may lend an impression of truth to our statements, when, for example, we pretend to be at a loss, where to begin or end, or to decide what especially requires to be said or not to be said at all" (*Inst. orat.*, IX.2.19).⁷⁷ By toning down authoritative delivery, a show of hesitation can aid to smooth out any potential conflicts arising from the subject between speaker and audience, at once creating an impression of the latter not as a passive recipient, but as an active participant whose judgment matters and constantly shapes the development of the discourse.

In [41], the potential conflict has to do with the Commentator reading Eufemie's heartache *against* romance credo dictating that unrevealed love should be a tormenting pleasure, as it is, for example, to Chrétien's Fenice, who finds Love's torture "an untiring delight" ("Mes cist travauz li est delice"; *Cligès*, 4561) and

⁷⁶ "[H]ow can the Wife, lying unconscious, be in a position to know that Jankyn was afraid and wanted to run away? Even in a passage as dramatic as this, such questions have no answers because it never occurs to the medieval poet that they might be asked." (Spearing 2012, 92)

⁷⁷ "Adfert aliquam fidem veritatis et dubitatio, cum simulamus quaerere nos, unde incipiendum, ubi desinendum, quid potissimum dicendum, an omnino dicendum sit?" (transl. Butler 1920)

therefore does not wish to be cured: “But rest assured, I have no interest in any kind of remedy, for I treasure the pain” (“Mes sachiez bien que je n’ai cure / De garir an nule meniere, / Car je ai molt la dolor chiere”; *Cligès*, 3074–76). This convention is so well-established as to be transparent in the Genettean sense, and it is precisely this transparency that triggers Heldris’s cautious rhetoric. If the simile of the embers and the affirming commentary almost tautologically overstated the conventional to explore the birthing mechanism of the verisimilar, now the explicating impulse comes closer to Genette’s original idea of open motivation as a kind of nervous, even hysterical attempt to justify that which goes against the grain of the accepted. Eufemie’s emotional state gives rise to a stretch of narration that one might indeed describe, after Genette, as a passage that is on the verge of becoming “too original” or “too true” in its reach towards the anti-verisimilar where Eufemie, an idealised romance figure, is allowed to suffer instead of rejoicing. Undermining audience expectations, this claim cannot afford to remain opaque in the narrative, but must be made overtly visible through rhetorical safeguarding.

Spearing finds a similar “what if” moment in the thirteenth-century *Havelok*, where an emotionally ambiguous passage shows the antagonist hesitating when about to deliver the death blow to the protagonist: “Of Avelok rewede him ful sore – / And thoucte he wolde that he ded wore, / But on that he nouth wit his hend / Ne drepe him nouth – that fule fend!” (*Havelok*, 503–6). According to Spearing, the closing exclamation characterising Godard as a “foul fiend” and thereby making him a “stereotyped villain” is arguably there to dispel the uncomfortable sense of slipperiness possibly evoked by Avelok’s unexpected pity, which, as Spearing phrases it, is “perhaps more than the poet can bear, or more than he thought his audience could bear” (2005, 64): thus, with Godard’s hesitation, the narration is about to venture into the unknown, but eventually reverts back to safety, letting the cobbler stick to his last. For Spearing, the subjectivity implied in this evaluative interjection is a case in point of how a medieval text may preserve traces of “writing itself as a form of experience,” thus capturing something of the historical poet’s reality, such as the *Havelok* poet’s desire to breach the established rules of romance (*ibid.*). The text, in other words, carries a trace of the moment when the *Havelok* poet finds himself at the brink of a revelation, ready to take a narrative leap yet reverting at the last minute.

Heldris, I claim, *does* take this leap, momentarily venturing into the unknown – the *invraisemblable* – to stretch the confines of conventional romance emotions. Whereas Spearing underlines the genuineness of the *Havelok* poet’s struggle, thereby dismissing the notion of the narrator, I propose to read the experientialisation

through *dubitatio* in [41] as a conscious strategy by which Heldris seeks to gently ease his audience into the unconventional. Indeed, Spearing himself suggests that first-person interventions hold great negotiating potential in that they could establish a kind of emergency exit from narrative predetermination. For example, a posture of humility insisting on writerly clumsiness could be used as a pretext to put a personal slant on the retold story whose outline could not, by default, be tampered with (Spearing 2012, 228). As Horace points out, consistency must be maintained when bringing well-known characters to the stage: Achilles must be passionate and implacable (*iracundus, inexorabilis*), Medea fierce and indomitable (*ferox innictaque*), Orestes sorrowful (*tristis*) (*AP*, 120–24). Likewise, this relative fixity dictates that courtly lovers must take pleasure in their amorous torment. Or, alternatively, they can curse the entire affair, as does Heldris’s Eufemie: “Mar vi onques icest anter! / Mar fust li serpens ainc peüs! / Mar fust li venins ainc veüs, / Dont Cador fu si atornés! / Li mals en est sor moi tornés” (*RS*, 792–96; “Damn this whole relationship! Damn that dragon (whoever raised him!), damn the cursed venom that made Cador so sick! The curse has come upon me”). Echoing Eufemie’s self-expressed exasperation, Heldris as Commentator casts serious doubt on the notion of pleasing torment, employing *dubitatio* to place his discourse at a crossroads between the conventional and the unconventional, between suppressing one’s voice and speaking up: should one follow tradition and acknowledge the verisimilar Eufemie, or should one consider an uncustomary option, the possibility that her emotional state was opposite to the one offered in the *estorie*, or even, in all its brilliant complexity, entirely beyond the established parameters of conventional courtly sentiment?

This impending transgression, as also suggested by Spearing in his discussion of *Havelok*, is certainly the poet’s struggle as a writer; but in *Silence*, it is a struggle in which the audience is enlisted as well. To paraphrase Hanning’s (1981, 12) words on the reciprocal consciousness determining romance narration, the reader is here forced into a relationship with the “creative intelligence which will confront and challenge us, seeking to convince us of its *sagesse*” and asking the reader to “exercise a discriminatory function (asking, in effect, ‘is this really *sagesse*?), at any given moment in the story.” In other words, the *dubitatio*, in its question form, serves as a prompt to the audience to speculate as to which of the alternative emotions is the more appropriate one – poetically speaking, the suffering of Eufemie would no doubt have been hedonistic; humanely speaking, it might have been something else. In posing this question to the audience, Heldris seems to be making common sense heuristics the object of his narration, by all appearances striking a pose as the folk

psychologist reader of Herman’s “Mediation argument,” who attributes states of mind to literary characters by the same heuristic tools, such as theory of mind, which we use to attribute motives to one another and to predict each other’s reactions (Herman 2011, 8). Thus, hesitating to give a conclusive answer, the poet *qua* Commentator is himself nonetheless inclined to vote for *dolor*, because it would perhaps be counterintuitive to human nature to interpret Eufemie’s moans and shudders (“Gemist, fremist...”) as indicative of *delit* (“jo nen os nomer delit” – “I dare not call this happiness”).

To return to Silence’s fortitude, there is a corresponding strategy at work in the passage which follows directly from the statement questioning the *estorie*’s trustworthiness in [40]:

[42] *Jo ne di pas qu’il ne pe[n]sast*
 Diversement, et ne tensast
 Diverse cogitatiön
 Com enfant de tel natiön,
 Meësment enfant si tendre.
 Ki doit a tel usage entendre.
 (RS, 2661–66; emphases added)

[I’m not saying that he didn’t go through periods of hesitation and inner conflict, as might be expected in a young person who came of such good stock, but who was also a tender child who had to force himself to live that way.]

Again, the digression involves an epistemological constriction: the view into Silence’s mind, heretofore available and unrestricted, is suddenly obstructed. Unlike the perceptive count of Chester, who came to the right conclusion about the lovers’ feelings through his sarcastically careful reading of their distinctly literary expressions, the Commentator here depends on a more “realistic” speculation on how a person of Silence’s background would most likely be expected to emotionally react in the impossible situation that he finds himself in. Being only a young child, Silence *must* have felt anguish and grief (“Com enfant de tel natiön, / Meësment enfant si tendre”), yet this must remain a conjecture that is, furthermore, rhetorically tampered almost out of sight (or hearing) through *occultatio* (also known as *occupatio* or *paralipsis*), described in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as occurring “when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying” (RH, IV.28.37; “Occultatio est cum dicimus nos praeterire aut non scire aut nolle dicere id quod nunc maxime dicimus”). Such delicate treatment provides strategic advantage with matters where direct reference would be, for some reason

or another, undignified or easy to refute (ibid.). In order to avoid compromising his ethos, the orator therefore only touches upon a controversial issue, insinuating rather than insisting. Tacitly assertive, the paralectic phrase “Jo ne di pas qu’il ne pe[n]sast / Diversement” (literally, “I am not saying that he did not think diversely”) would almost seem to be carried out as necessary self-defence in front of the audience whose members might be expected to be, if not exactly unable to bear the threatening complexity (as Spearing puts it in his analysis of *Havelok*), then at least heavily critical of what has been said, demanding from the poet an explanation for this somewhat volatile implication that the *jo* as commentator – and, by obvious extension, the contemporary poet behind this functional vocal positioning – is overreaching his authority by proposing an alternate interpretation and thus raising his voice against the *fama* represented by the *estorie*.

Expanding upon Barbara Rosenwein’s (2006, 2) indispensable definition of “emotional communities” in the Middle Ages as “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions,” Anatole Pierre Fuksas (2015) has argued for the existence of an emotional community of medieval verse romance. In this framework, he suggests that fear is outside the emotional spectrum of the protagonists of courtly romance (ibid. 82): while the minor characters tremble with fear (“peor”) as they watch Chrétien’s Lancelot crossing the Sword Bridge, Lancelot himself retains his composure. In tending towards the anti-verisimilar, Silence’s “diverse cogitation” can therefore be said to form a dissonance within this emotional community of romance, a dissonance that works to break the tale all quietly through *occultatio* which allows Heldris to state without stating, as it were, that there might have existed in Silence’s heart some other sentiment than unequivocal moral strength (“Jo ne di pas que...”) ⁷⁸ – in other words, the rhetorical device allows him to present his differing opinion as if this contradictory, disputatious voice is not even there; indeed, as if there is only silence, a translation *sans noise*.

The strategy complies with the show of resistance towards exaggeration that was witnessed in Section 2.3. There, I argued that Heldris’s wordless glossing in fact

⁷⁸ I am reminded of Gerald Prince’s (1988) concept of the “disnarrated,” which stands for narrative passages that consider what could have taken place but did not (cf. also Ryan 1986). According to Prince, such passages bring to light the logic of narrative as the result of evaluative choices: when the disnarrated pertains to the act of narrating rather than the narrated events, it suggests that the present narrative is more valuable than the one that is hypothetically referred to, in that it follows a more interesting narrative strategy (ibid. 5). In *Silence*, the hypothetical hesitation and inner conflict, moderated by rhetorical devices, seems to suggest the opposite: the narrative is, perhaps, valuable, because Silence’s verisimilar experience follows convention, but does it make the tale relatable? Could it be, in fact, even *more* interesting, if Silence was terrified and lost?

sought to silence and overcome the voice of the *estorie* by cutting down on the hyperbolic description that would have perpetuated the seneschal's misreading. Again, Heldris creates lacunae, or silences, where the *estorie* says too much, meeting its poetically valid yet humanely questionable claims with an experientialising rhetoric that opens up an alternate line of interpretation – a line of doubt rather than certainty – for the audience to consider. In addition to Eufemie's heartache and Silence's anxiety, we find the Commentator-I reacting against the *estorie* when recounting an epic battle –

[43] Mais bien vos puis par verté dire
 C'ainc mais n'oï gregnor martyre.
 Gregnor! Ba, Dex! comment gregnor?
 .m. per de castials et d'onor
 I sont ochis, fust drois u tors,
 Dont i a moult des altres mors.
 (RS, 5469–74; emphasis added)

[I can tell you in all honesty, however, that I have never heard of a greater slaughter. *Greater? Bah, how can I say greater*, when a thousand men with castles and fiefdoms were killed, whether they deserved it or not, along with many others.]

– and when the Silence, already emotionally burdened by the recent events, sets out to perform the heavy task of capturing Merlin in the woods:

[44] Li grant travail et li dur lit
 Li atenuisscent son delit.
 Atenuisscent? Nenil pas!
 Car il n'a nul delit, li las!
 Et quant en lui n'a point de joie,
 N'a delit nul, plus que je voie,
 Car de joie naist li delis.
 (RS, 5865–71; emphasis added)

[The difficult task and physical discomfort attenuated his happiness. *No, wait, that's hardly the way to put it*, for he hasn't any happiness at all, poor wretch! Because he had no joy, as I see it, he had no happiness, for happiness is born of joy.]

The Commentator corrects the claims that, humanely speaking, do not seem to make much sense. The motivation behind this self-doubt is not psychological, any more than the motivation between the hesitant discourse, expressed through *occultatio* and *dubitatio*, is the mitigation of some questionable epistemic powers: the *jo*

intervenes not because the poet wishes to maintain the illusion of natural epistemological limitations, but because this feigned act of indecision allows him to pit his own voice elegantly, almost inadvertently, against the totalising voice of tradition. Put differently, the Commentator’s literary myopia – unlike Cador’s – is a *deliberate* unwillingness to see; in other words, it is an unwillingness to misread Silence and Eufemie in the transparently verisimilar context. This way, Heldris’s *dubitatio* and *occultatio* suggest that, in addition to putting personal touches on monolithic plotlines, first-person interventions can also open a detour around conventional emotion, providing the medieval poet with the opportunity to close in on the more fragile and decentralising notion of the idiosyncrasies of the human heart.

4.2.3 *Sententia*: The Idiosyncrasy of the Human Heart

In Section 1.2, dealing with Heldris’s use of *interrogatio*, I discussed the common experiential sphere existing between poet and audience, serving as an implied point of reference for characters’ experiences and also as a tool for putting to the test the audience’s allegorical literacy. Occasionally, the romance makes this shared extratextual reality explicitly visible by employing the first-person plural. There are, for instance, passages addressing religious dogma in the plural, which, as pointed out earlier, is a common practice in French verse romance otherwise relatively restrained in plural reference (e.g., “*nostre sire Jhesu Crist*”; *RS*, 5688 [“*Our lord Jesus Christ*”]; “*Se Deu plaist, qui ainc ne menti, / Ki por nos p[e]chiés consenti / Longin son costé a percier*”; *RS*, 6165–67 [“If it please God . . . who suffered Longinus to pierce his side for *our* sins”]). Besides ideological tenets, the plural is employed in *Silence* to refer to common experience of life in a more general sense. Count Renalt’s death gives rise to a *memento mori* kind of reflection on the brevity of human existence –

[45] Car de *nos gens* n’ i a c’um tor:
 Que que nus engigne u açaigne,
 U il voelle, u il n’adagne,
 Morir l’estuet, et *nos tretolt*,
 Foibles et fors, humeles, estolt.
 (*RS*, 1614–18)

[It’s the same for *all of us*: whatever a man’s clever schemes or plots, whether he wants to or doesn’t deign to, he has to die – and so do *we all*, strong or weak, proud or humble.]

– whereas Nature’s promise to win Silence back over to her side is supported by what is commonly perceived in everyday life:

[46] *Nos veomes maint home enbatre*
Un an, u .ii., u .iii., u quatre
En bon us tolt par noretüre
Mal gré u non sa vil nature:
Et puis apriés si s’en repent,
De son bienfaire se repret
Et s’achieve sa felonie,
Ki le renbat en vilonie.
(*RS*, 2313–20)

[*We have seen* many a man do the right thing for one, two, three or four years, only because of nurture, whatever his vile nature wants, and then afterwards repent of it, go back on his fine behaviour.]

To recapitulate, one explanation for the relative rarity of this “textbook” type of we-narration (as Margolin called it) in verse romance would be the way that it seems to undermine the poet’s role as the sole commander of his or her fiction. It can be argued, however, that in *Silence* the communalising effect of the plural is not so much related to a loss of authorial control but, quite conversely, to the *gain of authorial persuasiveness*. Amit Marcus, who has theorised about first-person plural narration in modern literature, asks a question that is relevant also in the present context: do “we” narratives cancel out the difference between self and other, eliminating genuine dialogue and serving instead as a “vehicle of domination” through a collectively-based attempt to control signification? (2008, 135–36) As with the ventriloquised concern and enhanced *interrogatio*, which gently seduced the audience to play along with the poet’s vision, the first-person plural does not exactly defy the poet’s control, but rather works to secure it through a subtle strategy of domination that builds on audience co-operation; the “we,” in other words, lays the groundwork for authorial rhetoric that can afford to be authorial precisely because of this collaborative, experiential technique. Since we are all arguably familiar with the apparently unavoidable moral relapse in Example [46] above, the process can be rephrased with confidence as a universalising maxim – a *sententia* – attached to the antithesis between Silence’s all-enduring kindness and the *jongleurs’* increasingly darkening state of mind:

[47] Li bontés a l’enfant acroist,
Li vilonie a çals aöist.
Silences croist moult en francise,

Li jongleör en culvertise,
Tant com li buens tent a l'onor
Et malvais a le deshonor.
(RS, 3199–204; emphasis added)

[As the youth's goodness increased, his masters' villainy grew. As Silence grew more and more admirable, his masters became more and more deceitful, *just as a good man always tends toward honour, and an evil one towards dishonour.*]

In classical rhetoric, *sententia* was defined as a “saying drawn from life, which shows concisely either what happens or ought to happen in life” (RH, IV.17.24; “Sententia est oratio sumpta de vita quae aut quid sit aut quid esse oporteat in vita breviter ostendit”). Due to their claim towards universal applicability, sententious generalisations seem to suggest a speaker of conclusive authority, which is why aspiring orators were advised to treat this device with utmost caution; after all, the idea was for the orator not to preach morals but to skilfully plead the case, as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* reminds us (“ut rei actors, non vivendi praeceptores videamur esse”; RH IV.17.24). In addition to the too frequent application, there were also the embarrassing pitfalls of simply getting it wrong and glaringly misjudging one's own authority. Says Quintilian:

In hoc genere custodiendum est et id, quod ubique, ne crebrae sint, ne palam falsae (quales frequenter ab iis dicuntur, qui haec *καθολικά* vocant, et, quidquid pro causa videtur, quasi indubitatum pronuntiant), et ne passim et a quocunque dicantur. Magis enim decet eos, in quibus est auctoritas, ut reid pondus etiam persona confirmet. Quis enim ferat puerum aut adolescentulum aut etiam ignobilem, si iudicet in dicendo et quodammodo praecipat? (*Inst. orat.*, VIII.5.7–8)

In this class of *reflexion* we must be careful, as always, not to employ them too frequently, nor at random, nor place them in the mouth of every kind of person, while we must make certain that they are not untrue, as is so often the case with those speakers who style them *reflexions of universal application* and recklessly employ whatever seems to support their case as though its truth were beyond question. Such reflexions are best suited to those speakers whose authority is such that their character itself will lend weight to their words. For who would tolerate a boy, or a youth, or even a man of low birth who presumed to speak with all the authority of a judge and to thrust his precepts down our throats? (Butler, transl., 285–87)

Sententiae, then, are best left to speakers invested with authority – “eos, in quibus est auctoritas” – and, moreover, should not be untrue (“ne palam falsae”). *Auctoritas*, as recalled, was traditionally perceived in the Middle Ages as a quality exclusive to the classic Latin *auctores*, the great ancients whose works, in addition to providing

exemplary models of grammar and rhetoric, served as reservoirs of universal wisdom and moral enlightenment. Heldris, however, does not turn to any particular *auctor* for backup – in fact, not one is ever mentioned by name in *Silence* – but to his audience: it is the claimed personal experience, attributed to us all in [46], which authorises him as the poet-commentator to sententiously pronounce on the *jongleurs*’ state of mind in [47]. In this case, collective experientiality is drawn upon to present a somewhat conventional picture of the antagonists; it is rather when the narration turns to the unconventional that the true value of the strategy will be seen. Going back therefore, once more, to Silence’s identity crisis, one can detect this “we” ethos implicitly at work also in the two *sententiae* that are used to justify the character’s possible *souffrance* departing from the verisimilar:

[48] *Et cuers s’est une créature
Merveilles d’estrance nature:
Qu’il pense voir moult largement,
Torne et retorne trop sovent
Les larges pensers que requelt
Dont motes foie[e]s se due[l]t.
Et por cho di jo de Scilence
Qui ert de moult grant abstinence,
Que ses pense le tormentoit
Et il le sentoit et sofroït.
Et tols jors ert pres a contraire
A cho que ses cuers voloit faire.
Et qui oeuvre contre voloir
Soventes fois l’estuet doloir.*
(RS, 2667–80; emphases and underlining added)

[*And the human heart is a creature that has a strange and peculiar nature. it thinks a great deal, turns the deep thoughts it harbors over and over again, far too often, and causes itself a great deal of grief. And that is why I say <of Silence, who showed such great forbearance, that his thoughts tormented him, and he felt this and suffered from it.> He was always ready to go against what his heart wanted him to do, and whoever works against his will find himself often in a state of unhappiness.]*

To support the alternative interpretation against the venerable judgment of tradition, the Commentator appeals to humanity itself: because the human heart is such a profoundly peculiar thing, there is a tendency in us to dwell on painful emotions, despite the psychological harm it may cause, and moreover, a person turning away from what their heart knows is right will doubtless be plunged into misery. These verdicts are openly framed as explanations, as the underlined section shows (“Et por cho di jo . . .”): they are there to legitimise the Commentator’s argumentative

approach. No *auctor* is referenced; rather, the first-person intervention emphatically directs attention to the poet *himself* as the source of the two *sententiae*. This may seem like a rhetorically risky move, but combined with the *occultatio* discussed in the previous section (“Jo ne di pas qu’il ne pe[n]sast / Diversement . . .”), the risks involved are remarkably reduced: Heldris is not stating – thrusting his precepts down our throats, as Quintilian feared – but *suggesting*. Seeking acceptance, the *jo* puts itself forward as a cautious mediator who seeks authorisation neither from a previous source nor his own telling, but from the human heart, in the workings of which all of us are implicated: under such trying circumstances, we are asked, who would not feel torn and conflicted? I suggested earlier that this idea of collective readership was evoked to make the audience aware how their own readerly experiences *produce* the verisimilar. Now it is our common experience of humanity that *undermines* the verisimilar, reaching towards something more insecure: the “we” ethos and the collective mindset supposed by the two *sententiae* displaces the *estorie* as an authentication device, justifying the departure from the verisimilar by appealing to the auditor’s self-experienced comprehension of the human heart, a comprehension that might be at odds with what the *estorie* has to say about Silence’s courageousness.

Moreover, this proposal contradicting Silence’s conventional heroic fortitude is not in any way final, but mere conjecture that by its very form raises the question whether the Commentator’s tentative labelling of Silence’s emotions is in fact true or false. In this sense, it is not merely the Commentator that is heard in these lines. For is it not plausible that the *jo* here expands into the “poetic I,” a “representative of mankind,” in Spitzer’s (1946) sense of the term, standing as a kind of Everyman in entirely ordinary circumstances – for do we not constantly seek, more or less consciously, and more or less successfully, to divine other people’s thoughts in our everyday social interactions, as recent cognitive approaches to fictional minds are so fond of repeating?

In [47] and [48], then, Heldris’s *sententiae* underpinned by the collective “we” ethos arguably open up a space where hegemonic authorial rhetoric is contested through a communally oriented narrative voice. Following Mäkelä, who has explored the role of the maxim in modernist fiction, one could well designate this space as a “gnomic space” that gives rise to a “non-monolithic authorship” (2007, 116). By thus reformulating the gnomic statement, which in modern narratology has tended to carry connotations of conclusive authority similar to classical rhetoric (e.g., Cohn 1978, 22–23), Mäkelä wishes to trace a relativist attitude towards gnomic truths (ibid. 113) that she furthermore associates with the post-modernist scepticism towards authorial hegemony and knowledge in general. In medieval romance, there is a

contrary tendency: if the twenty-first century novelist can no longer occupy a stance of sententious authority with a straight face, the thirteenth-century poet, on the other hand, is just beginning to get there. A different end is pursued through the same means: the truth of the narrative – of the poet’s vision – is guaranteed through ethos-saving, relativizing maxims seeking accommodation with the audience.

At the same time, the gnomic space allows Heldris to determine his relationship as a poet not only to the imposing *fama*, but also to his more recent predecessors. In building authority on commonly negotiated norms, his ideological standpoint echoes Chrétien’s sententious opening of *Erec et Enide* with a “peasant’s proverb” which at the same time establishes and severs the work’s link to tradition, since the maxim draws on vulgar wisdom rather than prestigious authorities (Bruckner 2000, 15). Tradition no longer guarantees the veracity of the told – people do. In this way, as Krueger (1987, 122) puts it, Chrétien and his successors “posit the truth of their story to be in their own telling of it.” One of these successors, Heldris strongly exhibits this kind of self-generating discursive authority, yet his way of erecting a “fiction of authority,” to borrow a phrase by Susan Sniader Lanser (1992), is completely different. For Lanser, the maxim serves as a tool in this authority-establishing project that she investigates in the writings of female authors from the eighteenth century onwards, becoming “extrarepresentational” sites for negotiating the author’s role within the larger socio-cultural and literary context, and allowing the writer to take part from inside the fiction in social and cultural debate (ibid. 17). Although in a very different context, Heldris’s search for authority can be seen in similar terms. Against Chrétien’s narratorial *je* which “remains entirely particular,” bent upon drawing lines of exclusion between himself and his audience, and never becoming the universal “poetic I” (Lacy 1980, 36), the *Silence* poet projects a collective voice resisting authorial conclusiveness, or rather reaching towards the kind of conclusiveness that his audience can (or even must) vouch for. It could even be claimed that the romance transfers the last word to the audience and their *sagesse*, a tendency that is openly voiced when it is suggested that a glamorous outward appearance can house a vile heart and vice versa, as frequently seen in everyday life: “Et se ne me volés or croire / Vos le poés par vos prover” (RS, 1840–41; “And if you don’t care to believe me, you can prove it for yourself”).

Heldris’s “we” strategies thus represent a hands-on take on what Minnis calls the “disavowal of responsibility” trope: this trope allows, for example, Jean de Meun in *Le Roman de la Rose* to refer anyone who thinks he is lying about love to the *auctores* he is depending on (Minnis 1984/2010, 198). Heldris, on the other hand, has already gone a long way towards shattering his safety net by subtly calling out the *estorie*’s

lies. The audience must refer back to themselves; it is the reader “in qui est *auctoritas*,” when it comes to the emotions and mental states portrayed in the narrative. Personal experience guarantees the truth of the tale, much like eye-witnessing by the historian or a trustworthy source guaranteed the reliability of historical writing according to Isidore of Seville’s authoritative definition of history (cf. Beer 1981, 23–34).⁷⁹ And yet, it can be argued that this distribution of agency in a consensual act of poetic persuasion seeks, at bottom, a stabilisation of meaning that, as Marcus suggested, threatens to eliminate the distance between self and other, despite outward appearances. The collective voice conceals its authorial origin among echoes and recycled images, at the same time seeking to convince the recipient that it is *you* who is in charge, and that *we* can all vouch for the accuracy of the presentation. It is a form of literary manipulation which, while it seems to cede authority to the audience, also subtly hands it back to the poet by attesting to his compositional skills.

In his study on maxims in Old English poetry, Paul Cavill (1999) writes about the *consensus-reinforcing rhetoric* of the generalising statement. By affirming social norms and ideals, maxims arguably establish order against the threat of chaos and conflict (ibid. 110), generating an almost “symbiotic” relationship between poet, audience and tradition (ibid. 112). Such a centralising force indeed seems to be at work in the *sententiae* discussed above, as well as the strategy of *interrogatio*, which was likewise grounded, we recall, in the presupposition that a consensus can be found on the quality of human experience, a kind of unity which assures us, in the words of Elizabeth Ermarth, that “we all inhabit the same world and that the same meanings are available to everyone” – therefore, “with enough good faith, enough effort, enough time, problems *can* be solved, tragedies *can* be averted, failures in communication *can* be overcome” (1983, 65; emphases original). To suggest, therefore, as the Commentator does, that we are invariably prone to dwelling on the injustices we have suffered and that acting against one’s interest should always be a cause for anxiety, is to undoubtedly consolidate the kind of comforting potential of group membership that Cavill talks about. However, such symbiotic relationship can also entail a symbiotic delusion of safety – a delusion which Heldris’s experientialising rhetoric employing *occultatio* and *dubitatio* seems to target upon. For no sooner is the consensus specified, than it is taken apart, as the collective certainty

⁷⁹ “Apud veteres enim nemo conscribat historiam, nisi is qui interfuisset, et ea quae conscribenda essent vidisset. Melius enim oculis quae fiunt deprehendimus, quam quae auditione colligimus. Quae enim videntur, sine mendacio proferuntur” (*Elym.* I.41; “Indeed, among the ancients no one would write a history unless he had been present and had seen what was to be written down, for we grasp with our eyes things that occur better than what we gather with our hearing, since what is seen is revealed without falsehood”, Barney et al., transl., 67).

about what it is to be human and the sense of security it arguably entails is subverted by the strategic simulation of *doubt* eroding the solid *sententiae*. Indeed, it would seem that the failures in communication that a shared consciousness underlying the generalisations was supposed to prevent are in fact *created* and positively underlined by the first-person interventions prompting the audience to reflect on the validity of the poet's judgments and to contemplate the possibility of univocal, universal truths.

In essence, by experientialising the characters' emotions in a manner that resists conclusive answers, Heldris arguably mirrors the audience's notion of themselves as subjective experiencers whose interpretations of another person's mindset must, by necessity, be grounded on an illusion of similarity. Ruth Morse (1991, 53) writes that whenever a medieval character claims to know what another character is thinking, the author is deliberately creating space for audience discussion and argument about the true motives and meanings of the referred character. To be sure, the claim *not* to know has the same effect, as it directs attention to the element of doubt in universal applicability. The interlacing of an authorial voice pronouncing *sententiae* about human nature with an "ordinary" consciousness exhibiting epistemological limitations effectively cancels the idea of collective consciousness the narration pretends to be relying on: the supposedly universally valid statements are shown to result from *subjective* reflection on a *particular* situation. The mind-attribution thus emerges as a process of circular deduction, generalising from the particular and particularising from the general: Silence was a human child of tender age, *ergo* his heart must have been heavy with doubt and anxiety, and because the human heart tends to dwell on things that cause doubt and anxiety, Silence must have suffered. As with the "story tells that X" formula, the human heart as an authentication device is dismantled, as its authority is shown to be profoundly unstable: in real life we cannot know each other's minds with their own sets of sorrows and troubles, so at the end of the day how could *anyone* be in the position to judge what is or is not true of another's heart?

This doubt-fostering rhetoric reflects the call for dispute which I identified in the beginning of this chapter as the core impulse of the *Roman de Silence*. The inclusive space of romance readership, of which the *estorie* stands as a fixed symbol, is a secure space projecting a reality whose maxims are always true: a lover delights in torment, a hero faces adversity with courage. Against this closed type of collective voice Heldris raises a more open one that, through the representative *jo*, suggests a haunting *lack* of such consensus in human life. As Krause suggested, Heldris's text may reveal that human beings are unattainably different from idealistic literary

representations. Additionally, it proposes that they are perhaps unattainably different from each other, as implied by Nature's collection of moulds:

[49] A son secré va, si descuevre.
 Molles i a bien .m. milliers,
 Que cho li est moult grans mestiers,
 Car s'ele n'eüst forme c'une,
 La semblance estroit si commune
 De tolte gent, c'on ne savroit
 Quoi, ne quel non, cascuns avroit.
 Mais Nature garda si bien
 En s'uevre n'a a blasmer rien.
 Ele a forms grans et petites,
 Laides, contrefaites, parfites,
 Car si sunt faites tolt gent,
 Grant et petit, et biel, et gent,
 Tant mainte forme i a diverse.
 Et Nature en a une aërse-
 Ainc mais user ne l'endura.
 (RS, 1886–92)

[She goes to her coffer and opens it up. She has at least a million moulds there, and she has very great need of them, for if she had only one form, everyone would look so much alike that no one would ever be able to tell who was who or what their name was. But Nature takes such care that there is nothing to fault in her work. She has forms both big and little, ugly, misshapen, and perfect, for thus all people are fashioned, big and little, handsome and fine, she has so many different forms. But one mould she has kept aside; she has never used it yet.]

Nature's special mould is, of course, the one she uses to create Silence. The process, as explained earlier in this chapter, mirrors the poet's work of composition: what emerges from the poet's desk is a textualized repetition for whom the narration nonetheless claims uniqueness through constructing, in collaboration with the audience, a hero/ine whose predicament drives him to ask "Did anything like this ever happen to anyone? Never!" ("Avint donques mais a nule? /Nenil!"; RS, 2563–64; see also ll. 2583–86). In addition to the gender-related uniqueness of the character, these lines can also be read as a turn towards the mimetic, in Phelan's sense of characters as representations of possible humans (2005, 13). The maxims about the human heart takes this move even further. Contrary to Ryder and Zaerr (2008, 27), who argue that, due to their universal scope, Heldris's generalising statements serve as an agency-reducing method of acceleration eclipsing Silence from view, I propose that they constitute, in fact, an attempt to bring the audience *closer* to the particularity of Silence's experience. Instead of offering the audience an

interiority that is directly available by convention and pushing Silence further into the realm of the poetically true, Heldris chooses to explore the more idiosyncratic possibility precisely with the help of audience-oriented, universalising statements that should thus be perceived rather as a form of deceleration seeking to understand Silence's psychological state.

According to Eugène Vinaver, medieval romance literature does not give us people but *problems*: thus, despite its interest in causality and perspective, it would be misleading to speak of psychological realism in Chrétien's work, the purpose of which is not to make its characters behave like actual people, but to elaborate certain problems through them (Vinaver 1971, 30–31). While I maintain that Heldris's treatment of Silence's anguish as well as Eufemie's heartache does gesture towards an interest in the subjective existence of these characters beyond the verisimilar, it is nonetheless important to also acknowledge, in line with Vinaver's argument, how these alternative interiorities hinted at by Heldris are established as functional sites to negotiate the poet's role in the context of the rising literary self-consciousness. The battle between Heldris and the *estorie* about Silence's emotions is, ultimately, a battle about voice: what is the correct thing to feel in a given situation, and how should the poet write about it? Which one is the forgery, the Silence of the *conte* or the Silence of the *estorie*? By employing an experientialising rhetoric, Heldris seeks to convince the audience of the validity of his own vision – of his *auctoritas* – through involving the recipients in the narrative process. Suggesting alternative lines of interpretation, he leads the reader to question the fixed truths of books, as the hierarchy which places the voice of the *estorie* above Heldris's voice in terms of truthfulness is arguably *reversed*: the Commentator's additions are no longer mere *lies*, but perhaps more truthful than the *estorie*'s representation could ever hope to be. This flip between the Latin source and the French tale, I argue, ultimately symbolises an attitude defining a skilled readership that refuses to uncritically succumb to any kind of discourse that requires unconditional acceptance. This kind of vigilant, healthy criticism on the part of the reader is encouraged also in the work to which I turn next.

II PREDESTINED MINDS: *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*⁸⁰

In Book IV of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the tale recounting the love of Prince Troilus for the beautiful widow Criseyde takes a dark turn: at the behest of Criseyde's father, who now resides at the Greek camp, the Trojan parliament agrees to exchange Criseyde for a prisoner of war. In the face of the impending separation, Troilus sinks into an emotional paralysis, his mind fixed upon the inevitability of his fate:

[1] And shortly, al the sothe for to seye,
 He was so fallen in despeir that day,
 That outrely he shop hym for to deye.
 For right thus was his argument alway:
 He seyde he nas but lorn, weylaway!
 “For al that comth, comth by necessitee:
 Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee.
 (*TC*, 4.953–59)

That one must by necessity fall on Fortune's ever-spinning wheel after rapturously rising on it is one the central themes of Chaucer's text, introduced in the opening stanza (*TC*, 1.1–7) and culminating in Troilus's majestic monologue, influenced by Boethius, on predestination and free will near the end of the tale (*TC*, 4.958–1078). This thematic strain invests *Troilus and Criseyde* with a foreboding sense of circularity dictating that what has happened before will happen again, even at the most mundane level of human interaction; as both B.A. Windeatt (1992, 188–90) and Lee Patterson (1991, 151–52) have noted, events and actions from the exchange of brooches to the rituals of wooing tend to take place twice in the poem, structuring the protagonists' lives into a pattern of repetitions. Yet this repetitiveness is also literary historical repetitiveness. As reincarnations of Troilus and Briseida from Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie*, and Troiolo and Cressida from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (ca. 1335), Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde are subject to duplication that Spearing (2012, 115) suggests shows in Troilus's occasional half-awareness of being part of a history that has already been written.

The present chapter builds upon these themes of inevitability and duplication, with an emphasis on the poem's methods of representing the characters' emotions and states of mind. Whereas Chapter I of this study was primarily concerned with

⁸⁰ Some of the findings in this chapter have been previously published in Pihl (2018). The present discussion considerably develops the arguments presented there.

how character interiorities were formulated in the narratorial discourse of *Le Roman de Silence*, the analysis will now also involve the protagonists self-articulating their thoughts and sensations in the form of letters, songs and monologues.

I mentioned in the Introduction that *Troilus and Criseyde* has been praised by many critics for its fine psychological nuances, with Scholes and Kellogg suggesting that in its monologues rhetoric fades into psychology, shifting focus from the audience to the character and replacing verbal artistry with an attempt to reproduce the characters' "actual thought" (1966/2006, 185). Robert M. Jordan takes an opposite stance in pointing out that Chaucerian narrative "invites primary emphasis on the verbal medium" and in many ways "renders the medium opaque and noticeable" (1987, 16). Chaucer's rhetorical poetics, he writes, is all about "the making of make-believe" (ibid. 21). H. Marshall Leicester (1990), in his major study on the representation of the subject in the *Canterbury Tales*, has likewise drawn attention to the ways in which Chaucer's narration tends to break the illusion of spoken discourse, for instance when we suddenly find in the *Miller's Prologue* an exhortation to "Turne over the leef and chese another tale" (1.3177). Leicester refers to this as the poem's "conspicuous textuality," describing it as a self-conscious strategy by a writer who not only writes texts but deliberately calls attention to their writtenness (ibid. 8).

My analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde* contributes to this line of research, yet I wish to focus specifically on the tension between the actual and the artificial, the ways in which Chaucer *pretends* to make the opaque transparent in evoking a sense of what I shall refer to as *pseudo-experientiality*. By this I mean that the characters' subjective voices, explicitly promised to be heard in the narrative, come to us intermixed with de-individualising and distancing forces that consciously direct the allegedly primary voice of these experiencers towards the authorial source that brings them into being. Thus, despite their ascription to a specific individual, the characters' quoted words and thoughts that constitute their interiorities point to the essence of these interiorities as *materia* worked upon by the poet and constructed from texts that are common property. In this way, the chapter continues to develop the study's principal argument about the functionalised interiorities of medieval literature. Expanding upon Spearing's "stories before consciousness" argument, I put forward in Chapter I the suggestion that stories *are* the consciousness of *Silence's* characters, which means that their interiorities – *made-up minds*, as I called them – were shaped and functionalised through a strategic exploitation by the work's author of the audience's romance memory, in a manner that relies on and further reinforces the mechanics of narrative verisimilitude. I also submitted that this narrative technique tends to

sideline the characters, focusing as it does more on the communal creation and reception of the work as a representative of the romance discourse. In *Troilus*, we find at work a similar rhetoric, which through instilling a heightened source-awareness that, furthermore, toys with the schematicity and vagueness of language, makes us question the possibility of hearing the characters at all, and, consequently, to ask whether the aim of representing their interiorities is to explore their psychological processes or to make them serve some other ends instead.

The first section, “Undercover Operations,” opens with a focus on the narrative strategies that instil source-awareness and serve as reminders of origin by smuggling the poet’s voice by stealth into the characters’ speeches. A key concept is rhetorical *expositio*, a method of amplifying the matter by saying the same thing with variations, which I treat as a form of metalepsis, here to be understood in the term’s narratological sense of boundary-crossing between the levels of a narrative. By analysing the ways in which the text creates discursive echoes – a strategy that I shall call *iterative metalepsis* – between authorial and character speeches through certain connecting phrases and rhetorical figures, I will argue that such mirroring is a significant element in the poem’s method of representing the characters’ emotions and states of mind, and that its ultimate purpose is to draw attention to these emotions as poetic constructions.⁸¹ The section closes with a discussion of how the original manuscript context provides additional opportunities for these effects, with a focus on *delayed attribution*, a form which transgresses the three traditional categories of speech and thought representation.

The investigation of Chaucer’s undercover strategy of voice continues in Section 6, which expands the notion of source-awareness from the immediate narrative framework to the intertextual relations between texts. The analysis builds on the cognitive concept of source-monitoring, with an emphasis on how the characters’ interiorities are produced through quotation that is *shown* to be quotation. Besides tracing intertextual echoes, I analyse introductory *inquirits* that work through source-muddling; what I seek to argue is that one of the narrative prestidigitations performed by Chaucer in *Troilus* is the illusion that there is no communicative design by the poet at work in the characters’ self-narration of their interiorities, while at the same time the text’s rhetorical design – that could be designated as *apophatic mediacy* – constantly does pull the rug out from under this pretence of authorial invisibility. Together with iterative metalepsis and delayed attribution, source-muddling and

⁸¹ Forms of discursive echoing as a literary strategy can also be found in Old French narrative. Bateman (2011) explores the figure of Malebouche as an appropriator of other characters’ discourse in *Le Roman de la Rose* from the point of view of Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Griffin (2011) offers a discussion on how the figure of Echo structures the characters’ voices in *Narcissus et Dané* and *Cristal et Clarie*.

apophatic mediacy serve as *authorial signposts* which all have the same effect: even in such instances which purport to take us directly into the characters' private experience – monologues, songs, letters – there is only one source to be found behind the pretence of two. As with the overstated verisimilitude and the staging of the reception process in *Silence, Troilus and Criseyde* makes visible its constructed status and underlines the experiential voices of its characters as *materia*, as fragments of texts in a pre-existing web of texts.

The latter part of Section 6 explores the role of romance memory through the *wynter moone* -sequence, once again with an interest in how manuscript marking can turn a narratological reading of a scene radically on its head. Section 7 concentrates on frequency and repetition, which are investigated in connection to experiential inevitability and the techniques of source-shedding and habitual-generic narration as manipulative tools for determining the outcome of a given experience in advance; it will be argued that the text encourages a critical view of a passive internalisation of ready-made truths.

5 Undercover Operations

5.1 Creating Echoes: *Expolitio* and Iterative Metalepsis

5.1.1 Battles of Reason and Desire

The starting point of my analysis of *Troilus's* interwoven voices is the categorisation of fictional speech and thought acts in terms of direct, indirect and free indirect discourse. I will focus on the first two categories, which I shall refer to as “quoted monologue” and “psycho-narration,” after Cohn’s (1978) influential work on fictional consciousness representation. In defining quoted monologue as “a character’s mental discourse” cited by the narrator and psycho-narration as “the narrator’s discourse about a character’s consciousness,” Cohn (*ibid.* 10) identifies the degree of authorial intervention as the key distinguishing factor between these two modes. This means that her account, like the other classical “scale models” (Fludernik 1993, 289) of speech and thought representation (e.g., Genette 1972/1980; Chatman 1978; Cohn 1978; McHale 1978; Leech and Short 1981/2007), regards direct and indirect forms of representation as opposite poles on a continuum ranging from zero to total narratorial control: while the former technique purports

to offer a word-for-word replication of a character's language, the latter in turn emphasises the presence of a mediating instance, at the expense of decreasing the audibility of the character's "actual" words or thoughts.

According to Meir Sternberg (1982), this traditional method of determining narrative voice is partly responsible for the existence of five narratological "package deals" that mechanically staple direct and indirect discourse with a set of specific representational functions. Thus, the employment of *sympathy-promoting*, *detailed*, *realistic*, *distinctive* and *reproductive* direct discourse is understood to produce some very different narrative effects from those obtained by indirect discourse that is in turn seen as *non-empathetic*, *non-specific*, *non-realistic*, *stylised* and *paraphrased* (ibid. 111). Warning against such routine placement of equals signs between form and function, Sternberg formulates his famous "Proteus Principle" as a reminder that a given form may realise several different functions in different environments. One such environment is consciousness representation. In this area, the employment of direct quotation, despite its connotations of realism and specificity, may in fact pose a "threat to probability" (ibid. 121) that is avoided by the use of indirect discourse. Because indirect discourse suggests the presence of a regulating quoter, who is tacitly understood to be partly responsible for the composition, it does not evoke such incredulous and amused responses that a direct version, appearing "too stilted, witty, low, smooth, discontinuous, articulate, self-conscious, minutely recalled, or otherwise far-fetched to be true" (ibid. 120) would perhaps inspire in the readers.

There are psychological reasons for these presumed incredulous responses, ranging from the conviction that a subjectively limited "first-person ascription" of mental states to oneself can be less than reliable to the sense that emotional crises often entail the reaching of boundaries of consciousness in the form of disoriented thoughts that fictional characters themselves, insofar as they are representations of actual human beings, simply cannot grasp in their entirety (Palmer 2004, 102–3, 124–29). From this cognitivist standpoint, authorial back-up is therefore needed to counterbalance the natural restrictions inherent to human cognition, and it remains for the objective, omniscient narrator to perform a corrective manoeuvre which can arguably provide a reliable account of a character's motivations and inner states (Palmer 2004, 129). In other words, narratorial descriptions of characters' minds tend to give the impression of affording a *more* authentic and convincing view into those minds than would a self-articulated account, since they can bring us closer to the characters without risking a violation of psychological credibility, freely reaching even to the subconscious levels inaccessible to the characters themselves:

Not only can [psycho-narration] order and explain a character's conscious thoughts better than the character himself, it can also effectively articulate a psychic life that remains un verbalized, penumbral, or obscure. Accordingly psycho-narration often renders, in a narrator's knowing words, what a character "knows," without knowing how to put it into words. (Cohn 1978, 46)

By all appearances, the following passage from *Troilus* seems to look down on the protagonist precisely from the kind of linguistically and epistemologically elevated vantage point that Cohn describes. Dealing with Troilus's emotions as the Trojan parliament argues the trading of Criseyde for the prisoner Antenor, the stanzas convey the prince's anxiety indirectly in psycho-narration:

[2] [a] And ful of angwissh and of grisly drede
 Abod what lordes wolde unto it seye;
 And if they wolde graunte – as God forbede –
 Th'eschaunge of hire, [b] than thoughte he thynges tweye:
 First, how to save hire honour, and what weye
 He myghte best th'eschaunge of hire withstonde.
 [c] Ful faste he caste how al this myghte stonde.

 [d] Love hym made al prest to don hire byde,
 And rather dyen than she sholde go;
 [e] But Resoun seyde hym, on that other syde,
 'Withouten assent of hire ne do nat so,
 Lest for thi werk she wolde be thy fo,
 And seyn that thorough thy medlynge is iblowe
 Youre bother love, ther it was erst unknowe.'
 (*TC*, 4.155–61; bracketed letters added)

In the first stanza, the narrator places labels on Troilus's state of mind ("angwissh," "drede"), with possibly a brief slip into Troilus's perspective ("as God forbede") [a], then carefully reports the contents of the character's thought to the extent of numbering them ("than thoughte he thynges tweye: First . . . and . . .") [b], and finally summarises this entire mental process in one neat sentence ("Ful faste he caste . . .") [c]. The second stanza turns to amplification. Here Troilus's inner conflict transforms into a personified *psychomachia* which reports the opposing arguments by "Love" (irrational) and "Resoun" (rational) in indirect [d] and direct speech [e]. The latter even goes as far as to embed a stretch of "prospective discourse" (Sternberg 1982, 137–40) by Criseyde in Reason's words, transcribing what she would potentially say at learning that the pair's secret affair has been most embarrassingly exposed because of Troilus's public resistance to the political exchange ("And seyn that thorough thy medlynge . . ."). To be sure, these features all seem to point to the

presence of an omniscient, organising higher level agent capable of ordering and explaining the thoughts chasing each other through Troilus's mind with a precision that far exceeds the cognitive capacities of the troubled character and, especially in [d] and [e], delves into such thoughts and emotions of which, as Fludernik puts it, echoing Cohn's seminal definition of psycho-narration, the characters themselves "may only be dimly cognizant, and *certainly not in the terms of description supplied by the narrative*" (1993, 297; emphasis added).

However, while all these signs of superordinate narratorial agency can arguably be detected in the use of psycho-narration in [2], whatever cognitive and linguistic barriers this mode of representation seems to erect between narrator and character begin to crumble when Troilus himself gives an account of his inner conflict sometime later in the narrative:

[3] "Thus am I lost, for aught that I kan see.
 For certeyn is, syn that I am hire knyght,
 I moste hire honour levere han than me
 In every cas, as loveve ought of right.
*Thus am I with desir and reson twight:
 Desir for to destourben hire me redeth,
 And reson nyl nat; so myn herte dredeth.*"
 (TC, 4.568–74; emphasis added)

Troilus's quoted monologue is an abbreviation of the narratorial version of the same emotional event. At the same time, the stanza presents a contrary process of amplification by Chaucer, who expands upon Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* that he uses as his principal source material, sometimes following it very closely, sometimes drastically deviating from it (Windeatt 1992, 50–72), as in the passage under discussion. Whereas Boccaccio's Troiolo simply laments his situation, describing the feelings that he experiences knowing that his Cressida is about to be taken away from him –

Così piangendo, in amorosa erranza
 dimoro, lasso, e non so che mi fare,
 perocché il valor se pure avanza
 forte d'amor, il mio sento mancare,
 e d'ogni parte fugge la Speranza,
 e crescon le cagion del tormentare.
 (*Il Filostrato*, 4.70)

Thus in tears do I bide aweary in amorous perplexity and know not what to do, because I feel the mighty power of Love, if indeed it is strong, is lacking in

me, and on every hand hope taketh flight and the causes of my anguish increase. (Griffin and Myrick, transl., 68)⁸²

– Chaucer’s Troilus turns to the same rhetorical strategy of *prosopopeia* (personification) as the poet has done earlier: embedded in the Troilus’s quoted monologue we find a segment of indirect discourse which repeats and transposes in the character’s language the conflicting utterances of Love (“Desir”) and Resoun (“reson”) that were originally formulated in the narratorial discourse in [2], as they are in the *Filostrato*:

Amore il faceva pronto ad ogni cosa
doversi opporre, ma d'altra parte era
ragion che 'l contrastava, e che dubbiosa
faceva molto quella impresa altiera,
non forse di ciò fosse corrucciosa
Criseida per vergogna, e 'n tal maniera,
volendo e non volendo or questo or quello,
intra due stave il timido donzello.
(*Il Filostrato*, 4.16)

Love made him ready as duty-bound to oppose everything but on the other side was Reason, who stood against it, and cast upon that lofty enterprise much doubt lest Cressida should perchance be angry on shame’s account. And in such manner stood the timid youth between two courses, now willing this, now that, and then unwilling either. (Griffin and Myrick, transl., 59)

As Patterson (1991, 151) notes, Chaucer regularly adds replicating counterparts to single incidents in the *Filostrato*. Excerpts [2] and [3] demonstrate that this replication strategy is at work in the poem not only in the repetition of events in the storyworld but also at the level of voice: when it is time for Troilus to lament, Chaucer chooses to construct the prince’s speech by using the exact same elements that constitute the earlier indirect description of Troilus’s/Troiolo’s feelings. The technique can be understood as an application of rhetorical *expolitio* that Geoffrey of Vinsauf describes in the following terms:

. . . sententia cum sit
Unica, non uno veniat contenta paratu,
Sed variet vestes et mutatoria sumat;
Sub verbis aliis praesumpta resume; repone
Pluribus in clausis unum; multiplice forma
Dissimuletur idem; varius sit et tamen idem.

⁸² All English translations of the *Filostrato* are by Griffin and Myrick (1929/1999).

(PN, 219–24)

[A]lthough the meaning is one, let it not come content with one set of apparel. Let it vary its robes and assume different raiment. Let it take up again in other words what has already been said; let it reiterate, in a number of clauses, a single thought. Let one and the same thing be concealed under multiple forms – be varied and yet the same. (Nims, transl., 24)

The purpose of such treatment, according to Geoffrey, is to give the matter “a finer polish and impart a smooth finish by repeated applications of the file” (Nims, transl., 61; “ut poliam rem plenius et quasi crebra / Expoliam lima”, PN, 1250–51). Such stylistic polishing may well have been Chaucer’s intention in the duplicated portrayal of Troilus’s emotional anguish, which achieves variance through switching from indirect [2] to direct discourse in the recapitulation [3]. Likewise, it might be that he aimed at pathos in the style of *chansons de geste*, where varied repetition was an extremely popular method of magnifying the moral beauty of impressive narrative moments by dwelling on them (Ryding 1971, 78). This would tend to lead to chronological regression, with the writer starting the scene all over again two or three times in immediate succession. The romantic genre, concerned with wonders and surprise, abandoned this procedure, but retained repetition as a device of balancing one part of a tale with another to underline thematic continuities (ibid. 98).

Against this background, the *Troilus* iterations can be said to draw from both traditions. On the one hand, the re-description of Troilus’s despair, reminding the audience of his disconsolate state, does have an emotional impact. On the other hand, the temperate execution puts the focus more on the thematic pairing of the two scenes. What kind of thematic pairing this is can perhaps be determined from the presence of *prosopopeia* in both instances, which has the effect of creating a distinct *echo* between psycho-narration and quoted monologue. From our modern point of view, this echo bridges the traditional cognitive and linguistic divide between narrator and character, profoundly calling into question the functions traditionally associated with their respective discourses: knowing *exactly* how to put into words his inner life and *precisely* in the terms supplied by the narrative, Troilus speaks his mind in a manner that, due to the connecting *expolitio*, forces us to recognise in the character’s quoted monologue those features that are also found in the poet’s psycho-narration.

At this point, it might well be asked: is this not entirely typical of premodern narrative, where the languages of the narrator and the characters were not yet differentiated to the degree that one finds in the modern novel (cf. Stanzel 1984, 193)? In other words, is the echo between the two speakers arresting only to the

modern reader, whereas Chaucer's contemporary audiences would have been less concerned about it, perhaps even entirely ignoring it as not in any way significant to the understanding of the text at hand? After all, numerous features of medieval narrative seem to generally encourage its identification more as a system of similarity rather than difference, where the orientation of voices is not necessarily a central concern; for instance, romance characters' voices are frequently not individualised according to personal and social factors (e.g., Vitz 1999, 161–62), and it has even been argued that the absence of quotation marks in medieval manuscripts blurs distinct boundaries between direct and indirect speech to the degree of questioning their existence as separate categories (Moore 2011). I will come back to this problematic argument below. For now, it must be emphasised that in [2] and [3] we are not dealing with simply recognising a similarity of syntactic structures or ways of speaking; we are dealing, instead, with finding *precise* traces of the narratorial discourse in the character's speech.

This is a striking method, and one that I argue was meant to be acknowledged by medieval audiences as well. As recalled from the previous chapter (Chapter I: Section 2.1), a limited perspective on reality was a new genre-shaping factor in chivalric romance, where characters' perceptual and experiential limits would often lead them into incomplete and incorrect views about what is happening to them. On the other hand, romance characters are also known to perform some very clear-sighted self-referential analyses of their own emotions (cf. Fludernik 2011a, 77–79), perceptively identifying their states of mind in the present tense, as does, for example, a character in *King Horn* pronouncing “For sorewe nu I wepe,” and sounding very similar to the statement “Così piangendo, in amorosa erranza / dimoro” (“Thus in tears do I bide weary in amorous perplexity”) by Boccaccio's Troilo. Chaucer's strategy of echoing puts a special twist on what could have been just another such instance preserved and brought over from the source material. Instead, by explicitly establishing a connection, through a refined deployment of *expolitio*, between his own words and those of Troilus, Chaucer makes his self-analysing character appear as a doubly insightful, narrator-like constructor of his own mind who, rather than being restricted or blinded by personal limitations (as perhaps already expected by romance readers), is strictly *right* about himself. I argue that this is a conscious *metaleptic* technique designed to alert the audience to the presence of the author even in the most private articulations by the characters of their own emotions.

The term “metalepsis” (and the corresponding *transsumptio*) has its roots in ancient rhetoric and medieval poetics, where it referred to an operation of combining two dissimilar expressions on the basis of some shared properties (Purcell 1996, 78).

Thus, if the poet speaks of, for instance, “snowy teeth” (“dentes nivei”; *PN*, 778) the colour white is intuitively recognised as the missing connecting link. The term was adopted and put to new use in the 1970s by Genette, who redefined it in the narratological context as the crossing of the boundaries between the levels of a narrative. According to Genette’s foundational definition, metalepsis thus refers to “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (1972/1980, 234–35); in other words, it occurs whenever “an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative or when a character in that fiction intrudes into the extradiegetic existence of the author or reader” (*ibid.* 88).

Genette’s definition has since gone through a number of attempts to develop a more fine-grained understanding of the phenomenon, though one cannot help feeling that instead of achieving greater clarity the overlapping definitions by several theorists only serve to confuse the issue. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (2006), metalepses fall into two broad categories: *rhetorical* and *ontological*. The difference is that one retains the boundaries between the narrator’s plane of existence and the story level, whereas the other, characteristic of postmodernist writing, blends these two separate environments for good. Thus, rhetorical metalepsis “opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of boundaries”; the author may speak *about* her characters, betraying their status as imaginative creations, but she may not speak *to* her characters, since they belong to another level of reality (*ibid.* 207). Fludernik (2003b) dubs this category, which is also recognised by Genette in his initial discussion, *authorial metalepsis*, but unlike Ryan, she suggests that this ploy in fact *deletes* the boundaries between story and discourse by foregrounding the tale as a construction that does not have an independent existence outside the discourse that produces it; it is a device which “consists of pretending that the poet ‘himself brings about the effects he celebrates,’ as when one says that Virgil ‘has Dido die’ in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, or when Diderot . . . writes in *Jacques le fataliste*: ‘What would prevent me from *getting the Master married* and *making him a cuckold?*’ (Genette 1972/1980, 234; emphasis original). Whether one sees such techniques as reinforcing or eradicating the boundaries between narrative levels, they serve to undermine the mimetic illusion by treating the story as an invention by the author.

In the rhetorical category, one may also include what Fludernik (*ibid.*) calls *narratorial metalepsis*. This type, rather than deleting it, transgresses the ontological and existential distinction between the discourse level and the story level by creating the impression that the narrator and the narratee are physically present and moving

about in the fictional world of the story, such as in “we shall leave [Fanny] for a little while, and pay a visit to Lady Booby” in *Joseph Andrews* (cf. Genette 1972/1980, 235). The transgression is merely rhetorical and metaphorical also in the *while*-formula (“discursive metalepsis” in Cohn 2012), which provides the narrator with the opportunity to offer additional information while the events of the plot, not worth relating, proceed in the background, as in Balzac’s “While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain . . .” (cf. Genette 1972/1980, 235).⁸³

The type of metalepsis that I am concerned with in this chapter is not fully categorisable as one or the other of the types of metalepsis described above. On the one hand, the echoing technique does project a sense of the poet-narrator interfering into the storyworld, which would invite reading it as a type of narratorial metalepsis according to Fludernik’s categorisation. However, the impression is not one of the narrator being *physically* present on the story level; it has more to do with how that presence is discursively *felt* in Troilus’s speech due to the connecting echo which challenges the notion of author’s and character’s voices as separate entities with separate functions. Moreover, it is a strategy that is at once illusion-making and illusion-breaking, as it seems to both retain the levels (clearly, there *are* two distinct speeches by two different speakers in [2] and [3]) and cancel them out, yet not through an open flaunting of authorial powers, as in the Diderot passage illustrating authorial metalepsis, but through a discreet *reminder* that the words spoken by Troilus in the fictional world, and, by extension, his mental state giving rise to these words, originate from an inventor outside the tale.

I propose to call this strategy *iterative metalepsis*, where the word “iterative” is meant to express that the discourse space invades the story space through a specific lexical repetition of the poet’s language and rhetoric in the words of the character. I further suggest that Chaucer’s use of *expolitio* as a form of iterative metalepsis serves to point

⁸³ Both these types of metalepsis are found in Chaucer’s *Troilus*. The characters are regularly put on hold while the narration turns to explore another character’s actions (e.g., “Now lat us stynte of Troilus a throwe, / That rideth forth, and lat us torne faste / Unto Criseyde . . .”; *TC*, 2.687–89), and there are also instances of the while-formula, such as when the poet inserts an invocation while Troilus rehearses the words he will speak to Criseyde (“Lay al this mene while Troilus, / Recordyng his lesson . . .”; *TC*, 3.50–51). Though they do not use narratological terminology, David Lawton and Dieter Mehl both point out that passages such as these underline the compositional aspect by calling attention to the “poem’s careful artistry” (Mehl 1974, 183) and inviting the audience “onstage, into the poem” (Lawton 1985, 83). More practical reasons might also be involved. “Now let us turn to X” was a typical device of interlaced narrative which Chrétien de Troyes introduced in his *Yvain* and which gained ground especially in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* as a means of handling digressions between the several episodes and creating suspense (Ryding 1971, 70, 139). Fludernik (2003b) argues that the formula disappeared with the invention of the chapter.

us to the classical conception of voice as an art of imitation. This idea was transmitted to the Middle Ages by the fourth-century Latin grammarian Diomedes (Curtius 1953/2013, 440), who, in his *Ars grammatica*, identifies three types of poetry based on the person speaking:

Poematos genera sunt tria. Aut enim activum est vel imitativum, quod Graeci δραματικόν [*dramaticon*] vel μιμητικόν [*mimeticon*], aut enarrativum vel enuntiativum, quod Graeci ἐξηγητικόν [*exegeticon*] vel ἀπαγγελτικόν [*apangelticon*] dicunt, aut commune vel mixtum, quod Graeci κοινόν [*koinón*] vel μικτόν [*miktón*] appellant. (*Grammatici Latini* [ed. Keil 1857, 48]; bracketed transcriptions added)

There are three genres of poetry. There is the active or imitative genre, which Greeks call δραματικόν or μιμητικόν, and the narrative or enunciative genre, which Greeks call ἐξηγητικόν or ἀπαγγελτικόν, and the common or mixed genre, which Greeks call κοινόν or μικτόν.⁸⁴

Diomedes then elucidates that the first category, *dramaticon*, includes the imitative forms of poetry, such as tragedy and comedy, where the characters alone seem to speak, and no interfering voice of the poet can be heard (“sine ullius poetae interlocutione”). *Exegeticon*, on the other hand, refers to the narrative mode in which the poet’s voice is the only one present (“poeta ipse loquitur”), such as in Vergil’s *Georgics*, and finally, *koinón*, the form of epic narrative found in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Homer, displays a mixture of both the poet’s and characters’ discourses.⁸⁵ This description, widespread in the Middle Ages (Salmon 1961), goes back to Plato’s distinction between *diegesis* in which the poet speaks “in his own voice” and “remain[s] undisguised throughout,” and *mimesis* where the poet takes the person of his characters and, as at the beginning of the *Iliad*, “tries his very hardest to make us believe that it isn’t Homer who is speaking, but the old priest” (*Republic* 393a–d; transl., Waterfield 1993, 88).

In [3], Chaucer is certainly making us believe that it is Troilus independently speaking his own mind, but at the same time this illusion is undermined by the linking of Troilus’s words to his own authorial discourse. It is a strategy which makes explicitly visible the “already spoken” quality of utterances that Mikhail Bakhtin writes about, insisting that any discourse is to be understood in the light of the alien words that have already been pronounced about it and which exert their pressure on it; the word, then, is by nature “entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex

⁸⁴ The English translation is mine.

⁸⁵ Salmon (1961) provides an overview of the threefold division in the grammarians of the Middle Ages.

interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group” (Bakhtin 1981, 276). When attention is openly drawn to such resonances between poet and character through patterned repetition and re-formulation, as witnessed in [2] and [3], the illusionism involved in the tale is heavily foregrounded. The iterative metalepsis alerts the audience to the fact that Troilus’s experiential voice, no matter how heartfelt the emotion it expresses, ultimately issues from the composing poet who constructs that voice by employing a set of rhetorical tools.

5.1.2 “Autor Poetry”: The Sun Behind the Clouds

Let us look at another example of iterative metalepsis in *Troilus*. After seeing Troilus ride past her window in a jubilant procession, Criseyde undergoes a fierce inner debate about whether she should commit herself to a love affair with the prince or refuse his advances. It is basically only Criseyde that we hear throughout the entire monologue consisting of fifteen stanzas (*TC*, 2.703–805) – with one exception. By the time we get to the tenth stanza, a change of speaker occurs. I quote the part which shows this intersection between the two voices:

[4] “What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus?
Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?
What, pardieux! I am naught religious.
And though that I myn herte sette at reste
Upon this knyght, that is the worthieste,
And kepe alwey myn honour and my name,
By alle right, it may do me no shame.”

But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte
In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
And that a cloude is put with wynd to flighte,
Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,
That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle,
So that for feere almost she gan to falle.
(*TC*, 2.756–69)

The first of the two stanzas quotes Criseyde directly. Typically for Chaucer, it combines rigorous metrical patterning with a conversational rhythm (Elliott 1974, 19), while the hesitant questions and the interjection “what, pardieux!” consisting of an oath and an empathic monosyllable “what,” which Chaucer’s characters frequently utter in a state of confusion (*ibid.* 236), help to impart a colloquial flavour

to the lines.⁸⁶ Together, these features serve to create the illusion that this is not the poet but Criseyde herself in her own words, freshly in love with Troilus and preparing to step into the impending romance that she eventually decides will in no way be detrimental to her character and reputation. However, as the passage continues, Criseyde experiences a change of heart, at which point the use of direct quotation gives way to an authorial description of this inner process that is conveyed in the second stanza in the figurative terms of a cloud eclipsing the sun: like the sudden darkening of the sky in March, the poet informs us, Criseyde's resolve and good mood begin to crumble, and she almost collapses from fear.

There is, then, a sharp difference between the two stanzas that technically move from the imitative rendering of the character's troubled state of mind to its controlled ordering in the narratorial discourse – a juxtaposition which aptly illustrates the functional difference, suggested in Diomedes's account, between the poet speaking in the voice of his character (“Aut enim activum est vel imitativum”) and the poet speaking in his own voice (“aut enarrativum vel enuntiativum”). John of Garland, in a section dedicated to the “threefold genus of discourse” (“triplex genus sermonis”) in his *Parisiana poetria*, takes Diomedes's definition of *exegeticum* further, stating that the narrative mode consisting only of the poet's voice is also called *ermeticon* (“hermeneutic”) or *interpretativum* (“interpretative”) by some (PP, 5.303–10). This additional observation seems to wish to underline that a poet relating a tale indirectly looks upon the storyworld and his characters from an *explanatory* perspective, and insofar as such a procedure is in operation in [4], the passage, once again, seems to at least initially indicate a functional similarity between Chaucer's psycho-narration and its modern counterpart: Criseyde's cognitive chaos is authorially tamed in a language that not only suggests the poet's superior ability in explaining and ordering the character's inner life, but which also translates her consciousness into an extended poetic simile.

For Cohn, such “psycho-analogies” (1978, 37–44) are a specific device of omniscient psycho-narration. Momentarily shifting from past to present tense, and often replacing third-person pronouns with impersonal subjects such as “one” or “a person,” psycho-analogies allow the extradiegetic reality of author and recipient to infiltrate into the narration of a specific psyche, casting the character's subjective reality in an outsider's language, most frequently, in Cohn's interpretation, “when an author is for some reason unwilling to entrust the presentation of the inner life to

⁸⁶ On Chaucer's colloquial English and its structural traits, see also Schlauch (1952) and Cannon (1998).

the character's own verbal competence" (ibid. 44).⁸⁷ On account of these properties, psycho-analogies must surely be counted among the features that, according to Richard Aczel (1998), betray a narratorial agency at work even in those novels which are traditionally considered to involve an effaced narrator. For Aczel, such qualitative factors as "tone, idiom, diction, speech-style," as well as "stylistic virtuosity, convolutedness, rhetoricity" (ibid. 469–70) foreground the narrator as "manifest stylist, orator, or *ethos* in the Aristotelian sense of the term" (ibid. 472) that is juxtaposed with and conspicuously *different from* the surrounding character speech-styles. In other words, stylistic expressivity – that is, *how* a voice speaks, and not just from which ontological level in relation to the storyworld – should be considered central in the identification of voices in novelistic discourse. What this qualitative approach hence offers is one additional way of separating story space from discourse space: like gnomic statements, explanatory comments and other such elements of authorial rhetoric associated with omniscient psycho-narration, the alterity effect described by Aczel rests on the idea of two separately existing fields of agency, where narrator and characters operate firmly apart from one another.

Such an alterity effect indeed seems to arise between the two stanzas in [4]: it cannot be denied that the strikingly artistic language of the second stanza appears to stand in direct contrast to the more colloquial features of the preceding quoted monologue. Such linguistic foregrounding was already seen in the psycho-narration of Troilus's anxiety in [2], where the deployment of *prosopopeia* achieves a similar effect of imbuing the narratorial language with an additional aura of artistry, reminding the audience of the "poetic license" that can "confer a tongue" even to "that which has in itself no such power," according to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's definition of this rhetorical device ("Cui nulla potentia fandi, / Da licite fari donetque licentia linguam"; *PN*, 462–63; Nims, transl., 33). Whereas the personification of Troilus's emotions by the poet is part of a long stretch of authorial narration, in [4] the sudden appearance of figurative language in close connection to Criseyde's confused quoted speech makes the difference between the two modes of discourse especially pronounced.

But apart from the presumed recognition that a shift of speaker occurs between the two stanzas (from "I" to "she"), would such a stylistic discrepancy between author and character have been accessible or relevant at all to Chaucer's contemporary audiences? I noted above that voices in medieval romance were

⁸⁷ Cohn (1978, 44) cites from, e.g., Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): "As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another . . .".

generally not individualised; so, although in romance narration there are occasional slips into a character's viewpoint evoking their voice in the broad sense of perspective, it can be hazardous to speak of them as possessing idiosyncratic languages of their "own" that the narratorial discourse could consciously imitate in the manner of the narratological "Uncle Charles Principle" (Kenner 1978). As Kenner explains, the sentence "Uncle Charles repaired to his outhouse" in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) borrows the verb "repair" from Uncle Charles's characteristic language while retaining the heterodiegetic voice, thus describing the character's actions from the outside in a manner that the character himself might have described them, in his own characteristic parlance.⁸⁸

While such private vocabularies tend not to be present in medieval narrative, one does, however, find a hint of them in Chaucer. As Elliott's invaluable study on the different aspects of Chaucer's English shows, Chaucer was almost ecstatically experimenting with what was still at the time a brand-new literary language, and the variety of registers and styles that he incorporates in his texts constitute a unique achievement: the first appearance in English literature of individual voices that extend beyond the confines of decorum towards conveying the personalities of the speakers (Elliott 1974, 422). In other words, Chaucer uses dialects, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions as devices of characterisation which, instead of merely drawing a portrait of a certain human type, convey a *suggestion* of an idiosyncratic individual. This is the case also in *Troilus* in which distinct idioms are created for the three main characters by, for instance, regulating what kind of oaths each of them uses (ibid. 253). The elevated French oath "pardieux," which can be seen in [4], is restricted to Criseyde and Troilus (who nonetheless swears much less than Criseyde, maintaining a dignified tone throughout the text), but it never enters Pandarus's speech (ibid. 252). This indicates that a method of *exclusion* is one significant aspect of Chaucer's linguistic characterisation; he works through strategically limiting certain words and forms of speech to a particular character (ibid. 377–78), in this way creating what one might call, after Bakhtin, a collection of "character zones." According to Bakhtin, character zones "are formed from the fragments of character speech [*polureč'*], from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's words, from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations)" (1981, 316). Conversely, one might also speak of author zones exerting linguistic and rhetorical pressure on character discourse, and in order

⁸⁸ On this type of "stylistic contagion," see also Spitzer (1922/1961); Cohn (1978); Stanzel (1984); Fludernik (1993, 332–38).

to trace the metaleptic effects generated by [4], I first need to tackle the question of whether the extended simile can be said to belong to such an authorial zone.

A tentative answer could be obtained from the scribal markings found in the *Troilus* manuscripts. In her ground-breaking study on the representation of reported speech in late medieval English, Colette Moore (2011) analyses the various discourse organising marks used by scribes to aid readers to distinguish changes of perspective in the absence of quotation marks. These would include coloured inks, underlinings, marginal notes and midline punctuation (ibid. 25–42). Yet more than the attribution of voice to a specific speaker, medieval scribes tended to employ such visual aids to mark *auctoritates*, which is to say, they drew attention to passages and quotations – *sententiae* – that were considered to be true and noteworthy due to their link to an *auctor* (ibid. 42). Nonetheless, text-internal speakers could also be identified, as the documentation by Benson and Windeatt (1990) of all the marginal glosses in the sixteen surviving *Troilus* manuscripts shows. Windeatt (1992, 162–63) observes that there is a tendency in these manuscripts to label different speakers especially when the characters are engaged in rapid exchanges of dialogue without any lexical cues, such as *inquit* formulas, to indicate whether a shift of speaker occurs at the junction of the stanzas. In such circumstances, writing the characters’ names in the margin or adding small tags such as “nota creseid” or “nota pandar,” would help the reader to navigate the text or else tell the prelector at a glance which voice or ethos to adopt for which particular passage.⁸⁹

Still, not every marginal note in the extant manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde* is classifiable as a marker of either authoritative *sententiae* or character speech. An interesting example is provided by the late fifteenth-century MS Arch. Selden B.24.⁹⁰ In addition to flagging different speakers and lines of authoritative wisdom (with statements such as “nota bene videlicet amor vincit omnia”; Benson and Windeatt 1990, 36), the glosses in this document seem to pay some special attention to the authorial use of poetic language. This is the case, for instance, with the first occurrence of the extended simile in Book I which, similarly to [4], seeks to convey a character’s interiority at a moment of personal crisis. When Troilus, hitherto scornful of foolish lovers, falls head over heels in love with Criseyde, his sudden psychological transformation is likened in the narration to a balky equine called Bayard eventually committing to collaboration:

⁸⁹ My transcriptions of the glosses in the *Troilus* manuscripts follow Benson and Windeatt (1990).

⁹⁰ The manuscript in question is housed in the Bodleian Library. Windeatt (1984, 74) identifies the scribe as the Scotsman James Gray, the protégé of Henry Sinclair, third Earl of Orkney, whose arms appear in the manuscript.

[5] As proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe
 Out of the weye, so pryketh him his corn,
 Til he a lasshe have of the longe whippe –
 Than thynketh he, “Though I prounce al byforn
 First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
 Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe
 I moot endure, and with my feres drawe” –

So ferde it by this fierse and proude knyght:
 [. . .]
 (*TC*, 1.218–25)

We may speculate that it was the rhetorical conspicuity of these lines which motivated the Selden scribe to mark the stanza with a gloss reading “<*n*>ota, of ye au<*tor*>.” Similar glosses appear on ten more occasions in the manuscript, either in the form “acto^r,” “acto^r libri,” “auto^r nota bene” and even “auto^r poetry.” What is common to these markings is that they all seem to have been inspired by the poetic quality of the lines to which they refer, in addition to underlining the poet’s agency in telling the tale: they are found in connection to the lofty descriptions of spring scenery (*TC*, 2.50–56) and celestial movements (*TC*, 2.680–86), the self-consciously periphrastic designation of the sun (*TC*, 2.904–10), the traditional modesty topos (*TC*, 2.15; 2.22) and direct addresses to the audience (*TC*, 2.29; 2.666). In short, the Selden scribe seems to want to draw attention *specifically* to the poet’s craft, which could be argued to provide at least some kind of evidence that the divide between authorial expression ripe with artful turns of phrase, on the one hand, and colloquially flavoured character exchanges, on the other, would have been of certain interest to the early recipients of Chaucer’s text. Although the Selden scribe does not comment upon the other occurrences of the simile in the text, it is certainly not impossible that, if asked, they also would have been recognised by him as originating from the stylistically aware *autor/actor*.

In addition to the sun and the Bayard stanzas, the extended simile is employed as a means of consciousness representation on one other occasion, to convey the inexpressible joy felt by Troilus in terms of winter-grey hedges coming to life in spring:⁹¹

⁹¹ It will be interesting to note that the extended simile is a figure particular to *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer uses it only twice in his other works (*The Knight’s Tale*, 1638–48; *The Parliament of Fowls*, 148–52), both times as a feature of narratorial discourse. In *Troilus*, the other occurrences of the extended simile (2.967–73; 3.1233–39; 3.1240–45; 4.225–31; 4.239–45; 4.1432–35) are all related to physical activities instead of mental events, and they are all clearly authorial.

- [6] But right so as this holtes and this hayis,
 That han in wynter dede ben and dreye,
 Revesten hem in grene whan that May is,
 Whan every lusty liketh best to pleye;
 Right in that selve wise, soth to seye,
 Wax sodeynliche his herte ful of joie,
 That gladder was ther nevere man in Troie.
 (TC, 3.351–57)

This occurrence, as well as the Bayard one, embeds the simile in a lengthy stretch of uninterrupted authorial narration. Analysing the “diffused subjectivization” in the narration of *Troilus* (as opposed to the postulation of a single coherent “narrator” figure), Spearing identifies, among a variety of other centres of consciousness, a *poetic* consciousness that manifests itself, for instance, in the latent rhetorical organisation of the stanzas and the sometimes explicit reference to rhetorical concepts, as well as the implied suggestion of a reality shared by poet and audience (2005, 87–95). We may recognise such elements in the authorial discourse immediately surrounding the hedge and the Bayard similes (TC 3.344–50; 1.204–59): there are, for instance, proximal deictics (“This Troilus”; “this fierse and proude knight”), present-tense universal truths didactically directed at the audience (“Forthy ensample taketh of this man, / Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle”), humility formulas (“Who myghte tellen half the joie . . .”) and apostrophes (“O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!”). Together with the similes, these promptly evoke the impression of a stylistically aware, organising consciousness of the kind that is identified also in Aczel’s qualitative approach and which the Selden scribe, too, seems to detect in his gloss pertaining to the Bayard stanza.

From the fact that Chaucer seems to be restricting the extended simile to narratorial discourse, it can be speculated, then, that he perhaps invites his audience to treat this device as belonging exclusively to the poet’s compositional toolbox – the author’s “zone,” as it were – rather than that of the characters, and this interpretation would seem to be encouraged by the scribal commentary. In view of this, analogical representation can be understood as a difference-making device that magnifies the stylistic differentiation between poet and character voices in [4]; much like novelistic psycho-analogies, the extended simile introduces order and art into the chaos of human cognition where there should “naturally” be none, placing an authorial stamp on the experiences it poetically conveys.

However, as Criseyde’s monologue continues and Chaucer moves on to give an explication, in the character’s own words, of the “cloudy thought” that he has stated

darkens her mood, we hear a metaleptic echo which complicates the authorial status of analogical representation:

[7] That thought was this: “Allas! Syn I am free,
Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie
My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?
Allas, how dorst I thenken that folie?
May I naught wel in other folk asprie
Hire dredfull ioye, hire constreinte, and hire peyne?
Ther loveth noon, that she nath why to pleyne.

*“For love is yet the mooste stormy hyf,
Right of hymself, that evere was bigonne;
For evere som mystrust or nice strif
Ther is in love, som cloude is overe that sonne.
(TC, 2.771–81; emphasis added)*

The quoted monologue in the first stanza is, again, conversationally colloquial; to be sure, the self-pitying interjection “Allas!” and the accumulating questions (*sholde I, dorst I, may I*) capture Criseyde’s returning insecurity in a manner that considerably diverges from its preceding similaic representation by the poet. In the second stanza, however, in the section that I have emphasised, Criseyde’s anxious monologue assumes a more controlled, discerning tone: the sun simile, which we have just recently heard in the poet’s discourse in [4], returns, as Criseyde begins to conceptualise the experience of being in love in the same analogical terms as the poet, comparing a lover’s apprehension to a vision of the sun covered over by clouds. As with the passages conveying Troilus’s despair, the *expolitio* obtains variation through switching from indirect to direct representation of one and the same idea: first, the poet *explains* Criseyde’s emotions and then *mimes* them, expanding upon the metaphorical notion of love as a storm. Since the two voices, pretending to be independent of one another, are figuratively connected, the application of *expolitio* has an iterative metaleptic effect; it generates a sense of the poet being present in the latest mimetic replication of the earlier speech event. By mirroring his analogical construction in Criseyde’s speech, Chaucer thus inserts into the character’s voice such stylistic features which both Spearing and Aczel (and the Selden scribe?) describe as fundamentally authorial, since they seem to indicate the presence of a rhetorically fluent creative agent exerting control over the unfolding narration, and which, by contextual evidence, have connotations of authorial agency. Although on principle private, spontaneous and independent, the exact traces of authorial speech

in Criseyde's discourse link her monologue directly to her creator, rendering it not authentically experiential, but pseudo-experiential.

It will be useful to again compare Chaucer's account to that of Boccaccio. Similarly to the way that he amplifies the representation of Troilo's anxiety, he considerably augments the treatment of Cressida's fear in the *Filostrato*. First of all, the two poets differ in their use of quotatives. The manuscripts of the pre-print era did not have punctuation conventions to indicate switches of speaker; instead, lexical devices were used by poets to mark the onset and conclusion of direct speech within the body of the text (Moore 2011, 43–68). Moore divides these devices into four categories. The first category, *speech internal perspective shifters*, includes interjections (*Alas!*), vocatives (*Sire*), deictic pronouns (*ye*), spatio-temporal deictis (*here, now*), tense switching and other pragmatic markers (such as *yes, no*), whereas the second one, *speech external linguistic structures*, consists of simple *inquit* (*seyde she*) and more explicit quotatives (e.g. *he spoke in these words following*). The other two categories encompass *conventional social interaction routines*, such as entrance and exit talk gambits, changes in speech modality and politeness formulae, and *conventional narrative interaction structures* containing formulae for public address as well as character-constructing narrative (ibid. 44). Based on this categorisation, Boccaccio employs a simple speech-external *inquit*, interrupting Cressida's monologue with “E stando alquanto, poi si rivolgea / nell' altra parte: Misera, – *dicendo* – / che vuoi tu far?” (*Il Filostrato* 2.75; “She ceased awhile. Then she turned her thoughts in the opposite direction, *saying*: “What dost thou purpose to do, wretched one?” Griffin and Myrick, transl., 31). Evaluated against Chaucer's adaptation of the scene, this interruption, which brings Cressida's voice back with an economical “*dicendo*,” could not be any less unobtrusive and clear-cut. It represents what Seymour Chatman (1978, 166) calls a minimally mediated narrative record, where the narratorial discourse serves no other purpose but to structure the switches between points of view with the help of conventional reporting clauses (cf. also Leech and Short 1981/2007, 258).

Chaucer turns in the opposite direction. Instead of settling for a minimal *inquit* in the style of his source, he makes sure that this only intrusion by the poet in the long monologue does not go unnoticed; indeed, he makes a great show of it by ushering in Criseyde's voice with the sun simile right before installing the *inquit* “That thought was this.” One may well ask why Chaucer would have opted for such a conspicuous expansion of Boccaccio's conventional quotative, if not for the reason of drawing attention to it and to craft a preparatory signal for the subsequent duplication of the content in Criseyde's words. The reiteration further develops Cressida's insights about love as a source of eternal woe (“nella qual sempre convien che si stea / in

pianti ed in sospiri ed in dolendo? / Avendo poi per giunta gelosia / che è peggio assai ch'ogni morte ria?" [*Il Filostrato*, 2.75; "for there must ever be in it continuance of woes, of sighs, and grieving, with jealousy added, which is far worse than wretched death?", Griffin and Myrick, transl., 31]), turning them into a maxim ("love is yet the mooste stormy lyf") that echoes the weather vocabulary of the poet's simile. (The interpretational implications of this maxim will be examined more closely below, in Section 6.1.) Due to this connection, Criseyde's subjective rendering of the experience of love, like Troilus's prosopopeic rendering of his despair, begins to look like an *authorial signpost*, deliberately formulated in such a way as to point her words back to the poet. If, as Vinaver (1971, 13–14) gracefully argues, the driving force behind amplification in the romantic genre was to understand, to rationalise and motivate characters' actions and decisions, here the amplification of source material seems less concerned with establishing the psychological reasons leading to Criseyde's change of heart than it is with giving this change of heart a poeticising treatment by linking together poet and character through refined *expolitio*. Criseyde's experience is instrumentalised into a function of the artistic craft; rather than focusing on character psychology per se, the simile of the sun and clouds prepares the way for its artistic variation in the maxim.

What is more, when Criseyde's monologue is finished and psycho-narration takes over again three stanzas later, there is a sense of looping motion as the weather-related vocabulary returns once more in the description of how Criseyde's gloomy thoughts are now beginning to disperse, with obvious connotations of a brightening sky: "And after that, hire thought gan for to *clere*, / And seide, 'He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothyng n'acheveth'" (*TC*, 2.806–8; emphasis added). The simile has come full circle: put forth in the diegesis, it has been recycled through the character's discourse to be brought back to the author again. Despite giving the impression of leaving the final word to Criseyde, Chaucer eventually tips the scale back in the poet's favour by redirecting the echo towards its original source.

5.2 Misidentifications: Interfering Consciousness and Delayed Attribution

The method of collapsing into one the two voices present in the *koinón* type of narration becomes even more pronounced in the manuscript culture in which *Troilus and Criseyde* was originally produced, read and heard, as the conventions of speech marking in that area allow for some additional metaleptic effects to emerge that go unnoticed in the modern editions of the poem. For the reader of a printed edition,

it is apparent at a mere glance that there are two sets of voice at work in [4]: the quotation marks surrounding the first stanza provide a conventional visual clue that the lines represent the words or thoughts of a character, whereas the voice that speaks in the second stanza is identified, by contrast, as that of the narrating instance. Put in narratological terms, the passage quite readily invites itself, by mere visual inspection, to be classified as an instance of quoted monologue switching into psycho-narration as soon as the second stanza begins.

Yet one must ask, looking at a manuscript rendering of the passage: at which point does this switch between the speaking subjects *exactly* occur?⁹²

What shal I doon to what fyn lyve I thus
 Shal I nat love in cas if that me leste
 What pardieux I am naught religious
 And though that I myn herte sette at reste
 Upon this knyght that is the worthieste
 And kepe alwey myn honour and my name
 By alle right, it may do me no shame

But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte
 In marche that chaungeth ofte tyme his face
 And that a cloude is put with wynde to flight
 Which oversprat the sonne as for a space
 A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace
 That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle
 So that for feere almoste she gan to falle (f42r)

According to Moore's categorisation, it becomes evident only halfway into the second stanza, with the appearance of the speech-internal perspective shifters used in line "A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace," where the third-person reference and the change of tense from present to past with the auxiliary verb *gan* are both indicators that the reporting instance now takes control of the narrative. This places the preceding sun simile in an ambiguous position that is best described in terms of *delayed attribution*,⁹³ a phenomenon which has been outlined, though not so named, by Moore (2011, 143–49) in her discussion of "indeterminate speakers" in the works of the so-called "*Gawain*-poet." The idea is that the speaking subject

⁹² The manuscript citation is to the early fifteenth-century Corpus Christi manuscript, MS.61, and folio numbers. The manuscript is available in digital form through the *Parker Library on the Web* project: <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/dh967mz5785> [accessed 24 January 2021].

⁹³ I adopt the term from Windeatt's (1992, 214) review of the themes of *Troilus*, where he mentions in passing that the "artfully delayed attribution" in the scene underlining the importance of planning ahead makes the thoughts of the narrator and Pandarus overlap. I will return to this scene in Section 7.2.

changes, but remains unidentified until several words into the new stanza, where “the context of reference . . . is established a posteriori” (ibid. 143). This kind of hindsight recognition, made possible by the lack of quotation marks, can give rise to a curious effect of misidentification in the manuscript version of [4], one which could be freely described along the lines of *I thought it was Criseyde, but it was in fact (also/ only?) the poet*. To put the point in another way, it is only when the lexical perspective shifters (*gan, hire*) attribute the subsequent lines to the poet a posteriori that the manuscript reader is forced to re-evaluate the source of the preceding lines containing the same imagery. What he or she might have unsuspectingly continued to read as Criseyde’s perspective unfolding in the character’s present tense only retrospectively offers itself to be read as an authorial description of the character’s mind. We may expect this to apply to aural reception as well, especially if one prelector did all the voices in a public reading.

We are faced with a problem of categorisation. In modern terms, what looks like quoted monologue transforms in hindsight into omniscient psycho-narration that nonetheless also retains its earlier identity; quite simply, one cannot unsee or unhear the fact that for a moment the lines *were* uttered by Criseyde. Since, as I have suggested above, the extended simile is not a shared device in *Troilus* (or indeed in any of Chaucer’s works) but “belongs” to the poet’s compositional zone, the poem in this passage thus seems to go against its own conventions by allowing the simile to occupy a middle ground between narration and imitation, as if part of Criseyde’s first-person monologue and yet at the same time identifiable as the poet’s words.

Lucy Ferriss (2008) has discussed authorial presence in first-person voice in terms of inverted Uncle Charles Principle, renaming the opposite effect as “A&P Principle” (from John Updike’s 1961 short story “A&P”). Whereas the Uncle Charles Principle (UPP) states that “Narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s,” the APP asserts that “focalizing idiom need not be the focalizer’s.” Ferriss argues that, unlike UPP, the latter often goes unnoticed, without the impression of an authorial consciousness interrupting a “character-based point of view,” which for her suggests a deep level of identification with the focalising character by reader and author alike: “we are aware, not that an extradiegetic narrator has snatched up the narration, but that the focalizer has borrowed whatever language he or she needs from the author’s idiomatic field” (ibid. 186). I take this to mean that the APP serves as a tool of characterisation that advances our immersion in literary characters’ psychology. When the point of narration is to explore a character’s psyche, as so often seems to be the case with today’s fiction, the APP can therefore help to convey a sense of his

or her personality through a set of words that, as Ferriss puts it, might have been used if the character “had had the verbal dexterity to do so” (ibid. 185).

Since the interfacing of the sun simile momentarily creates the impression of Criseyde speaking in the poet’s voice (whether through an experienced recognition of the simile as the poet’s device, or through the delayed attribution inviting the re-evaluation of the initial attribution to Criseyde), this phenomenon can perhaps be conceptualised somewhat as a local premodern instance of Ferriss’s A&P Principle (“the focalizing idiom need not be the focalizer’s”). However, it seems to me to suggest an opposite effect: not immersion or identification, but precisely the *disruptive* injection of an orchestrating poetic consciousness into the character’s monologue. As I have argued, the sun simile creates a metaleptic reference point which turns Criseyde’s speech echoing the same elements into what could be called an authorial signpost pointing back towards the poet; in the same vein, the delayed attribution, which permits the simile to be read at first as Criseyde’s before it is belatedly assigned to the poet, further betrays the unity of what pretends to be two separate voices. In fact, one could even go as far as to argue that the strategically postponed identification tricks the recipient into spelling out the mechanics of the mimetic operation, even if this realisation is not explicitly verbalised but only intuitively felt (i.e., “I thought it was Criseyde, but it was the poet”).

This surprise realisation has an obvious counterpart in the “jolt” reactions that, according to Irene de Jong, are elicited by the conscious metaleptic blending of narrative voices in ancient Greek narrative (2009, 100). De Jong observes that in the song by Demodocus in Book VIII of the *Odyssey*, the change from a dependent construction (“Striking his lyre he started to sing beautifully . . .”) into an independent one causes the voice of the intradiegetic narrator (Demodocus) to merge with the primary narrator (“Homer”), until the song is once again, and quite unexpectedly, assigned to Demodocus at its conclusion: so, “does Homer become Demodocus or does Demodocus become Homer?” (de Jong 2009, 101). Whereas Genette is of the opinion that the “effect of strangeness” produced by narrative metalepsis is either comical or fantastic (1972/1980, 235), in Homer, according to de Jong, this is not so; neither is it based on disrupting the mimetic illusion.⁹⁴ Rather, Homer would seek to increase the authority of his own work, since fusing his voice with the renowned singer seems to subtly imply that the present song is as good as the one sung in the heroic past. Similarly, the blurring of the boundaries between the narrator’s song and that of the Muses in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (ll. 68–75) suggests that

⁹⁴ For the functions of metalepsis in ancient narrative, see Martinez and Trimble (2020).

the narrator has mastered their trade so well that we cannot even tell them apart (ibid. 102).

Unlike Demodocus and the Muses, Chaucer's Criseyde is not a versifier; "Ne nevere yet ne koude I wel endite," she remarks in a letter to Troilus (*TC*, 5.1628), apologising for her lack of skill in composing a verbal document. The fusion with Criseyde cannot therefore be said to elevate Chaucer's voice, but rather the other way around: it injects, as pointed out, a poetic flair into the consciousness of someone who claims not to possess compositional skills. As such, it serves as a cue which reminds us that, much like Virgil makes Dido die in Genette's classic definition of authorial metalepsis, it is Chaucer who makes Criseyde sigh in fear throughout her entire monologue which nonetheless, by its very form, keeps up the pretence of privacy and spontaneity. Like the iterative metalepses generated by *expolitio*, the delayed attribution enables an undercover operation by which Chaucer can smuggle his own rhetoric into the character's subjective words, rendering them pseudo-experiential. Whereas the iterative metalepsis makes us aware of the unity through an echo, the metaleptic identity exchange between author and character works through compressing into one the two voices. Due to the strategically postponed attribution, which identifies lines 763–766 as authorial psycho-narration only a posteriori, Criseyde's voice, at first presumed to continue there, is momentarily responsible for the simile; and yet at the same time, and precisely because the interface lines are eventually understood as authorial, this apparent self-articulation of private experience is inevitably performed in someone else's – Chaucer's – voice. Or, more precisely, in a pluralistic *poets'* voice, which I will explore next.

6 Speaking Their Minds

6.1 The Already-Spoken Love: Criseyde, Penelope and the Others

According to cognitive narratologist Lisa Zunshine (2006), the pleasure of literature largely derives from the way it stimulates readers' social-cognitive processes, one of them being our *metarepresentational* ability that allows us to keep track of the sources of the representations that are communicated to us through various channels. As Zunshine explains, a metarepresentation is a two-part entity consisting of a source of the representation ("I thought . . .") and its content (" . . . that it was going to rain"). It is this cognitive faculty that allows us to take different statements, ideas and

arguments “under advisement,” to specify them as originating from a certain viewpoint, instead of treating them as absolute truths (e.g., “*it was Eve who told me that Adam is a bad colleague*”) (ibid. 47–50). Since such “source-tagging” is a basic cognitive ability of humans, it is perhaps reasonable to presume, as Zunshine does, that authors of all times have more or less consciously exploited it in their writings; perhaps, from Homer to Tolstoy, “all fictional texts rely on and thus experiment with their readers’ ability to keep track of *who* thought, wanted, and felt *what* and under what circumstances” (ibid. 75; emphases original).

As the discussion so far has hopefully illustrated, Chaucer’s iterative metalepses would indeed seem to make explicit use of this source-monitoring ability, in a manner that invites the audience to recognise a repetition. While clearly attributed to Criseyde and Troilus, the lines spoken by them in [3] and [7] provoke a question “did I not hear this before?”, thus triggering a cognitive process that locates, at first, *two* sources behind the expressed sentiments: it is Troilus/Criseyde *and* the poet who paraphrase the lovers’ inner conflicts in terms of *prosopopeia* and analogical comparison. However, I have also tried to demonstrate that the metaleptic echoing in *expolitio*, as well as the metaleptic identity exchange enabled by manuscript speech marking, in fact serve as forceful reminders of the singularity behind this apparent duality, of the fact that behind the character voices there is one miming artist to whom the representations must eventually be tagged. To a degree, this might be true of all reading: as Zunshine points out, fictional texts are perhaps “metarepresentations par excellence,” stored in our cognitive systems with a tacit awareness of source tags carrying their authors’ names (“a story invented by X”). Yet we are also endowed with an ability to suppress this knowledge in order to enjoy the emotional impact of stories, despite the fact that the “whole emotionally moving bundle of representations” is an “‘invention’ of somebody known as Jane Austen” (Zunshine 2006, 66–67).

However, with regard to the rhetorical bend of medieval narrative and to the fact that medieval romance was associated with the rise of literary self-consciousness related to the notion of the poet as a masterly inventor of fictional fabrications, it must be asked if the pleasure involved in these tales has more to do with embracing rather than suppressing the awareness of inventedness. Chaucer’s text certainly works in this direction, handing the audience several threads to follow. For the process of source-monitoring does not, or *must* not, end with the recognition of the singularity of *two* voices within the present text; too many interpretive insights are lost if it does. A further analysis of Criseyde’s weather monologue shows that establishing a text-internal source-awareness through *expolitio* (“a story ‘invented’ by

Chaucer,” or, more precisely, “a voice mimed by Chaucer”) is but one component in a scene that consciously constructs itself as a *collage* of sources for the sentiment (i.e., fear and worry involved in loving) it explores.

As I pointed out above, the monologue expands outward into the general in developing the sun simile into a universal *sententia*:

[8] “For love is yet the mooste stormy lyf,
Right of hymself, that evere was bigonne;
For evere som mystrust or nice strif
Ther is in love, som cloude is overe that sonne.
Therto we wrecched wommen nothing konne,
Whan us is wo, but wepe and sitte and thinke;
Oure wrecche is this, oure owen wo to drynke.
(*TC*, 2.778–84)

Consisting of vague expressions that highlight the statement’s all-inclusive range (*evere, for evere, som cloude*) and employing the plural noun to group all singular occurrences into a commonly shared female experience (“*we* wrecched wommen,” “*oure* wrecche”), the lines insist on the inevitability of the constant state of fear in which love puts all earthly lovers, as Criseyde’s own turbulent state of mind so comprehensively demonstrates.

Due to the lingering echo of the poet’s simile, there is a sense that the experience Criseyde’s formulates in her maxim has *already* been spoken by the poet on behalf of her in somewhat similar words. But the echo originates much further back in time. We find traces of it, for instance, in Penelope’s letter to Ulysses in Ovid’s *Heroides*, where she writes: “Imagining hazards more awful than real, / love has always been tempered by fear” (“Quando ego non timui graviora pericula veris? / res est solliciti plena timoris amor”; *Heroides* 1, 11–12). As with Criseyde’s distress, this adage – “res est solliciti plena timoris amor” – is proven true even as it is being expressed, as the fearful Penelope claims to recognise the missing Ulysses in every death:

in te fingebam violentos Troas ituros;
nomine in Hectoreo pallida semper eram.
sive quis Antilochum narrabat ab hoste revictum,
Antilochus nostri causa timoris erat;
sive Menoetiaden falsis cecidisse sub armis,
flebam successu posse carere dolos.
sanguine Tlepolemus Lyciam tepefecerat hastam;
Tlepolemi leto cura novata mea est.
denique, quisquis erat castris iugulatus Achivis,
frigidius glacie pectus amantis erat.
(*Heroides* 1.13–22)

I was sure it was you the Trojans attacked
 and the name of Hector made me pale;
 if someone told the tale of Antilochus
 I dreamed of you dead as he had died;
 if they sang of the death of Menoetius' son,
 slain in armour not his own, I wept,
 because even clever tricks had failed; when they
 told the tale of Tlepolemus' death
 I saw you die the death of that great warrior,
 drenching the Lycian's spear with warm blood.
 No matter which Greek died, their names could have been
 the same, my loving heart became ice.
 (Ovid 1990/2004, 3)

Through fear names and fates become interchangeable: every tale and every song refers to one and the same hero in Penelope's mind – her husband. The letter therefore engages in its very first lines with the questions of repetition and replaceability that Chaucer develops further in Criseyde's monologue. Intertextually connected to Penelope's letter through the linking *sententia*, the monologue produces a kind of reverse image of Penelope's written thoughts: in Criseyde's stanzas, it is not the fates of the dying male figures that are replaceable with one another, but love as a shared female experience, one that is verbalised in similar terms by these two women pining for their Greek and Trojan warriors on the opposite sides of the war.

Open reference to the *Heroides* is made elsewhere in *Troilus*. Comparing his non-existent love life to the situation of the abandoned Oenone, Pandarus questions Troilus whether he has seen the letter written by the nymph to Troilus's treacherous brother: "I woot wel that it fareth thus be me / As to thi brother, Paris, an herdesse / Which that icleped was Oënone / Wrot in a compleynte of hir hevynesse. / Yee say the lettre that she wrot, I gesse?" (*TC*, 1.652–56). One can easily imagine the prelector directing the question simultaneously to the present audience, while ostensibly it is addressed by Pandarus to Troilus. Since the *Heroides* is thus alluded to so early on in the first half of the first book, the allusion may be expected to serve as a cue that establishes the *Heroides* as a suggestive subtext for the audience to consider at each turn of the story, providing additional interpretative frames for elements such as theme and characterisation. Provided that the reader or listener was able to recognise the allusive quality of Criseyde's fearful monologue (as they can be expected to have been) and, moreover, was familiar with the outcome of Troilus and Criseyde's love from Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (or, less likely, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*), the link between the two women would introduce an

exciting rhetorical *oppositio* between the constant Penelope and the fickle Criseyde referred to as the paradigmatic “touchstone for infidelity” (Van Dyke 2005, 199) in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*: despite their dispositional differences, the two ladies are similar in their discursive expression of love.

In this intertextually dialogising perspective, Criseyde’s “we wretched women” gains a specifically literary character, and the *sententia* she shares with Penelope likewise becomes suggestive of poetic rather than (or not merely) everyday application. What is more, Criseyde’s “cloudy thought” stems from the fact that she proclaims to have witnessed the dreadful effects of love in others: “May I naught wel in other folk aspice / Hire dredfull joye, hire constreinte, and hire peyne?” (see ll. 775–76 in [7] above). She certainly may; and if not in the streets of Troy, then at least in a variety of tales about the subject. What Criseyde thus appears to communicate in her monologue is a literary historical standpoint which opens a circular view of fictional minds: in their woe, romance heroines “wepe and sitte and thinke,” as Criseyde herself is doing at present and as Penelope writing her letter has done before her in another book (or, paradoxically, will do *after* her, once the Trojan war is over). From this perspective, the love talk authorised by personal experience is transformed into an act of re-phrasing, executed in collective poetic terms, that by necessity involves a transition from private to public experience. It is the breast of a lover (“pectus amantis”) that grows cold from fear in Penelope’s letter (instead of merely her *own* loving heart, as in the English translation); it is the inescapable *angoisse d’amor*, paraphrased by Capellanus as “Amorosus semper est timorosus,” that causes Cador and Eufemie to lose rational thinking in *Silence*; and now it is Criseyde’s turn to tremble in trepidation in the grip of love.

Hence, Criseyde’s maxim that is recycled in various texts in various different forms, while in essence expressing the same traditional view of love as *dolor*, is a perfect representative of what Lawton (2017) calls “public interiorities” in medieval narrative. These are “pieces of language – as speech or text – which already exist before they are revoiced by a new user,” such as Psalms, prayers or *exempla*, and they “evoke or confer a subject position – resignation before Fortune, for example, or courage in face of persecution, or precepts for personal conduct – which is available to others, who may use it and interpret it differently” (ibid. 8). As I already noted in the Introduction, this kind of layeredness was consciously used by medieval writers for artistic ends (ibid. 9); it was, moreover, a profoundly communal practice, one that shifts the focus from the speaking subject to how the ideas communicated by public interiorities gain their meaning through being recognised as revoicings (ibid. 78). Building on this, I propose that *Troilus*’s maxim as a public interiority communicating

a lover's fear does not seek only to produce small-scale interpretational epiphanies (such as can be gained from the juxtaposing of the unfaithful Criseyde and the constant Penelope through the revoicing of the latter), but makes a point of foregrounding the revoicing practice itself.

The most basic indicator of this is the first-person plural pronoun, which transforms the latent echo (the form in which the public interiority is present in Cressida's speech in the *Filostrato*) into a manifest sign of discursive collectivity, explicitly inviting a multiple source-tagging ("it is Criseyde/ Penelope/ a string of others who experience love as fear"). Another indicator is the application of *expolitio*, by which, as was shown in the previous sections, Criseyde's words are explicitly tagged to Chaucer, the source behind the present reincarnation of this public interiority – and perhaps, by extension, to the other poets behind the other instances of the same sentiment. This opens up additional ways of thinking about how authors and narrative texts can make use of their readers' cognitive skills. For Zunshine, the human source-monitoring ability principally serves as a tool of discrimination by which readers assign different truth-values to the statements and thoughts originating from different sources in the narrative (2006, 60), and this process is conventionally aided by explicit tags, such as "so Richard Dalloway felt," "alert[ing] us to . . . the mind behind the sentiment" (ibid. 47); this is especially important, since knowing that Richard Dalloway is the source of certain sentiments in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* crucially directs the reader's understanding of the psychological forces at work in the novel (ibid.). This is undoubtedly true. However, Chaucer's technique shows us that finding the source, or indeed prompting the audience into finding it through certain means, does not always invite the relativisation of information and its subsequent placement in a system of worldviews by which one is able to safely navigate the poetic plot much as one navigates one's own life (i.e., "my co-worker Eve says that X" → "Criseyde says that X, whereas Troilus says that Y"). Quite the contrary: is it not more likely that, instead of serving as an aid to such naturally occurring mapping procedures, the process of source-tracking arguably triggered by *expolitio* and the acknowledgment of a multiplicity of identical literary experiencers ("we wretched wommen") rather alerts readers to the decided "unnaturalness" of the text, to the status of the sentiments expressed in the characters' quoted monologues as a poetic invention, in leading them to the ultimate sources behind them (Chaucer, Ovid, chivalric poets...)?

In fact, this readerly process is alluded to in the text when Criseyde, already knowing she must leave Troy, admits to being afraid Troilus will forget her in the company of other ladies: "For I am evere agast, forwhy men rede / That love is a

thing ay ful of bisy drede” (*TC*, 4.1644–45). The line reproduces Penelope’s maxim to the letter. The passage has a metaleptic effect: men may read this piece of wisdom in any number of tales, including the *Heroïdes*, but they also read it in the present one, at the very moment that Criseyde formulates it; in other words, Criseyde refers to the book of which she herself is part. (I will come back to this type of metalepsis in Section 6.4.) Like Penelope and the others, she too will become part of the collective experiential source tag in the future, as “men rede” her tale.

Observing how love comes to Criseyde as a series of symbolic events that show desire as an external force landing upon the passive character, Lee Patterson argues that for Criseyde love is something that is simply performed *upon* her body and will – “and yet at no point does either body or will find representation” (1991, 145–46). This, I would add, is felt especially sharply in the monologue under discussion, which, by definition, should open the way for self-expression. Instead, by rearranging Cressida’s words into a maxim constellation with a broadly reverberating echo, Chaucer seems to delineate love as a state of mind that is simultaneously experienced and *un*experienced by Criseyde, indeed as “an entity at once a part of and apart from the female subject who experiences it,” as Patterson puts it (*ibid.* 146). The echo effect, both in the restricted text-internal sense (Chaucer – Criseyde) as well as the unrestricted intertextual sense (Chaucer – Ovid / Criseyde – Penelope), constructs Criseyde’s moment of revelation in a manner that indeed only alienates her from herself, and it does this by underscoring the fact that her experience consists of representations by other voices of other experiences of love. As a result of this, the weather monologue, which expands the already-spoken simile into an already-spoken maxim, appears less as self-expression of the character’s psyche than a self-administered double exposure that simultaneously reveals Criseyde both as a narrating subject (by form) and a narrated object constructed from the blocks of the inherited amatory discourse. Indeed, neither body nor will finds representation – except, one might add, within the established confines of the recycled and the verisimilar.

For Kellogg and Scholes (1966/2006, 187–88), the weather monologue is precisely the locus where we see “rhetoric fading into psychology,” as Chaucer “project[s] his character into new realms of psychological and social considerations, both of which are beautifully reflected in that pivotal line of the monologue, ‘I am myne owene womman’” (*TC*, 2.750). In Sheila Fisher’s view, Criseyde’s conflicted inner world offers us “the most fully realized representation of a woman’s consciousness and self-consciousness in the Middle English romance tradition” (2001, 155–56). In a similar vein, Carolyn Van Dyke underlines the way in which

the stereotypical constructions of Criseyde's subjectivity suggested in the narrative are eventually overshadowed by the sincere subjectivity displayed in her interior monologues and self-analyses which arguably win for her our empathy and respect (2005, 203). Yet they also win our admiration for the poet's craft, by showing how the woman's "subjective consciousness" is a collective textual construction, a pseudo-experience, which points back to itself as layered and adapted piece of writing. Chaucer fabricates, before our very eyes, a stylised experience of *literary love that is always the same*, a never-ending story experienced by each in their turn, as further illustrated by Pandarus's cynical take on how Troilus will recover from losing Criseyde: "If she be lost, we shal recovere an other" (*TC*, 4.406).

The predestined quality of Criseyde's experience of love is likewise brought to the fore in the description of how she falls in love with Troilus. Watching Troilus ride past her window, she famously exclaims, in an allusion to the magical love-potions of romance tradition (Windeatt 1988, 137), "Who yaf me drynke?" (*TC*, 2.651). At this point, a miffed response from the audience is imagined: "Now myghte som envious jangle thus: / "This was a sodeyn love; how myght it be / That she so lightly loved Troilus / Right for the firste syghte, ye, parde?" (*TC*, 2.666–69). It is most interesting to compare these lines with the passage from *Silence*, where the first-person intervention regarding Silence's state of mind was carefully framed with rhetorical circumspection, as it suggested for Silence an experiential independence from the verisimilar (Chapter I: Section 4.2.2). Now, instead, it is the verisimilar which has to be explained, as if to an audience that no longer takes any conventionally verified emotion as a given fact. An explanation follows, manifesting the "jo ne di pas que" pattern which was also seen in Helderis: "For I sey nought that she so sodeynly / Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne / To like hym first, and I have told yow whi; / And after that his manhood and his pyne / Made love withinne hire herte for to myne, / For which by process and by good servyse / He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse" (*TC*, 2.673–79). This longwinded explanation, however, is preceded by a compressed statement: "Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe! / For every thyng a gynnyng hath it need / Er al be wrought, withowten any drede" (*TC*, 2.670–72), which in effect spells out that any tale must have a beginning, and what we have here is precisely that – a tale. In tales people fall in love at first sight, as confirmed by Diomedes in his wooing of Criseyde: "And wondreth nought, myn owen lady bright, / Though that I speke of love to yow thus blyve; / For I have herd er this of many a wight, / Hath loved thyng he nevere saigh his lyve" (*TC*, 5.162–65). Hence, Criseyde's mind, at the moment of falling in love, is instrumentalised into a brief excursion into the nature of the storyteller's art: in real

life, it might have taken some time for her feelings to develop, but stories have a logic of their own.

In this section, I have explored Criseyde's "already-spoken" love as a collective poetic construction – a pseudo-experiential artefact. As Sternberg writes, we should not automatically think of direct quotation as involving authorial empathy and inviting sympathetic response from the audience,⁹⁵ since these "independent" speech-events, informed by their private intentions are, at bottom, recontextualised and dominated by authorial intention (1982, 114–15). Indeed, it is easy to assign a "sense of communicative purpose" only to the narrator's voice while taking characters' discourse at face value, which may obscure the fact that also the latter can be directed towards the implied reader, serving rhetorical and persuasive goals outside the immediate story space (Sternberg 2005, 234). Criseyde's speech invites a process of source-tagging, which goes even further beyond the Chaucer-tag to the tradition-tag. Due to this strategy, the analogical conceptualisation of Criseyde's emotional turmoil in terms of the sun and clouds, which leads up to the maxim, is retrospectively recontextualised: the function of the simile has less to do with the character's mental state than the act of narration which brings this mental state into being.

Hence, the sun simile, as a metaphorical rendering of the mind, performs quite a different role to that assigned to psycho-analogies by Cohn in the modern context, where the strategy tends to be seen as entailing an element of authenticity and intimacy. For Cohn, the use of psycho-analogies in novelistic discourse potentially manages to capture something of the ineffability of human consciousness by bringing into focus the indefiniteness of our thoughts and feelings (1978, 42, 48). Chaucer's premodern text suggests a different approach. Instead of using analogical representation as a tool with which to emulate either an individual worldview or the subconscious workings of the psyche in general, Chaucer would rather seem to be *imitating the poetic discourse itself*,⁹⁶ its cyclic and collective nature that is so powerfully displayed through the manifold echo effect triggered by the weather simile. In other words, I would argue that Chaucer's analogies do not aim to represent character consciousness, but rather the discourse which brings that consciousness into being

⁹⁵ Sternberg quotes Booth (1961/1983, 378–79), according to whom "inside views can build empathy even for the most vicious character."

⁹⁶ Cf. Mäkelä, who argues that even the so-called realist rendering of consciousness, in writers such as Gustave Flaubert and Charles Dickens, undermines psychological immersion in many ways, suggesting that "narrative can only represent the *narrative construction of an experience*, not the 'raw feels' of immediate impression" (2013a, 163; emphasis added). Chaucer seems highly aware of this element of unattainability in putting experiences into words, centuries before the said writers.

and thus becomes the object of narration itself. Next, I will continue this line of thought by investigating how the text of *Troilus* subtly foregrounds the mediating instance even while ostensibly denying its existence.

6.2 Dissimulation: Over-Explicit Quotatives and Apophatic Mediacy

According to Monika Fludernik (1993, 401–2), narratological studies have for a long time idealised direct discourse as a form which purports to give a word-for-word reliable transcription of an original utterance over indirect speech associated with “distortive” mediation (ibid. 28; cf. also Palmer 2004, 68–69). The scale models of speech and thought representation that were discussed at the beginning of this chapter are all constructed around this “reproductive fallacy” (Sternberg 1982, 128). For instance, Genette treats “reported speech,” which he aligns with Plato’s *mimesis*, as a strategy that puts the reader in direct contact with the original utterance, as “the narrator pretends to literally give the floor to his character” (1972/1980, 172). Similarly, Chatman argues that the “the negative pole of narrator-presence – the pole of “pure” mimesis – is represented by narratives purporting to be untouched transcripts of characters’ behavior” (1978, 166). Leech and Short’s suggestion that towards the “free end” (Direct Speech, Direct Thought) of the “cline of speech presentation” narratorial inference grows gradually less noticeable, until the narrator “apparently leaves the characters to talk entirely on their own,” could also be mentioned as a classic example (1981/2007, 260).

While words such as “pretend,” “purport” and “apparently” used in these designations clearly acknowledge the illusionism involved in direct discourse,⁹⁷ the tendency is nevertheless to take the authenticity of the form as a given, rather than genuinely problematising it (cf. Fludernik 1993, 402). The persistence of this illusion might be due, as Fludernik (ibid.) suggests, to the “legally bolstered status of self-identity” carried by verbatim quotation, while it is also typographical conventions that may play a part in it; the inverted commas used around direct speech invest quotations with syntactical independence (Leech and Short 1981/2007, 256), which one imagines is easily associated with ideas of personal property and subjectivity that the quoted words would somehow manage to perfectly evoke.

Although the practice of marking off character speech with quotation marks only began in the early modern era (e.g., Finnegan 2011, 80–95), there is reason to believe that an association of direct discourse with notions of authenticity and fidelity

⁹⁷ See also McHale (1978) on the “purity” of direct discourse as a novelistic illusion.

regarding the words represented in the narrative was made in the medieval context as well. Exploring the functions of speech and thought representation in different medieval genres, Marnette (2003) argues that the observed preference of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century French chroniclers for indirect discourse can be explained in terms of plausibility. Because the authors of the chronicles recounted events they had witnessed themselves, the credibility of their accounts depended not only on the fact that they had been personally present at the scene but also on their ability to recognise the “‘finiteness’ of their own memory” which would not allow them – or anyone else, for that matter – to repeat to the letter what had been said and how (ibid. 417). In giving the impression of providing the “‘true’ voices of history” (ibid.), the use of direct discourse would therefore compromise the legitimacy of the report and at worst brand the chronicler as a liar. From this it can be concluded that even in the Middle Ages, when one claimed to quote someone directly, a report of the actual words spoken was expected, whereas the presence of a mediating instance (i.e., indirect discourse) would have reduced the element of fidelity in underlining the role of the mediator in formulating the message.

In the following passage, Chaucer toys with this promise of authenticity in quotation. Having fallen head-over-heels in love with Criseyde, Troilus is struggling to balance the private with the public in practising “loves craft” (*TC*, 1.379). The conventional secrecy required of lovers meets with a desire for expression which comes out as a song: “And on a song anon-right to bygyne, / And gan loude on his sorwe for to wynne” (*TC*, 1.389–90). But before the audience is treated to this song, the poet steps forward to frame it with some introductory lines:

[9] And of his song naught only the sentence,
 As writ myn auctour called Lollius,
 But plainly, save oure tonges difference,
 I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus
 Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus
 As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,
 Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here.
 (*TC*, 1.393–99)

Based on Moore’s model of medieval speech marking, the stanza makes use of speech-external linguistic structures to indicate the approaching change of speaker. As recalled, these can be divided into simple *inquits* (*s/he seyde*) and explicit quotatives (*s/he spoke in these words following*). Chaucer opts for an explicit take-off. He devotes an entire stanza to convince us that what we are about to hear “next this vers” is not just an approximate but an *exact* rendering of the character’s words: he promises to

quote Troilus “pleinly,” as opposed to his *auctor* who only gives the “sentence” (i.e., a paraphrase) of the prince’s song, vowing to deliver “every word right thus” and say “al, that Troilus / Seyde in his song.” In sum, this is a preparatory quotative that is more than just explicit; it is *over*-explicit in all its elaborate carefulness.

Why such laborious insistence on a verbatim transcript of Troilus’s words? While insisting on a wall-to-wall presence of the character’s voice, the poet simultaneously proffers to efface and even to obliterate authorial agency. I see this as a strategic move that structurally supports the idea of *experiential* authenticity as tied to a quotative one – that is to say, the idea put forth in the text that lovers obtain authority over love as a linguistic phenomenon through their personal experience of it. Thus, by informing the audience that they shall hear Troilus exactly as he spoke, while he himself purports to remain quiet, Chaucer in effect promises his audience an authoritative account on the experience of love.

This thematic aspect is addressed in a crucial passage in which Criseyde walks in the garden with her niece Antigone, who sings a song about the joys of loving a valiant knight (*TC*, 2.827–75). When the song is over, the following dialogue takes place between the two women:

[10] And of hir song right with that word she stente,
 And therwithal, “Now, nece,” quod Cryseyde,
 “Who made this song with so good entente?”
 Antygone answerde anoon, and seyde,
 “Madame, ywys, the goodlieste mayde
 Of gret estat in al the town of Troye,
 And let hire lif in moste honour and joye.”

 “Forsythe, so it semeth by hire song,”
 Quod tho Criseyde, and gan therwith to sike,
 And seyde, “Lord, is ther swych blisse among
 Thise loveres, as they konne faire endite?”
 “Ye, wis,” quod fresshe Antigone the white,
 “For alle the folk that han or ben on lyve
 Ne konne wel the blisse of love discryve.

 “But wene ye that every wrecche woot
 The parfit blisse of love? Why, nay, iwys!
 They wenen all be love, if oon be hoot.
 Do wey, do wey, they woot no thyng of this!
 Men moste axe at seyntes if it is
 Aught fair in hevne (Why? For they kan telle),
 And axen fendes, is it foul in helle.”
 (*TC*, 2.876–96)

The passage, which, again, is Chaucer's addition to Boccaccio, deals with the question of authenticity involved in emotional self-expression. Criseyde's question – "is ther swych blisse among / Thise loveres, as they konne faire endite?" – touches on the veracity of the given account; at bottom, she wishes to know whether being in love really feels like it is described by the anonymous Trojan lady who has composed the song. Indeed it does, replies Antigone, and points out that it is not just any folk, but only the lovers themselves who can accurately describe the bliss of love. The answer thus insists on becoming an expert by experience: the Trojan lady – "the goodlieste mayde" – is recognised by Antigone as an authority on love based on her personal knowledge on the subject, which consequently introduces the idea that an *authentic* representation of love is linguistically attainable, although solely for lovers. By this logic, the protagonists of Chaucer's tale – Criseyde and Troilus – falling in love with each other are likewise transformed into experts-by-experience, thus becoming credible spokespersons for the *qualia* of love. In other words, their first-person accounts are afforded a status of truthfulness, with the implication being that Troilus's song, too, since it is given as an exact transcription, will provide an accurate description of his immediate experience – of what it is like to be in love.

In contrast, Chaucer famously excludes himself from these experts-by-experience by striking a pose as a humble servant of courtly lovers, one who has not personally dared, for his ungainliness, to try his hand at the art of love: "For I, that God of Loves servantz serve, / Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse" (*TC*, 1.15–16). Accordingly, the tale makes frequent use of the inexpressibility topos, when it comes to the characters' consuming emotions:

- [11] Who koude telle aright or ful discryve
 His wo, his pleynt, his langour, and his pyne?
 Naught alle the men that han or ben on lyve.
 Thow, redere, maist thiself ful wel devyne
 That swich a wo my wit kan nat diffyne;
 On ydel for to write it sholde I swynke,
 Whan that my wit is wery it to thynke.
 (*TC*, 5.267–73)

The stanza rephrases Antigone's statement above about the incompetence of the uninitiated ("For alle the folk that han or ben on lyve / Ne konne wel the blisse of love discryve" – "Who koude telle aright or ful discryve . . . Naught alle the men that han or ben on lyve"), and as a representative of this group the poet's attempts at description are only bound to dilute the intensity of what the characters are going through: "but, as for me, my litel tonge, / If I discryven wolde hire hevynesse, / It

sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse / Than that it was, and childisshly deface / Hire heigh compleynte, and therefore ich it pace” (*TC*, 4.801–5). Such narratorial self-denigration is certainly characteristic of Chaucer’s poetics which habitually plays with the idea of the poet-narrator as an emotionally obtuse simpleton unable to understand or describe the events and emotional experiences unfolding in the narrative (McNamer 2019, 124).⁹⁸ But rather than creating a kind of psychological portrait of an unreliable narrator hampered by his personal shortcomings, it is perhaps more fruitful, as Spearing suggests, to view this incompetence strictly as a matter of discourse in *Troilus*: for how else could we reconcile those self-proclaimed representational difficulties with the learned and scholastic “I” that speaks elsewhere within the same work? (Spearing 2005, 83) Against this background, Spearing is of the opinion that the inexpressibility topos serves as a discursive intensifier which, for instance, aids readers to imaginatively share Troilus’s suffering (*ibid.*).

I concur with this discursive emphasis, yet hope to suggest an additional function. According to my view, it is profitable to conceive of the professions of incapacity in *Troilus* as a strategic establishment of a contrasting background track, the purpose of which is to bring into focus *the purported validity of the characters’ experience-based discourse*. By placing emphasis on how he, a complete ignoramus, is *not* able to convey the experiences that must be conveyed, and therefore at times refrains from even trying, the poet basically confesses to his discourse being that distortive and untrustworthy medium that modern-day narratology tends to see in indirect representation of speech and thought. Hence, he obliterates himself from view in order to give the floor to the linguistically apt lovers. One might perhaps venture as far as to describe this as a special instance of a “figural narrative situation,” where “the illusion of immediacy is superimposed over mediacy” (Stanzel 1984, 4–5) by replacing the mediating narrator by a reflector-character through whose perspective the audience experiences the storyworld. Although employing different means, Chaucer’s narration can be argued to work towards the creation of a similar *impression* of immediacy and authenticity through underlining narratorial absence. Yet this absence, as an effect generated by narratorial withdrawal in the face of experts-by-experience, is something that must not be taken at face value, since it is a method that rather ends up revealing what it ostensibly seeks to conceal.

In view of this, I suggest designating this narrative strategy as *apophatic mediacy*. I take my cue here from Mehtonen (2012), who introduces the concept of “apophatic first-person speaker” in her discussion of Meister Eckhart’s use of different speaking “I”s in his sermons. According to Mehtonen, Eckhart’s sermons create textual

⁹⁸ For a discussion of Chaucer’s “self-deprecating literary roles,” see Minnis (1984/2010, 190–210).

spaces which cancel the speaking subject as part of a quest for a poetics that seeks to abandon the “I” “in the silence of transcendence” (ibid. 81). A corresponding process of negation could be discerned in Chaucer’s text, albeit clearly for more mundane purposes: instead of transcendence, the background track, which portrays the “I” as not saying anything at all or else saying incorrectly, generates a silence of *dissimulation*, an aura of pretence which conceals the poet’s voice under the illusion of the characters independently speaking their own minds without the author’s intermediating hand.

I further suggest that such apophatic dissimulation can be seen at work in the over-explicit quotative that ushers in Troilus’s song in [9]: the poet comes forth only to obliterate himself from view in favour of Troilus’s own experiential voice, emphasising the fact that in the following stanzas we may hear the prince precisely as he spoke (or sang), every word included, as if the poet is not involved. And yet, the narration equally allows the reader to draw the opposite conclusion. As discussed in Chapter I: Section 4.2.2 of this study, the object of rhetorical *occultatio* is precisely to draw attention to that which is claimed not to be present – does not the poet in fact make his presence all the more felt by its negation? Does not the very elaborateness of his relinquishing of agency forcefully call attention to precisely what it purports to obliterate?

On closer inspection, even the phrases by which the self-obliteration is performed in [9] seem to point to this conclusion. For all the insistence upon exact quotation, the stanza makes it equally clear that the prospective quotation is not, after all, verbatim, due to the fact that it is transmitted by the composing poet in English – a language that the Trojan character decidedly did *not* speak. The line “But plainly, save oure tonges difference” thus openly juxtaposes authenticity and falsity as features of Troilus’s (anti-)mimetic or, as I propose to call it, pseudo-experiential discourse: on the one hand, the audience is led to believe that it will hear the character’s genuine voice, and yet on the other, this possibility is denied them, since it is a voice embedded in a mediating instance delivering the message in incorrect language. Citing this same passage as evidence that the “faithfulness expectation” (Moore 2011, 82) for direct speech would possibly not have existed for late-medieval English-users, since the flexibility of medieval speech marking did not draw as clear-cut and pronounced boundaries between direct and indirect discourse as do quotation marks, Moore (ibid. 85–86) suggests that it is only the modern reader who is bothered by the linguistic discrepancy and thus simply puts it down as an “overstatement for emphasis.”

Are we then meant to draw from this the conclusion that the apparent paradox would have gone by unnoticed or met with indifference in the medieval context? It is, of course, impossible to argue either way with any absolute degree of certainty, but I am inclined to think that, given the lengths to which Chaucer goes in order to underline the conglomeration of various voices, the passage does seek to alert both the medieval and the modern reader to this very aspect. The interjections involved in the jumbled lines “*I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus / Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus / As I shal seyn*” seem to identify the eventual performer of the song as either the poet (“I”) or Troilus, or even both of them at the same time, thus reinforcing the impression that what is about to follow is a piece of combined discourse where we can hear both author and character at the same time – and yet neither of them exactly. Furthermore, the song is presented as an expansion upon Troilus’s words given in a Latin text by an *auctor* called Lollius, which raises the number of voices openly acknowledged in the passage to three.

Thus, the introductory framing of Troilus’s song presents a metarepresentational dilemma; indeed, the three intermingled source tags (Troilus? Chaucer? The *auctor* Lollius?) and the disturbing linguistic discrepancy may lead one to ask whether the lines do not represent a case of intentional *source-muddling* designed precisely to upset the idea of a successful source-tagging as the end product of a smooth-sailing cognitive operation. It is perhaps a cognitive fact that the *inquit*-based introductory stanza invites, regardless of the historical period inhabited by the reader, a metarepresentational inference along the lines of “it is Troilus who states / sings / thinks that love involves contradictory emotions.” But, again, is it first and foremost Troilus’s mind that the reader is asked to identify as the source behind that sentiment? As stated, the strategy of apophatic framing subtly forces attention to the secondary source (poet) behind the ostensibly primary source (Troilus), and behind this secondary source there seems to exist yet another source (“*myn auctour*”). In other words, this layered construction alerts us less to Troilus’s sentiments than to *how* and *by whom* those sentiments will actually be presented; it creates a sense of a false start that makes as if to turn completely towards Troilus, but nonetheless gives us to understand that the forthcoming song remains simultaneously anchored to the poet and his *auctour*.

Let us look at another passage that likewise launches a segment of direct speech through an elaborate quotative, introducing the weather monologue which is preceded by the poet turning

- [12] Unto Criseyde, that heng hire hed full lowe
Ther as she sat allone, and gan to caste

Where on she wolde apoynte hire atte laste,
If it so were hire em ne wolde cesse
For Troilus upon hire for to presse.

And, Lord! So she gan in hire thought argue
In this matere of which I have yow told,
And what to doone best were, and what eschue,
That plited she ful ofte in many folde.
Now was hire herte warm, now was it cold;
And what she thoughte, somewhat shal I write,
As to myn auctour listeth for t'endite.
(TC, 2.689–700; emphases added)

The phrase “And, Lord!” at the beginning of the second stanza takes us back to Section 1.1 of Chapter I, where I expanded upon Fludernik’s reading of such emotional interjections as narratorial empathetic alignment with characters’ emotions, suggesting that they might alternatively be understood as a method of experientialising the narration by simulating an audience point of view. In the present case, however, attributing the exclamation to the reporting instance rather than the audience does seem more reasonable, yet rather than empathetic identification with the character, the exclamation might be directed at the author himself. As Spearing remarks, this “metanarrative element” (2005, 84) of the passage has a hint of exasperation; indeed, “the difficulty and interest of *imagining* [Criseyde’s inner] life and of *representing* it seem scarcely indistinguishable” in this stanza, as the third-person representation merges with first-person references to the act of composing that attempts to “somewhat” capture the character’s mental movements (ibid.; emphases original). Spearing is of the opinion that this element is not a distraction from the tale, but rather seeks to make the audience a sympathetic participant in the poet’s task of finding words (ibid. 85).

While I agree with the suggestion that the stanza evokes – much like the over-explicit quotative in [9] – a kind of shared experientiality inspiring uncertainty about whether the lines are primarily about the poet’s experience of composing or the character’s experience of love, I do wish to read this effect more along the lines of the undercover agency that I argue informs Chaucer’s strategies of voice in *Troilus*. Although the “somewhat” can certainly be read, as Spearing does, as an expression of authorial exasperation amplifying readerly participation, I prefer viewing it as a humility topos which insincerely doubles as an assertion of agency, in other words, as yet another means of smuggling in the poet’s voice by stealth. For the word “somewhat” can be read in at least two different ways. In addition to taking it as an allusion to how difficult it will be for the poet to put Criseyde’s thoughts into English

tongue, it can also indicate that the ensuing monologue will be a paraphrase of these thoughts, literally a *somewhat* rendition; that is to say, it indicates that the words Criseyde will speak are to be tagged to her *only partially*, despite the fact that they are given in direct form. By constructing the introductory quotatives in such a way as to undermine the notion that the characters' "true" voices will be heard in their monologues, with one confirming the presence of the poet's voice through vehemently denying it and by establishing a translational paradox, and the other surreptitiously pointing to its paraphrastic quality, the quotatives give rise instead to an impression that Troilus and Criseyde will be more or less *absent* from their own experiences they will articulate in their monologues.

To put this point more precisely, on account of the complication of voice-attribution in these passages, the subsequent monologues emerge as mimetic in the original classical and medieval sense of the term: not as faithful duplications of words that were spoken by the characters, but as instances of artful imitation. According to Meir Sternberg, this aspect of embeddedness involved in any quotation is something that the "reproductive fallacy" involved in the traditional sliding scale models of speech and thought representation tends to overlook. He underscores that it is problematic to define narrative voice based on its level of faithfulness to the "original" utterance, since the so-called original utterance does not have an independent existence outside its quotation. Thus, even in formally autonomous direct quotation the quoted voice (what Sternberg calls "inset") is always embedded in and subordinated to the quoting surrounding instance ("frame") in which the author communicates with the reader for his or her own purposes (1982, 109–10, 131); it is, in other words, a "mimesis of discourse" (*ibid.* 107) and not the thing itself, and since the inset is designed to serve certain artistic ends, it is always subordinated to the quoting frame (*ibid.* 109).

Sternberg further insists that character speech typically conceals this teleological function, realising the operative poetics at work while at the same time camouflaging it, thus standing, in Sternberg's eloquent phrasing, "as carrier and cover at once, vehicle and veil" (2005, 236). As my discussion so far has attempted to demonstrate, Chaucer's treatment of his quotatives seems to work in the opposite direction, set on *both* veiling *and* unveiling the illusion. Even as he swears to give us the authentic voice of an individually existing Troilus, setting up the pretension that it is the clumsy narrative frame that is subordinated to the experientially authorised inset and not the other way around, he loops this voice back to himself through the introductory framings which imply that the characters' voices, as the end products of translational and compositional agency, are in fact twice removed from the "original" speaker.

This ultimate agent makes its undercover presence known by surreptitiously indicating that Criseyde’s monologue is merely a *somewhat* paraphrase and that Troilus’s song goes further into the realm of *inventio* in transforming the *sentence* given in the source into exact words – a move that highlights the essence of Troilus’s inner self as a block of *materia* provided by the *auctor* and now elaborated on by Chaucer. In giving rise to such perceptions, the over-explicit quotatives in [9] and [12] thus forcefully remind the audience that what they are about to hear is in fact not a *re-*presentation but a presentation by a mediating instance seeking to produce *ethopoeia*. Isidore of Seville writes:

Ethopoeiam uero illam uocamus, in qua hominis personam fingimus pro experimendis affectibus aetatis. studii, fortunae, latitiae, sexus, maeroris, audaciae. Nam cum piratae persona suscipitur, audax, abrupta, temeraria erit oratio; cum feminae sermo simulator, sexui conuenire debet oratio; iam uero adolescentis et senis, et militis et imperatoris, et parasiti et rustici et philosophi diuersa oratio dicenda est. Aliter enim loquitur gaudio affectus, aliter uulneratus. (*Etym.* II, 14.1-2)

Now we call that figure “characterization” [ἡθοποιία] in which we represent the character of a person to express the feelings of age, interest, fortune, joy, sex, grief, boldness. For when we assume the character of a pirate, our speech will be bold, curt, reckless; when we imitate the conversation of a woman, our speech ought to be appropriate to her sex. Likewise we have to employ a different pattern of speech for a young man and an old man, for a common soldier and a general, for a parasite and a country bumpkin and a philosopher. For someone overcome with joy speaks differently from someone who has been wounded. (Marshall, transl., 61–62)

Like Isidore, the Roman orators underscored the importance of fitting the speech to the character of the speaker whose words and thoughts were being emulated. The employment of appropriate style and vocabulary was regarded as paramount also in poetic composition; Horace insists that a breach of decorum will either induce sleepiness or invite howls of derisive laughter from the audience, as it will make a great difference whether the words are pronounced by a deity or a human being, a Theban or an Argive (*AP*, 73–118). The twelfth- and thirteenth-century arts of poetry followed suit. Matthew of Vendôme, in his *Ars versificatoria* (ca. 1775) illustrates the principles of sound characterisation by pointing out that a matron is always severe and never wanton (“rigor severitatis, remotio petulantiae, fuga incontinentiae sive libidinis”, I.69), and Geoffrey of Vinsauf demonstrates the use of *sermocinatio* – “whereby a speech is adapted to the person speaking, and what is

said gives the very tone and manner of that speaker” (Nims, transl., 62)⁹⁹ – by impersonating a monologue by a good pope (“papa bonus”; *PN*, 1309).

While the technical components of *ethopoeia* were widely discussed in rhetorical and poetic theory, the most comprehensive treatment of the device available to the Middle Ages was Priscian’s sixth-century translation of Hermogenes’s *Progymnasmata* (2nd century BC), which included *ethopoeia* (or, as Priscian calls it, *adlocutio*) among its elementary school exercises in rhetoric (Specht 1986, 5–6). It is certainly plausible that Chaucer too was at some point made to practice the production of *ethopoeia* and to study its strategies in the Latin curriculum authors; it is at least certain that the device is widely represented in his writings (*ibid.* 8). In fact, Specht is inclined to consider Criseyde’s refined farewell monologue in *Troilus* (5.1054–85) as an advanced exercise in impersonation which, in the style of the *progymnasmata* exercises, answers the question “What words Criseyde might utter, having cast off Troilus in favour of Diomedes” (*ibid.* 9). Furthermore, it is reasonable to presume that such ethopoetic soliloquies, which give psychological truths in “formal, introspective, and essentially non-naturalistic” manner (*ibid.* 1), might serve a different purpose to the more colloquial means of characterisation that, as we have seen, are also found in the text. Specht therefore submits that Chaucer seeks to mitigate the audience’s moral judgment of Criseyde by employing the traditional device of *ethopoeia*, thereby not only linking her to a line of literary predecessors, including Ovid’s tormented heroines in the *Heroides*, but also underlining the representative nature of her character, emotions and fortune (*ibid.* 11).

Specht’s argument resonates with my own thinking with regard to the pseudo-experientiality of the *Troilus* monologues that I have been discussing. The over-explicit quotatives usher in segments of *ethopoeia* that is made visible as a device by this very act of framing; I therefore contend that it is not only the representative nature of the characters’ emotions in the subsequent stanzas that are foregrounded by the use of *ethopoeia*, but the creation of *ethopoeia* itself, indeed as an imitation exercise answering the questions “What words might Criseyde and Troilus speak – or, in Troilus’s case, *sing* – having fallen in love with each other.” The words that Criseyde does speak were already discussed above in Section 6.1; the words of Troilus are quoted below:

⁹⁹ “Deinde quasi quasdam notulas, certissima signa, / Pono, quibus quae sit hominis natura patenter / Describo: color iste magis meliusque colorat. / En alium florem, personae quando loquenti / Sermo coaptatur redoletque loquela loquentem” (*PN*, 1266–70). For Geoffrey, *sermocinatio* covers the imaginary monologue (*ethopoeia*) as well as the fictional dialogue, whereas John of Garland groups *prosopopoeia* and *ethopoeia* under the heading of *conformatio* (cf. Specht 1986).

[13] *Canticus Troili.*¹⁰⁰

“If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thirst I, the more that ich it drynke.

“And if that at my owen lust I brenne,
From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
If harm agree me, wherto pleyne I thenne?
I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte.
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

“And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus possed to and fro,
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye.”
(*TC*, 1.400–20)

Troilus’s words are concerned with the traditional opposition of pleasure and pain within a lover’s heart – a theme that was already introduced in Chapter I: Section 4.2. I argued there that Heldris deliberately infringed verisimilar experientiality by suggesting that, from the real-world perspective, Eufemie’s moans and shudders might best be interpreted as signs of *dolor* rather than *delit* caused by a love that must be concealed. I followed this with the suggestion that Heldris thereby opens a window into a more humanely relatable character, as was also arguably the case with Silence’s possible lack of fortitude. In contrast to Heldris’s renegade move with regard to characterisation, Chaucer’s *ethopoeia* impersonates a courtly lover who plays

¹⁰⁰ The quotation marks surrounding the stanzas in modern editions provide a conventional visual clue that these lines represent the words or thoughts of a character. Moreover, the part conveying the character’s voice is set apart from the rest of the discourse by the titular line *Canticus Troili* (“Troilus’s song”), which occurs, in various spellings, as a marginal gloss in eleven of the sixteen surviving Troilus manuscripts (Benson and Windeatt, 1990). For some reason, modern editions wish to retain this particular scribal clarification and to relocate it so that it becomes part of the narrative text itself; together with the accompanying quotation marks, this additional operation further reaffirms the impression that in the second stanza we are being offered a verbatim replication of the character’s actual words.

by the book to the last. For Troilus, hidden love is a form of voluntary self-castigation, both enjoyable and damaging at once – a “wondre maladie” and “swete harm so queynte” that blows over him like two contrary winds buffeting a boat on a stormy sea. In this way, the song-monologue expresses a *literary* rather than a psychological truth: like Criseyde’s fearful anxiety towards love, Troilus’s sweet torment is consistent on the scale of the verisimilar, of which their fates and emotions are indeed representative and, as Specht suggests, all the more outlined as such through the choice of the traditional *ethopoeia* over the more colloquial language that is spoken by the characters on many other occasions in the poem.

But, as I already stated, it would perhaps be profitable to consider not just the representativeness of the characters’ emotions, but the representativeness of the discourse itself that brings these emotions about. The introductory quotative in [9], despite objections to the contrary, roots the impending character speech firmly in the poet’s framing discourse that simultaneously pretends to fade from view at its launch; thus, it makes the audience aware that the pretence of exact transmission (“every word right thus”) by an incompetent hand is in fact an act of impersonation, a piece of language fabricated not by an expert in love but an expert in rhetoric, the poet himself. As with Criseyde’s Ovidian discourse conjuring the experience of an afflicted heroine, the quotative descends into an artistically controlled imaginary monologue where mental torment walks hand in hand with rhetorical precision: *al sterelees* and yet in full control, Troilus appears, and quite correctly so, more as a stylistically aware poet than a subjectively restrained character lost in the *wondre maladie* of his soul. Additionally, the song-monologue also makes use of iterative metalepsis as a strategy of authorial signposting. The analogical depiction of Troilus’s contradictory state of mind as a boat struggling in the waves (“Thus possed to and fro, / Al sterelees withinne a boot am I . . .”) is presented in the stanza as Troilus’s inspired creation, yet the figurative expression reoccurs in the introduction to Book II, where the poet laments the difficulty of the writing task that lays ahead of him:

- [14] Owt of thisse blake wawes for to saylle,
 O wynd, o wynd, the weder gynneth clere;
 For in this see the boot hath swych travaille,
 Of my connyng, that unneth I it steere.
This see clepe I the tempestuous matere
Of disespere that Troilus was inne
 But now of hope the kalendes bygynne.
 (TC, 2.1–7; emphasis added)

The image of the boat in a storm links together the mimesis and diegesis in [13] and [14], establishing a connection between Troilus's self-expressed loving despair and the poet's process of composition that is likewise presented as strenuous rowing amidst raging waves. There is a long-standing tradition behind this notion: the composition of a poetic work was compared to undertaking a dangerous nautical voyage by classical Latin writers such as Horace, Statius, Pliny and, of course, Ovid (Curtius 1953/2013, 128–30). It should also be noted that Troilus and Criseyde's monologues are described in the introductory framings as adaptations from a Latin *auctor* Lollius, who is almost certainly a fabrication (see also ll. 5.1653: “as telleth Lollius”), and while Chaucer on the whole is loosely following Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Troilus's song is in fact traceable to Petrarch's sonnet number 132, “S'amor non è”: “Among conflicting winds in a frail boat / I find myself on the deep sea without a helm, / so light in knowledge, so laden with error, / that I do not know what I wish myself, / and tremble in midsummer, burn in winter.”¹⁰¹

Why, then, would Chaucer pretend to translate from Latin (cf. *TC*, 2.13–4), when evidence suggests otherwise? Various explanations have been given, ranging from a misreading by Chaucer of a line in Horace to developing a pseudonym for Boccaccio who may not have impressed Chaucer's audiences as an authority (Kittridge 1917; Elliott 1974, 80; Lawton 1985, 86–87). My own suggestion is to simply view the insistence on a Latin source in the same vein as I did the *estorie* in *Le Roman de Silence*. That is to say, not as a reference to any particular author whose identity Chaucer had perhaps misunderstood, but as a symbol of *fama* and the Latin amatory discourse, of the poetic tradition that besides the references to an original source is also evoked through the already-spoken quality of the figurative language still warm, as it were, from its previous use. It is neither the character nor the singular poet that communicates, but a layered, hybridised, collective poetic voice that constitutes the characters' supposedly private monologues and experiences. Troilus's *dolor* in the boat passage is thus treated in very much the same way as Criseyde's fearfulness in the weather monologue. The first-person representations of these emotions are tagged not just to the present poet, Chaucer, through echoed *expolitio* and the apophatic mediacy emerging in the over-explicit quotatives, but also, in a wider sense, to the existing poetic discourse about love and lovers, and the art of writing about them.

¹⁰¹ “Fra sì contrári vènti in frale barca / mi trovo in alto mar senza governo, / sì lieve di saver, d'error sì carca, / ch' i' medesimo non so quel ch' io mi voglio, / e tremo a mezza state, ardendo il verno.” The English translation is by Kilne (2002).

On the basis of the preceding observations, I propose that Chaucer’s technique offers an opportunity to enrich Walsh’s rhetorical three-fold model of voice with the categorisation of *voice as voice*. This purposely tautological coinage is meant to refer to the self-reflexive quality of a discourse that is, as I have sought to show throughout this chapter, primarily concerned with its own representative quality, even as it ostensibly offers itself to be read as an instance of “voice as idiom,” due to being assigned to a specific speaking or thinking character. Similarly to classical and medieval rhetoric and poetics, Walsh’s category of voice as idiom has to do with characterisation: it rests on the assumption that to represent a character’s idiom is to construct a distinct speaker and to invite reference about his or her subjectivity (Walsh 2010, 50). However, what I am trying to say is that, while the *ethopoeia* in the passages discussed above does formally construct distinct subject positions (Troilus/Criseyde articulating in the first person their inner sensations), its primary aim as a device is not to convey the characters’ subjectivity through their mimed words. As the metaleptic and apophatic strategies methodically loop the characters’ speeches back to the enveloping poet’s discourse, the effect of voice as idiom turns on its head, that is, it turns into a projection of voice as voice: it is no longer only a case of the poet imitating the voice of the character, but of the character made to imitate the voice of the poet(s), in a process of self-impersonation that I would describe, with Eugene Vance, as a *fetishistic* procedure. Drawing from Roman Jakobson’s (1960) take on the poetic function of language, Vance suggests that the poetic performance itself constitutes the goal of representation in *Troilus*, subordinating any other functions that its monologues might have (1979, 307). Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate just *how* this fetishizing is achieved through an employment of undercover narrative strategies that surreptitiously tag the characters’ words to the ultimate source behind them, thereby establishing their inward experiences as *materia* worked upon and shaped at will by the poet: “This see clepe I the tempestuous matere / Of disespeir that Troilus was inne” (see ll. 5–6 in [14] above). The capacity of poets to fashion anything out of words is self-consciously evoked also in a passage that is accordingly marked by the Selden scribe with “<n>ota of ye autur” (Benson and Windeatt 1990, 41):

- [15] *The dayes honour, and the bevenes yē,*
 The nyghtes foo – al this clepe I the sonne –
 Gan westren faste, and downward for to wrye,
 As he that hadde his dayes cours yronne,
 And white thynges wexen dymme and donne
 For lak of light, and sterres for t’apere,
 That she and alle hire folk in went yfeere.

(*TC*, 2.904–10; emphasis added)

This description of nightfall takes place directly after the dialogue between Antigone and Criseyde in [10]. Due to its placement, the periphrastic designation of the sun throws into particularly sharp relief the poetic use of language standing in contrast with Criseyde and Antigone’s colloquial one (“Why, nay, ywis!”), as if providing, in addition to the anonymous song, a supplementary example of the skilled rhetoric discussed by them.¹⁰² Moreover, the metalinguistic first-person aside (“al this clepe I . . .”) virtually flaunts the poet’s agency in constructing a stylistically controlled discourse dependent upon free choice between alternative modes of expression, thus suggesting that the world of the story, including the characters’ interiorities, are his to shape; like the poem itself and its maker, they are *subgits to poesye* (cf. *TC*, 5.1790), following in the footsteps of “Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (*TC*, 5.1792). Furthermore, through the intertextual echoes, the unique voice of the self turns into a representative of a hybrid collective voice parsed together from outside voices; what was meant to be original and private, and, moreover, entirely liberated from interference by the clueless poet, is shown to be collective and plural, a patchwork constellation that replaces the individual experience of love with a pseudo-experiential representation multiply removed from the experiencing subjects themselves. The minds of Troilus and Criseyde appear as products of a highly rationalised, voice-oriented poetic process which highlights their essence as fragments of texts constituting a cumulative, never-ending story about love and suffering.

6.3 All These Lovers in Such Cases: Repetition, Compression, Typification

Having left Troilus to his own devices for the duration of the authorial invocation to Venus with which Book III (3.1–49) opens, the poet turns back to the prince to describe afterwards the manner in which he rehearses the words he would speak to Criseyde:

[16a] Lay al this mene while Troilus,
 Recording his lesson in this manere:
 “Mafay,” thoughte he, “thus wol I sey, and thus;

¹⁰² Following the authorities on rhetoric, medieval arts of poetry refer to periphrasis as *circuitio* or *circumlocutio*. It is “a roundabout description of a simple idea” (“est quando rem simplicem circumloquimur”; *PP*, 6.291).

Thus wol I pleyne unto my lady dere;
 That word is good, and this shal be my cheere;
 This nyl I nought foryeten in no wise."
 (TC, 3.50–55)

The point of view conveyed is obviously Troilus's, indicated by the simple targeting *inquit* ("thoughte he") as well as the idiomatic French oath "mafay" used by no one else but Troilus in the poem (Elliott 1974, 252). The form of quotation is prospective: it represents a potential speech-event that has not yet come into being, but might do so in the future ("Thus *wol* I sey"). Sternberg remarks that such prospective (or "preproductive") quotation, chronologically preceding the actual delivery, disproves the fallacy that direct discourse should always be *re*productive: since "there is a representation before there is an object to be represented," the "very term 'original' fails to apply in its normal sense" (1982, 138). Furthermore, the eventual enactment – *if* it ever takes place – may be radically different from its forecast (ibid. 139), as it is when Troilus finally finds himself face to face with Criseyde. Blushing and stuttering in a trembling voice ("so he wex sodeynliche red," TC, 3.82; "In chaunged vois . . . Which vois ek quook," TC, 3.92–93), he does not manage to reproduce his rehearsed speech which, as the poet tells us, "is thorough his wit ironne" (TC, 3.84), but merely lets out a stunted cry –

[16b] Lo, the alderfirste word that hym asterte
 Was, twyes, "Mercy, mercy, swete herte!"
 (TC, 3.97–8)

– which seems all the more scant for the impression of verbosity created by the varied repetition of the pattern *thus will I say* in the prospective version that never becomes actualised. While becoming lost for words makes for a psychologically endearing portrait of the love-smitten prince, the form in which he is quoted by the poet on both occasions suggests that additional effects are involved. For it is important to note here that the patterned repetition obscures Troilus's words even in the preliminary instance: we never find out what it was that he intended to say, and which word he deemed particularly effective ("That word is good"), and what exactly was that phrase he swore not to forget ("This nyl I nought foryeten in no wise"), because these quoted words are transformed and packed into a summary *thus*. This *thus* is to be understood as an authorial intervention serving as a stand-in for the plethora of thoughts and intentions coursing through Troilus's heated brain.

Such a refusal to report a character's words verbatim can be viewed, with Fludernik, as a way of denying the mimeticism of a given discourse (Fludernik 1993,

402–3; e.g., “My name is so-and-so,” in Nabokov’s *Sebastian Knight*). As a counterweight to the classical accounts, and much in line with Sternberg’s critical take on them, Fludernik proposes an anti-mimetic model of speech and thought representation which, instead of treating written speech and thought as corresponding to an original utterance indicative of underlying subjectivity, pays attention to expressive elements as signals. Such signals, instead of attempting to capture a specific speech or thought act by a specific person, are used to represent a “*typical or schematic image of a linguistic expression*” fitting the present context (*ibid.* 392; emphasis original).

Chaucer’s schematic treatment of Troilus’s thought in [16a] implies typicality not only by denying mimeticism but by repetition. The kind of blunt monotonous force of the *thus-and-thus* pattern drives home the point that Troilus’s discourse is conventional to the degree of not even *needing* to transcribe it, that it is constituted by routine expressions and professions of love determined, on the one hand, by literary predecessors and, on the other, by human cognition, in a way that seems to crystallise the complex interplay between “love as a crisis-ridden human experience and love as a convention-driven literary subject,” which Hanning (2010, 105) suggests is one of the poem’s central concerns.

A sense of what Troilus’s missing words were like can be grasped earlier in the text, in an episode which likewise makes us aware of the ordinariness of amatory discourse, while also referring to its potential as a tool for manipulation. Once Criseyde has finally agreed to at least accept Troilus as an admirer, Pandarus decides that it is time to speed things up with a love letter: “but if I were as thow, / God help me so, as I wolde outrely / Of myn owen hond write hire right now / A lettre, in which I wolde hire tellen how / I ferde amys, and hire biseche of routhe” (*TC*, 2.1003–8). In pointing out the need to beseech Criseyde’s pity for Troilus who fares amiss for love of her, Pandarus prospectively envisages the contents of the not yet existing letter from his own point of view, while cunningly making it look as if the entire idea originates in Troilus (“if I were as thow . . .”; “I wolde . . .”); his prospective paraphrase of Troilus’s expected words is predictive and manipulative in that it places the perspective of the forecaster over the forecastee, thus allowing the predicting quoter to “create the future speaker in his own image” (Sternberg 1982, 139).

In addition to contents, the letter’s stylistic features are also envisioned in advance by Pandarus whose instructions, as has been noted (Camargo 1991, 58), derive from Horace’s *Ars poetica* as well as Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* (I.455–68). Borrowing from Horace (*AP*, 356) the image of the world’s best harpist ruining his performance by

playing the same note over and over again (*TC*, 2.1030–36), Pandarus advises Troilus to avoid repetition, but the enacted counterpart of the envisioned letter ends up being exactly its opposite, an epistolary confession swimming in repetition:

[17a] And [Troilus] sette hym down and wrot right in this wyse:
 First he gan hire his righte lady calle,
 His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,
 His blisse, and ek thise other termes alle
 That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche;
 And in ful humble wise, as in his speche,
 He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;
 To telle al how, it axeth muchel space.
 (*TC*, 2.1064–71)

Similarly to the compression of Troilus’s rehearsed words into a *thus-and-thus* pattern in [16a], the paraphrase of his written words here creates an impression of a long and winded discourse, the quotation of which would demand “muchel space,” and which seems to directly defy Pandarus’s advice with its redundant epithets. Likewise, the poet again refuses to quote the prince’s words directly: since what Troilus says is, apparently, entirely predictable to the narratee, consisting of phrases and expressions that are employed by all lovers in similar situations (“thise other termes alle / That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche”), the envisaged first-person discourse can be indirectly represented in the frame which gives only glimpses of the conventional and repetitious language (“righte lady,” “hertes lif,” “lust,” “sorwes leche,” “blisse”) constituting the otherwise invisible epistle.

As the paraphrase of the letter continues, the repetitive structure beginning the sentences with “and” over and over again gives rise to a kind of “and so on and so forth” effect, suggesting that a discourse such as this one could go on unceasingly in a similar vein, which adds an ironic touch on Troilus’s sincere description of his “endeles” woo:¹⁰³

[17b] And after this ful lowely he hire preyde
 To be nought wroth, thogh he, of his folie,
 So hardy was to hire to write, and seyde
 That love it made, or elles most he die,
 And pitousli gan mercy for to crye;
 And after that he seyde – and leigh ful loude –

¹⁰³ Kivistö (2002, 159), in her study on the sixteenth-century collection of satirical letters *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, likewise suggests that the repeated use of the connective “and” creates the impression of “everlasting continuity,” and also of “spontaneous process of composition,” which would perhaps be a fitting description also of Troilus’s attempt at letter-writing.

Hymself was litel worth, and lasse he koude;

And that she sholde han his konnyng excused,
That litel was, and ek he dredde hire soo;
And his unworthynesse he ay acused;
And after that than gan he telle his woo –
But that was endeles, withouten hoo –
And seyde he wolde in trouthe alwey hym holde;
And radde it over, and gan the lettre folde.
(*TC*, 2.1072–85)

According to Camargo (1991, 60–61), the fact that Chaucer paraphrases the letter which Boccaccio quotes in full in the *Filostrato* indicates the emotionally detached “outsider” narrator’s impatience to get on with the “real action” of the story, rather than dwelling on and inviting the audience to empathetically identify with the character’s inward experience by directly quoting him. I, for my part, prefer to explain Chaucer’s use of paraphrase precisely on experiential grounds, as a further means to illustrate how love, explicitly put onto paper here on the level of the story, is a contrived written enterprise, restricted and determined by the collectively created discourse about it that schematises the experiences that it seeks to convey. In other words, by paraphrasing the contents of Troilus’s letter Chaucer casts this letter in an ironic light. The queuing of the epithets for Criseyde, which betrays their redundancy, the repetitive structure of the sentences describing what Troilus says, the interjections about space and typicality – these are all features that juxtapose Troilus’s honest and solitary attempt at expressing his sentiments with the literary heteroglossia of the fourteenth-century in a manner which would not be possible through direct quotation. Like Lensky’s sentimental poetic language in Bakhtin’s (1981, 43–46) analysis of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (1382), Troilus’s language is surrounded with “intonational quotation marks” (ibid. 44), appearing as an image of another’s style in another’s language that makes itself felt through the ironic accents; like Lensky’s language, it functions “as an object of representation,” indeed almost a “material thing” (ibid.), thus falling into line with the other techniques by which Chaucer’s text draws attention more to the poetic discourse than the personal experience it outwardly purports to mediate.

By hinting, then, at the predestined typicality of Troilus’s words, Chaucer again reminds us how literary characters’ emotions are poets’ *materia*, as such always associated with an element of artifice. This element is foregrounded also by Pandarus’s suggestion to blot the letter with some non-spontaneous tears (“Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite”; *TC*, 1027) that, instead of serving as *signa naturalia* of

Troilus's pain, rather come across as *signa data* constituting a carefully planned (self-)portrait of a pining lover. As Augustine explains, natural signs, such as tracks of animals or facial expressions, "without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke signifies fire" (*De doctrina Christiana*, 2.1.1), whereas conventional signs are those which "living beings mutually exchange in order to show, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds, or their perceptions, or their thoughts" (*De doctrina Christiana*, 2.2.3).¹⁰⁴ Posing as *signa naturalia*, Troilus's tears are in fact *signa data* of a conventional literary *dolor* and bring to mind, for instance, Briseis's tear-stained letter to Achilles in the *Heroides* (III.3–4). Troilus does as he is told, apparently all innocent of the manipulative aspect: "And with his salte teris gan he bathe / The ruby in his signet" (*TC*, 2.1086). As McKinnell writes, Chaucer clearly encourages his audience to view the tears and the entire letter-writing episode with a "cheerful detachment" (1979, 83), since it indicates an uncritical adoption of courtly convention by Troilus, who fails to see its "absurdities" (*ibid.*)

Contrasting the sincerity with which Troilus throws himself into the affair, Chaucer paints, in schematic language, a picture of a typecast lover whose individual behaviour is constrained into a series of patterned actions and thoughts. As the letter proves successful, initiating a correspondence between the protagonists, this new phase of the affair, and the emotional impact of Criseyde's written responses on Troilus, is dealt with synoptically:

[18] Wherfore I seye *alwey*, that *day and nyght*
 This Troilus gan to desiren moore
 Thanne he did erst, thourgh hope, and did his myght
 To preessen on, as by Pandarus loore,
 And writen to hire of his sorwes soore.
 Fro day to day he leet it nought refreyde,
 That by Pandare he wroot somwhat or seyde;

And dide also his oþer observaunces
 That til a lovere longeth in this cas;
 And after that his dees torned on chaunces,
 So was he outhur glad or seyde "Allas!"
 And held after his gistes ay his pas;
 And after swiche answeres as he hadde,
 So were his dayes sory outhur gladde.
 (*TC*, 2.1338–51; emphases added)

¹⁰⁴ The English translations are by D.W. Robertson (1997).

Resorting to frequency expressions (“alwey,” “day and nyght, “Fro day to day”) compressing a string of repeated actions in the story into a single occurrence in the discourse, the stanzas makes use of what Genette calls iterative narration (“narrating one time . . . what happened n times”; 1972/1980, 116). This detachment from detail also informs the description of the actions themselves as well as the emotions that Troilus experiences during this indefinable time period, which are given only in outline. We do learn that Troilus sends word to Criseyde daily through Pandarus, although the contents of his notes are not made clear (“he wroot somewhat or seyde”); whatever else he does besides scribbling is cursorily passed over by planting yet another vague reference to the “observaunces / That til a lovee longeth in this cas” (cf. “thise other termes alle / That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche” in [17a]). However, it is Troilus’s state of mind which receives the most sketchy treatment: depending on the tone of Criseyde’s replies, he is either glad or cries “Allas!” Representing a “condensed speech act” – a brief discourse putting a speech event in typicalized form (Fludernik 1993, 403) – the exclamation compresses into a single utterance a number of words spoken repeatedly over a period of time, which is also the case in the following passage:

[19a] He was so fallen in despeir that day,
 That outrely he shop hym for to deye.
 For right thus was his argument alway:
 He seyde he nas but lorn, weylaway!
 (TC, 4.953–59)

Instead of creating the illusion of words that were “actually” spoken by the particular Troilus in his particular despair, Chaucer gives an idea of what a lover in this situation would likely say; the “weylaway” *evokes* rather than indicates subjectivity (cf. Fludernik 1993, 391), and as with the lovers’ “observaunces,” it seems to suggest the absolute repetitiveness of their verisimilar suffering which, in essence, is compressible into “weylaway” and “allas.” Again, Troilus’s words remain invisible, as they did in the indirectly quoted letter, yet they are fully imaginable by romance memory.

Returning, then, to the contents of the letter paraphrased in [17a], we may notice that it too launches the character’s words with a quotative (“And sette hym down and wrot *right in this wyse*”), which, while not as over-explicit as the apophatic framing introducing Troilus’s song in [9], nonetheless offers a similar kind of false start in apparently preparing us for a reproductive transcription of the prince’s words: what we get instead is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek gloss of his personal appeal, grounding it less to Troilus than to Chaucer. At one point, Chaucer openly calls his bluff:

[20] But now, paraunter, som man wayten wolde
 That every word, or soonde, or look, or cheere
 Of Troilus that I rehercen sholde,
 In al this while unto his lady deere –
 I trowe it were a long thyng for to here –
 Or of what wight that stant in swich disjoynte,
 Hise wordes alle, or every look, to poynte.

For sothe, I have naught herd it don er this
 In story non, ne no man here, I wene;
 And though I wolde, I koude nought, ywys . . .
 (*TC*, 3.491–500)

In the words of Burrow (2002, 114), Chaucer here summons the idea of “total narrative” by taking a moment to explain that, even if he and the audience wanted to, he cannot give a complete account of every look, gesture and word. The passage thus dispels once and for all the illusion hinted at by the false starts: on the one hand, we are led to believe that we will hear the characters’ “true” experiential voices, and yet, on the other hand, we are meant to realise that we *never* get to hear them – only a heavily compressed account by the inventing poet. Eugène Vance has written about *Troilus* producing a sense of a latent story, as the destruction of Troy is referred to but filtered through several narrative voices to an almost subliminal level of awareness (1979, 323–25). A description of the city’s fall may be found in other books: “But how this town com to destruccion / Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle . . . But the Troian gestes, as they felle, / In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite, / Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write” (*TC*, 1.141–42/1.145–46). In Wayne C. Booth’s words, Chaucer here reminds us “that we are reading only one tale among many, that he is selecting his materials in our own interest, and that if we want other stories we can go to Homer and other authors for them” (1961/1983, 170). But who do we go to if we want to hear the story containing the lovers’ every *word*, *soonde*, *look* and *cheere* – that other latent tale implied by the text?

[21] The lettres ek that she of olde tyme
 Hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede
 An hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,
 Refiguryng hire shap, hire wommanhede,
 Withinne his herte, and every word or dede
 That passed was; and thus he drof t’an ende
 The ferthe day, and seyde he wolde wende.
 (*TC*, 5.470–76)

Troilus is said to tell his tale anew to himself – the version which includes “every word or dede that passed was” – and to the patiently listening Pandarus: “This tale was ay span-newe to bygynne, / Til that the nyght departed hem atwynne” (3.1665–66). Elizabeth Scala (2002) has written about “absent narratives” as a characteristic feature of medieval literature: texts frequently make reference to missing stories. In *Troilus*, one such missing story is the “actual” tale of the lovers’ inner experience, which we never get to hear, perhaps consisting of words that were *not* what our romance memory supposes them to be. The strategies of pseudo-experientiality lead to an impression of *a tale told incorrectly* or at any rate *only partially*: something is constantly slipping out of reach that is only partly grasped by the narration. In this sense, *Troilus and Criseyde* also creates the effect of two rivalling tales that in *Silence* was realised in the debate between the poet-commentator and the venerable *estorie* as a representative of the traditional discourse of *fama*.

6.4 Frost in Winter, Snow on Fire: Laughing at Fools in Rhymes

As with so many courtly lovers, the first meeting between Criseyde and Troilus takes place in a religious setting. For Troilus, the temple where the Trojans gather to “herknen of Palladions servyce” (*TC*, 1.164) is a place to amuse himself with mind-reading: “And in his walk ful faste gan he to wayten / If knight or squyer of his compaignie / Gan for to syke, or lete his eighen baiten / On any womman that he koude espye” (*TC*, 1.190–93). Sighs and longing glances are a giveaway of secret affections that Troilus, much like the Count of Chester in *Silence*, spies on his friends’ bodies, describing to them the scenes of unhappiness and suffering that he imagines love puts these “yonge knyghtes” (*TC*, 1.184) through in the hands of indifferent ladies: “He wolde smyle and holden it folye, / And seye hym thus, ‘God woot, she slepeth softe / For love of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte!’” (*TC*, 1.194–96). The prince follows these observations with a condescending gesture –

[22a] And with that word he gan caste up the browe,
 Ascaunces, “Lool is this naught wisely spoken?”
 (*TC*, 1.204–05)

– and a moment later we see his gaze landing on Criseyde to observe “hire mevyng and hire chere” (*TC*, 1.289),

[22b] Which somdel deignous was, for she let falle
 Hire look a lite aside in swich manere,

Ascaunces, “What, may I nat stonden here?”
(TC, 1.290–92)

A rich display of the Palmerian “social minds in action” can be witnessed in these passages, where thought seems to become public and visible on the body: Criseyde’s sidelong glance conveys to Troilus a somewhat disdainful (“sommel deignous”) disposition, whereas his own sneering head-toss (“he gan caste up the browe”) is obviously a “dramaturgical gesture” (ibid. 110), a self-conscious use of visible expression to invite the world to interpret the character behind it in a particular way. Much has been made of these looks and glances cast in the temple. Mostly the discussion has concerned the characters’ agency as subjects or objects, and the psychological implications thereof.¹⁰⁵ While I do agree that the temple scene, with its pronounced emphasis on conscious and unconscious revelation of one’s personality, is centrally concerned with subjectivity and its projections, I nonetheless suggest that even more important is the way in which Chaucer constructs the temple scene, and the ones immediately following it, in a manner that implies the *hypotheticality* and *textuality* of these projected selves.

The first indication of this is Chaucer’s treatment of the characters’ non-verbal communication. The conjoined explanations of their roughly defined body language count as what Sternberg calls “mute signalling” recast into language: a non-verbal object, such as gesture, is invested with expressiveness through quotation reproducing what is by nature unreproducible as such in words (1982, 133–36). Moreover, here the mute signals (the head-toss, the sideways glance) invite a verbalisation that expressly underlines its own vagueness: when Troilus casts up his brow, it is *as if* (“ascaunces”) we hear him say something to the effect of *Did I not speak well?* Similarly, when Criseyde looks aside, it is *as if* she communicates an unspoken question which seems to proudly challenge the onlooker. Taking Boccaccio’s line “e ’l tornare / ch’ella fe’ ’n sé alquanto sdegnosetto / quasi dicesse. – E’ non ci si può stare –” (*Il Filostrato*, 1.28; “that act of hers somewhat disdainful, *as if she were to say* ‘one may not stand here’”, Griffin and Myrick, transl., 13), Chaucer develops the *quasi dicesse* further, investing both characters’ actions with a strong

¹⁰⁵ Questioning the readings that position Troilus as an active subject and Criseyde as a passive object of desire in the scene, Miriam Moore (1999) argues for a view of equality arising from the way in which Chaucer expands upon the *Filostrato* by also involving Criseyde’s gaze: “Troilus’s eye chooses, but almost immediately and equally, he is chosen by Criseyde’s returning look” (ibid. 160), which Moore takes to indicate that her “subjectivity is inscribed in his desire” (ibid. 152). Carolyn Van Dyke (2005) is likewise of the opinion that it is the impression of Criseyde as an individual which enamours Troilus. The proud look by which the traitor’s daughter demands space for herself provides Troilus (and us) with a glimpse of her inner life, a “powerful display of subjectivity” (ibid. 200) that Van Dyke in her analysis sets against the competing readings of Criseyde as the categorical female (ibid. 198–222).

sense of conjecture and even misapprehension that the corresponding Middle English *ascaunces* entails.¹⁰⁶ The fact that the modern editions add quotation marks around the verbalised gestures unfortunately robs the lines somewhat of their slipperiness, watering down the element of doubt that *ascaunces* brings in so forcefully in the original manuscript context. When not fixed by typographical means, it is even more apparent that the interpretation of the gestures does not need to be fixed, but remains open to discussion.

But even if the exact state of mind behind Criseyde's glance is thus obscured on the discourse level, on the story level its meaning is nonetheless very much fixed and certain for Troilus, who is smitten by the lady's regard: "And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken / So gret desir and such affecciou, / That in his herte botme gan to stiken / Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun" (*TC*, 1.295–98). As Sternberg (1982, 135) writes, making mute signalling articulate increases the *reporter's* perspectival share, although the use of quotation would indicate the opposite; hence, despite the first-person ascription ("may *I* nat stonden here?"), the line does not provide a view into Criseyde's consciousness, but an imaginary interpretation of it and her personality by the observing Troilus. This interpretation then triggers in the "mirour of his mynde" (see the Introduction to this study) a series of expectations as to how the situation might evolve, with the metaphor of the mirror strongly reinforcing the impression that we are dealing with a construction, a fantasy that Troilus's mind conjures up (cf. Lucas 1998). As already mentioned in my preliminary discussion of the stanza, he envisions a stereotypical courtly affair, with himself as the lady's humble servant ("and if he dede his cure / To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace, / Or ellis for oon of hire servantz pace. / Imagenynge that travaille nor game / Ne myghte for so goodly oon be lorn / As she . . ."; *TC*, 1.369–74). As Van Dyke remarks, Criseyde emerges in this constructed vision as an "idealized *domina*" (2005, 206), the embodiment of a romantic ideal that culminates in a metaphorical description by Troilus (who seems to be addressing himself in the second person here) of the *domina's* indifference and his own *dolor* from which death inevitably ensues:

[23] "But, O thow woful Troilus, God wolde,
 Sith thow most loven thorough thi destine,
 That thow beset were on swich oon that sholde
 Know al thi wo, al lakked hir pitee!

¹⁰⁶ The *Middle English Dictionary* gives the following definitions: 1. (a) Conj. In such a way that; (b) as if, pretending that. 2. Adv. (a) As if to say or indicate (sth.); (b) with affectation, factitiously, insincerely; deceptively.

But also *cold in love towards the*
This lady is as frost in wynter moone,
And thow fardon as snow in fire is soone.
(*TC*, 1.519–25; emphasis added)

In articulating Criseyde's haughty disposition in terms of "frost in wynter moone," these lines could be said to represent a particularly poetic version of what Alan Palmer has described as "double cognitive narratives," by which he means "versions of characters' minds that exist in the minds of other characters" (2010, 12; see also Palmer 2004, 230–39, where he uses the designation "doubly embedded narratives" instead). The term "double" here refers to the fact that characters' minds already exist as "cognitive narratives" in the minds of readers. Armed with the real-world belief that fictional beings, like actual human ones, possess a consciousness that continues (the so-called "continuing consciousness -frame"; 2004, 175–83), readers combine isolated references to a particular fictional character into a sustained "narrative" about their consciousness, consisting of that character's "total perceptual and cognitive viewpoint, ideological worldview, memories of the past, and the set of beliefs, desires, intentions, motives, and plans for the future" (2010, 11). This readerly strategy, which Palmer describes as joining up the dots (2004, 176), is also in operation on the level of story, as characters engage in attempts to see the storyworld from another's point of view in order to, for instance, anticipate future events or, in the case of the detective novel, solve the mystery (2004, 231).

Up to a point, this is certainly one valid way to describe the manner in which Troilus creates detailed mental projections of Criseyde and his hypothetical love affair with her. After all, these projections do seem to issue from a process of dot-joining, with Troilus first drawing conclusions about Criseyde's haughty gesture, conclusions that are later reinforced as he is said to go about his business in hope of catching a glimpse of her ("To sen hire goodly lok he gan to presse"; *TC*, 1.446), which leads him to cry for her pity "a thousand tyme" (*TC*, 1.457) per hour ("now wolde God, Criseyde, / Ye wolden on me rewe, er that I deyde! / My dere herte, allas, myn hele and hewe / And lif is lost, but ye wol on me rewe!", *TC*, 1.459–62). That Criseyde's presumed lack of pity is Troilus's fantasy is openly stated in a narratorial intervention "But how it was, certeyn, kan I not seye, / If that this lady understood nat this, / Or feynede hire she nystee, oon of the tweye; / But wel I rede that, by no manere weye, / Ne semed it that she of hym roughte, / Or of his peyne, or whatsovere he thoughte" (*TC*, 1.492–97), which seems to further support the impression that Troilus's subjectively coloured view of Criseyde – his "double cognitive narrative" of her – is the key point of interest here.

What is more, the openly textualised beginning of the affair – the *ascounces* verbalisation of Criseyde’s mute gesture that becomes read as if it were a straightforward bodily transcription of her mental processes – seems to present a particularly illustrative example of Palmer’s rather vague argument about mental representations being “narratives” in a *literal* sense (2010, 12, 14). Literal, he explains, because they are discursively constructed and because the reader’s (or character’s) series of encounters with a particular (discursive) consciousness is ultimately refined into an account that is “coherent and continuous” (2010, 12). While the state of being discursively constructed and coherent is hardly grounds enough for defining narrative, in the case of *Troilus* the idea of mental representations as “literally” narratives can be said to carry a special meaning due to the intertextual resonances constituting the audience’s romance memory. I will now explain why.

It was already pointed out that the verbalising of the mute signals in the temple scene explicitly textualises the consciousnesses the gestures purport to project. The affair is launched by Criseyde’s disdainful look and later concludes with a concrete reference to her body as a written emotional record: “Though ther be *mercy writen in youre cheere*, / God woot, *the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde*?” (*TC*, 3.1356–57; emphasis added), says Troilus to Criseyde, as the disdain he originally glimpsed in her countenance is finally replaced with the granting of mercy, that is, with Criseyde becoming his lover.¹⁰⁷ What would it have meant for Chaucer’s contemporaries to have Criseyde’s disposition described like this in scribal terms, as a text of mercy written on her countenance? I discussed in Chapter I: Section 3.2 the “self-text metaphor” as a figurative means of expressing amorous sentiments in courtly romance. Already conventionalised by Chaucer’s time, the metaphor is connected by Jager more broadly with notions of interiority and reflection he associates with the rising practices of private reading, thereby arguing that the symbolism of the book of the heart became identified with the idea of the “unique individual” and the “hidden human subject” (2000, xvi–xvii). What I would like to suggest, however, is that Chaucer’s use of the self-text metaphor points precisely in the opposite direction, towards the *shared* and the *impersonal*, and the meaning of the word “text(e)” as a “story, tale, narrative” (*Middle English Dictionary*). I claim, in other words, that there are two parallel but *different* reading processes going on, one within the story and the other outside it, at the level of author-audience communication. In the storyworld, Troilus’s depiction of Criseyde’s countenance as a text may simply be a

¹⁰⁷ For a reading of this scene from a psychological perspective, with a focus on how Troilus cannot understand Criseyde’s text because he establishes her as a self-absorbed “Troilus-based text,” see Warren (2001).

realistic expression of the Hippocratic mind-body continuum, which connects interior emotions with observable physiological affects indicative of Criseyde's subjectivity, just as his *domina* projection of Criseyde can be understood as an assemblage of hearsays about what love is, consisting of one hardship after another: "I have herd told, pardieus, of youre lyvyng, / Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces, / And which a labour folk han in wynnynge / Of love, and in the keypyng which doutaunces; / And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces" (*TC*, 1.197–201; emphasis added). But for the recipient of Chaucer's tale, these hearsays are of course *literally* texts, in the sense that they are recycled fragments of romance plots inscribed in romance memory that Criseyde's body seems to document in depicting the traditional progression from frustration to fulfilment. The same applies to Troilus's body, which likewise becomes a representative of the self-text metaphor in its shared and most literary sense. Within the fictional world of the story, his paleness, which "shewed in his hewe both eve and morwe" (*TC*, 1.487) is mistaken by the citizens of Troy for some "other siknesse" (*TC*, 1.489); yet for the romance reader, it is not a natural sign in Augustine's sense, but part of the *signa data* of romance, just another indication of how the protagonists of Chaucer's book speak and feel and act themselves into an "old romaunce" (*TC*, 3.980) that Pandarus appears to be witnessing in observing their scripted lovers' behaviour.¹⁰⁸

This shift of focus from Troilus's text to that of the audience invites the question *whose* mind does the figurative virtual representation – the so-called "cognitive narrative" – of Criseyde as a cold winter moon and the conjoined metaphorical description of Troilus in terms of burning snow actually reside? Which effects are sought by it? These questions become all the more relevant when one looks at the whole sequence in which the metaphorical stanza is embedded, expressing embarrassment at the irony of Troilus having mocked lovers and then falling desperately in love himself (which, of course, is another romance trope, one that will be discussed also in Chapter III):

[24] But whan he hadde a space from his care,
 Thus to hymself ful ofte he gan to pleyne;
 He seyde, "O fool, now artow in the snare,
 That whilom japedest at loves peyne.
 Now artow hent, now gnaw thin owen cheyne!
 Thow were ay wont ech lovere reprehende
 Of thing fro which thow kanst the nat defende.

¹⁰⁸ Windeatt (1988) lists the ways in which the pair's behaviour conforms to the stereotypical behaviour of romance lovers.

“What wol now every lovere seyn of the,
If this be wist, but evere in thin absence
Laughen in scorn, and seyn, ‘Loo, ther goth he
That is the man of so gret sapience,
That held us loveres leest in reverence.
Now, thanked be God, he may gon in the daunce
Of hem that love list febly for to avaunce.’

“But, O thow woful Troilus, God wolde,
Sith thow most loven thorough thi destine,
That thow beset were on swich oon that sholde
Know al thi wo, al lakked hir pitee!
But also cold in love towardes the
Thi lady is as frost in wynter moone,
And thow fardon as snow in fire is soone.
(TC, 1.505–25; emphasis added)

Again, the plasticity of manuscript speech marking complicates straightforward source-tagging. The *inquit* “He seyde” in the third line of the first stanza does seem to unambiguously assign the ensuing speech to Troilus, and modern editorial punctuation certainly takes the quotative at face value, marking the lines as direct speech and thus fixing the entire thirty-four line sequence (ll. 507–39) as an instance of apostrophic self-address by Troilus. In the context of manuscript reading and aural reception, however, the attribution of the sequence possibly moves from “he seyde” to an unresolved “*who* seyde?” In these practices, there is involved a mechanism of forgetting: a lengthy sequence, such as this one, may effectively cause trouble remembering who is doing the speaking and who is being addressed (cf. Moore 2011, 173). A manuscript reader would not discern at a glance the *inquit* formulas, of which there are only two in the sequence, the initial “He seyde” and the concluding attribution “Thise wordes, and ful many an other to, / *He spak*” (TC, 1.540–41; emphasis added) thirty-two lines later; and a listener, guided only by the prelector’s voice, would not be able to go back and reread the beginning to see whose words are being rehearsed.¹⁰⁹

The fact that the speech is not once explicitly attributed to Troilus *during* the stanzas introduced with the *inquit* above endows the apostrophic second-person references with a freedom which modern punctuation, anchoring the words to Troilus once and for all, quite drastically impairs; in other words, the lack of reference allows the apparent direct speech to freely slide into narration. As a result, the entire

¹⁰⁹ Only two of the surviving *Troilus* manuscripts comment on this sequence, marking the initial line (l. 505) with “Yet the repentyng of troylus for scornynge of louers (MS Rawlinson Poet. 163), and “nota of dispa^r in lufe” (MS Arch. Selden B.24 (Benson and Windeatt 1990, 37).

segment, including the stanza containing the metaphors, can be read not as a self-address *by* Troilus, but more as a moral reprimand directed *at* Troilus by the poet. In fact, Moore (2011, 171–72) suggests that for the medieval reader the use of the second-person pronoun might have had just such pedagogical implications; it might have been taken simply as a trope for presenting general wisdom, even when outwardly directed at a particular person addressed in direct speech. Therefore, if understood as a deployment of such a conventional pedagogical *thow*, in “O fool, now *artow* in the snare” and so on, we have *either* Troilus himself insightfully criticising his own behaviour *or* the poet reading him a lesson in how “pride goeth before sorrow,” as Wycliffe’s Bible puts it (Prov. 16:18). The lesson is consistent with how the poet accompanies Troilus’s falling in love in the temple with a direct address to the audience, holding Troilus up as a cautionary example – “Forthy ensample taketh of this man, / Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle, / To scornen Love, which that so soone kan / The fredom of youre hertes to hym thralle” (*TC*, 1.232–35) – of the unavoidable truth that even the “worthiest and grettest of degree” (*TC*, 1.244) become conquered by love, and “This was, and is, and yet men shall it see” (*TC*, 1.245).

In the framework of this chapter, I hence claim that the *nynter moone* -sequence propagates the idea of Troilus’s individual agency shifting towards the literary, or the pseudo-experiential; again, what we might think is the character’s experiential voice capturing his innermost sentiments is in fact the poet speaking to him and across him, communicating to the audience a general pedagogical wisdom. This interpretation agrees with how the second person is used elsewhere in the poem in a slightly moralistic tone. Troilus’s futile wait for Criseyde to return and his vaguely suspicious reading of her letter full of empty promises and explanations (“botmeles bihestes”; *TC*, 5.1431) invite character-directed addresses from that same authorial perspective adopting a wryly ironic tone that comes from knowing how the story will end: “But Troilus, now far-wel al *thi* joie, / For *shalton* nevere sen hire eft in Troie!” (*TC*, 5.27–28; emphasis added); “But Troilus, *thow* maist now, est or west, / Pipe in an ivy lef, if that the lest! / Thus goth the world. God shilde us fro meschaunce, / And every wight that meneth trouthe avaunce!” (*TC*, 5.1432–35; emphasis added). If the pedagogical second person is here employed to comment on the way in which Troilus falls victim to the deceptive ways of the world, so it can be understood to be used in [24] as an admonishing, almost gloating response to his having acted “as proud a pekok” (*TC*, 1.210) and now suffering the fate of the objects of his ridicule; inversely, the grammatical form provides the poet with the

chance to educate his audience with a “thou shalt not” type of instructional rhetoric: you shall not mock lovers, you shall not give your trust too easily.

Yet another possible source for this admonishing rhetoric appears in the second of the two stanzas in [24], where the voice of “lovers” is interjected into the narrative with a reporting phrase from line 514 onwards (“and *seyn*, ‘Loo, ther goth he . . . That held *us* loveres leest in reverence . . .”). Moore (2011, 169–70) insists that passages like this in medieval narrative are *not* quotations of spoken utterances, although this is what the accompanying *inquit* formulas and the shifts in grammatical person might make them look like, giving rise to a somewhat ludicrous impression of a number of people speaking the same thing at the same time (an impression especially heightened, one might add, by modern quotation marks). Falling somewhere between direct and indirect discourse, such group speeches serve instead as a method of introducing general opinions into the narrative. Moreover, as von Contzen (2015, 146) has demonstrated, these collectively expressed opinions by groups are often used as a foil to the protagonist’s behaviour, for example, by drawing attention to a saint’s extraordinary holiness and thus inviting affective participation on the part of the audience.

Such functions can indeed be assigned to the lovers’ derisive perspective shining a rhetorical spotlight on Troilus’s axiom-proving behaviour. As my above transcription of the *Troilus* passage according to the *Riverside Chaucer* shows, modern punctuation has a way of representing this perspective as part of the intense conversation that Troilus seems to be having with himself: it is as if Troilus, addressing himself in the second person, momentarily proceeds to reprimand himself in the third person by imagining and adopting the lovers’ collective voice criticising him. I am not saying that this could not be the case, but rather that the modern way of transcribing this stanza as a multivoiced soliloquy involving a quotation within a quotation closes off valuable interpretative options in turning the entire sequence into a psychological drama played out *inside* Troilus’s head. Reading [24] instead in the way that I have suggested, as a pedagogical rebuke by the poet, has the consequence that the judgemental *loveres* are no longer located within the storyworld as speaking entities quoted with precision by Troilus for the duration of five lines; rather, they are now seen as part of authorial rhetoric which deploys an additional device to vary the representation of the moral-pedagogical message, and, moreover, in a manner that involves the audience, identified throughout the tale specifically as *loveres*, in the delivery of this message: “Forwhi to every love I me excuse, / That of no sentement I this endite . . .” (*TC*, 2.12–13); “But now to *yow*, *ye loveres* that ben *here*” (*TC*, 2.1751; emphasis added); “For myne wordes, heere and

every part, / I speke hem alle under correccioun / Of yow that feyng han in loves art”
(*TC*, 3.1331–33; emphasis added).

The pairing of *lovers* with *here* melds into one the text-internal narratee (Chaucer’s “fictional audience” in Strohm’s [1983] parlance) and the actual courtly audience (Chaucer’s “primary audience”; Strohm, *ibid.*), positioning them as the lovers whose critical voice is evoked in [24]. Whereas the existing modern editions invariably choose to put an end to this embedded quotation at the conclusion of the stanza (l. 18), after which Troilus’s voice, set off with double quotation marks, returns, in the original context there is nothing to prevent us from continuing to treat the metaphorical images as opinions of the lovers, as answers to the question “What wol now every love seyn of the” (l. 512), and now merging with the poet’s admonishing rhetoric that I have argued is foregrounded in the passage instead of Troilus’s voice. So, what the lover-readers and the poet will say of Troilus, *and* Criseyde, is a conventional poetic truth about romance characters – a haughty lady and his desolate servant – clothed in figurative language, indeed in the form of analogical description that, as mentioned earlier, Chaucer seems to mark as an authorial device by a method of exclusion.

Finally, it must be pointed out that assigning the *wynter moone* -sequence to the poet and audience, rather than Troilus, enables a rather cruel metaleptic effect. When first-person reference appears after the three second-person stanzas, it is in connection to Troilus fearfully imagining a fate as a laughing-stock, should his secret infatuation with Criseyde become public knowledge:

[25] “God wold I were aryved in the port
Of deth, to which my sorwe wol me lede!
A, Lord, to me it were a gret comfort;
Than were I quyt of languisshyng in drede;
For, be myn hidde sorwe iblowe on brede,
I shal byjaped ben a thousand tyme
More than that fol of whos folie men ryme.
(*TC*, 1.526–32; emphasis added)

If the preceding stanzas are read as the perspective of the poet and the lover-readers, Troilus has already become the fool that is mocked in poetry; indeed, he has been *byjaped* throughout the sequence in rhyming septets for incautiously embodying a truth that besides everyday applicability (“pride comes before a fall”) is a repeated poetic cliché concerned with patterned literary behaviour. In other words, the present tale *is* the tale Troilus anticipates with fear, and one can easily imagine the prelector encouraging the actual audience to laugh with gestures and tones of voice

underlining Troilus's embarrassment. It is only much later, in Book Five, that Troilus himself seems to catch on to the presence of story-like elements in the unfolding text of his life: "O blisful lord Cupide, / Whan I the proces have in my memorie / How thow me hast wereyed on every syde, / *Men myght a booke make of it, lik a storie*" (TC, 5.582–85; emphasis added).

To sum up the preceding discussion, I have suggested above that the original manuscript context enables us to abandon the "head internal drama" approach in favour of a number of pedagogical, rhetorical and intertextual effects that highlight the collusion of poet and audience as a central element of the text. In other words, the point of [24] is not necessarily, or possibly *not at all*, to represent Troilus's inner turmoil, but rather the manner in which his embarrassing situation can serve, on the one hand, as a didactic instrument, and on the other, as a reminder of the cumulative and verisimilar nature of literary lovers' experience. Troilus's "cognitive narrative" about Criseyde is a "narrative" more from the poet's and the audience's point of view, which becomes visible when the text is liberated from modern punctuation: it is the result of an intertextual process of "dot-joining" through which Criseyde, and Troilus himself, are literally set up as recycled fragments of texts; she as the courtly *domina*, he as the fawning servant. Jill Mann (1991) has noted that Chaucer's narratorial interventions frequently dramatise the reading process by evoking a reading presence, such as in the *House of Fame*: "And then thoughte y on Marcian, / And eke on Antecaudian . . ." (ll. 986–87). My reading of the *wynter moone* -sequence suggests that such representations of the reading process can be encoded in Chaucer's texts in more ways than just direct first-person interventions. As with the emotional interjections in *Silence*, which I proposed were best understood as simulating the point of view of the recipient, [24] incorporates the perspective that is traditionally relegated into the position of a quiet receiver; and, as with *Silence's* interjections, the question of manipulative interpellation is again involved. As readers, we are *predestined* to share in the laughter at the foolish lover, as the narrative structure turns *us* into foils to Troilus and his misinformed pride.

I began this section by pointing out that many readings of the temple scene, as well as the subsequent scene of Troilus's mirror, have underlined the subjective element that comes with the emphasis on Troilus's hopes, desires and anticipation. I have suggested an alternative view which proposes that the psychological element is of secondary importance or, indeed, not even present in the scenes in the sense that they would serve to construct portraits of the protagonists as individual human beings. Criseyde's inward experience, what she "really" felt is left unsaid, hidden beneath the traditional figurative language and the *as if* gesture read in terms of a

romance trope; Troilus's voice, it was shown, may not be Troilus's voice at all, but rather a metaleptic construction meant to highlight both the artistic and literary aspect, as well as the didactic potential, of Troilus's fall.

7 Was, Is and Yet Shall Be?

7.1 Source-Shedding and the Illusory Truth Effect

I discussed earlier the argument put forth by Zunshine that the human mind tends to think of works of fiction quintessentially as metarepresentations stored with strong source tags carrying their authors' names; consequently, as products of artistic invention by an inventing author, fictional representations are viewed as open to interpretation and subject to critical evaluation (2006, 66). Zunshine contrasts this with the writing of history, which by definition does not invite the reader to filter and evaluate the information provided, but rather to incorporate it into her memory with a "weaker metarepresentational tagging" (2006, 71) than a book of fiction. Because historians' accounts generally speaking tend to consist of well-researched facts (excluding, of course, propagandist historiography), we ascribe to them a high truth-value and store the information documented therein "simply as 'X'" (ibid. 70), instead of the slanted metarepresentational pattern "it is X who says that X." From this, one gathers that once human beings – whether in the context of books or their everyday lives – are disabused of the notion that there is a source behind a given piece of information, that information is no longer treated with suspicion suitable to personal opinions. In order to give credence to a statement, to give it an objective value, the source tag must be shed.

In the following excerpts from *Troilus*, this kind of veracity treatment through source-shedding is levelled at the protagonists' emotions. In the first one, Troilus is reading, with his heart racing, a hope-inspiring letter from Criseyde. Describing the effect of the lady's words on the prince, Chaucer likens Troilus's increasing desire to wood catching fire as well as to the growth of a sapling into a mighty oak-tree:

[26] *But as we may alday oureselven see,*
 Thorough more wode or col, the more fir,
 Right so encrease hope, of what it be,
 Therwith ful ofte encresseth ek desir;
 Or as an ook comth of a litil spir,
 So thorough this lettre which that she hym sente

Encrescen gan desir, of which he brente.
(*TC*, 2.1331–36; emphases added)

Only six stanzas later, the simile put forth in the narratorial discourse is enlarged upon by Pandarus. In an attempt to console Troilus, who is rather crestfallen by Criseyde's game of hard-to-get, Pandarus likens her stubbornness to a sturdy oak not easily bent by the winds, thus implicitly (and, as it turns out, erroneously) suggesting to Troilus – and the reader – that Criseyde's love, once won, will be as steadfast as the prince's unwavering resolution to love her:

[27] “Peraunter thynkestow: though it be so,
 That Kynde wolde don hire to bygynne
 To have a manere routhe upon my woo,
 Seyth Daunger, ‘Nay, thow shalt me nevere wynne!’
 So reulith hire hir hertes gost withinne,
 That though she bende, yeet she stant on roote;
 What in effect is this unto my boote?”

 “Think here-ayeins: *whan that the stordy ook,*
 On which men bakketh ofte, for the nones,
 Receyved bath the happy fallyng strook,
 The greete sweigh doth it come al at ones,
 As don thise rokkes or thise milnestones;
 For swifter cours comth thyng that is of wighte,
 Whan it descendeth, than don thynges lighte.

 “*And reed that boweth down for every blast,*
 Ful lightly, cesse wynd, it wol aryse;
 But so nyl nought an ook, whan it is cast;
 It nedeth me nought the longe to forbise.
 Men shal reioissen of a gret emprise
 Acheved wel, and stant withouten doute,
 Al han men ben the lenger theraboutte.
 (*TC*, 2.1373–93; emphases added)

Heavy trees, once they receive “the happy fallyng strook,” stay down, unlike spineless reeds that “wol aryse” when the wind ceases; thus, by likening Criseyde's proud disposition to a sturdy oak, Pandarus tries to make Troilus see that her eventual surrender to him – indeed her *falling* in love – will be of permanent nature.

In both these passages, the source-shedding is achieved through two intertwined mechanisms: 1) the conversion of a particular source into a collective one, and 2) the appeal to frequency. The emphasised lines in the above excerpts are all habitual-generic sentences describing “the typical or characteristic properties of a species, a

kind, or an individual” (Dahl 1985, 99); in their “nomic” and “lawlike” (ibid.) appearance they thus resemble maxims expressing general truths. We see all the time (“alday”) that fire begins to burn when wood or coal is added, and that sturdy trees stay down whereas lightweight reeds stand upright again once the wind settles, and that people rejoice when hard work pays off. In short, these sentences all imply that the actions portrayed in them take place repeatedly and over an extended period of time (cf. Comrie 1976, 27–8; Dahl 1985, 95), and, consequently, as illustrations of Troilus and Criseyde’s emotions, they suggest *experiential inevitability*: in time, Criseyde *will* break and respond to Troilus’s advances, just like Troilus *will* derive a deeper satisfaction from his eventual victory than he would from an immediate breakthrough.

Another way in which the passages indicate experiential inevitability through frequency is intertextuality. The opening line in [26] (“But as we may alday oureselven see, / Thorough more wode or col, the more fir . . .”) expresses in slightly altered terms the familiar Ovidian simile of a breeze (i.e., the loved one’s presence, or the promise of that presence) stirring embers (i.e., the lover’s desire) into flame, and the idea is amplified in the description of the sapling turning into an oak. As recalled, the simile of the embers was present also in *Silence*, appearing, curiously enough, almost in the same form as in Chaucer, likewise positioning the narratee as an eyewitness-authority based on habituality (“Vos avés veü bien sovent”; See Chapter I: Section 3.1.1). I suggested that it would be productive to read this as a means of engaging the actual audience’s romance memory; in other words, the frequency claimed for the phenomenon could alternatively be understood as literary frequency marked by a simile so omnipresent and conventional that it has lost its ability to surprise.

It is worth considering that Chaucer’s almost identical use of the image in a habitual-generic form enhanced by the adverb “alday” and authorised by a collective witness (“we”) is similarly meant to be read in terms of literary familiarity. Genette remarks that iterative narration resorts to sylleptic formulations (“every day,” “the whole week” and so on) to compress a string of repeated actions or events in the story into a single occurrence in the discourse. In generalising iteration, the scope of description extends beyond the specific story (ibid. 118); the narrative is, as Mieke Bal explains, concerned with facts and states existing outside it, which is why this mode of iterative presentation is often used in “situation-descriptions,” such as when the opening scene of *Oliver Twist* aims to describe the living conditions of any poorhouse of the time (Bal 1985/2009, 111). The iterativity implied by Chaucer’s *alday* and the knowledgeable *compaignye* seems to suggest that the emotions covered

by this particular presentation (and even the figurative mode of this presentation) occur and have occurred outside the present tale, not only within the specific storyworld created in it, but *in other storyworlds, in other romance texts*: the lines capture what it is like, in general, for a courtly lover to love and for the reader to read about that love. Before Troilus, the emotional pattern of lovers being stoked into greater flames and burning in the vicinity of their beloved ones has been experienced by Medea and Eufemie, as well as Chrétien's heroes and heroines, among others, and the fire imagery as the prototypical expression of these sensations is openly alluded to also in the description of Troilus tirelessly pressing for glimpses of Criseyde: "And ay the ner he was, the more he brende. / For ay the ner the fir, the hotter is – / *This, trowe I, knoweth al this compaignye*" (TC, 1.448–50; emphasis added). Rather than reading the final line with Edmund Reiss as the *Troilus* narrator "patronizing his audience by spelling out the obvious" (1980, 393), one can alternatively see this stating of the obvious as a nod to readerly *competence*, to their romance memory acknowledging the authenticity of the representation which has gained its validity over a cumulative series of experiences, both by romance characters and romance readers.

Similarly, Chaucer's amplification of the Ovidian simile with the images of the oak and the reed carry intertextual allusions likely recognised by Chaucer's readers. To be sure, a reed swayed by the wind as a symbol of fickleness has scriptural echoes (Luke 7:24–27), whereby it provides solemn food for thought. But coupled with the oak it also brings to mind the fable by Aesop, known to the medieval audiences as Avianus's translated version "De quercu et arundine" ("The Oak and the Reed"), which explores the ways of humility and pride. In the romance genre, the oak as a symbol of steadfastness and consistency is found, for instance, in *Silence*, where Eufemie, on her way to Cador's bed, expresses disappointment at her heart that used to be "plus durs que cesnes" (l.858; "harder than oak"). Moreover, one must also note that, besides these broader intertextual links, the oak tree conceptualises the characters' emotions in *Troilus* on both the level of story and that of discourse; as pointed out above, the figurative description by the narrator in [26] is echoed by Pandarus in [27], forming an iterative metaleptic link to the poet's discourse.

So, together with the habitual-generic sentences, these internal and external literary iterations underlining the poetic habituality of the characters' emotions and indeed creating a sense of a "whirl of moving textual elements" – to borrow Zumthor's (1984, 78) evocative description of medieval literary discourse – contribute to an impression of endless and inevitable repetition. According to cognitive scientists, humans are extremely sensitive to frequency. In their seminal article on the role of frequency in cognition, Hasher, Goldstein and Toppino (1977)

introduce the idea of “illusory truth” effect, which refers to the phenomenon that the repetition of a certain plausible statement increases the likelihood that this statement will be judged true: “The more often you hear that 50,000 people live in Greenland, even if you do so in contexts that are explicitly ambiguous or equivocal, the more certain you will become that indeed they do” (ibid. 108). Unkelbach and Rom (2017) suggest that this effect depends on finding coherent corresponding memory references that help to invest a given statement with a coherent meaning; in other words, “[i]f a statement’s elements have corresponding references in memory, prior presentation links these references into a coherent network,” which in turn increases the probability that repeated statements will be judged as true (ibid. 121).

In the poetic context of Chaucer’s *Troilus*, the illusory truth effect generated by repetition invites the audience to attribute referential – and even ever-standing – validity to emotional experiences that are authorised through finding corresponding references in memory to other tales. What is more, there is indication that *rhyming* advances the illusory truth effect. McGlone and Tofighbakhsh (2000) have found that rhyming aphorisms (“What sobriety conceals, alcohol reveals”) are considered more accurate than their modified versions (“What sobriety conceals, alcohol unmasks”), possibly because rhyming increases information processing fluency. In light of this, Chaucer’s rhyme royal thus seems like a perfect tool for creating a sense of cognitively verified inevitability, almost of foreboding, in a tale of predestination – not to mention the fact that the human brain is likely to complete the rhyme in advance, even before the line reaches its conclusion: thus, in a sense, we too are predestined to confirm the statements. Our cognition, readily persuaded through rhyming, and completing the rhymes on its own, becomes a natural pre-setting device for the characters’ emotions; together with the methods implying repetition (habitual-generic mode of narration, intra- and intertextual echoing), it works to subtly confirm their accuracy.

These methods all work to create, in ways that ultimately derive their authority from source-shedding, connotations of validity and permanence with regard to the emotions the narrative proposes the characters are feeling. Although ostensibly there *is* a particular source for the statements (the narrator, “Chaucer,” other poets in [26] and Pandarus in [27]), these methods sabotage the impression of a specific opinion by a specific individual by positioning “us” (as humans, as readers) as the collective source; as a result, the specific individual turns into *everyone*, and when the source is everyone, everywhere, at all times, the sentiments expressed gain status “simply as X.” Indeed, the line “It nedeth me nought the longe to forbise” (i.e., “I need not

illustrate further”) in [27] both acknowledges and asks us to take for granted this collectively affirmed lawlikeness by which Criseyde and Troilus’s present and future emotional experiences become inevitable matters of fact, revolving towards the courtly maxim stating that “[t]he easy attainment of love makes it of little value” (*De amore* II.8.46; “Facilis perceptio contemptibilem reddit amorem, difficilis eum carum facit haberi”). Next, I will explore how this kind of experiential inevitability is used as a tool of manipulation within the storyworld.

7.2 Men Say – I Not: Internalisation and Criticism

In another passage, where Pandarus tries to persuade Troilus into concealing the affair with Criseyde, lest the entire plan should fall through, collective agreement and experience is again appealed to and insisted upon:

[28] “And think what wo ther hath bitid er this,
 For makyng of avantes, *as men rede*;
 And what meschaunce in this world yet ther is,
 Fro day to day, right for that wikked dede;
 For which *thise wise clerkes that ben dede*
 Han evere yet proverbed to us yonge,
 That ‘firste vertu is to kepe tonge.’

This time source tags are not shed but explicitly supplied for the statements claiming that boasting (“makyng of avantes”; “that wikked dede”) leads to misery (“wo”; “meschaunce”): it is “wise clerkes that ben dede” (i.e., *auctores*) who say these things as well as “men” (by implication everyone, including us) who read their words and the old stories that are also tagged as the stanza continues:

 “And nere it that I wilne as now t’abregge
 Diffusioun of speche, *I koude almoost*
 A thousand olde stories the allegge
 Of wommen lost through fals and foles bost.
 Proverbes kanst thiself inowe and woost
 Ayeins that vice, for to ben a labbe,
 Al seyde men soth as often as thei gabbe.

These stories are so many and so familiar that Pandarus suggests that Troilus could very easily think of a proverb or maybe even come up with one of his own about the subject (“Proverbes kanst thiself inowe and woost . . .”), and although the real reason

for his demand of secrecy seems to be the fear of being denounced as a panderer (TC, 3.253–55), his outward concern is for the impact of exposure on her niece:

“O tonge, allas, so often here-byforn
Hath mad ful many a lady bright of beve
Seyd, ‘Weilaway, the day that I was born!’
And many a maydes sorwe for to newe;
And for the more part, al is untrew
That men of yelp, and it were brought to preve.
Of kynde non avauntour is to leve.
(TC, 3.302–8; emphasis added)

The passages claim that there is a consensus based on several stories and clerks’ sayings that a catastrophe will ensue should Troilus decide to shout his conquest from the rooftops, and that by doing so he will lose Criseyde, whose anticipated lament over her lost honour is by implication included in the *vox communis* utterance (cf. Fludernik 1993, 404) of all ladies wronged by blabbermouths (“avauntours”), as the typified reaction “Weilaway!” can be said to stand for the experience of an undefined number of ladies of no particular time. In addition to providing collective source tags and designating a schematic reaction, Pandarus underlines the sheer daily quantity of the cases to provide additional evidence for the inevitability of the hypothetical scene (i.e., this is what *will* happen, this is how Criseyde *will* feel). The kind of behaviour that Troilus must eschew is witnessed in the world “fro day to day”; it has been experienced “so often” by “ful many a lady,” and “many a maydes sorwe” is renewed also in a “thousand olde stories” (cf. also “But as we may alday oureselven see” in [26] above).

That quantity serves as a truth device is also suggested by the repetition of the source tags themselves within the text (Table 1). As the tags are repeated, the repetition itself, rather than the points that are tried to be proven with their help, becomes the truth; the claimed acts of saying, telling, teaching and writing turn into self-sustaining tools of grandiloquence making what is said sound valid and important, and worth adopting through reading and hearing. As mentioned earlier, it was poetic discourse which, according to Jesse M. Gellrich challenged the “myth of the Book,” that desire for “presence of meaning as absolute” (1985, 41) as the determining principle of medieval thought – an effort which can be recognised, so I argue, also in the source-tagging method in *Troilus*. The repeated adding of apparently authoritative tags makes suspect the very ideas they seem to espouse, inviting a critical review of their all-around applicability and helping readers to develop an awareness of the manipulative potential of words dressed as lawlike

truths through the kind of veracity treatment that I have attempted to illustrate takes place in the passages quoted above. To recapitulate, the source-tagging as well as the source-shedding (“no particular one” becoming, in a sense, “everyone”) practiced in them are attempts to manipulate another into believing in a certain emotional outcome.

<p><i>The Human Collective Tag</i></p> <p>“As men may se, and so the wyse it demeth” (1.644) “Men seyn” (1.708; 4.1584) “For thus men seyth” (4.1453) “For it is seyde” (1.740) “as thise wyse treten” (1.742) “And seyde is” (4.1455) “for I have herd er this of many a wight” (5.164) “ful ofte a by-word here I seye” (4.770) “For this I have herd seyde of wyse lered” (1.976) “The wise seith” (1.694) “as techen us the wyse” (1.698) “as writen clerkes wyse” (1.961)</p>	<p><i>The Book/Story Tag</i></p> <p>“as bokes telle” (1.788) “And certeynly in storye it is yfounde” (5.834) “And after this the storie telleth us” (5.1037) “I fynde it ek in stories elleswhere” (5.1044) “But trewely, the storie telleth us” (5.1051) “as olde bokes tellen us” (5.1478; 5.1562) “as us the bokes telle” (5.1533) “as techen bokes olde” (3.91)</p>
<p>“As writen clerkes in hire bokes olde” (3.1199) “And trewely, as men in bokes rede” (5.19) “Lo, trewely, they writen that” (5.816) “As men may in thise olde bokes rede” (5.1753) “Men sen alday and reden ek in stories” (3.1063)</p>	

Table 1. Source-tags of *Troilus*

In [28], this manipulative act, designed to keep Troilus from speaking, seems to be ulteriorly motivated by Pandarus’s desire to protect his own reputation, rather than saving his niece from heartbreak. In [27], Pandarus’s reasons are perhaps less selfish, but the stanzas nonetheless involve an element of coercion in suggesting that

Pandarus's orchestrating of Troilus's emotions apparently stems from clever mind-reading. Indeed, we seem to be witnessing there not only a double cognitive narrative, as defined by Palmer, but a *triple* one, for the version of Criseyde that Pandarus imagines existing in Troilus's mind (i.e., Troilus's double cognitive narrative of her as a cold, unyielding *domna*), as indicated by Pandarus's "Peraunter thynkestow" (i.e., "Perhaps you're thinking"), becomes embedded in Pandarus's own double cognitive narrative of Troilus becoming demoralised by Criseyde's politely giving him the cold shoulder. From these layered versions he then re-narrates Criseyde, with the help of the oak and the reed, into the exact opposite of Troilus's version, but indeed into another stereotype, that of the "Willing Widow" (Van Dyke 2005, 204) who is susceptible, and permanently so, to romantic advances.

However, although it is perfectly valid to say that we do have some type of virtual versions of Criseyde and Troilus existing in Pandarus's mind here, just as it is valid to say that we perhaps learn something about Pandarus as a character on account of these versions, the existence of these mental representations is not the principal point of the narrative, any more than the point of the *nynter moone* -passage discussed above was that it involved a version of sorts of Criseyde in Troilus's mind. In other words, the fabric of the storyworld is *not* constituted by the intertwining of these mental narratives that the readers would follow to make sense of the plot. This, according to Palmer, is how plots and storyworlds come into being, through the overlapping of sustained cognitive and double cognitive narratives of which the reader progressively becomes aware; for him, the artistic effect of novelistic narration principally depends on the intertwining of these different attitudes and dispositions from which "a complete picture of an aspectual, subjectively experienced storyworld results" (Palmer 2004, 184). In *Troilus*, however, the point of Pandarus's "mind-reading" is to ask the audience to consider the validity and applicability of the statements that he formulates in such a way as to be taken as givens by Troilus.

It is profitable to think of this element of manipulation in connection with the medieval view of reading as a process of internalisation which aimed at integrating the contents of a text into one's own field of knowledge. According to Mary Carruthers, this operation did "not observe in the same way the basic distinction we make between 'what I read in a book' and 'my experience.' . . . for 'what I read in a book' *is* 'my experience,' and I make it mine by incorporating it . . . in my memory" (1990/2008, 211; emphasis original). Yet, as Carruthers is careful to point out, it cannot be emphasised enough that this method of reading did not indicate a passive absorption of what one read without criticism. This can be gleaned from, for example, Hugh of St Victor's (ca. 1096–1141) Preface to his *Chronicle*. Defining the

three levels of biblical exegesis, Hugh distinguishes *littera* (the text itself as an object of grammatical and rhetorical study) and *historia/allegoria* (the foreshadowing of an event in the Bible to another) from *tropologia*, which, in Carruthers's words, is "what the text means to us when we turn its words, like a mirror, upon ourselves, how we understand it when we have domesticated it and made it our own" (ibid. 210). The tropological understanding of a text thus refers to a process by which the words of a text are familiarised through active *meditatio*, and by which the student of that text virtually transforms from a mere interpreter into a re-author (ibid.).

Chaucer seems to take on this re-authoring aspect and make it visible by widely deploying the imperative form of the verb "thenken" ("to think"). Besides "Thenk here-ayeins" in [27], and "think what wo ther hath bitid" in [28], we have other instances where this particular command is used, in unison with source tags implicit or explicit, for purposes of psychological manipulation aiming at concrete actions. This is Pandarus persuading Criseyde into accepting Troilus as a lover instead of a friend by prompting her to consider for herself how each hour a woman grows a bit more older and thereby less attractive, and that it is much too late to regret having held back when crow's feet appear around one's eyes:

[29] *"Thenk ek how elde wasteth every houre
In eche of yow a partie of beautee;
And therfore er that age the devoure,
Go love; for old, ther wol no wight of the.
Lat this proverbe a loore unto yow be:
To late ywar, quod Beaute, whan it paste;
And Elde daunteth Daunger at the laste.*

*"The kynges fool is wont to crien loude,
Whan that hym thinketh a womman berth hire hye,
'So longe mote ye lyve, and alle proude,
Til crowes feet be growe under youre yē,
And sende yow than a myrour in to pryē,
In which that ye may se youre face a morwe!
I bidde wisshe yow namore sorwe."
(TC, 2.392–406)*

Likewise, Criseyde should not let local gossips keep her from pursuing extramarital affairs:

[30] *"Fy on the devel! Thynk which oon he is,
And in what plit be lith; com of anon!
Thynk al swich tarried tyde, but lost is nys.
That wol ye bothe seyn, whan ye be oon.*

Secoundely, ther yet devyneth noon
Upon yow two; come of now, if ye konne!
While folk is blent, lo, al the tyme is wonne.

“In titeryng, and pursuyte, and delayes,
The folk devyne at waggynge of a stree;
And though ye wolde han after mirye dayes,
Than dar ye naught. And whi? For she, and she
Spak swych a word; thus loked he, and he!
Las, tyme ilost! I dar nought with yow dele.
Com of, therefore, and bryngeth hym to hele!”
(*TC*, 2.1737–50)

William A. Quinn (2013, 91) comments on the mischievous interactive opportunities this passage must have provided in recital, imagining each “she” and “he” jestingly pointed at one member of the live audience. But why stop there? Why identify the listeners as the morally upright, prudish folk, when a more audacious choice is available? In [29] as well as in [30], the prelector could also point each “ye,” “yow” and “thenk/thynk” to the listeners, thus making Pandarus’s speeches to Criseyde double as attempts to seduce the audience into adopting the proverb about wasting beauty as a precept and a rule of conduct in their own lives (“Lat this proverbe a loore unto yow be”) – a morally questionable suggestion, no doubt, and one that is made all the more appealing by ridiculing the opponent and their way of speaking. As Turner (2006, 34) remarks, the short phrases, the rhetorical question (“And whi?”) and the repetitive structure in the description of the gossips’ speeches successfully “mimics the sound of gossip itself,” to which it could be added that the schematicity of the representation once again comes with connotations of habituality: we are given to understand that the ubiquitous gossips are *always* like this, envious and pathetically predictable, and therefore their “titeryng” should simply be discounted. Thus, the demands to think can be thought of as not directed merely by Pandarus to Troilus and Criseyde, but also by Chaucer to the narratee – a position that can be adopted by the people physically present in recital or the reader reading a manuscript or a printed edition, when the social event has already become, as Mehl puts it, fossilised.

However, there are risks involved in this, for thinking is a risky business: how true are these statements when you do stop to consider them? Are they worthy of being internalised and integrated into one’s own memory, or should their internalisation be resisted? *Troilus* asks these questions by underlining the manipulativeness of (illusory) veracity treatment, but also by drawing attention to the inconsistencies involved in the application of commonplaces and by presenting

moments of decision-making by the characters who *have* internalised given maxims and resort to them to justify not entirely successful or morally sound actions.

As for the characters' decisions, the internalisation of maxims as codes of conduct is illustrated in the scene where Pandarus, having found out that Troilus is in love, goes to elaborate lengths to pry out the identity of Troilus's object of affections (*TC*, 1.624–721). But no matter what argument he uses, Troilus stubbornly refuses to speak. Here Chaucer again considerably departs from his source in order to flesh out the reasons for Troilus's reticence. Building on Boccaccio's remark that Troilo feels ashamed (“*e volea dire e poi si ritenea, / tanto d'aprirlo a lui si vergognava*”, *Il Filostrato* 2.18; “and felt inclined to speak, and then held back, so greatly ashamed was he of discovering it to him”, Griffin and Myrick, transl., 22), Chaucer presents a set of general truths about life and love that not only justify the prince's decision in the past of the told, but also make a statement about how things are known to stand in the *now* of the telling:

- [31] And with that, Pandare of his wordes stente;
 And Troilus yet hym nothyng answerde,
 For-why to tellen nas nat his entente
 To nevere no man, for whom that he so ferde;
 For it is seyde, “Men maketh ofte a yerde
 With which the maker is hymself ybeten
 In sondry manere,” as thise wyse treten,

 And namelich in his counseil tellynge
 That toucheth love that oughte ben secree;
 For of himself it wol ynough out sprynge,
 But if that it the bet governed be,
 Ek som tyme it is a craft to seme fle
 Fro thyng whych in effect men hunte faste;
 Al this gan Troilus in his herte caste.
 (*TC*, 1.736–49; underlining and emphasis added)

The proverbial wisdom offered in the underlined section, substantiated by the explicit collective tags “For it is seyde” and “as thise wyse treten,” expresses three things. First, that liberally sharing one's private matters is tantamount to being beaten with a rod of one's own making; second, that for this reason love must be kept tightly under wraps, especially since amorous feelings tend to be exposed as if on their own accord without careful and crafty management; and third, that lovers are hence to conduct themselves in a way that makes it look as if they are fleeing from the very thing they are in fact pursuing. The third-person reference to Troilus and the past-tense description of his state of mind (“yet hym nothyng *answerde* . . . to tellen *nas* nat

his entente”) at the beginning of the first stanza encourage these maxims to be read as a continuation of the narratorial report that now switches reference from Troilus in particular to man in general. The passage hence seems to represent typical omniscient narration where the author communicates universal truths to the audience as if “behind his character’s back” (Cohn 1978, 25), without the character ever being aware of serving as a “sounding board” (ibid. 23) for these commonplaces.

It is only at the end of the second stanza that we find out that no such discrepancy really exists: as the concluding line makes explicitly clear (“Al this gan Troilus . . .”), these pieces of common wisdom are in fact Troilus’s thoughts, an act of reasoning within himself, which leads him to abstain from speaking Criseyde’s name to Pandarus. The passage thus makes use of delayed attribution that was also found in the weather monologue (see Section 5.2), only here it is psycho-narration that becomes retrospectively identifiable as quoted monologue, instead of the other way around; what is at first located on the level of discourse is in fact present also on the level of story. (Interestingly, here the modern editions do not add quotation marks around lines 740–48, which successfully retains the ambiguity.) The function of postponing the attribution of the statements is also quite different here: rather than highlighting the nature of character voice as an act of miming by the poet, the delayed attribution now illustrates *the process of internalisation* by which a set of authoritative maxims aid Troilus, who is quietly roaming around in his memory while Pandarus pesters him, to seal his decision to remain quiet.

The primary maxim informing Troilus’s decision (“Men maketh ofte a yerde . . .”) occurs in various forms in the romance literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In *Le Roman de Silence* it is spoken by the protagonist, after he realises he has been tricked into revealing his true gender:

“Dolans,” fait il, “por que amenai
 Merlin? com mat i assenai!
 Jo ai fait al fuer de serjant
 Ki quiert meïsmes le verjant
 Dont on le destraint et castie,
 C’or ai jo tel coze bastie
 Dont g’iere tols desiretez.
 (RS, 6441–47; emphasis added)

[“What a fool I was,” he said, “why did I bring Merlin here? What a catastrophe! *I’ve acted like the sergeant who goes himself to fetch the club with which he will be beaten*, for now I have fixed things so that I will be disinherited.]

Ménard's (1969, 616–18) catalogue, which lists instances of this proverbial expression in French romance (excluding *Silence*), sheds light on its characteristic uses in these texts. Most frequently, the commonplace occurs in a character's speech at a moment of self-revelation, as in the excerpt from *Silence* above, but it can also be used authorially to criticise a character's foolhardy actions. The third thing that can be deduced from Ménard's collection is that there is a tendency to present this proverb in connection to a prefatory pattern "I have heard it said that" (e.g., "J'ai oï dire en provier"; *Roman de Fergus*, 73, 15).

That Chaucer was familiar with at least some of these romance texts may perhaps be inferred from the way in which he takes the trope and inverses the pattern of learning by trial and error.¹¹⁰ Whereas it seems to come as a somewhat embarrassing surprise to many of the French characters that they have acted out a common proverb, for Chaucer's Troilus this traditional piece of wisdom, further authorised through the veracity treatment provided by the collective tags, encourages proactive planning; he fully *intends* to act out the commonplace – and when doing so, fails. For as soon as Pandarus, growing impatient with Troilus's reticence, resorts to physical persuasion ("And with that word he gan hym for to shake, / And seyde, 'Thef, thou shalt hyre name telle'; *TC*, 1.870), Troilus, fully set on holding his peace, pitifully bleats out Criseyde's name ("Thanne is my swete fo called Criseyde!"; *TC*, 1.874). Despite the less than successful outcome of Troilus's plan of action, the fact that he *tries* to proceed by commonplaces makes of him an exemplar of the medieval sense of character (as in human being, not just literary character) as a "subject-who-remembers" (Carruthers 1990/2008, 226). Consisting of a "memorized chorus of voices," an "everpresent florilegium built up plank by plank continuously through one's lifetime" (*ibid.* 222), this subject composes his or her own experience from the experiences of others that are "often epitomized in ethical commonplaces, and made one's own by constant recollection." (*ibid.*). Functioning as an internalised rule of conduct for Troilus, the commonplace about making a rod for one's own back advises precaution, as do the ones relied upon by Pandarus as he is planning the first meeting between Criseyde and Troilus. In the second of the two stanzas below, Pandarus's careful mental machinations are compared to those of a person undertaking the building of a house:

[32] This Pandarus, tho desirous to serve
 His fulle frend, than seyde in this manere:
 "Farwell, and thenk I wol thi thank deserve!
 Have here my trowthe, and that how shalt wel here."

¹¹⁰ On Chaucer's familiarity with the French tradition, see Brewer (1974).

And went his wey, thenkyng on this matere,
And how he best myghte hire biseche of grace,
And find a tyme therto, and a place.

For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
Aldirfirst his purpos forto wyne.

*Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,
And caste his werk ful wisely or he wroughte.*

(TC, 1.1058–71; emphasis and underlining added)

Structurally, the passage is an exact replication of [31]: since the first stanza is clearly marked as omniscient narration presenting a summary report of Pandarus's state of mind ("thenkyng on this matere"), the present-tense observations in the second stanza also tend to be read as authorial; that it is Chaucer who compares Pandarus's slow and cautious proceeding to the complex planning of a house, at the same time embedding the character's private thought in a universal frame and deriving from it a moral lesson along the lines of "make haste slowly."¹¹¹ When we get to the end, however, the delayed attribution causes, as Windeatt has remarked (1992, 214), overlapping between the thought of Pandarus and of the narrator, and so once again what we initially may have taken as a stretch of omniscient narration turns out to be a rendering of the character's thought. Windeatt, although identifying the blend, does not elaborate on the reasons for this narrative technique. As I see it, and have suggested throughout this section, by showing us Troilus and Pandarus's acceptance of a set of commonplaces as behavioural guidelines, it works to foreground the process of internalisation determining the medieval understanding of character. Certainly, it would have sufficed to employ these commonplaces exclusively on the level of discourse as explanations of Troilus and Pandarus's decisions, but Chaucer goes the extra mile to make the characters themselves conscious of them.

Their consciousness, however, might differ from that of Chaucer's audience. If for Pandarus and Troilus the maxims simply serve as proverbial building blocks of personal experience, the reader of the tale might recognise their recycled literariness. Whereas Troilus has internalised a proverb which is also considered a prototypical romance expression for acting foolishly, Pandarus's decision echoes, as several critics have pointed out (e.g., Spearing 2005, 86), Geoffrey of Vinsauf's advice on the

¹¹¹ By furnishing line 1069 with a gloss "nota To avis' afor'" (Benson and Windeatt 1990, 38), the Selden scribe seems to be encouraging the reader's internalisation process.

necessity of premeditation before the poet begins to compose, thus connecting the ontological levels of the narrative:

Si quis habet fundare domum, non currit ad actum
Impetuosa manus: intrinseca linea cordis
Praemetitur opus, seriemque sub ordine certo
Interior praescribit homo, totamque figurat
Ante manus cordis quam corporis . . .
(*PN*, 43–47)

If a man has a house to build, his impetuous hand does not rush into action. The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work, and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it. (Nims, transl., 20)

By showing us the process of internalisation directing the characters' actions and, moreover, by linking it with literary associations, Chaucer constructs a picture of a love affair that is not inexorably driven on by fate (as Troilus believes), but rather by human occupations which, apparently unknown to the characters themselves, come with connotations of poetic patterns. This self-reflexivity might well create a distancing effect on its own, but critical detachment is also invited by the fact that the actions justified by the internalised commonplaces in [31] and [32] ultimately end up in failure. We already saw how Troilus's adamant decision to stand firm against pressure crumbles during the space of only about thirty stanzas. Likewise, on a grander scale, Pandarus's "grete emprise" (*TC*, 3.416) to bring together his niece and Troilus falls through: in spite of all the planning, and the promise of eternal love conveyed by the simile of the falling oak, Criseyde is eventually lost to the winds of change and Troilus winds up dying alone. Besides the fact that applying internalised truths does not automatically lead to success, they can also justify immoral choices. Diomedes, considering pursuing Criseyde, who he knows has pledged herself to Troilus, convinces himself with quantities: "I have herd seyde ek tymes twyes twelve, / He is a fool that wol foryete hymselfe" (*TC*, 5.97–98).

Troilus, Pandarus and Diomedes all emerge as subjects-who-remember, uncritically and arrogantly applying internalised maxims to their own lives, while Chaucer invites his reader to be a *subject-who-thinks*, who practices discretion: are the "truths" internalised by the characters truly worth internalising, to be used as precepts? There are also inconsistencies that should give us pause. One should both seek to hide one's affair ("firste vertu is to kepe tonge," [28]) and to not care about the *titeryngs* of people [30]. One should stand proudly, not swaying this way and that like a spineless reed [27], because when one eventually does fall, that fall will be all

the more impressive. On the other hand, it is not impressive but ludicrous: as seen in Section 6.4, to break at once is cause for derision, as it indicates a foolhardy resistance in the face of the evitable. As Troilus falls, the narrator states, once again employing the pedagogical second-person: “The yerde is bet that bowen wole and wynde / Than that that brest, and therefore I yow rede / To folowen hym [i.e., Love] that so wel kan yow lede” (*TC*, 1.257–59). So, is it better to be the bending rod, as recommended here, or the breaking rod, as recommended by Pandarus in [27]? One and the same imagery is employed to justify opposite behaviours, and the inconsistent use of maxims is seen also in Troilus’s exasperated reaction to Pandarus’s suggestion that the abandoned Troilus will live happily on memories of his time with Criseyde: “Whi gabbestow, that seydest unto me / That ‘hym is wors that is fro whele ythrowe, / Than he hadde erst noon of that wele yknowe?’” (*TC*, 4.481–83).

According to Leicester (1987, 22–23), Chaucer’s texts depict a self-consciously “modern” society that “still tries to mystify itself, to treat its institutions as if they were still supported by the logocentric guarantees of common understanding and a shared world”; it is typical for Chaucer to mime traditional attitudes – that which “everybody knows” – “in such a way as to bring out contradictions and the dilemmas they lead to” (*ibid.* 23). This drive can also be seen in the manner in which the text of *Troilus* encourages us to approach “inevitable” experiences with caution, suggesting that, at times, a difference *can* and *must* be made between “what I read in a book” and “my experience,” and that internalised truths, made out to be solid and ever-standing, do not always lead to the expected outcomes. A discerning attitude is simulated in the narration as Criseyde becomes Diomedes’s lover. The inserted opinion “Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte” (*TC*, 5.1050) is contrasted with a number of book tags all attesting to Criseyde’s culpability: “And after this the storie telleth us” (*TC*, 5. 1037) that Criseyde regifted Troilus’s presents to Diomedes; it is said “ek in stories elleswhere” (*TC*, 1044) that Criseyde tenderly nursed Diomedes after he had been wounded by Troilus; and “trewely, the storie telleth us” (*TC*, 5.1051) that she acknowledged her own duplicity. The experientialising rhetoric (“Men seyn – I not”) introduces an element of uncertainty and tentativeness that stands in opposition to conclusive judgments. This was seen also in Section 6.4, where I pointed out that Criseyde’s lack of pity for Troilus’s suffering, inevitable only according to the rules of the verisimilar, was called to question by narratorial doubt as to whether she even knew about Troilus’s condition (“But how it was, certeyn, kan I not seye . . .”).

Quoting a passage with a similarly “unexplicit treatment of Criseyde’s state of mind,”¹¹² Mehl (1974, 178) suggests that the technique requests from the audience an active effort of imagination, presenting us with the same kind of uncertainty that determines our relationship with actual human beings; the poet gives an outline that each member of the audience must flesh out according to his or her own experience of human nature (ibid. 217). I only wish to add that, as with Heldris’s *occultatio* and *dubitatio*, the tentative attribution generated by Chaucer’s experientialising rhetoric reaches beyond the verisimilar, towards liberating Criseyde from literary predestination, while it also advises caution on uncritical internalisation of given truths by encouraging an independent formulation of opinion. The human heart does not easily yield to proverbial lore; we cannot always make sense of each other’s motivations by falling back on illusory truths that claim for themselves universal applicability through manipulative source-shedding strategies.

The next chapter, turning to Boccaccio’s *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, is concerned with a different kind of attitude towards internalisation and ready-made answers, as we find in it a demanding narrative voice that, rather than encouraging active and critical thinking, seeks to subject the narratee to the one correct interpretation of her experience of love and suffering.

¹¹² “Nought list myn auctour fully to declare / What that she thoughte whan he seyde so, / That Troilus was out of towne yfare, / As if he seyde therof soth or no” (*TC*, 3.575–78).

III MIND GAMES: *ELEGIA DI MADONNA FIAMMETTA*

There can be no slightest doubt that *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, written by the Italian master Giovanni Boccaccio around 1343, is one of the most important texts in Western literary history. Its verbose and imaginative main character, Fiammetta, stands as a predecessor to such literary heroines as Arabella the Female Quixote by Charlotte Lennox, Defoe's Moll Flanders and Flaubert's Emma Bovary, to whom she has been explicitly compared (Hollander 1977, 174; Hagedorn 2004, 125). Technically, the text introduces an unprecedented narrative situation (cf. Segre 1979, 66): it pretends to be a book written in the first person by a person who is not the author. The narrative voice has a predecessor, though; it is, famously, modelled after the voice of the abandoned women in Ovid's *Heroides*,¹¹³ with the exception that this is not the voice of a classical Roman heroine, but that of a young girl residing, to all appearances, in Boccaccio's contemporary Naples.

In the premise, and indeed the narrative at large, there is a touch of the realism that has been recognised as a hallmark of Boccaccio's works:¹¹⁴ retrospectively relating her adulterous affair with a Florentine womaniser – a crime which, if exposed, might at worst result in a death sentence for her – the girl writes her book under the pseudonym “Fiammetta.” The work thus appears, at first blush, to set up the most “natural” possible narrative situation, combining in Fiammetta the figure of the storyteller (the “telling” frame) and the experiencer (the “experiencing” frame). After describing the beginning and end of her love affair in the first two chapters, Fiammetta moves on, in imitation of the women of the *Heroides*, to a painstaking analysis of her heartbreak, which occupies the remaining seven chapters:

- [1] . . . voi, leggendo, non troverete favole greche ornate di molte bugie, né troiane battaglie sozze per molto sangue, ma amoroze, stimulate da molti disiri, nelle quali davanti agli occhi vostri appariranno le misere lagrime, gl'impetuosi sospiri, le dolenti voci e li tempestosi pensieri, li quali, con istimolo continuo molestandomi, insieme il cibo, il sonno, i lieti tempi e l'amata bellezza hanno da me tolta via. (*Elegia*, 3–4)

¹¹³ For Boccaccio's sources and influences for the *Elegia*, see Waley (1972).

¹¹⁴ Most notably by Auerbach (1953/2013) and Branca (1976), who describes the *Decameron* as a “mercantile epic” (ibid. 276). For contrasting views, highlighting the poetical and allegorical aspects of Boccaccio's works, see Almansi (1975) and Kirkham (1985).

. . . and as you read, you will find neither Greek myths embellished with many lies, nor Trojan battles befouled with much blood, but stories of love stirred by innumerable desires; in them, there will appear before your eyes the wretched tears, the impetuous sighs, the doleful voices, and the stormy thoughts that have troubled me with constant torment and have taken away from me appetite, sleep, joyful memories, and treasured beauty all at once. (*EMF*, 1)

Unlike the women of the *Heroides*, who address their absent lovers, Fiammetta directs her words exclusively to women readers, to *gentili donne*, for the purpose of setting an example, so that “the more you become aware of the wickedness of the one who is causing this to happen to me, the more cautious you may become about entrusting yourself to any young man” (*EMF*, 58; “perché piú la nequizia di colui per cui ciò m’avviene conoscendo divegniate piú caute in non commettervi ad ogni giovine”, *Elegia*, 77). She also underlines the idea of her book providing a relatable model for its readers, in case they were to suffer the same fate as she: “I beg you, do not refuse to weep, and bear in mind that your fortunes are as insecure as my own, and that if – God forbid – they were to turn out like mine, you would cherish these tears when you remember having shed them” (*EMF*, 1; “Priegovi che d’averle non rifiutate, pensando che, sì come li miei, così poco sono stabili li vostri casi, li quali se a’ miei simili ritornassero, il che cessilo Iddio, care vi sarebbero rendendolevi”, *Elegia*, 3–4).

Yet besides these altruistic motivations, Fiammetta’s writing has self-serving interests: representing an account by a woman who is “both *wronged* and *wrongdoer*” (Migiel 2015, 175; emphasis original), it seeks to justify through rhetoric the capital crime of adultery, and to portray Fiammetta herself as a passive victim of circumstances, rather than an active agent in her transgression. In other words, all elements are in place in this “introspective confession-apology” (Segre 1979, 77) for the *Elegia* to be regarded as a possible premodern candidate for what has come to be known in narratology as “unreliable narration.”

The notion of the “unreliable narrator” has been one of the most discussed topics in narratological studies since Wayne C. Booth introduced the concept in his cornerstone work *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). According to Booth’s classic definition, the first-person narrator is “*reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (1961/1983, 158–59; emphases original). The “implied author” serving as a byword for the work’s norms he defines as “an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes . . . silently paring his fingernails” (ibid. 151). As these metaphorical expressions indicate, Booth’s view of unreliable narration is based around the idea of the author encoding into a text a meaning to

be discovered beyond the literal level of the narrator's report: the (implied) author and the (implied) reader are in secret collusion behind the speaker's back (ibid. 304), whereby the narrator tends to become a pawn of irony unaware of the fact that his or her words communicate an additional message (cf. also Chatman 1978, 233; Fludernik 1999, 78; Cohn 2000, 307).

Booth's rhetorical approach has since been extended by James Phelan, who provides a fine-grained classification of the different techniques of narratorial unreliability. According to Phelan, fictional first-person narrators (what he calls "character narrators") perform three functions with regard to the narrated. As *reporters*, they communicate information about the events and characters in the storyworld. As *evaluators* of these elements, they reveal their worldview and moral outlook, and as *interpreters* they make sense of the narrated according to their level of knowledge, perceptiveness and sophistication. In all of these roles, character narrators can deviate from the implied author's view along the axis of facts and events (misreporting / underreporting), the axis of ethics and evaluation (misregarding / underregarding), and the axis of knowledge and perception (misreading / underreading). The mis- and under- types require different kinds of constructive activity on the part of the authorial audience to whom the text has been designed: whereas the first category invites the audience to reject the narrator's words in favour of reconstructing an alternative version (that is to say, the implied author's version), the second one asks them to supplement the narrator's view (Phelan 2005, 50–53; see also Phelan and Martin 1999). Phelan's approach shares with Booth an interest in the ethical dimensions of unreliable narration; it is a technique by which authors can place their readers into certain ethical positions in relation to the telling and the told.

A different view is represented by Tamar Yacobi (1981, 1987) and Ansgar Nünning (1997, 1999 and 2005), whose cognitive approaches consider unreliable narration as a readerly strategy of naturalising perceived discrepancies within texts. Criticising the manner in which the rhetorically oriented models treat the implied author – that metaphorical "anthropomorphized phantom" (Nünning 1999, 54) – as the sole yardstick for identifying unreliable narrators, Nünning contends that the verdict of narratorial unreliability emerges from a) concrete textual signals, but also from b) a conflict between the reader's values and those encapsulated by the narrator. As for the textual signals, the very basic requirement is that unreliable narrators are first-person narrators who are also the protagonists and who recount a part of their lives (cf. also Zerweck 2001). In addition to this primary condition, texts featuring unreliable narrators tend to have a high frequency of commentary and reader

address, and most often the topic of narration is the narrator him- or herself, to the extent of the text having the appearance of a report by a “compulsive monologist” (Nünning 1997, 84). The critic’s conjectures also play a part in determining narratorial unreliability, including, for instance, such elusive concepts as “basic common sense” and “normal moral standards,” as well as what a given culture considers normal psychological behaviour (Nünning 1999, 64). Vera Nünning (2004) finds evidence for this from the contrasting reception of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), whose narrator has been described either as admirable or as contemptible, depending on the historical period of the critic.

In what follows, I will work through the method of *trying* to apply these major narratological frameworks of unreliability to Fiammetta’s first-person narration. Interestingly, some major readings of the *Elegia* have moved in this direction, though the concept of unreliable narration is not explicitly raised in them. For instance, Janet Levarie Smarr (1986) proposes that there is in the work a clash between Fiammetta’s superficial understanding of the events and Boccaccio’s moralistic view on the destructiveness of her affair and expanding self-delusions. In a similar vein, Robert Hollander (1977) is of the opinion that Boccaccio gives his protagonist an ironic treatment, asking the reader to understand that her “romantic version of the truth” is a flawed one by opposing it with contrary facts and by underlining Fiammetta’s behavioural “extravagances worthy of burlesque” (ibid. 47). What Hollander and Smarr suggest, in other words, is that we are meant to look beyond Fiammetta’s words to find Boccaccio’s “true” version of her tale, one that would illustrate for the reader the effects of sin by documenting the fall “into total insanity” by a woman who “descends dramatically straight toward hell” (Smarr 1986, 130) and who arrogantly misuses the free will given by God (Hollander 1977, 42). These readings are highly valuable, and based on them alone, a case could be made that unreliable narration, in the narratological sense of a perceived incongruence between the narrator and the implied author and/or the reader’s standards of normalcy, *was* within the grasp of medieval literary imagination – although, for instance, Vitz (1989, 216) remarks that this was not the case. In narratological discussion, the birth of the unreliable narrator has been located either in the nineteenth century or the late eighteenth century (Nünning 1997; Zerweck 2001). Zerweck attributes it to the development of a realist representation of human psychology, against which a narrator’s normative deviance could be revealed (ibid. 159–60). However, it was only in the late Victorian and Modern period that unreliable narration turned into a literary phenomenon which arguably reflected the growing scepticism about epistemological questions (ibid. 161; see also Nünning 1997, 92). For instance, Nelly

Dean's biased narration in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) effectively undermines the assumption that it is possible to give an objective and authoritative version of a series of events (Nünning, *ibid.*).

In the forthcoming analysis, I intend to reconsider these statements with the help of the *Elegia*, a work riddled with textual inconsistencies put forth by a morally questionable diarist, asking if we can call Fiammetta an unreliable narrator, and if so, what kind of unreliability it is. Are the realist paradigm and epistemological crises the only breeding grounds for this type of narrative strategy? Is there another way of looking at the phenomenon, besides viewing it as a reflection of the moral and epistemological concerns of a given historical period? Most importantly, I argue that the *Elegia* provides a way of furthering the discussion on narratorial unreliability beyond the psychological and emotional disturbances of the narrator. As Nünning writes, unreliable narration generally has the effect of directing the reader's attention from the level of the story to the speaker, "foregrounding peculiarities of the narrator's psychology" (1997, 88). This tends to recurrently lead to heavily narrator-centred analyses placing an emphasis on the manner in which the narrator's psyche might affect his or her report, thus turning the text itself into a kind of metaphor for certain psychopathological states. Hence we have, for instance, the unhinged narration by a "dangerously sick person" (Fludernik 1999, 93) in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), and the heavily repressed account of an English butler's past regrets driven by his "strict adherence to a code of dignity" (Phelan and Martin 1999, 92) in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In such readings, the technique of unreliability contributes to the creation of a psychologically convincing portrait of the narrator, with the textual level reflecting the functioning of minds that are disturbed and tormented, and unable to produce, for some reason or the other, a wholesome account of events.

Of course, I have no intention to repudiate the validity of the highly perceptive analyses by leading scholars, nor do I intend to utterly disown the psychological element in the *Elegia* – a work which has, as mentioned in the Introduction, been acclaimed for its impressive inward exploration of the experience of abandonment. My aim is merely to suggest an alternative interpretative angle which, rather than concentrating on naturalising Fiammetta's discourse as that of an unreliable narrator, seeks to describe the ways in which this discourse works on several levels simultaneously. On the one hand, the narrative *can* be read as the symptom of an obsessive, unstable mind, but also, at the same time, it presents itself as a literary game inviting us to read the text-internal contradictions and discrepancies not merely as the revelation of a troubled psyche, but as tools to explore the roles of author and

reader, and the question of what constitutes a rewarding relationship between the two.

The first part of the chapter (Section 8) discusses the problems that ensue from the attempts to solve the discrepancies in Fiammetta's discourse by resorting to the naturalising frame of "unreliable narration." The key argument is that the narration of the *Elegia* consistently resists being tidied up into the kind of singular whole at which this reading strategy traditionally aims, presupposing the communication of a solid message by the implied author to the authorial audience. Psychologically, Fiammetta's discourse comes across as wholly "unnatural," consisting of inconsistent slips and authorial see-through moments, which make it somewhat impossible to speak of a coherent "voice" that would "belong" to Fiammetta. Hence, it will be argued that the *Elegia* suggests other than psychological motivations for the perceived discrepancies, motivations that are related to flawed ethos-building with regard to the functions Fiammetta gives her tale (instruction, consolation, vindication). These will be explored more closely in Section 9. Section 10 turns to the narrative devices used by Fiammetta to extinguish opposition and deny alternative interpretations of her tale, but more than constructing a psychological portrait, these techniques are studied as means to explore different types of author-audience relationships (open and flexible versus closed and prescriptive), as well as a self-conscious commentary by Boccaccio on poetic theory. In addition to suggesting how (not) to be an author, the *Elegia* offers itself to be read as an exercise on rhetorical amplification, connecting the magnitude of Fiammetta's suffering to the literal length of her lamentation.

8 Discrepancies

8.1 The Perspectival-Existential Principle and Fiammetta's "Unreliability"

Looking back on her first sexual encounter with her lover, Fiammetta portrays it as a rough yet consensual act ensuing from a prolonged show of scripted reluctance by herself:

[2a] L'uno giorno all'altro dopo traevano con isperanza sollecita li suoi e miei disii; e ciò ciascuno agramente portava, avvegna che l'uno il dimostrasse all'altro occultamente parlando, e l'altro all'uno di ciò si mostrasse schifo oltremodo, sì come voi medesime, le quali forse forza cercate a ciò che più

vi sarebbe a grado, sapete che sogliono le donne amate fare. E esso adunque, in ciò poco alle mie parole credevole, luogo e tempo convenevole riguardato, più in ciò che gli avvenne avventurato che savio, e con più ardire che ingegno, ebbe da me quello che io, sì come egli, benché del contrario infignessimi, disiava. . . . non pertanto niego che ciò, e ora e allora, non mi fosse carissimo. (*Elegia*, 36)

His desire and my own made each day drag on one after the other, tense with expectation, and each of us bore this with bitterness because one would show it to the other by speaking cryptically, and the other would appear extremely disdainful, just as you ladies do, who may be looking for the strength to do what you would like to do most and which you know women who are loved usually do. Thus, somewhat mistrustful of me in this matter, and more lucky than wise in what happened to him and with more impudence than talent, he found a convenient time and place and obtained from me that which I wanted just as much as he did, although I feigned the contrary. . . . however, I don't deny that I cherished it then, as I do now. (*EMF*, 25)

However, at a later point in her narrative Fiammetta returns to this event and brashly changes the details regarding her own complicity:

[2b] Veramente una iniquità in me conosco, per la quale l'ira degl'iddii, faccendola, giustamente impetra; e questa fu di ricevere te, scelerato giovine e senza alcuna pietà, nel letto mio, e avere sostenuto che il tuo lato al mio s'accostasse; avvegna che di questo, come essi medesimi videro, non io, ma tu se' colpevole; il quale col tuo ardito ingegno, me presa nella tacita notte sicura dormendo, sì come colui che altre volte eri uso d'ingannare, prima nelle braccia m'avesti e quasi la mia pudicizia violata, che io appena fossi dal sonno interamente sviluppata. E che doveva io fare, questo veggendo? Doveva io gridare e col mio grido a me infamia perpetua, e a te, il quale io più che me medesima amava, morte cercare? Io opposi le forze mie, come Iddio sa, quanto io potei; le quali, alle tue non potendo resistere, vinte, possedesti la tua rapina. Ohimè! ora mi fosse il dí precedentea quella notte stato l'ultimo, nel quale io sarei potuta morire onesta! (*Elegia*, 83–84)

To tell the truth, I do recognize having perpetrated a wicked deed by which I rightly provoked the gods' anger, and this consisted in receiving you, who are an evil and pitiless young man, in my bed, and in having allowed your body to touch mine, although in this regard, as the gods themselves know, you are the culprit, not I, because you took me in the quiet of the night with your bold cunning when I was safely asleep, and like someone who has done it before and is used to deceiving, you took me first in your arms and violated my chastity almost before I was entirely awake. What was I supposed to do when I saw this? Should I have screamed and brought endless shame on myself and death on you, whom I loved more than myself? As God knows,

I resisted as much as I could, but as my strength was not equal to yours, you won and possessed what you were stealing. Alas, how I wish now that the day before that night had been my last, one in which I could have died virtuous! (*EMF*, 63)

Obviously these two accounts cannot both be true. Insofar as the *Elegia* pretends to document a series of actual events experienced by an actual woman, one of them must be a lie: either Fiammetta willingly gave herself to her lover, though feigning resistance, or she was sexually violated by him in a cowardly surprise attack. Registering this unexpected discrepancy, the reader begins to search for an explanation.

According to Tamar Yacobi (1981), there are five possible explanations for textual inconsistencies. A *genetic* resolution would attribute a perceived anomaly to the author, assuming inadvertency or perhaps a change of intention, whereas a *generic* one takes into account the requirements of a given genre, such as certain plot structures, and how these might clash with our everyday expectations of normalcy and probability. The *existential* principle makes sense of oddities by referring them either to some institutionalised models of unity (as with the generic principle) or to a peculiarly structured text-internal reality, but when peculiarities are made sense of *functionally*, they are understood to serve the work's aesthetic, thematic or persuasive goals. Finally, the fifth, *perspectival* principle is the one which coincides with the notion of narratorial unreliability: the reader identifies the figure who mediates the fictional world as the source of the incongruities. This, in turn, entails the activation of a corrective reading strategy with regard to the events and details presented in the narrative (Yacobi 1981, 118).

Which, if any, of these integration mechanisms would be the most suitable to account for Fiammetta's incompatible descriptions? Together, the two versions seem to constitute an instance of *expolitiio* gone haywire, an attempt at rhetorical variation that not merely diversifies the structural form of the representation, but meddles with its content so that it becomes impossible to judge which version is the accurate one. A genetic resolution seems intuitively incorrect: it is highly improbable that Boccaccio, that masterful poet and rhetorician, would have overlooked such an obvious blemish, simply forgetting what he had written before and then never bothering to unify the finished product. The more rational explanation is that the discrepancy is entirely intentional. According to Menakhem Perry, readers tend to choose the simplest and most conventional frames when making sense of a text in the process of reading (1979, 45). Based on this precedence given to the typical, the immediate conclusion for those familiar with the many suspect first-person narrators

of modern fiction is that there must be something shady about Fiammetta herself. This is because her discourse is marked by such features which, according to Nünning (1997, 96), can be seen as two of the most traditional clues to narratorial unreliability: internal contradictions (e.g. the incompatible accounts in [2a] and [2b]) and discrepancies between the narrator's utterances and actions (e.g. the incompatible accounts in relation to Fiammetta's claim elsewhere in the book about her "very true narrative" (*EMF*, 155; "il mio narrare verissimo", *Elegia*, 198). These clues are themselves conventional; they are part of the pre-existing frames of reference learnt from other works of fiction that the reader brings to the text (Nünning 1999, 68). In other words, Yacobi's perspectival principle offers itself as the most natural interpretative strategy for the discrepancies in Fiammetta's discourse, since we who have come after Boccaccio have been repeatedly exposed to equivocal voices in first-person narrative and promptly model Fiammetta's ambiguities on them.

For instance, Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, whose reliability as a narrator has been discussed by many critics (e.g. Booth 1961/1983, 321–23; Olson 2003), gives a description of her loss of virtue that bears striking resemblances to Fiammetta's account. Moll explains how the son of her employer callously sets about seducing her – "and this he contriv'd so subtilly, as if he had known as well, how to catch a Woman in his Net as Partridge when he went a Setting . . . After he had thus baited his Hook, and found easily enough the Method how to lay it in my Way . . ." (Defoe 1993/2001, 16) – which leads to a series of scuffles whose descriptions are ambiguous about Moll's level of consent: "I struggl'd to get away, and yet did it but faintly neither, and he held me fast, and sill Kiss'd me"; "he began to be in Earnest with me indeed; perhaps he found me a little too easie, for God knows I made no Resistance to him while he only held me in his Arms and Kiss'd me" (*ibid.* 18–19). All the same elements are involved, as in the *Elegia*: the ruthless manoeuvres of the presumably inveterate seducer, the struggle that is not quite struggle, the rhetorical appeal to God as a witness. Both ladies also blame their beauty for their downfall –

- [3] E come la mia persona negli anni trapassanti crescea, così le mie bellezze, de' miei mali speciale cagione, multiplicavano. Ohimè, che io, ancora che piccolo fossi, udendole a molti lodare, me ne gloriava, e loro con sollecitudini e arti faceva maggiori. Ma già dalla fanciullezza venuta ad età piú compiuta, meco dalla natura ammaestrata sentendo quali disii a' giovini possono porgere le vaghe donne, conobbi che la mia bellezza, miserabile dono a chi virtuosamente di vivere desidera, piú miei coetanei giovinetti a altri nobili accessse di fuoco amoroso. (*Elegia*, 5–6)

And as my body grew with the passing of time, my charms, which were the specific cause of my troubles, multiplied. Alas, what pride I took in them, although I was still young, and how I improved on them with care and artful means upon hearing them praised by many people! But once I had passed from childhood to a more mature age, trained by the nature stirring within me, I learned of the desires lovely young women can arouse in young men, and I became aware that my beauty in particular, an unwelcome gift to anyone who wishes to live virtuously, set afire young men my own age as well as other noblemen. (*EMF*, 3)

I had with all these the common Vanity of my Sex (*viz.*) That being really taken for very Handsome, or if you please for a great Beauty, I very well knew it, and had as good an Opinion of myself as any body else could have of me; and particularly I lov'd to hear any body speak of it, which could not but happen to me sometimes, and was a great satisfaction to me. . . . But that which I was too vain of, was my Ruin, or rather my Vanity was the cause of it. (Defoe 1993/2001, 16)

– which will now serve as warning to potential future victims of young men: like Fiammetta, Moll justifies her narrative by the exemplarity of her case, pointing out that she is “the more particular in this part, that if my Story comes to be read by any innocent young Body, they may learn from it to Guard themselves against the Mischiefs which attend an early Knowledge of their own Beauty” (Defoe 1993/2001, 19). Yet one cannot escape the feeling that this concern for the reader’s well-being as well as Moll’s lamentations over her personal ruin pay lip service to moral responsibilities, since her interest seems to lie more on the transactional aspect of the situation. Promising Moll marriage, the deceitful gentleman wins Moll over for good by extracting a large purse – “My Colour came and went, at the Sight of the Purse, and with the fire of his Proposal together . . . so putting the Purse into my Bosom, I made no more Resistance to him, but let him do just what he pleas’d” (Defoe 1993/2001, 23) – and what Moll seems to retrospectively regret the most about how things went is that she did not negotiate an even more lucrative deal for herself while she had the opportunity to do so (*ibid.* 21). Similarly, the exemplary and cautionary motivation Fiammetta gives for her writing proves not entirely convincing, as will be seen further on.

The point in making these comparisons is to demonstrate that Moll’s rhetoric of victimisation provides a retrospective model affecting the settlement of Fiammetta’s inconsistencies. One might speak, following Per Krogh Hansen, of *intertextual unreliability* that is based, besides intratextual clues, on extratextual and contextual evidence: identifying a character-narrator as a representative of a type that is recognised as unreliable will lead the reader to read the text accordingly (2007, 242).

In other words, Moll's multiple blame-shifting, her moral superficiality, as well as her equivocation about questions of complicity and motivation become anachronistic intertextual prompts that help to activate the perspectival principle upon finding the same elements in the ambiguous account by a first-person female voice from some four hundred years earlier. Applying this frame, we end up reading Fiammetta backwards, as an unreliable narrator whose ambiguous representation of her sexual encounters can be explained by attributing to Boccaccio the intention of drawing up a psychological portrait of a deceitful person, someone who, like Olson's description of Moll, shows untrustworthiness as a "constant behavioral trait" (2003, 104) and whose narration therefore tends to be driven by "some current self-interest" (ibid. 102).

Certainly, this mimetic portrait is supported by some other incongruities sprinkled in Fiammetta's memoir. Questioned by her husband about the tears she sheds in the night for her departed lover, Fiammetta finds an excuse in the violent death of her brother, spinning a needlessly drawn-out tale of dreaming about his bloodied corpse demanding vengeance, which, "as the gods know" (*EMF*, 138; "come gl'iddii conoscono", *Elegia*, 139), she would have already exacted, were she able to bear arms. She admits to her imagined reader that this tale is a lie, but insists in the same breath that it is a first-time lie: "At this, with a woman's presence of mind, I decided to lie – an art I never exercised before" (*EMF*, 106; "Al quale io con femminile subitezza preso consiglio al mentire, il quale mai per addietro mia arte non era stata", *Elegia*, 138). The authorial audience, however, is aware at this point of the several lies uttered by Fiammetta in the interests of concealing her affair, and yet Fiammetta herself is – or purports to be – simply appalled at the duplicity she spies in others: "O God, how can men lie with such a bold face?" (*EMF*, 136; "O Iddio, come possono gli uomini con così aperto viso mentire?", *Elegia*, 176).

It is not entirely clear, based on these gaps between word and deed, whether Fiammetta should be judged to be an *untrustworthy* or a *fallible* narrator. According to Olson, *all* unreliable narrators fall into one or the other of these two categories (2003, 104), the difference being that the fallible ones are not dispositionally but situationally unreliable, perhaps because they do not have access to all the necessary information or because they are, for example, children having only a limited understanding; this group we excuse for their failures, whereas the other one is met with scepticism (ibid.). Curiously enough, this two-fold classification and the different responses elicited by each category is reminiscent of Boccaccio's typology of liars that he sets up in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (first draft ca. 1360) as a justification of the classical poets and their pagan tales. According to Boccaccio,

there are two types of liars. One group, those who knowingly lie, he suggests calling “wilful deceivers” (“mentientes”), separating them from “those who have told a falsehood without knowing it” (“qui, ignorantes se mendacium dicere, mendacium dixere tamen” (XIV.13.149a; Osgood, transl. 65–66). In some cases, ignorance is acceptable and excusable, such as with mountaineers unschooled in the fundamentals of navigation, or a blind man ignorant of letters, and also with pagan poets who could not express the Christian truth in their works for the singular reason of having existed in a different historical era. This group should not be called liars, for sinning in pardonable ignorance (“qui ignorantia excusabili peccavere”) is not to be judged by the same standard as “crass and negligent” (“crassa et supina”) offenses (XIV.13.149b; Osgood, transl., 67). Although these classifications have nothing to do with defining the reliability of narrative voices, they do lend some support to the idea that Boccaccio would have been interested in how circumstances and personal factors affect a person’s output, and some part of this interest is perhaps displayed in the way that he makes Fiammetta tell her tale in a manner fraught with lies and deception.

But, as mentioned, Fiammetta does not fit easily into either of the two categories: one cannot really decide whether the tensions in her narration stem from fallibility or untrustworthiness, or, in Boccaccio’s vocabulary, from ignorance or wilful deceitfulness. Considering the cultural context in which she was produced, it could be argued that she is *both* at once, embodying the medieval view of women institutionalised by Judeo-Christian theology and ancient medical theory. On the one hand, the Aristotelian notion of woman as a defective male dominated by humoral coldness and wetness characterised women as weak and passive beings, childlike in intellect and equipped with an inborn penchant for instability and irrationality; on the other hand, the female sex was associated with contradiction, falsehood and seduction through words (e.g. Bullough 1973; Bloch 1987, 1991; Levin 1987, 14). In this context, the perspectival principle joins with the existential one, as Fiammetta’s duplicities offer themselves to be read as textual manifestations not only of her private personality, but of the female nature at large. A similar tendency can be observed in the *Decameron*, where, according to Regina F. Psaki (2015) the speech of the female characters is thematised and universalised as representing the entire female sex, whereas the speech attributed to men characterises them as individuals, without the gendered dimension. The *Elegia* seems to confirm this representative agenda, as the personality traits associated with Fiammetta by several critics tend to comply with stereotypical female attributes. In Calabrese’s interpretation, Boccaccio creates in Fiammetta a woman who “has trouble remembering what she wanted and

when” (1997, 31), who “at every turn selfishly and expediently dramatizes herself,” and, regarding the incompatible accounts in [2a] and [2b], “[t]hough she must realize that her own words have revealed her consent, she evidently hopes that her ‘false’ will outweigh her own ‘true’” (ibid. 35). This reading of Fiammetta as aware of her lies but simply hoping they will go away or perhaps unnoticed by her readers complements the psychological portrait of a woman who is, in Robert Hollander’s words, a “fool” (1977, 46), and indeed “not particularly intelligent,” according to Annelise M. Brody’s (2013, 180) view.

These are all characterisations that would probably meet the requirement of historical validity that Vera Nünning (2004) regards as the key factor in a cultural-historical determination of unreliable narration. Basing her argument on Ansgar Nünning’s reader-oriented definition, according to which narratorial unreliability depends on the distance between the narrator’s and the reader’s views of the world, she draws attention to the fact that readers’ norms and values are historically and culturally specific, and what is considered normal and abnormal is therefore subject to change from one context to another. Hence, the cultural context in which a given text was produced, its particular value systems and theories of personality, must not be ignored; otherwise we run the risk of ahistoricism and see unreliable narrators where none exist, such as those twentieth-century critics who considered the protagonist of *The Vicar of Wakefield* an insufferable hypocrite, whereas contemporary eighteenth-century critics believed the vicar to be the embodiment of quite decent human behaviour. For Vera Nünning, these readings, which she considers to be reductive in their contextual short-sightedness, miss the “complexity of the issue” (ibid. 238) of unreliable narrators; conversely, a “responsible” (ibid. 246) critic approaching possible candidates takes into account the value systems prevalent at the time. It is only through the latter method that the analysis of unreliable narration becomes “valid and meaningful” (ibid. 248).

Apparently, this meaningfulness has to do with how a writer’s treatment of a narrator can, for its own part, help further illustrate the worldview of the period (ibid. 246), and this is doubtless what the *Elegia* also achieves. By reading the text in its own terms and paying careful attention to the slips and contradictions in Fiammetta’s account, it is easy, and by no means inaccurate, to conclude that Boccaccio’s narrative technique – the voice he gives to Fiammetta – must somehow reflect and at the same time reinforce the fourteenth-century concept of woman, that it portrays the protagonist as a category-crossing chimera who is *both* fallible *and* untrustworthy, and who embodies the vices of her sex, rather than the virtues of an

“outsoken feminist” that she is made out to be on the back cover of the 1990 English translation.¹¹⁵

However, this conclusion seems not entirely satisfactory, and the quest to determine whether this or that narrator is reliable or not according to the standards of the time can quickly begin to feel like treading water. I believe that more interesting results will be obtained if we look past this type of *yes* or *no* debate, and the perspectival principle on which it relies. As discussed above, the conventionality of the perspectival principle as a strategy of naturalising narratorial inconsistencies inevitably guides the modern reader towards an interpretation according to which Fiammetta, like Moll and countless of other subsequent self-narrators, reveals her psychological peculiarities in the recording of her past experience. It must be pointed out that I see no reason to doubt that Boccaccio’s contemporary audiences were as fascinated as any twenty-first century reader by Fiammetta’s ever-deepening plunge into the black despair of her heartbreak, and likewise I think that to find her lacking according to the moral standards of her day is in its own way highly illuminating and meaningful. But I also believe that this mimetic reading stemming from the combination of Yacobi’s two reconciliation methods (the perspectival-existential) can be, and is, reductive, in the sense that it successfully overshadows the other ways in which Fiammetta’s falsehoods might have been conceived of by Boccaccio and his fourteenth-century readers. I therefore suggest that a cultural-historically valid and meaningful reading of Fiammetta’s narratorial oddities must consciously *abandon* the perspectival principle as the primary integration mechanism. For Vera Nünning (2004, 248), the “trap of interpretation” set by the subjectivity of values is that we read into historically distant narrators such personality traits that the contemporary context did not afford them. Yet I wish to underline that the perspectival principle can itself be that trap, resulting in a “narrator-portrait fallacy” (Yacobi 2001) prioritising the treatment of the narrator as a real person. Next, I will elaborate on why it is important to avoid this trap in the interpretation of the *Elegia*, and suggest a complementary strategy for resolving the incongruities in the text.

8.2 The Forthcoming Narrator and Planted Evidence

As stated, the decision to attribute inconsistencies to an unreliable narrator typically entails the activation of additional strategies by which readers attempt to find out

¹¹⁵ See also Causa-Steindler’s introduction to the English translation (1990). For a critique of this feminist reading, see Kirkham (1993b) and Calabrese (1997).

what “really” happened and to construct the “actual” state of affairs behind the literal level of narratorial report found to be lacking in one way or another (Yacobi 1981, 118): typically, the reader either completely rejects the words of the narrator and reconstructs an alternative version, or, accepting the narrator’s version, merely supplements the account (Phelan 2005, 50–51). Greta Olson (2003) links these strategies with her two types of unreliability: the deficient accounts by fallible narrators must be filled in, whereas those given by untrustworthy ones need to be altered for a more reliable version to emerge. Both of these two reconstructive operations rely on the established Boothian idea that unreliable narration consists of surreptitiously providing the reader with a more complete view of the fictional reality than the narrator is capable of: successfully decoding the intended message, the reader then finds herself in collusion with the author, admiring, as it were, the figure appearing in the carpet unbeknownst to the fictional mediator (Fludernik 1999).

This does not seem to be the case with Fiammetta’s incompatible descriptions of her night of passion. There is nothing about her report that needs to be complemented or altered, there are no truths that emerge as if behind her back for the reader’s amusement: reversing her earlier position, she simply fabricates a different version of events that seems to better suit her current mood after she has just learnt that her departed lover has had several flings with other local women, including some young and beautiful nuns, and that he has not returned from Florence as promised because he has found himself a wife there. Besides the historically driven existential justification (i.e., the attribution of the textual oddities to the narrator’s feeble/cunning female brain), one could therefore attempt to postulate yet another mimetically oriented explanation based on the placement of the lie, proffering that Fiammetta in the present documents the emotions of the past as they came to her at the time she experienced them: thus her falsehood could be understood as a direct consequence of the anger and disappointment caused by the news of her lover’s duplicity, colouring her interpretation and coming out as a harangue that is, moreover, directed at the absent lover (“*you* took me in the quiet of the night . . . *you* won and possessed what *you* were stealing . . .”). Indeed, the *Elegia* makes a point of associating emotional turmoil with broken rhetoric. Fiammetta remarks that her words may prove lacking due to the fact that she is in mental pain: she prays that some deity in heaven “may aid my afflicted memory and sustain my trembling hand” (“che la dolente memoria aiuti, e sostenga la tremante mano”), so that her hand, “more willing and able in this task” (“piú a tale officio volonterosa che forte”), will manage to put on paper “my mental anguish as I have experienced it and still experience it” (“che quali nella mente io ho sentite e sento l’agnoscie”)

(*EMF*, 2; *Elegia*, 4). Such concessions to memory and cognition are, in fact, characteristic of modern first-person narrators who frequently question the plausibility of their memory, thus suggesting that “mnemonic credibility” conditions the act of narration (Cohn 1978, 144–45). Fiammetta, too, draws attention to the influence of cognition on representation, using her inner turmoil as an excuse for any writerly eccentricities:

[4] E se forse alcuna donna delle tue parole rozzamente composte si maraviglia, di' che quelle ne mandi via, però che li parlari ornate richieggiono gli animi chiari e li tempi sereni e tranquili. E però piuttosto dirai che prenda ammirazione come a quel poco che narri disordinato, bastò lo 'ntelletto e la mano, considerando che dall'una parte amore e dall'altra gelosia con varie trafitte in continua battaglia tengono il dolente animo, e in nebuloso tempo favoreggiandogli la contraria fortuna. (*Elegia*, 201–2)

If perhaps some lady is astonished by your [i.e., the book that she is writing] crudely composed words, tell her to dismiss them, because it is clear minds and serene and tranquil times that require ornate speeches. But tell her rather to feel admiration, since intellect and hand proved sufficient for that disordered little bit you are narrating, and considering that by stabbing me in various ways, love on one side and jealousy on the other keep my suffering spirits in a state of continual struggle and in murky weather, with contrary Fortune acting as an accomplice. (*EMF*, 158)

These apologetic statements about a disordered tale consisting of unrefined, “broken” words (“parole rozzamente composte . . . quel poco che narri disordinato”) stand in direct contrast to how Fiammetta elsewhere declares herself a master composer, if not *the* master composer, who has become proficient in figurative speaking by imitating the manner in which her lover publicly speaks of their affair by referring to the pair by the pseudonyms “Fiammetta” and “Panfilo,” so as to protect their reputations:

[5] O pietosissime donne, che non insegna Amore a' suoi soggetti, e a che non li fa egli abili ad imparare? Io, semplicissima giovine e appena potente a disciogliere la lingua nelle materiali e semplici cose tra le mie compagne, con tanta affezione li modi del parlare di costui raccolsi, che in breve spazio io avrei di fingere e di parlare passato ogni poeta; e poche cose furono alle quali, udita la sua posizione, io con una finta novella non dessi risposta dicevole. (*Elegia*, 34–35)

Most compassionate ladies, is there anything that Love does not teach his subjects and which he does not make them capable of learning? I was a very innocent young woman barely able to speak of simple and concrete matters with my women friends when I picked up his manner of speaking with such

enthusiasm that in a short time I could have outdone any poet in speech and fiction; and once I understood his [Panfilo's] approach, there were few things to which I could not give a proper answer by inventing a fictitious story. (*EMF*, 24)

Fiammetta is indeed very capable of producing the kind of supreme narration that she boasts about above. For instance, she opens her book with a thematic proverb, as recommended in the arts of poetry –

Suole a' miseri crescere di dolersi vaghezza, quando di sé discernono o sentono compassione in alcuno. (*Elegia*, 3)

Unhappy people customarily take greater pleasure in lamenting their lot when they see or hear that someone else feels compassion for them. (*EMF*, 1)

– employs a number of highly evocative figures of speech, such as,

. . . e cotale la vana letizia in me con turbazione súbita si volgeva, quale, poi che il forte albero rotto da' potenti venti con le vele ravviluppate in mare a forza da quelli è trasportato, la tempestosa onda cuopre senza contrasto il legno pericolante. (*Elegia*, 92)

. . . this futile joy turned to inner turmoil, and I became like a helpless, tottering ship with tangled sails, its mast shattered by strong winds, about to be swallowed by tempestuous waves. (*EMF*, 70)

– and commands an overall clear vision of the temporal-experiential aspects of her memoir, not in the least affected by her inner pain:

Oh quante volte, ancora che freddissima luce porgesse, la rimirai io a diletto lunga fiata, imaginando che così in essa fossero allora gli occhi del mio Panfilo fissi come i miei! Il quale io ora non dubito che, essendogli io già uscita di mente, non che egli alla luna mirasse, ma solo un pensiero non avendone, forse nel suo letto si riposava. (*Elegia*, 65)

Oh, how often, in spite of her [i.e., the moon's] frigid light, I admired her with pleasure for a long time, imagining my Panfilo's eyes fixed upon her just as mine were! I now have no doubt that having already forgotten me, not only was he not looking at the moon but neither had he a single thought about her and was probably in bed fast asleep. (*EMF*, 48)

In these excerpts, displaying only a fraction of the whole, Fiammetta is structurally and rhetorically in total control of her output; she is, as literary historian Steven

Moore puts it in his history of novelistic narration, “one hell of a writer for a teenage girl” (2010, 258). In light of this, the appeal to imitation in [5] almost invites itself to be viewed as a reconciliatory operation performed by Boccaccio, a writerly attempt at smoothing out the inevitable anomaly resulting from putting his own erudite rhetoric in the mouth of a young female.¹¹⁶ Technically Boccaccio handles this by turning it into Fiammetta’s own amazement conveyed by her question to her narratee: “Most compassionate ladies, is there anything that Love does not teach his subjects and which he does not make them capable of learning?” The same strategy is used with Fiammetta’s description of how she becomes extremely well-versed in astrology by observing the movements of the planets in expectation of Panfilo’s return, eventually finding herself able to determine the time left until sunrise at a mere glance at the night sky: “Deh, chi crederebbe che Amore m’avesse potuto mostrare astrologia, arte da solennissimi ingegni e non da menti occupate dal suo furore?” (*Elegia*, 66; “Dear me, who would believe that Love could teach me astrology, an art that occupies the greatest talents, not the minds which are prey to his furor?”), *EMF*, 49).

In expressing amazement at her own rhetoric and cognitive skills that seem to be improving despite her growing emotional distress, Fiammetta puts into words the questions that must have crossed the minds of the actual readers of Boccaccio’s book as well;¹¹⁷ thus, it could be suggested that through Fiammetta’s rhetorical questions Boccaccio signals to his audience that he is one step ahead of them, anticipating their reactions and telling them that he *knows* Fiammetta would not be able to write like this, were she a real woman. It is indeed a very pronounced wink to the audience (to resort to the conventional narratological metaphor for the effect of unreliable narration), but one that I think does not really aim at ironising the character; rather, it would seem to wholeheartedly invite us to *embrace* the oddness of the discourse resulting from the clash between Boccaccio’s rhetoric, on the one hand, and the deficient narrator he puts in charge of it, on the other. In other words, rather than treating the passages involving the rhetorical questions as authorial attempts to bring

¹¹⁶ Fiammetta repeatedly describes herself as young and delicate, which she also cites as one of the excuses for her adultery: “ché pensare si dee me tenera giovine non potere resistere a quello che gl’iddii e li robusti uomini non poterono” (*Elegia*, 189–90; “I am an immature young woman, unable to resist what the gods and lusty men could not resist”, *EMF*, 148).

¹¹⁷ Boccaccio wrote for male audiences, criticising his friend Maghinardo Cavalcanti in a letter for having allowed the women of his household to read his texts (Kirkham 1993a, 118). This discrepancy between what could be, to an extent, described as a sympathetic view of the female experience in the *Elegia*, and the fact that the narrative is primarily motivated by the artistic expectations of Boccaccio’s learned male readers, tends to put to question any emancipatory aspects of the text (Armstrong 2013, 304).

cohesion into Fiammetta's voice and in that way to preserve her as a mimetic creature, one might instead understand them as fully intentional see-through moments offering a glimpse of the poet behind the creation. A live reading, still a popular mode in Boccaccio's society (Ahern 2005), would further highlight the illusionary nature of Fiammetta's voice, if conducted by Boccaccio himself, or any male reader for that matter: in this scenario, Fiammetta's comment that she wails in a "voice enraged beyond ladylike dignity" (*EMF*, 110; "con voce oltre alla donnesca gravezza rabbiosa", *Elegia*, 144) holds comic potential, as the notion of her voice reaching beyond the *voce donnesca* gains additional, more literal meanings.

This interpretative approach to Fiammetta's experiential voice as a see-through construction exacerbated in oral performance will, I think, allow us to grasp more clearly the significance of Fiammetta's incompatible descriptions that will quickly become inexplicable from the perspectival point of view. The perspectival principle, perhaps the most eligible one to us by convention, presupposes psychological coherence which, as I have attempted to show above, is simply not present in Fiammetta's narration: one moment she is the perfect rhetorician fully in control of her presentation, and the next she is losing her grip, writing herself into a corner and wilfully incriminating herself with her dysfunctional *expolitio*. From the way she tells her tale, we would then have to envision a mind that is only selectively capable of employing the tools in its rhetorical arsenal, in addition to accepting that this rhetoric would be wielded by a person decidedly *not* competent in bringing out her experience in such a learned manner, as suggested by Boccaccio's see-through nudges to the audience. When understood like this, as authorial acknowledgements of the absence of coherence in the narrating voice, these nudges become part of the *game Boccaccio plays with his readers*, and part of this game is testing the readers' vigilance by creating a deliberate knot – the conspicuous incongruence between [2a] and [2b] – in the narrator's discourse.¹¹⁸

As Hastings (1989) and Usher (2003) have documented, Boccaccio's theoretical writings on the nature of reading and readership display a great interest in the connection between effort and pleasure, illustrating Boccaccio's view that, rather than spelling out the meaning of the work, the poet should make readers work the meaning out for themselves. During this process, the reader would ideally have to experience a certain amount of difficulty, since "[i]t is obvious that everything that is acquired with toil has more sweetness in it than that which comes without trouble"

¹¹⁸ This reading supports Almansì's (1975) suggestion that Boccaccio was fundamentally interested in distancing effects, by which his readers would be reminded of the fact that they are recipients of a work of art.

(Boccaccio 2002, 52). The *Elegia* is a book that raises the topic of interpretation on its very first pages in the form of a dream retrospectively described by Fiammetta as a “revealing vision” sent to her by the gods in order to “make the future clear” to her (*EMF*, 4; “e con aperta visione . . . mi chiarirono le future cose”, *Elegia*, 7):

[6] E così ornata levatami, quale Proserpina allora che Pluto la rapì alla madre, cotale m’andava per la nuova primavera cantando; poi, forse stanca, tra la più folta erba a giacere postami, mi posava. Ma non altramente il tenero piè d’Euridice trafisse il nascoso animale, che me sopra l’erbe distesa, una nascosa serpe vegnente tra quelle, parve che sotto la sinistra mammella mi trafiggesse; il cui morso, nella prima entrata degli acuti denti, pareva che mi cocesse; ma poi, assicurata, quasi di peggio temendo, mi pareva mettere nel mio seno la fredda serpe, imaginando lei dovere, col beneficio del caldo del proprio petto, rendere a me più benigna. La quale, più sicura fatta per quello e più fiera, al dato morso raggiunse la iniqua bocca, e dopo lungo spazio, avendo molto del nostro sangue bevuto, mi pareva che, me renitente, uscendo del mio seno, vaga vaga fra le prime erbe col mio spirito si partisse. Nel cui partire il chiaro giorno turbato, dietro a me vegnendo, mi copria tutta, e secondo l’andare di quella così la turbazione seguitava, quasi come a lei tirante fosse la moltitudine de’ nuvoli appiccata, e seguissela; e non dopo molto, come bianca pietra gittata in profonda acqua a poco a poco si toglie alla vista de’ riguardanti, così si tolse agli occhi miei. (*Elegia*, 7–8)

Bedecked like this, I stood up, and went singing through the fresh spring, as Proserpina did when Pluto stole her away from her mother; then, tired perhaps, I lay down to rest where the grass was thickest. But just as the lurking beast pierced the tender foot of Eurydice, a serpent slithered unseen through the grass in which I lay and seemed to bite me under the left breast; when its sharp teeth first pierced my flesh, the bite seemed to burn, but then, as if I had feared something worse, I felt reassured, and I seemed to place the cold snake into my bosom, imagining that by offering the warmth of my bosom I would make it kinder towards me. The snake, made bolder and fiercer by my gesture, fastened its evil mouth onto the bite it had given, and after a long time, having swallowed much of this blood of ours, it seemed to leave my bosom against my will and go away sinuously through the young grass, taking my spirit with it. As it was leaving, the clear day grew cloudy; its turbulence came after me and surrounded me entirely; and it followed the path of the beast as if all the clouds were tied to it and drawn by it; soon thereafter it disappeared from my view, like a white stone which slowly fades from the observer’s sight when it is thrown into deep water. (*EMF*, 4–5)

Boccaccio here makes use of the established patterns of dream-vision narrative, where truths are allegorically conveyed to the dreamer figure. However, Fiammetta fails to take lesson from what the dream shows her: on waking up, she recalls brushing the dream off as nonsense, and she likewise remembers dismissing as

unimportant the fact that the garland of flowers she wore on her head that morning got caught in the curtain of her bed and tumbled to the floor. Now, in the present of her writing, she harshly admonishes herself for having failed to pay attention to these events that she has only later come to view as portents of her destruction:

[7] Ahi, misera me! Quanto giustamente, se io li schernii allora, poi con mia grave doglia gli ho veri creduti, e piantili senza frutto, non meno degl'iddii dolendomi, li quali con tanta oscurità alle grosse menti dimostrano i loro secreti, che quasi non mostrati se non avvenuti si possono dire! . . . Ohimè! che segnale più manifesto di quello che avvenne mi poteano dare gl'iddii? Certo niuno. . . . Oh, se la mia mente fosse stata sana, quanto quel giorno a me nerissimo avrei conosciuto, e senza uscire di casa l'avrei trapassato! Ma gl'iddii, a coloro verso i quali essi sono adirati, benché della loro salute porgano ad essi segno, elli privano lui del conoscimento debito . . . (*Elegia*, 9–10)

Miserable me! How appropriate that since I scorned dreams at that time, I should come to believe later in their truthfulness through great pain and wept over them in vain! But I complain no less about those gods who reveal their secrets to obtuse minds in such obscure ways that they can be said to be almost unrevealed until they have come true. . . . Alas, what clearer sign than that could the gods have given me of what was to happen? Surely none. . . . Oh, if only my mind had been sound! Then I would have recognized what a black day that was for me and would have spent it without leaving the house. But the gods deprive those who have angered them of the understanding they need, although they may offer them a sign of their salvation . . . (*EMF*, 6)

Fiammetta's failed process of interpretation is here conveyed in a vocabulary reminiscent of the process of analogical reading and composing that Boccaccio describes in his *Genealogia* in the familiar medieval terms of concealment and revelation: "I have time and time again proved that the meaning of fiction is far from superficial. . . . [F]iction is a form of discourse, which, under guise of invention, illustrates or proves an idea; and, as its superficial [*supervacaneus*] aspect is removed, the meaning of the author is clear. If, then, sense is revealed from under the veil of fiction [*sub velamento*], the composition of fiction is not idle nonsense" (Osgood, transl., 48).¹¹⁹ It is only the unlearned that content themselves with external

¹¹⁹ "Sed iam diu premonstratum est longe aliud, quam sonet cortex, a fabulis palliatum. . . . Fabula est exemplaris seu demonstrativa sub figment locutio, cuius amoto cortice, patet intentio fabulantis. Et sic, si sub velamento fabuloso sapidum comperiat aliquid, non erit supervacaneum fabulas edidisse" (*Genealogia*, XIV.9.146a).

appearances; the learned look for the “hidden truths” that lie beneath.¹²⁰ By echoing in Fiammetta’s words these familiar ideas of poetic compositions as layered constructions requiring decoding, and by making her dwell on the fact that she did not understand what the dream was trying to tell her, Boccaccio seems to create in the readers of his *Elegia* a heightened awareness of themselves as interpreters, inclining them to pay special attention to the dream passage. For Fiammetta, inside the storyworld, the dream is simply a collection of visual tokens predicting her downfall; for the readers of Boccaccio’s work, the dream is, quite literally, a piece of writing designed by the author to be deciphered by his audience, leading them to ask what truths are possibly veiled by it.

Identity-wise, the dream does not require much thought work: it must be relatively clear even to the most inexperienced of readers that the serpent worming its way into Fiammetta’s bosom represents the treacherous lover Panfilo. The fact that he comes to her in a dream finds an obvious counterpart in the second of Fiammetta’s two descriptions of their encounter, which, as recalled, paints a vision of Panfilo ambushing Fiammetta while she slept. In addition, the alleged violence with which he overpowers her (“I resisted as much as I could, but as my strength was not equal to yours, you won and possessed what you were stealing . . .”) is linked to the dream by its allusions to Proserpina and Eurydice, two mythological women likewise subjected to a physical assault: Proserpina, while picking flowers in the field, was taken by force to the Underworld by Pluto, and Eurydice ended up having her foot lethally pierced by a snake as she was fleeing the lustful Aristaeus.¹²¹ As Warren Ginsberg has shown, classical and biblical allusions played a fundamental role in the medieval idea of character. By making a character repeat the experience of another character in another context, a writer provided a frame of reference that would suggest to the readers the ethical and moral dimensions of the present character

¹²⁰ “[I]anti quidem sunt fabule, ut earum primo contextu oblectentur indocti, et circa abscondita doctorum exercentur ingenia, et sic una et eadem lectione proficiunt et delectant” (*Genealogia*, XIV.9.146c; “Such then is the power of fiction that it pleases the unlearned by its external appearance, and exercises the minds of the learned with its hidden truth; and thus both are edified and delighted”, Osgood, transl., 51).

¹²¹ “Quo dum Proserpina luco / ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit, / dumque puellari studio calathosque sinumque / inplet et aequales certat superare legendo, / paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti: / usque adeo est properatus amor” (*Metamorphoseon libri*, V.391–396). “And here Proserpina was playfully picking its white lilies and violets, and, while competing to gather up more than her playmates, Dis saw her, was smitten, seized her and carried her off; his love was that hasty” (Ovid 2004, 175). “[I]lla quidem, dum te fugeret per flumina praeceps / immanem ante pedes hydrum moritura puella / servantem ripas alta non vidit in herba” (*Georgicon libri*, IV.457–59). “She in her haste to shun thy hot pursuit / Along the stream, saw not the coming death, / Where at her feet kept ward upon the bank / In the tall grass a monstrous water-snake” (Virgil 1921/2005, 96).

(1983, 72–6, 96). Fiammetta makes use of this device with masterful cunning. Recalling the illustrious names of Proserpina and Eurydice, she summons images of powerless ladies suffering at the hands of male tormentors, thereby forging a profitable interpretative frame that she uses as a component in her defence speech.

According to Cicero’s instructions, a speaker wins the good-will of the audience by humbly underlining the difficulties and misfortunes that have befallen him or her (*De inv.* I.16.22), and one seeking exculpation (*purgatio*) can appeal to ignorance (*imprudencia*), chance (*casus*) or necessity (*necessitudo*) (*De inv.* 2.31.95–32.100; see also *RH*, I.14.24). Throughout her tale, Fiammetta skilfully pairs *imprudencia* with *necessitudo*, creating in the dream section a convincing narrative of ignorance and inevitability: by emphasising her lack of understanding regarding the gods’ portents and by inserting the appropriate classical allusions, she manages to portray herself as a blameless poor creature who needs to be looked upon with benevolence and pity by her hypothetical female readers. But besides this global function, the dream also has a more precise meaning: through the subtle echoes, it lends itself to be read as a veiled anticipatory description of the enigmatic twice-depicted love scene, apparently confirming the truthfulness of the version which portrays Fiammetta as the victim. Yet on a closer look it *also* appears to foretell the contradictory account by hinting at Fiammetta as a willing accomplice: at first, she states to suffer discomfort at feeling the serpent’s teeth over her breasts, but she soon gives in (“I felt reassured, and I seemed to place the cold snake into my bosom . . .”) and is eventually reluctant to let the serpent go (“it seemed to leave my bosom against my will”).

It would be very easy to claim that what we have here is a prime example of first-person narration as “an art of indirection” (Phelan 2005, 1) that communicates two different purposes to two different audiences, one addressed by the narrator to the narratee, and the other by the (implied) author to the authorial audience. So, although the dream appears to play into the hands of Fiammetta and the ethos of innocence she so carefully constructs throughout her tale, it also seems to surreptitiously undermine this stance through those terse admissions of consent that almost get lost in the coiling bulk of her prose but are nonetheless visible enough to provide us with an impression of a voluntary act – yet one that Fiammetta is quick to clothe in the language of apprehension, pointing out that she cradles the serpent to her chest “imagining that by offering the warmth of my bosom I would make it kinder towards me.” Likewise, she later insists that she consented to sexual acts with Panfilo not because of personal desire, but for reasons of charity (“e quelle cose, le quali io pietosamente verso di te da molto amore sospinta operai, da focosa libidine dirai nate”, *Elegia*, 84; “and those things which I did for you, acting out of compassion

and driven by love, you will say were prompted by a burning lust”, *EMF*, 63). If, as the dream passage and the textual whole would suggest, Fiammetta is determined to present herself as the injured party, then the contradictory strain in her account can only be understood as Boccaccio’s communication to his audience: hence, the slips revealing her consent would become what Phelan calls “disclosure functions” of first-person narration, by which, “[a]long the narrator-authorial audience track, the narrator unwittingly reports information of all kinds to the authorial audience” (2005, 12), and the effect of which is that the authorial audience will recognise a communication by the implied author, of which the narrator remains unaware (*ibid.* 50).

Following this line of thought, it could then be said that while Fiammetta recounts to her narratee, the *gentili donne*, the contents of the dream the truth of which she could not decipher, she simultaneously conveys to Boccaccio’s audience a different truth that compromises her ethos and casts serious doubt over the veracity of the second version of the events she gives in [2b]. In this reading, we hence have a classic case of narratorial unreliability, with Fiammetta unintentionally condemning herself with her own words much to the delight of the authorial audience. It is precisely in this frame that Robert Hollander, though not in narratological terms, views the original reception of the *Elegia*, considering it Boccaccio’s finest achievement in ironical narration and imagining him reading the book aloud to his friends who, like Franz Kafka’s friends at his recitals, would have joined him in uncontrollable laughter (Hollander 1977, 40, 170).

At this point, however, the priority of such an ironical reading must again be reconsidered, on account of the fact that as a whole Fiammetta’s narration seems to directly defy the psychological portrait of her as a linguistically and morally benighted woman functioning as a laughing-stock for her creator and his audience. I pointed out above that the incompetence with which she handles the *expositio* is inexplicable considering the virtuosity and precision of her pen that she demonstrates elsewhere. The dream raises similar concerns: it records a truth that we must presume Fiammetta would rather keep to herself, providing that we wish to retain an image of her as a real person. So, the question is, why does she not keep it to herself? Why, when she obviously has the skill and means necessary to prevent this from happening, does she deliberately incriminate herself and allow her carefully built ethos to crumble by exposing herself as a liar?

The same questions could be asked of the numerous classical allusions that Fiammetta makes. At first, the nature of Fiammetta’s crime is not spelled out; it is only hinted at through these references (cf. Smarr 1986, 143–44). The first subtle

indication of adultery occurs when Fiammetta, still describing her dream, points out that, as darkness descended, she “thought night had returned, just as it fell on the Greeks at the sin of Atreus” (*EMF*, 5; “e la notte tornata pensai, quale a’ Greci tornò nel peccato d’Atreo”, *Elegia*, 8), who murdered his brother for having slept with Atreus’s wife. Another early clue is the absence of Juno, the goddess of marriage, in Fiammetta’s egoistic description of her beauty as similar to the “goddesses whom Paris saw in the valley of Ida” (*EMF*, 6; “simile alle dèe vedute da Paris nella valle d’Ida tenendomi”, *Elegia*, 9): “not only did men turn their eyes toward me,” Fiammetta writes, “but so did women, just as if there appeared before them miraculously and for the first time Venus or Minerva” (*EMF*, 7; “che non solamente gli uomini gli occhi torsero a riguardarmi, ma eziandio le donne, non altramente che se Venere o Minerva, mai più da loro non vedute, fossero in quello luogo”, *Elegia*, 10). Hollander (1977, 166) speculates that the exclusion of Juno, “if intentional on Boccaccio’s part, may be programmatic,” precisely because of the association of Juno with marriage vows. Janet Levarie Smarr draws a similar conclusion, arguing that the classical allusions “introduce a distance between the author and the narrator by evoking associations of which Fiammetta seems naively or even wilfully ignorant” (1986, 143). Here, although the narratological concept is never raised, Smarr treats Fiammetta precisely as an unreliable narrator who elicits a “distancing of our sympathy” through the recognition that she is “offering only a limited view of the truth” (*ibid.* 146).

This immediately begs the question of whether, in offering her limited view, Fiammetta is “misreporting” or “underreporting,” according to Phelan’s taxonomy. If Fiammetta is misreporting, she omits Juno out of genuine error (she is “naively ignorant”); if she is underreporting, she consciously tells less than she knows (she is “wilfully ignorant”). The trouble is that there is no way of deciding either way, because the text of the *Elegia* consistently resists any such attempts of perspectival reconciliation. The hypothesis of naivety is invalidated by the fact that elsewhere in her narrative Fiammetta is perfectly aware of Juno as a protector of marriages, calling the goddess’s vengeance upon herself (“o sacra Giunone, le cui santissime leggi io sceleratissima giovine ho corrotte, vendicati”, *Elegia*, 140; “O blessed Juno, whose most godly laws I have disgracefully corrupted, take revenge”, *EMF*, 107) and expressing indignation at finding out that Panfilo has given himself to another woman “by Juno’s laws” (*EMF*, 104; “per giunonica legge”; *Elegia*, 136). It does not make much more sense to read the slip as a sign of conscious underreporting – that is, as a wilful attempt by Fiammetta to *conceal* her adultery – since the omission itself is a disclosure which draws attention precisely to husbands, wives and marriage laws.

In fact, the narrative is filled with such hints from the very beginning. In the prologue Fiammetta mentions the “harshness” (“l’acerbità”, *Elegia*, 3) with which she has been treated by a certain man. This is bound to get the reader thinking “what did this man do to her?”, while basically guessing the answer from the way that Fiammetta pointedly aligns her tale not with epic battles but with “stories of love” (“favole . . . amoroſe”, *Elegia*, 1). Then, as soon as the narrative proper begins, she mentions her husband with whom she “lived in bliss until the raging passion later took hold of my young mind with a fire I had never felt before” (*EMF*, 4; “felicissima dimoraic infino a tanto che il furioso amore, con fuoco non mai sentito, non entrò nella giovine mente”, *Elegia*, 6) and, after stating that she really loved him, she exclaims “Oh, how much happier than any other woman I could call myself, had such love lasted in me forever!” (*EMF*, 4; “Oh quanto piú che altra mi potrei io dire felice, se sempre in me fosse durato cotale amore!” *Elegia*, 6). Readers’ thoughts may also be led in certain unfavourable directions by the first allusion that Fiammetta makes: “Oh quanto piú felice sarebbe stato se nata non fossi . . . né piú lunga età avessi avuta, che i denti seminati da Cadmo” (*Elegia*, 5; “How much luckier it would have been if I had not been born . . . or if I had not lived longer than the teeth sown by Cadmus” (*EMF*, 3). Traditionally seen as a symbol of transience, Cadmus may set off a web of other connotations as well. Where and why did Cadmus sow a dragon’s teeth in the ground? He was on a (failed) quest to find her sister Europe. Why was Europe missing? Because she had been abducted by Jove. In what kind of circumstances was she abducted? Like Proserpina, she was picking flowers in a field, when Jove came for her in the shape of a white bull, and Europe, although apprehensive at first, put out a hand to decorate his horns with flowers and eventually mounted him of her own free will, captivated by the beauty of the beast (*Metamorphoses* III.1143–1204). Through such allusions, the reference to Cadmus surreptitiously presents the reader with another interpretative frame which seems to hint at active *concession*, and which is therefore detrimental to Fiammetta’s ethos, whereas the allusions to Proserpina and Eurydice which come soon after, seem to activate, more openly, an opposite script consisting of images of resistance shown by innocent victims.

From these strategic hints, then, it is possible to argue that Fiammetta’s adultery *has already been exposed* by the time she openly mentions it, since the entire preceding narration is constructed in such a way as to make the reader figure it out on her own. Why would Fiammetta incriminate herself like this? Rather than an attempt by an unreliable narrator seeking to conceal her crime, the web of disclosures is better understood as a way of activating the readers’ interpretive faculties, by inviting them to find glosses for the allusions and to speculate about the level of Fiammetta’s

complicity in a crime that is basically spelled out in the text *without* spelling it out. This effectively sabotages the attempt to read Fiammetta's narration as an account of psychological coherence: as a person intending to mislead others, Fiammetta would simply be *too forthcoming* in her report. Studies have shown that liars tend to be reticent: for fear of giving themselves away, they tell less compelling and intricate tales than do truth tellers, offering fewer details and taking care to avoid any imperfections that naturally occur in truthful accounts (DePaulo et al. 2003). Thus, still indulging in the thought experiment about Fiammetta as a real Neapolitan woman, we can see that, in giving the two conflicting accounts and including a vivid description of her dream, and adding allusions that cast her in a suspicious light, Fiammetta does exactly what a liar would likely never do. It would seem that the accounts by many modern narrators deemed to be unreliable in the sense of untrustworthiness suffer from this same peculiarity: since they *must* be made to talk for artistic ends, they fall into excessive reports, where the more natural solution would be to hold one's peace. This puts a different spin on the "unintentional self-incrimination" that Zerweck (2001, 156–57) sees as the second of the minimal conditions of unreliable narrator (the first condition being the presence of a personalised narrator), arguing that, for instance, Nabokov's Humbert reveals, unintentionally, that his actions destroyed Dolores Haze. I am not entirely convinced that Humbert as being only partially aware of the import of his words on the reader is the most lucrative way of looking at Nabokov's text; rather, I think that his performance as an author-narrator bears some resemblance to Boccaccio's Fiammetta, whose narration, like Humbert's, comes across as highly systematic and planned, orchestrated by a rhetorically oriented author (Boccaccio / Nabokov) who *gives himself away entirely intentionally* in the game of artifice he plays with the reader.

Boccaccio's unprecedented experiment with narrative voice in the *Elegia* invites reflection on narrative as a collaborative operation between author and audience. As stated, the openly acknowledged "impossibility" of Fiammetta's voice – a "realistic" voice of a young girl expressed through the rhetoric of an experienced professional author – can be viewed as an intentional element in Boccaccio's see-through strategy of writing. Accordingly, the allusions, as well as the dream, become *planted evidence*, seemingly related to the narrator's psyche, but actually strategic components in the literary game into which Boccaccio challenges his audience. According to Yacobi's model, the functional principle explains textual oddities by attributing them to the work's artistic goals. Out of the five resolving mechanisms, this one comes closest to matching the narrative strategies of the *Elegia* that I have been attempting to illustrate; the functional principle might therefore serve as a hypernym for a more

precise designation that could be called the *pedagogical principle*. Instead of falling back on the hackneyed duology fallible/untrustworthy, neither pole of which seems to be supported by textual evidence, and which would, in general, take the discussion into the somewhat absurd area of trying to decide what the fictional Fiammetta knew and did not know, this reconciliation method underlines the playful and edifying effects enabled by the presentation of narratorial discrepancies. The question is not so much “Does Fiammetta not realise that Juno is missing?” as it is “Do *you*, reader, see that Juno is missing, and are *you* able to catch the implications of the allusions?” Similarly, the tell-tale slips in the narration of Fiammetta’s dream can be considered not as disclosure functions ironising her, but rather the entire dream sequence, together with the two incompatible accounts she gives, could be seen as setting up a puzzle to be solved, the dream providing the key for the lock consisting of the two different versions of events.

Faced with the two incongruent versions, the surprised reader must ask: Did she or did she not consent? The answer, if there is one, is suggested in the description of the dream that the competent medieval reader would have known is located in Boccaccio’s text in pride of place, right at the beginning of the narrative where the most crucial arguments conventionally occurred (e.g., *RH*, III.10.18). For Fiammetta, the premonitory dream is crucial in that in hindsight she treats it as a preview of her downfall, representing the first stage in the series of unfortunate events that she then begins to unravel in (too much) detail for the narratee. But the dream also functions as a discursive foreshadowing, one that could be called an allegorical prolepsis. For Genette, the most typical form of prolepsis is the *annonce* or “advance notice,” which “refer[s] in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place” (ibid. 73). What Fiammetta’s dream conveys *sub velamento* in the beginning is later represented without the veil, as the actual agents take the place of the serpent and the mythological figures standing in for them in the dream. The interpretative effort this allegorical ensemble requires of the reader is best understood in terms of prolepsis as “anticipated recall” (Bridgeman 2005). From a cognitive perspective, prolepsis depends upon the reader constructing a contextual frame that she “*expects* to have to recall at a future stage in reading, and stores in memory accordingly” (ibid. 130; emphasis original), and these proleptic frames are activated through textual cues that could involve, for instance, unfinished openings or genre classifications (ibid.). In the case of the *Elegia*, we could therefore speculate that the (implied) reader of the book, approaching texts with the knowledge that special attention must be paid to beginnings, treats the dream as a proleptic frame

which she then recalls from memory later on in the reading process, when the textual cues (the slumbering victim, the savage perpetrator) trigger its activation.

Many possible effects can be sought through the manipulation of the order of representation (Perry 1979, 40–41). For medieval theorists of poetry, the advantage of inverting the chronological order was that it created a more artistic impression. Distinguishing between natural and artificial ordering of the material, Geoffrey of Vinsauf writes: “Nature’s smooth road points the way when ‘things’ and ‘words’ follow the same sequence, and the order of discourse does not depart from the order of occurrence. The poem travels the pathway of art if a more effective order presents first what was later in time, and defers the appearance of what was actually earlier.” There is no doubt that “[t]he order of art is more elegant than natural order, and in excellence far ahead, even though it puts last things first” (Nims, transl., 18–19).¹²² By constructing in the *Elegia* an allegorical prolepsis, Boccaccio seems to be self-consciously putting into practice the recommendations put forth in the poetic manuals we know he owned and commented upon in his theoretical output (Andrei 2017, 153).¹²³ But his strategy also serves the ideal of reading as a cognitive process that he underlined in his theoretical writings. In composing the dream and the two incompatible descriptions, Boccaccio offers his readers a pleasurable literary puzzle, an exercise in readerly vigilance that trains their memory and perception in the backward process of interpretation. Rather than primarily asking for what pathological reason is Fiammetta inconsistent in her narration and what does this inconsistency say about her as a person, this reading views her lie as an authorially designed piece directed at an audience who is aware that they are being spun a line as part of the game of interpretation. Here the pleasure of reading has more to do with understanding the rules of this game than with joining authors in laughter at narrators who contradict themselves without even realising they do so.

Finally, it must be mentioned that, although the dream provides the readers of the *Elegia* with the key to the lock constituted by the conflicting accounts, they find no conclusive answers. Rather, the dream suggests that both of these accounts can be true at the same time; in this capacity, it opens up a rewardingly complex view that questions stereotypical characterisation. As a literary character, Fiammetta’s self-narration is burdened with the Ovidian script of feigned reluctance, familiar to the readers of the *Ars amatoria* (I.673–74), and she also recalls Potiphar’s wife, who in

¹²² “Linea stratae / Est ibi dux, ubi res et verba sequuntur eumdem / Cursum nec sermo declinat ab ordine rerum. / Limite currit opus, si praelocet aptior ordo / Posteriora prius, vel detrahat ipsa priora / Posterius . . . Civilior ordine recto / Et longe prior est, quamvis praeposterus ordo” (PN, 88–93; 99–100).

¹²³ Boccaccio comments on the “noble” device of artificial narrative order in *Genealogia*, XIV.13.149b.

the Book of Genesis accuses Joseph of attempted rape after he refuses her advances. This female stereotype was popular in the Middle Ages – we find her, for instance, in Heldris’s *Silence*, where the malicious Queen Eufeme frames Silence for rape when she fails to seduce him (*RS*, 4115–48). But Fiammetta is not merely another manifestation of this stereotype mechanically acting out a scripted behaviour. By constructing her change of attitude regarding her own consent in such a way as to make readers wonder about the truth of the matter, and then giving them an ambiguous answer in the form of an allegorical dream, Boccaccio paints a picture of overwhelming desire tinted with resistance that is perhaps induced by the shame of adultery and of betraying the trust of the husband who, as the narrative makes perfectly clear, thinks the world of his wife, and whom Fiammetta consistently professes to love as much as he loves her (e.g., “e così egli da me era igualmente amato, come egli mi amava”, *Elegia*, 6; “and I loved him just as much as he loved me”, *EMF*, 4).

It is through these technical choices that Boccaccio does raise compelling moral and psychological questions for his audience to ponder, questions that would go unnoticed by a reading that would fall back on the familiar perspectival principle and treat Fiammetta’s incongruities as a straightforward expression of her psychopathological state. By putting the audience to work, Boccaccio crafts a relationship with his audience that is open and flexible, and which, as the remaining sections of this chapter will show, ultimately contrasts with the attitude that Fiammetta herself, as the author of her *libretto*, adopts towards her narratee.

9 Discordances

9.1 Fiammetta’s Superlative Rhetoric

9.1.1 The Exhibitive Principle

In the very first pages of the *Elegia*, we find yet another textual oddity requiring reconciliation. Fiammetta states that her falling in love with Panfilo was an unprecedented event in terms of its force and flash-like speed. Whereas other people take their time to fall in love, for her it was an on-the-spot event setting her apart from all the rest:

[8] Ohimè! che Amore così come ora in me usa crudeltà non udita, così nel pigliarmi nuova legge dagli altri diversa gli piacque d'usare! Io ho più volte udito che negli altri i piaceri sono nel principio levissimi, ma poi, da' pensieri nutriti, aumentando le forze loro, si fanno gravi; ma in me così non avvenne, anzi con quella medesima forza m'entrarono nel cuore, che essi vi sono poi dimorati, e dimorano. Amore il primo di di me ebbe interissima possessione; e certo sì come il verde legno malagevolissimamente riceve il fuoco, ma quello ricevuto più conserva e con maggior caldo, così a me avvenne. Io, avanti non vinta da alcuno piacere giammai, tentata da molti, ultimamente vinta da uno, e arsi e ardo, e servai e servo più che altra facesse giammai il preso fuoco. (*Elegia*, 15–16)

Alas, just as Love is now showing unheard-of cruelty toward me, so when he first caught me, it pleased him to use a different rule from the one he used with other people. I have often heard that in people his delights are at first very slight but that later they become stronger and more serious as they are nourished by thought, but this did not happen to me; on the contrary, such pleasures entered my heart with the same strength they had later, and still have now. On the very first day Love took complete possession of me; what happened to me is exactly what happens to green wood, which catches fire with great difficulty but, once lit, burns longer and with intense heat. I had never been overcome by any pleasure before although many had tempted me, but I was ultimately conquered by one and I burned, and still burn; and I tended, and still tend, this fire more than any other woman ever did before, now that it has been kindled. (*EMF*, 10)

The experiential difference Fiammetta claims for herself compared to “other people” (“altri”) is unfounded: the romance memory of the competent reader is populated by figures who fall in love *exactly* as Fiammetta does. For instance, the heart of the proud Soredamor, who, like Fiammetta has always shown disdain for Love, is caught at first sight of Alexander in Chrétien’s *Cligès* (l. 440 ff.), and Medea, laying her eyes on Jason, is at once enflamed “like a knot of pine kindled before some powerful god” (Ovid 1990/2004, 107; “ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos”, *Heroides*, XII.34). As seen in Chapter II: Section 6.4, this is also the fate of Troilus, whose instant infatuation with Criseyde is, moreover, a reiteration of Troiolo’s falling in love with Cressida in the *Filostrato*, which Boccaccio composed a decade before he did the *Elegia*.

Instead of creating a text-internal inconsistency, the peculiarity of Fiammetta’s “different rule” (“nuova legge”) comes into view against this intertextual background with which one expects Boccaccio’s learned audiences to be familiar. Should one therefore resort to the perspectival principle, making the inference that Fiammetta lacks the authorial audience’s vast reading, naively imagining as unprecedented a thoroughly verisimilar romance experience? This can hardly be the case, for the text

directly opposes such a reconciliation attempt. Besides employing mythological allusions to plead her case and concluding her book with a catalogue of ancient misfortunes, which imply a sound knowledge of the classics, Fiammetta also explicitly refers to herself as a reader of the texts which have helped to institutionalise the trope of love at first sight: “Ricordami alcuna volta avere letti li franceschi romanzi” (*Elegia*, 186; “At times I remember reading French romances”, *EMF*, 145); “Egli non mi venne una volta sola nell’animo l’avere già letto ne’ versi di Ovidio che le fatiche traevano a’ giovini amore delle menti” (*Elegia*, 59; “Not just once but as many times as I recalled to mind that he was on a journey, I remembered having read in Ovid’s verses that physical exertion made young people forget love”, *EMF*, 43).

Fiammetta stresses that she *remembers*, yet it turns out she remembers selectively. In her fear of losing Panfilo, she is able to apply Ovid verses to the physical effort of his journey, but nonetheless fails to make the connection between the cynical view the *Ars amatoria* takes of making vows to girls and Panfilo’s promise to return: “Donna, io ti giuro per lo luminoso Apollo . . . che il quarto mese non uscirà che, concedendolo Iddio, tu mi vedrai qui tornato . . . O santissimi iddii, igualmente del cielo governatori e della terra, siate testimoni alla presente promessione” (*Elegia*, 53; “My lady, I swear to you by the brilliant Apollo . . . not even four months will go by before you see me back here . . . Most holy gods, rules of heaven and earth alike, be witness to this promise”, *EMF*, 38). Similar oaths have been sworn to the abandoned women in the *Heroides*, but, despite her professed knowledge of Ovid, it escapes Fiammetta’s notice that when a lover makes a vow like this a lover does not intend to return, according to the laws of verisimilitude. It is almost as if Fiammetta becomes here the inexperienced romance reader that I discussed in Chapter I: Section 4.1, suffering from literary amnesia which not only makes her blind to poetic recurrence, causing her to take at face value Panfilo’s treacherous promises, but also makes her erroneously raise her ordinary experience above the ordinary rules of love. But, as pointed out, this interpretation is impossible to reconcile with Fiammetta’s readerly expertise counterbalancing any implications of inexperience, which, in turn, would once again seem to indicate that the perspectival resolving of the *Elegia*’s textual oddities may not give entirely satisfactory results, since it rests on establishing a coherent viewpoint that simply cannot be constructed on the basis of Fiammetta’s selective literary amnesia. Other explanations will therefore have to be sought.

Above, I argued for the relevance of the pedagogical mechanism of integration for the discrepancies found in Fiammetta’s discourse, characterising it as a subcategory of Yacobi’s functional principle which appeals to authorial purpose to make sense of textual peculiarities; from this basis, I suggested that some of the

inconsistencies in the *Elegia* serve to exercise readers' vigilance and perception, sending them on a hunt to find the solution which the book, however, eventually withholds. More than character psychology, the focus was therefore on the work of fiction as a form of communication between author and audience, and on the ways in which the perceived inconsistencies were put to the service of exercising discerning readership and making the reader work, which for Boccaccio was the basis of ideal readerly experience. Likewise, the amnesiac element in [8] can be seen in functional terms, yet its ultimate purpose is not so much instructional as it is *exhibitory*; put differently, it serves to display the author's scope of invention as he rearranges traditional *materia*. Because Fiammetta's experience is new and original in the sense that the passage brings together the familiar building blocks of the literary experience of falling in love and blends them into a new kaleidoscopic combination held together by Fiammetta's perspective. The "I have often heard" ("Io ho più volte udito") is a reworking of the "vos avés veü bien sovent / "as we may alday ourselven see" pattern discussed in the previous chapters of the study, though now it is Fiammetta herself, rather than the narratee, who becomes the experiential witness. The conventional notion of love accelerated by a catalyst is also present, but here the wind and the lover's vicinity are replaced by love "nourished by thought" ("da' pensieri nutriti") and finally, the quantity of Fiammetta's experience, her tending of love's fire "more than any other woman ever did before" ("più che altra facesse giammai"), can be read *literally* as a reference to the text of the *Elegia* itself as a prolonged *Heroides*. In short, the exhibitiv mechanism of reconciliation explains the claimed originality as a self-referential nod to Boccaccio the artificer brandishing his skill at handling and recycling traditional elements; the psychological upheavals of falling in love are not in themselves the primary focus here, but the aesthetic and poetic procedure, as Fiammetta's mind once again becomes a see-through window into Boccaccio's agency as a writer.

It must be underlined, however, that the exhibitiv principle as a reconciliation strategy does not exclude personality factors, especially since the belief in the superlative uniqueness of Fiammetta's love becomes in the text a running argument encompassing the entire love affair and the nature of Fiammetta's suffering. In the fashionable spa region of Baiae, where her loving husband has brought her to recover from her nervous breakdown, Fiammetta spends her days observing lovers' behaviour and listening in on their conversations, as a result of which she perceives a stark difference between their experience and hers: "là dove con disiderio ascoltando quali gli altrui amori siano stati, agevolmente ho compreso niuno si fervente né tanto occulto né con si gravi affanni essere stato come il mio" (*Elegia*,

104; “there, by listening with curiosity about other people’s love affairs, I easily understood that no other love has been as passionate, as secretive, and as burdened with anxieties as mine”, *EMF*, 79). The fire of love, she argues, does not merely warm her but outright consumes her “more than any other woman” (*EMF*, 4; “più che altra non riscaldare, anzi ardere”, *Elegia*, 6), and in addition to love, she also views her pain in comparative terms, identifying herself as the “most sorrowful of all women” (*EMF*, 122; “più che altra dolorosissima donna”, *Elegia*, 159) and her life as “more wretched than any other” (*EMF*, 7; “vita più che altra angosciosa”, *Elegia*, 11).

These judgments bear directly on the quantity over quality principle of medieval characterisation that was discussed in Chapter I of this study. In view of this technique, Yacobi’s generic mechanism of integration might therefore go some way towards resolving the oddity (i.e., “medieval romance typically describes characters in superlative terms”). Unlike in *Silence*, however, where the superlative rhetoric belonged to the poet, the *Elegia* brings it to the level of first-person narration, thus inevitably raising some questions about the narrator; after all, hearing an extradiegetic narrator praising characters’ supreme qualities has a very different effect to hearing characters pronounce such things about themselves, especially if it tends to happen recurrently, as it does in the *Elegia*. Undoubtedly, Fiammetta’s view of herself as the primary sufferer may seem a little bloated; her rhetoric of superiority tends to make us acutely aware, as Cesare Segre puts it, of her “fairly banal story” (1979, 80). The incongruence between her love affair and mythological examples seems to be exacerbated in the scene of Panfilo’s final departure, the interpretation of which Fiammetta models after the tale of Laodameia and Protesilaus:¹²⁴

[9] Alcun’altra volta con più gravezza mi venne pensato lui avere il piè percosso nel limitare dell’uscio della nostra camera, sì come la fedele serva m’avea ridetto; e ricordandomi che a niuno altro segnale Laudomia prese tanta fermezza, quanta a così fatto del non redituro Protesilao, già molte volte ne piansi, quello medesimo di ciò sperandoche n’è avvenuto. (*Elegia*, 58)

At other times it occurred to me to give more serious thought to his [Panfilo’s] having stubbed his toe on the threshold of our bed chamber, as my faithful servant had reported, and remembering that Laodameia had not taken any other sign as seriously as this one, which indicated the Protesilaus would not return, I wept many times. (*EMF*, 43)

The episode of Panfilo stubbing his toe on the threshold on his way out, reported afterwards by the servant to the swooned Fiammetta, goes as follows:

¹²⁴ See, e.g. *Heroides* XIII.

[10] Ma poi, più non potendo dimorare per la nemica chiarezza sopravvegnete, con maggiore abbondanza di lagrime disse “Addio!”, e quasi a forza tirato, percotendo forte il piede nel limitar dell'uscio, uscì delle nostre case. Onde uscito, appena si saria detto che egli potesse andare, anzi ad ogni passo volgendosi, quasi pareva sperasse che, voi risentita, io il dovessi chiamare a rivedervi. (*Elegia*, 56)

Then, unable to stay any longer because of the hostile daylight that was upon us, he bade farewell with even more tears and leaving our home as if he were pulled away by force, stubbed his toe hard on the threshold. Once he was outside, it could have been said that he was nearly unable to walk, but he looked back at each step, as if he were hoping that I would have to call him back to see you because you had been revived. (*EMF*, 41)

Harking back to Horace's discussion of the three defective styles (*AP*, 25–27), Matthew of Vendôme writes in his twelfth-century *Ars versificatoria* of the “empty mist” (“phalerata nubes”) produced by “turgid” and “inflated” discourse (“turgidum et inflatum”) (*AV*, I.32). John of Garland, in his discussion of the same, elaborates that “bombast” is related to words (“ex parte uerborum”), whereas “inflation” pertains to the ideas expressed by them (“ex parte sentenciarum”) (*PP*, 5.61). Is this what happens in Fiammetta's account? Should we understand her mythological interpretation as flawed inflation of a trivial incident? In the servant's description there are certainly many elements that seem to underline the comic tone of the departure scene. For one, Panfilo is said to have stubbed his toe *hard* (“forte”) on the threshold, which we infer must have hurt, since “it could have been said that he was nearly unable to walk” (“appena si saria detto che egli potesse andare”), and from contextual evidence one gathers that the way that he turns to look back “at each step” (“ad ogni passo volgendosi”) may have more to do with fear than hope of seeing Fiammetta revived – after all, we have just finished reading, only a few pages back, his profuse explanations as to why he should leave at once in response to Fiammetta's attempts to make him stay, which tends to create the impression of the following events proceeding with clumsiness and hurry for the sole reason of Panfilo trying to get away as fast as he can from the clingy Fiammetta.

Robert Hollander rightly asks whether we witness pathos or bathos in this scene (1977, 46). Likewise, Segre underlines the ironical effect of the exaggerated comparisons: since they are not made by Boccaccio but Fiammetta, they work to produce a “detailed, refined, psychological analysis” of the protagonist (*ibid.* 81). This seems to involve the assumption that Boccaccio does not agree with Fiammetta, but rather shares the critic's perspective on the banality of the affair; in other words,

we are once again revolving towards the narratological definition of unreliable narration, with the narrator apparently departing from the implied author's norms. Following Phelan's typology of unreliable narrators, Fiammetta could then be classified as a "misreader," who may be completely honest in her report but unreliable along the axis of knowledge and perception. In other words, we could say that while Fiammetta reliably relates her own experience, she does this in a manner that makes it look like the overstatement of the century, which demands that we subtract the narrator's inflated account in order to arrive at a more sober version supported by the implied author (cf. Phelan and Martin 1999, 94–95).

Of course, the difficulty here is that which has been acknowledged by many critics of unreliable narration (e.g., Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 101; Nünning 1999): how would one be able to decide, and based on which signals, that the (implied) author does not agree with the narrator? As for Fiammetta's superlative proclamations, the answer to this question might be found in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (ca. 1361–75), where the author criticises Arachne for her hubristic pride, pointing out that "whoever thinks that he is the only one who can surpass in glory so great a multitude of men is a fool" (Guarino, transl., 39).¹²⁵ It is a statement that could be used to force upon the *Elegia* the narratological category of unreliable narration, as it seems to offer a direct intertextual confirmation of the values by which the implied author of the *Elegia* (as well as the actual one) stands, and from which Fiammetta clearly diverges, whether consciously or unconsciously. This latter question regarding narratorial motivation for misreading is generally speaking no less difficult to answer than the question of the implied author's values. To be sure, fine interpretations can be achieved by suggesting that certain moments in the telling express narrators' subconscious desires or infuse the words with additional meanings that they are not aware of, as, for instance, in Phelan's (2007b) analysis of "The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe. Such interpretations are highly interesting in that they respond to the mimetic component of narrative, treating misreportings, misreadings and miscalculations as keyholes into the psyche of Montresor and other such similarly suspect fictional beings. On the other hand, it might be difficult to shake the notion that, insightful as they are, psychologising readings confuse a gut feeling about what the narrative *must* be about with authorial intention; thus, one would be led to make statements along the lines of "Boccaccio wants his readers to understand" that a) "Fiammetta is not conscious of her misreadings," or that b) "she is only subconsciously aware of them," or that c) "she misreads the significance of her

¹²⁵ "Et ob id quenquam se solum existimare, inter tam innumerabilem mortalium multitudinem, cursu prevalere ceteris ad gloriam, stolide mentis est" (*De mulieribus claris*, VIII).

experience on purpose.” But, as stated, it is quite impossible, based on Fiammetta’s narration, to construct for her a coherent perspective that would allow us to decide for certain between intentionality and inadvertency. Thus, instead of treating Fiammetta’s superlative rhetoric solely as a textual manifestation of the character’s psyche, I understand her inflated misreadings as elements in a textual experiment in which Boccaccio unleashes and explores a discourse that persistently undermines its own validity, arguing against its own rules as it goes along. Fiammetta’s claim of uniqueness creates a mismatch between ethos-building and the functions she assigns to her book (a plea for vindication, a consolatory model), and these functions are part of the reason why the *Elegia* is addressed to hypothetical women readers instead of the treacherous lover, as in the *Heroides*.

9.1.2 The Woman’s Heart: A Plea for Vindication

The most basic category in the classification of narratees is the explicit narratee directly addressed by the narrator (Prince 1980, 13). This is the case in the *Elegia*, which pretends to be a book (a “libretto”; *Elegia*, 33, 199) written by the protagonist to a group of non-present readers, whom she constantly refers to by such designations as “noble ladies” (“nobili donne”), “compassionate ladies” (“pictosissime donne”) and “dearest ladies” (“carissime donne”). In one sense, this type of narratee must be seen as a naturalising device, playing, as Prince (*ibid.* 22) puts it, a “verisimilating (*vraisemblabilisant*) role”; historically, we are not yet in the realm of the autonomous monologue recording a train of thought seemingly addressed to no one (cf. Cohn 1978, 217–66) (although, as will be seen in Section 9.2, the status of Fiammetta’s discourse as a written document is not as uncomplicated as it may seem at first.) Besides helping to establish the narrative framework, the narratee may serve various purposes. It may act as a mediator between author and audience (asides addressed to the narratee clarifying certain ambiguities or defending certain values), functions to characterise the narrator, underscores thematic aspects, progresses the plot and becomes the spokesman for the moral of the work (Prince 1980, 20–23; see also Chatman 1978, 258–62). As for the function of characterisation, Prince writes that the relationship of the narrator to his or her narratee may serve as an insight into the narrator’s personality, sometimes revealing traits that the narrator otherwise seeks to conceal (1973/1980, 22).

In the *Elegia*, this function could certainly be said to be present, but it must be stressed that the manner in which Fiammetta addresses her narratee reveals details about her character only in the very abstract sense of ethos. Conceived by Aristotle

as one of the three modes of persuasion, together with pathos and logos, he writes about ethos in his *Rhetoric*: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible” (1356a).¹²⁶ Thus, through a strategic projection of “good sense, good moral character and goodwill,” the orator will “inspire trust in his audience” (1378a), creating an impression of a speaker able to speak authoritatively and convincingly about the topic at hand. Aristotle underlines that an appropriate ethos is generated during the speech: persuasion by credibility is not achieved through any pre-existing view of the speaker’s character, but by what the speaker says. In this sense, ethos is a matter of conscious and partial revelation; instead of showcasing his or her personality, the speaker “selectively reveals (or invents) aspects of character pertinent to the rhetorical work required at the moment” (Killingsworth 2005, 251–52).

Fiammetta’s discourse represents precisely such an attempt at controlled revelation that would incline the narratee to mercy. The aspect of situated ethos-building is introduced on the very first pages of the *Elegia*, as Fiammetta lays the foundation for her narrative by implicitly describing it as a form of cooperation. As Prince (1980, 20) remarks, the tone in which the narrator addresses the narratee is indication of the distance between them, and it also reveals something about the narrator’s attitude and aims. In her opening words, Fiammetta establishes a very close affinity with her readers, almost to the point of identifying them with herself:

[11] [M]i piace, o nobili donne, ne’ cuori delle quali amore più che nel mio forse felicemente dimora, narrando i casi miei, di farvi, s’io posso, pietose. Né m’è cura perché il mio parlare agli uomini non pervenga, anzi, in quanto io posso, del tutto il niego loro, però che sí misramente in me l’acerbità d’alcuno si discuopre, che gli altri simili imaginando, piuttosto schernevole riso che pietose lagrime ne vedrei. Voi sole, le quali io per me medesima conosco pieghevoli e agl’infortunii pie, priego che leggiate . . . Le quali cose, se con quel cuore che sogliono essere le donne vederete, ciascuna per sé e tutte insieme adunate, sono certa che li dilicati visi con lagrime bagnerete . . . (*Elegia*, 3–4)

I wish to recount my story to you, noble ladies, and if possible to awaken pity in you, in whose hearts love perhaps dwells more happily than in mine. And I do not care if my speech does not reach the ears of men; in fact if I could, I would entirely keep it away from them, for the harshness of one of them is still so alive in me that I imagine the others to be like him, and I would expect jeering laughter from them rather than compassionate tears. I pray that you alone, in whom I recognize my own open-mindedness and inclination for misfortunes, may be my readers . . . If you will consider these

¹²⁶ The English translations are by Roberts (2010).

things both one by one and altogether and feel them with a woman's heart,
I am sure that your gentle faces will be bathed in tears . . . (*EMF*, 1)

The hypothetical women readers, as Segre suggests, are placed here in the position of “confidantes,” whom Fiammetta directly addresses throughout the tale as if “invoking understanding and help” from them (1979, 86). Yet it should be noted that the narrator-narratee relationship imagined by Fiammetta is not merely that of a lovelorn girl to a circle of shoulders to cry on; it is also, and, I think, in an even more important sense, that of a rhetorician to a group of recipients to be persuaded on several points, not the least of them being that her adultery was, as she herself describes it in a delicious understatement, in the words of Venus addressing her, a case of erring a little (“poco avendo fallito”; *Elegia*, 29). The element of persuasion and pliability, as Elena Lombardi (2018) has noted, is characteristic of the idea of the female reader contained in Boccaccio’s works, where the “generic and plural female readership” is frequently evoked with requests of reciprocation calling for empathy and even persuading the readers to change their minds about the author. This image of the reader conforms to the late medieval view according to which women read *ad personam*, reacting with compassion to what they read and referring what they read to themselves (ibid. 193). This is observable also in the *Elegia*, where the plural and absent female narratee serves as the evaluating recipient of Fiammetta’s pleas. I suggest that, by addressing her words exclusively to women, in whom she claims to recognise herself, Fiammetta seeks to receive a full exoneration based on a sense of identification and communality – a process which she begins in the opening *exordium* quoted above.

Cicero divides the *exordium* into two portions: introduction (*principium*) and insinuation (*insinuatio*). While the introduction serves to generally bring the hearers’ minds into a suitably receptive state for the rest of the speech through making them well-disposed, attentive and receptive (“benivolum, attentum, docilem”), insinuation consists of a calculated use of language that seeks to influence the auditor by dissimulation and indirection (*De inv.* I.15.20). Such a technique is required if the case is difficult and the audience hostile, as one might expect them to be when the case in question is adultery by a fourteenth-century Neapolitan noblewoman. Significantly, Fiammetta does not explicitly spell out the specific nature of her crime until much later, at a point when she has, at least notionally, already secured her readers’ sympathy – a process to which her *exordium* crucially contributes, paving the way for the immoral revelations. The circuitous route Fiammetta’s *exordium* takes into the affections of the recipient uses all the tricks to curry their favour, portraying Fiammetta herself as a humble and tearful petitioner, and a victim of terrible

circumstances, who in her misery has no one else to turn to but the wise and compassionate listener (e.g., *De inv.* I.16.22). At the same time, the *exordium* depicts the petitioner and her audience as a close-knit group, appealing to the collective “woman’s heart” (“con quel cuore che sogliono essere le donne”) and taking an antagonist stand against the “ungrateful sex, denigrator of innocent women” (*EMF*, 158; “generazione ingrata e detrattrice delle semplice donne”, *Elegia*, 201), whose eyes are not fit to “perceive godly things” (“non si convengono a voi di vedere le cose pie”; *ibid.*). The indication is that, just as Fiammetta recognises herself in the *nobili donne* (“le quali io per me medesima conosco . . .”), the *nobili donne*, reading *ad personam*, will recognise their own nature in Fiammetta.

The female solidarity thus established becomes a safety measure. It can be called upon at moments when the narrative must touch on the causes and motivations leading Fiammetta into the adulterous affair. In the following excerpt, Fiammetta expresses amazement at her instant infatuation with Panfilo:

[12] Deh, pietose donne, chi crederà possibile in un punto uno cuore così alterarsi? Chi dirà che persona mai più non veduta sommamente si possa amare nella prima vista? Chi penserà accendersi sì di vederla il disio, che, dalla vista di quella partendosi, senta gravissima noia, solo desiderando di vederla? Chi imaginerà tutte l’altre cose, per addietro molto piaciute, a rispetto della nuova spiacere? Certo niuna persona, se non chi provato l’avrà o pruova come fo io. (*Elegia*, 15)

Ah, merciful ladies, who would believe it possible for a heart to change at once in such a manner? Who would say that one could love so desperately at first sight a person never seen before? Who would think that the desire to see such a person could flare up so much merely by desiring to see him that upon losing sight of him, one would feel the deepest grief? Who would ever imagine that everything which had been pleasing in the past would become worthless when compared to this new thing? Surely no one can understand this except someone who has experienced it – or is experiencing it, as I am. (*EMF*, 10)

This passage, as well as practically every passage in the *Elegia*, involves many features that Nünning includes in his list of “pragmatic” and “syntactic” indicators of narratorial unreliability: speaker- and addressee-oriented expressions, hesitations, repetitions. These, according to Nünning “indicate a high degree of emotional involvement,” hence serving as clues for the reader to treat the narrator as unreliable (1999, 65; 2005, 104). Again, it will be interesting to note that these markers may in fact have more in common with the openly disjointed truthful accounts than with false reports that often appear too good to be true in order to avoid being detected

as lies (DePaulo et al. 2003). In other words, in the real-world context it is the honest description that may look like unreliable narration, and vice versa, for the reader of fiction who is accustomed to preparing a diagnosis of the narrator on the basis of signals that seem more determined by literary scripts on how an “unreliable narrator” tells a tale than any actual mechanisms of deception; an unreliable voice, like any aspect of literary verisimilitude, comes to us endowed with certain conventional signals, the interpretation of which depends upon author and reader sharing a common set of interpretative frames.

In Boccaccio’s day, these conventional markers of unreliability in fiction did not exist, or, to be more precise, they existed but had an utterly different function, and because of this, using Nünning’s list as a mnemonic when reading medieval narratives would have awkward interpretive consequences: simply put, each narrator in every single tale would have to be identified as an unreliable narrator. It should be pointed out, first of all, that in [12] the emotional involvement is affected; what looks like sincere amazement is a rhetorical device with which Fiammetta (and Boccaccio) keeps going the plea for vindication based on collective sentiment. The efficacy of the anaphoric repetition (“who would believe . . . would say . . . would think . . . would ever imagine”) is further augmented by the direct address to the merciful ladies in the beginning, as well as the concluding suggestion of sharing an experiential common ground; together, all these elements serve to convince Fiammetta’s narratee that, although it may sound incredible to the uninitiated, her falling in love with a stranger was, in a certain sense, a necessity, an experience of the kind that must be lived through in order to understand it. In other words, Fiammetta builds a convincing ethos of solidarity through precisely those textual features that in another context are perhaps most profitably read as signs of narratorial unreliability, that is, as means of *un*convincing the reader.

But the passage proves problematic in another manner: not because of the subjective involvement distorting the report, but because it directly clashes with the contrasting impulse to describe an unmatched experience. The way in which [12] and [8] follow each other in the text makes this contrast extremely visible. The shift from one stance to the opposite takes place within consecutive sentences, moving from the establishment of common ground in the opening sentence in [12] to the explicit denial of its existence in the opening sentence in [8] –

Certo niuna persona, se non chi provato l'avrà o pruova come fo io. Ohimè!
che Amore così come ora in me usa crudeltà non udita, così nel pigliarmi
nuova legge dagli altri diversa gli piacque d'usare! (*Elegia*, 15)

Surely no one can understand this except someone who has experienced it – or is experiencing it, as I am. Alas, just as Love is now showing unheard-of cruelty toward me, so when he first caught me, it pleased him to use a different rule from the one he used with other people. (*EMF*, 10)

– as the superlative rhetoric enters Fiammetta’s speech and she begins to underline the extreme *singularity* of her experience. This effectively blunts the cutting edge of the key persuasive tool in her rhetoric of vindication: laying claim to an emotional experience that is simply inimitable in its solipstistic distinctiveness, Fiammetta shatters the experiential interchangeability between herself and her narratee. She even points this out herself when calling to question the harshness of death: “E che certezza di doglia puote uno rendere, testimoniando cosa che egli non provò mai? Certo niuna” (*Elegia*, 186; “What certainty about suffering can one provide by testifying to something he never experienced? Certainly none”, *EMF*, 146). The inconsistency of Fiammetta’s claims undercuts her ability to speak authoritatively and convincingly of her case for purposes of vindication. The same problem applies to the function of her text as an example of consolation.

9.1.3 Pain Shared, Pain Halved: An Offer of Consolation

Fiammetta states that by turning her experience into a book she aims to become “an eternal example to happy and unhappy people” (*EMF*, 159; “esempio eterno a’ felici e a’ miseri”, *Elegia*, 202), and to appear “like Dido . . . renowned forever for my sorrow” (*EMF*, 76; “io, come Dido, con dolorosa fama diventerò eterna”, *Elegia*, 100). The Roman *exemplum*, based on the Aristotelian concept of *paradeigma*, designated a piece of illustrative narration that was inserted into a public speech as a means of persuasion through appealing to a previous instance: “An example supports or weakens a case by appeal to precedent or experience, citing some person or historical event” (*De inv.*, I.30.49; “Exemplum est quod rem auctoritate aut casu alicuius hominis aut negoti confirmat aut infirmat”). In the Middle Ages, the *exemplum* retained its ideological function, serving as a tool for instruction and conversion in the context of preaching, illustrating, as Larry Scanlon puts it, a moral through the enactment of that moral in a protagonist or an event (1994, 33–34). Thus, the medieval *exemplum* can be defined as “a narrative enactment of cultural authority” (*ibid.* 34), which directs the audience to suit their actions to the teaching it provides. What is common to both the classical and the medieval *exemplum* is that they aim to legitimise a certain view, to clarify and demonstrate the truth of a general

statement (Lyons 1989, x), whether the statement that is being illustrated has to do with Christian doctrine or is related to the particulars of a legal case.

The book that Fiammetta writes is an *exemplum* in at least three senses:

1. A cautionary tale demonstrating the truth of the statement *young men are deceitful*, told so that women “may set their affairs in order and avoid becoming like us,” becoming instead “more sagacious in matters of love in order to avoid, for fear of our misfortunes, the hidden deceptions of young men” (*EMF*, 157; “acciò che essi pongano modo a’ loro beni, e fuggano di divenire simili a noi . . . che, se savie sono, ne’ loro amori savissime ad ovviare agli occulti inganni de’ giovini diventino per paura de’ nostri mali”, *Elegia*, 200).

2. A panegyric tale illustrating that Fiammetta is the most sorrowful woman in all of history, including the city of Naples and the annals of mythology. “Si che, ogni cosa pensata, io sola tra le misere mi trovo ottenere il principato” (*Elegia*, 197; “Therefore, all things considered, I alone find myself achieving the first place among suffering women”, *EMF*, 155).

3. A consolatory tale whose writer does her audience a favour by providing them with an example with which to identify. “Priegovi che d’averle non rifiutate, pensando che, sì come li miei, così poco sono stabili li vostri casi, li quali se a’ miei simili ritornassero, il che cessilo Iddio, care vi sarebbero rendendolevi” (*Elegia*, 3–4; “I beg you, do not refuse to weep, and bear in mind that your fortunes are as insecure as my own, and that if – God forbid – they were to turn out like mine, you would cherish these tears when you remember having shed them”, *EMF*, 1).

The problem is that 2 and 3 are somewhat irreconcilable. (I will deal with the first point in the subsequent section.) As Lyons writes, examples are by nature iterative: they depend on repetition and demand reoccurrence, one instance standing for a network of similar instances taking place through time (1989, 26–7). This idea of reproducibility seems to be the basis for the identificatory reading practice recommended by Fiammetta: “in libri diversi ricercando l’altrui miserie e quelle alle mie conformando, quasi accompagnata sentendomi” (*Elegia*, 66; “I looked in various books for other people’s miseries, and by comparing them to mine, I felt as if I had company”, *EMF*, 49). The thought resurfaces in various forms throughout the tale: “Ohimè! con quanta consolazione piú volte già mi ricorda d’averle udite le miserie e le disavventure degli amanti nuovamente avvenute!” (*Elegia*, 169–70; “Oh, what great

consolation I often remember feeling as I listened to the miseries and misadventures of lovers happening anew!” *EMF*, 131); “Mentre che io vado agli antichi danni . . . acciò che avendo compagni mi dolga meno” (*Elegia*, 194; “As I go searching around in my mind for ancient misfortunes . . . so that by having companions it might hurt me less”, *EMF*, 152).

By these statements, Fiammetta provides her readers a guideline for how her own finished book should be perused in the future; in other words, the experience she records in her book shall serve as a comforting model for unhappy lovers who will see in Fiammetta their own image, much like she finds herself in Dido: “Vienmi poi innanzi, con molta più forza che alcuno altro, il dolore dell’abandonata Dido, però che più al mio simigliante il conosco quasi che altro alcuno. . . . E certo io nel primo partire di Panfilo sentii per mio avviso quel medesimo dolore, che nella partita di Enea” (*Elegia* 185; “Much more forcefully than any other, the grief of the abandoned Dido comes next to mind, perhaps because I know it to be more like mine than any other. . . . when Panfilo left, I too of course experienced the same grief she did when Aeneas left”, *EMF*, 144–45). This process of identification privileges similarity over difference; like any example, it rests on the assumption of the existence of a shared, stable identity cutting across chronological boundaries (Lyons 1989, 11), with the result that the example in question is deprived of “autonomy and unicity” (ibid. 27).

Writing about Pierre Abelard’s autobiography *Historia Calamitatum* (ca. 1132), Evelyn Birge Vitz explains that experiential comparability was a positive resource for the medieval mind: by aligning himself with historical, biblical and literary figures of the past, Abelard seeks inner peace in the figurative meaning of his disastrous life while at the same time offering himself as an encouraging example for the reader (1989, 33–4). What is important is that Abelard does not see himself and his life as unique but parallel to what others have been through, which according to Vitz reveals a “profound mental habit”: “The individual seeks to align himself with these old models – these embodiments of vertical excellence on the various dimensions of human experience – these old truths; not to feel or say new and different things, or distinguish, for example, between *his* experience of pain and that of the martyrs” (ibid. 25–6; emphasis original). Fiammetta does exactly the opposite: the cruelty of her love is an unheard-of cruelty (“crudeltà non udita”) and the *nuova legge* of her experience sets her apart from all the rest (see Example [8]).¹²⁷ If Abelard constantly

¹²⁷ Annelise M. Brody suggests that the *Elegia* illustrates an attempt to cling on to a literary tradition whose time is starting to pass. For Abelard, the comparative technique might have had therapeutic effects, but in the *Elegia* none of the models to which Fiammetta refers seem to help her heal, and so the “lifeless parade” of the classical figures populating her book can be thought of as exemplifying

works to “narrow” and “schematise” himself to fit his agenda of serving as a typological model and providing consolation (Vitz 1989, 33), Fiammetta by contrast fails to obey the ideal of comparability with any consistence. By framing her tale as a consolatory example, she frames it in a way that works directly against the singularity that she claims for her experience within the same narrative; at the same time, the claim for singularity effectively precludes any chance of comfort through identification, as it underlines Fiammetta’s experience as an experience that cannot be reproduced.

Here, it will be useful to refer to Cohn’s concept of “discordant narration,” by which she means an account by a voice that seems unfit for the tale that is being told. In discordant narration, the reader experiences a sense of clash between a narrator’s gnomic and/or adjectival judgments and the story he or she tells, such as when Nelly Dean’s bitter judgments of Cathy and Heathcliff contrast with the unearthly quality of their love depicted in *Wuthering Heights* (Cohn 2000, 307–8). Similarly, Fiammetta’s narration can be said to clash with the tale as a whole, yet not merely in the sense that her overstrung evaluations guilelessly/arrogantly elevate what is quite trite, but more in the sense that it *creates a discordance with the consolatory function Fiammetta blatantly assigns to her book, and simultaneously, cuts the ground from under her narrative as a plea for vindication*. By making Fiammetta set herself up, with one hand, as a model to be looked upon by her readers in their time of need, and sequester herself away with the other in the solitude of her unrepeatable love, Boccaccio presents in the *Elegia* an attempt to educate as well as vindicate, which ends up falling apart on both accounts through the annihilation of the common experiential ground it uses as a central strategy. Out of her own mouth, Fiammetta takes away the chance of both consolation based on identification and exoneration based on a shared understanding of what kind of state of mind led her into the extramarital affair. If this is no ordinary love and no ordinary experience, how could anyone ever presume to understand, to look upon Fiammetta with mercy and to draw consolation from her pain? Hence, the explicit presence of the narratee in the *Elegia* serves to construct an image of an unsuccessful ethos-building.

Boccaccio’s farewells to ancient literature which no longer manages to fulfil “one of poetry’s highest tasks” of bringing relief to “modern readers in pain” (Brody 2013, 182). I find this interpretation of Fiammetta’s discourse as a kind of metaphorical requiem for the closing world highly appealing, but I also think that her professed singularity serves more immediate, text-internal purposes as well.

Next, I will look at another discordance-generating feature, the muddling of temporal relations and its relation to ethos, which clashes with the book's function as a cautionary tale.

9.2 The Persistence of Sin

As seen in the constant pairing of grammatical tenses in many of the excerpts quoted throughout this chapter, Fiammetta's narration tends to obliterate the difference between her past and present experience (e.g. "I burned, and still burn; and I tended, and still tend, this fire . . ."; "e arsi e ardo, e servai e servo . . . il preso fuoco").¹²⁸ The coalescence of different time levels is further underlined in the scene where Fiammetta relates the crushing disappointment she felt at finding the yard empty when answering her lover's imaginary knocks at the door:

- [13] Ma poi che la finestra aperta aveva, e riguardata la porta, gli occhi del conosciuto inganno mi faceano piú certa . . . E nel modo usato alle lagrime ritornando, miseramente piango, e isforzandomi poi di dare alla mente riposo con gli occhi chiusi allettando gli umidi sonni, tra me médesima in cotal guisa gli chiamo:
"O Sonno, piacevolissima quiete di tutte le cose, e degli animi vera pace . . ." . . . Egli, piú pietoso che alcuno altro iddio a cui io porga prieghi, avvegna che indugio ponga alla grazia chiesta da' prieghi miei, pure dopo lungo spazio, quasi piú a servirmi costretto che volonterosamente, pigro viene, e senza dire alcuna cosa, non avvedendomene io, sottentra al lasso capo, il quale di lui bisognoso, quello volonterosamente pigliando, tutto in lui si ravvolge.
Non viene, posto che il sonno venga, però in me la disiata pace, anzi, in luogo de' pensieri e delle lagrime, mille visioni piene d'infinite paure mi spaventano. Io non credo che niuna furia rimanga nella città di Dite, che in diversi modi e terribili già piú volte mostrata non mi si sia, diversi mali minacciando, e spesso col loro orribile aspetto li miei sonni rotti . . . (*Elegia*, 92–4)

But after I had opened the window and looked out of the door, my eyes made me more certain of what I knew already to be a deception . . . And I keep weeping miserably as I return to my usual tears, but then, in an effort to give my mind a rest, I close my eyes, inviting moist dreams, and calling sleep to invade me, as follows:

"O Sleep, you are of all things the most pleasant rest and the true serenity of the mind . . ."
. . . Sleep, who is more compassionate than any other god to whom I pray, is slow in granting the grace for which I beg, but after a long while he comes

¹²⁸ Guérin (2019) discusses the cyclical and "anti-narrative" quality of Fiammetta's discourse.

lazily, as if he were forced rather than willing to serve me, and, without saying a word or giving me warning, creeps into my tired head, which out of need eagerly grabs on to him and entirely wraps itself up in him.

But while Sleep sometimes comes, the much desired Peace keeps away, and instead of thoughts and tears, a thousand visions full of countless fears frighten me. I believe that there is no other kind of Fury in the city of Dis who has not already appeared to me in various and terrible guises, threatening me with different misfortunes, and such Furies interrupted my sleep with their hideous appearance . . . (*EMF*, 70–1)

Temporarily switching from the past into the present tense to describe a bygone event, the passage uses the historical present tense which traditionally serves as a rhetorical intensifier in the style of *enargeia*: it is not to be taken literally, and there is typically no ambiguity about the pastness of the event it relates, since the embedded present tense emerges from and promptly returns to retrospective narration (Cohn 1999, 98–9). However, although [13] shifts back to the past tense after the brief excursion into the present, the exact time frame for the event nonetheless remains uncertain: do the auditory hallucinations and the invocation to sleep take place in the remembered past or in the present of the writing? Certainly, Fiammetta remarks elsewhere that she suffers from chronic insomnia even as she writes (see Example [1]), which further complicates the attempt to determine the temporal placement of [13], since we cannot even decide whether it describes a singular or repetitive event.¹²⁹

A similar iterative effect is observed in the catalogue of ancient misfortunes with which Fiammetta concludes her book, as her tale reaches the present time of narration. The catalogue consists of a string of recollections linked together by adverbial phrases of time –

Ecuba *appresso* vegnente nella mia mente, oltre modo mi pare dolorosa . . .
(*Elegia*, 190; emphasis added)

Hecuba, who comes *next* to mind, seems to me exceedingly sorrowful . . .
(*EMF*, 149; emphasis added)

Dietro a questa, così piena di tristizia come fu, mi si para Cornelia . . . (*Elegia*, 192; emphasis added)

¹²⁹ The strategy is perhaps modelled after Ovid's ambiguous use of the historical present tense, which tends to leave the reader undecided between a specific and eternal reading (Kroon 2007, 78–81).

After Sophonisba the sad Cornelia appears before me . . . (EMF, 150; emphasis added)

Poi, in me rivolgendo i pensieri della misera Tisbe guardante davanti da sé il suo amante pieno di sangue, e ancora con poca vita palpitante, quelli e le sue lagrime sento . . . (Elegia, 184–85; emphasis added)

Then, as I turn over in my mind the thought of that poor Thisbe when she saw her lover before her, drenched in blood and pulsing with little life, I feel her thoughts and her tears . . . (EMF, 144; emphasis added)

– with a particular memory giving rise to another through free association:

[14] Vengonmi ancora nella mente talvolta le pietose lagrime di Licurgo e della sua casa, meritamente avute del morto Archemoro, *e con queste quelle della dolente Atalanta* madre di Partenopeo morto ne’ tehani campi; e sì proprie a me con li loro effetti s’accostano e sì mi si fanno conoscere, che appena più sapere le potrei, se io non le provassi, come già da me un’altra volta provate furono. (Elegia, 195; emphasis and underlining added)

I also remember the sorrowful tears of Lycurgus and of his household, shed with good reason for the death of Archemorus, *and they make me think of the tears of sad Atalanta*, mother of Parthenopaeus, who was killed in the Theban battlefield, and their effect is so touching and I experience them in such a way that I could hardly feel them more deeply if I shed them myself, as I have already done before. (EMF, 153; emphasis added)

Unfortunately, the translation skips the “talvolta” (“at times”) in the first line, thus obscuring how this adverb of frequency distorts the straightforward sequential progression of the narration (a more literal translation would be: “At times, the sad tears of Lycurgus and his household also come to my mind”). Such an effect is created also by the previously quoted “Ricordami *alcuna volta* avere letti li franceschi romanzi, a’ quali se fede alcuna si puote attribuire, Tristano e Isotta oltre ad ogni altro amante essersi amati” (Elegia, 186; “*At times* I remember reading French romances in which, if they can be trusted, Tristan and Iseult loved one another more than any other lovers did . . .”, EMF, 145; emphases added). Whereas “appresso,” “dietro a questa” and “poi” indicate that the names and fates of the women occur to Fiammetta one by one as she writes, the “talvolta” and “alcuna volta” point to an indefinable point in time, suggesting the repetition and return of thoughts running in aimless circles.

Here, as well as in [13], Fiammetta's narration thus vacillates between establishing a specific moment of writing and capturing a sense of her melancholy existence at large, which has the effect of leaving us undecided whether we are reading a written record or following a train of thought (that is to say, whether the dominant cognitive storytelling frame is more that of "telling" or "experiencing"). In other words, the technique gives the impression of a temporary dissolution of the communicative frame: turning inward into the seclusion of the narrator's mind, Fiammetta's discourse begins to lose some of its narrative function as a tale self-consciously addressed to *gentili donne*, verging instead on autonomous monologue. Cohn (1978, 225) defines autonomous monologue as "a discourse addressed to no one, a gratuitous verbal agitation without communicative aim", which cancels out the text's realistic motivation (e.g. the text presenting itself as a written memoir) and creates the illusion of rendering "an unrolling thought" (ibid. 175). It often consists of verbs of internal activity and emotive syntax (exclamations, interrogatives, ellipses) combined with a freely associative logic and the use of various tenses, capturing a mind that turbulently oscillates "between memories and projects, the real and the potential, the specific and the general" (ibid. 227). Through grammatical and lexical manipulation, the communicative function and the time-bound materiality of Fiammetta's writing seems to momentarily give way to a direct view into the anti-narrative monotony of a suffering mind, indeed into the kind of "adjournment *sine die*" which Segre attributes to the exclamations and interrogations pervading Fiammetta's catalogue, reading into them a "weariness which resembles despair" (1979, 92). In this way, the *Elegia* contributes to the historical transition towards the portrayal of inside views, which Lawrence Lipking (1988) sees as originating with the classical poetry of abandoned women. Whereas epic poems and epic heroes achieve closure after a series of events that the plot brings into a conclusion, the suffering of the abandoned women exchanges the Aristotelian rule of action for a continuous state of inconclusion (ibid. 3).

Although a case can be made that the momentary resemblance of Fiammetta's written memoir to autonomous monologue, liberating the discourse from its communicative purpose and seeking to imitate mental weariness and stagnation in a textual form, is motivated by an interest in the workings of Fiammetta's psyche in itself, there is also another, more practical side to the temporal distortions that is related to persuasion and the failure to persuade. In depicting a mind permanently locked in the presentness of the past, they effectively become demonstrations of how to destroy an ethos of instruction. Marina Scordilis Brownlee (1990) has noticed that Fiammetta's narration is filled with contradictory impulses with regard to the

reasons for writing the book. How to be an *exemplum* when she basically writes a “diary” not intended for disclosure, for fear of losing her reputation? (ibid. 60–1) And again, how to be a cautionary *exemplum* when she means for the sin to continue? (ibid. 68) Determined to achieve reunion, Fiammetta announces that she intends to go stalk Panfilo in Florence, on the pretence of a “fictitious vow” (*EMF*, 129; “il vóto fittizio”, *Elegia*, 167) of pilgrimage she explains to her husband she has given to God, and in her closing words encourages her lady readers to say intercessory prayers for the success of this enterprise, or else for her death: “Al quale io priego Iddio, che o per li vostri prieghi, o per li miei, sopra quello salutevole acqua mandi, o con trista morte di me, o con lieta tornata di Panfilo” (*Elegia*, 198; “I pray to God that by either your prayers or by my own, He may quench this fire with soothing water through either my own death or the happy return of Panfilo”, *EMF*, 155).

This openly stated persistence in sin is reinforced by the shift of grammatical tense witnessed in [13], which effectively creates a fusion between the narrating and the experiencing self. Traditionally, fictional autobiography is related in the past tense with the purpose of keeping these two selves apart; the result is what Cohn (1978, 145) calls “dissonant self-narration” by “a lucid narrator turning back on a past self steeped in ignorance, confusion, and delusion.” On the other hand, there is “consonant self-narration,” which is the discourse by a narrator who closely identifies with his or her earlier self, exhibiting no cognitive privilege and failing to evaluate past experiences from an enlightened point of view (Cohn 1978, 155). Although the *Elegia* has been interpreted as a *bildungsroman* by a woman exploring her past undertakings from a distance with an ironic smirk on her lips (Causa-Steindler 1990, xix), the latter mode comes much closer to depicting Boccaccio’s technique which constantly suggests that there is no real gap between Fiammetta’s narrating and experiencing self. While Fiammetta does wordily express penitence for her adultery, she is intent on fostering her pain, and instead of examining her past actions with genuine, corrective hindsight, the sententious evaluations prompted by her recollections of her behaviour seem rather to justify why she should keep on existing in the state of sin:

[15] Ohimè misera! quanto male per me nel mondo venne sì fatto giorno! Ohimè! quanto di noia e d’angoscia sarebbe da me lontana, se in tenebre si fosse mutato sì fatto giorno! Ohimè misera! quanto fu al mio onore nemico sì fatto giorno! Ma che? Le preterite cose mal fatte, si possono molto più agevolmente biasimare che emendare. (*Elegia*, 14)

Alas, miserable me, how much harm came into the world because of me on such a day! Alas, how much trouble and anguish I could have avoided if that

day had been changed into night! Alas, miserable me, how hostile was that day to my virtue! But after all, things badly done in the past can be more easily regretted than corrected. (*EMF*, 9)

Like Dido, who despite being coldly discarded by Aeneas, claims to love him all the more once her lamentation is over,¹³⁰ Fiammetta ends her tale in a state of amorous obsession which has, if anything, grown worse over the course of her writing; she is, as Robert Hollander puts it, a “patient who refuses to be cured” (1977, 46). But she is also a teacher who fails to teach. The *Elegia* blends past and present, and minimises the distance between the narrating and the experiencing self, in order to explore the self-destructing discourse brought about by this paradoxical equation. As the oratorical treatises advise, it is important to underline the persistence of difficulties when seeking vindication, but at the same time this seems to work against Fiammetta, since, as stated, the intention to persist in sin and suffering looks awkward against the cautionary function she gives her tale, regarding the deceitfulness of young men: how could she expect to have any authority over the matter and inspire her readers to take heed of the lesson, when she so garishly undermines her own ethos?

These are questions that touch more generally on the relationship between *auctor* and *auctoritas* in the Middle Ages. Since in the medieval context, the *auctor* was, as Minnis writes, not merely a writer, but an authority worthy of belief, “an ‘immoral author’ was therefore an oxymoron” (2008, xiv), and in biblical exegesis, there was some struggle over how to reconcile the moral fallibility of scriptural *auctores*, such as the adulterous David and the womanising Solomon, with their authority (ibid. 8). In his commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274) pondered whether the work of Solomon could be said to possess any authority, and concluded that it could, since the epilogue of Ecclesiastes clearly demonstrates that when Solomon wrote the text he was no longer living in a state of sin, but in a state of repentance (ibid.; see also Minnis 1984/2010, 110–11). Another oxymoron was the concept of female authority: “Because of her natural and legal inferiority, and possession of the wrong type of body, woman could scarcely ever be an *auctrix* (“authoress”)” (Minnis 2008, 23): one could be cured from immorality, but not from being born a woman (ibid. 246). Being a woman and a sinner, Fiammetta is doubly fallible as the teller of a cautionary tale that is intended to provide guidance and advice. If, as Bonaventure indicates, a true penitent could achieve *auctoritas* despite

¹³⁰ “[N]on tamen Aeneam, quamvis male cogitat, odi / sed queror infidum quæstaque peius amo” (*Heroides*, VIII. 29–30.) “But no matter how bad he might think / I am, I can never say that I hate him . . . When my complaint has been said, I love him more” (Ovid 1990/2004, 59).

his or her previous sins, then Fiammetta lags far behind in gaining hers. What she perhaps wins in her audience's goodwill and pity by underlining the continuance of her difficulties, she loses in pedagogical effectiveness: her *exemplum* is reduced to hollow virtue signalling, in the classic vein of *do as I say, not as I do* (cf. Matt. 23:3).

From all this it becomes clear that the point of the narrative strategies establishing consonance between Fiammetta's past and present selves is not (only) to illustrate how her psychology might affect the form of her self-narration (as in the modern novel it might well be, cf. Cohn 1978, 157, 160), but to provide an example, indeed a cautionary one, on how to undermine one's ethos. This stands also for the other two functions of Fiammetta's tale, the consolatory and the exculpatory. In sum, Fiammetta *seems to select all the wrong aspects* for the construction of an ethos that would convince her readers and consequently trigger in them sentiments of mercy and identification: by alternately bringing the narratee closer through appealing to a communal experience and then again alienating the narratee through insisting on experiential singularity, and by openly anticipating the renewal of sin, Fiammetta's text creates a discordance between function and ethos. What may look like the bloated visions of a pathological misreader, or evocative descriptions of the inertia of heartbreak, must *also* be viewed as rhetorical and pedagogical knots that destabilise the narrator's moral authority, weak to begin with due to her gender, as part of a thought experiment on how one might character assassinate oneself through one's own rhetoric.

In this way, by bringing attention to ethos-building as situated creation of identity, the *Elegia* may help us see more clearly how also narratorial unreliability, as it is understood in the modern narratological context, always depends upon author's choices: it is the result of the novelist selecting the appropriate schematic signals, many of them inherited from classical rhetoric, that we have come to interpret as markers of problematic point of view, and which "reveal" the narrator's "character" according to the requirements of the narrative situation that we have come to recognise as "unreliable narration." Thus, in addition to being excessive and overly forthcoming in their reports (as seen above in Section 8.2), unreliable narrators, in a certain sense, tend to work against themselves by seemingly choosing on their own those schematic elements that only end up revealing their shortcomings. Understanding unreliable narration in terms of conventional creation of situation-appropriate ethos may cause one to question the subtleness of the procedure; while first-person narration is, in many ways, an "art of indirection," as Phelan puts it, seeking to give the impression that the telling is entirely motivated by the character's intentions and aims (2005, 1; cf. also 2007b, 204), we might nonetheless ask whether

narratorial unreliability is not in fact a form that by necessity reveals the hand of the author behind the mind that it *too* carefully and selectively portrays, thus highlighting the unnaturalness and artificiality of the representation. From this point of view, narratorial unreliability shows itself, once again, as a feature of author's craft, in addition to being a peek into an individual psyche, or a vehicle for social critique reflecting, for instance, the growing scepticism about epistemological certainty that according to Zerweck was one of the main impetuses for the increasing proliferation of literary unreliability in the late Victorian period (2001, 161–62).

10 Prescriptions

Unreliable narrators seek to justify themselves and their worldview. A classic instance is the butler in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, who is repeatedly seen to employ phrases like "Let me make perfectly clear," coupled with addressee-oriented expressions such as "you will perhaps understand" (Wall 1994, 24; Nünning 1997, 97). In Kathleen Wall's view, it is through such "verbal patterns or tics" (ibid. 23), of which the butler himself seems unconscious, that the implied author conveys the idea of Stevens's narrative as a "defense of his life and the values that have shaped it" (ibid. 24). For Nünning, such frequently occurring addressee-oriented expressions are one of the most pivotal signals of unreliable narration (1997, 84; 1999, 65; 2005, 103), precisely because they create an impression of the narrator seeking to defend a controversial standpoint.

There are, of course, other and more varied ways in which a defensive and justificatory effect can be achieved in narrative. The remainder of this chapter explores these aspects of Fiammetta's discourse, focusing on how the text of the *Elegia* counterbalances a narratological reading of Fiammetta's narration as a justification of a questionable worldview with a self-conscious exercise on technical *amplificatio* and flawed rhetoric. Besides questioning the possibility of exemplary identification through the sporadic closing and widening of the distance between the narrator and the narratee, there is in Fiammetta's ethos-building another knot concerned with the relationship she establishes with her *pietose donne*: the prescriptive voice that she employs in her teaching.

10.1 Having the Final Word

10.1.1 Dido at the Tournament: Hypothetical Focalisation and Intermental Thought

Building on the narratological concept of focalisation (Genette 1972/1980), David Herman (1994) has discussed such moments in narrative discourse when the storyworld seems to be observed from a *hypothetical* point of view: “hypothetical focalization . . . entails the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived – if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue” (ibid. 231). Herman distinguishes between *direct* and *indirect* forms of hypothetical focalisation. The first category “entails explicit mention of a counterfactual observer or witness,” whereas the second category covers instances which invite the reader to “infer the focalizing activity of a merely hypothetical onlooker” (ibid. 237). He also makes a further distinction between *strong* and *weak* forms of hypothetical focalisation. In the strong form, the focaliser and the act of focalisation are both virtual, unlike in the weak form, where virtual acts of focalisation are ascribed to characters actualised in the storyworld (ibid. 239).

We seem to find a stretch of direct weak hypothetical focalisation in Fiammetta’s description of the splendidly dressed ladies watching the spring tournament in Naples:

[16] Né credo che piú nobile o ricca cosa fosse a riguardare le nuore di Priamo con l’altre frigie donne, qualora piú ornate davanti al suocero loro a festeggiare s’adunavano, che sono in piú luoghi della nostra città le nostre cittadine a vedere; le quali poi che alli teatri in grandissima quantità radunate si veggono, ciascuna quanto il suo potere si stende dimostrandosi bella, non dubito che *qualunque forestiere intendente sopravvenisse, considerate le contenenze altiere, li costumi notabili, gli ornamenti piuttosto reali che convenevoli ad altre donne, non giudicasse noi non donne moderne, ma di quelle antiche magnifiche essere al mondo tornate: quella, per alterezza, dicendo Semiramis simigliare; quell’altra, agli ornamenti guardando, Cleopatrùs si crederebbe; l’altra, considerata la sua vaghezza, sarebbe creduta Elena; e alcuna, gli atti suoi bene mirando, in niente si direbbe dissimigliare a Didone.* (Elegia, 112; emphasis added)

And I do not believe that it was a nobler or richer experience to look at Priam’s daughters-in-law with the other Trojan women whenever they gathered before their father-in-law all bedecked with jewels for a celebration than to watch the local ladies in several parts of our city; and when they are

seen assembled in large numbers at the theaters, each one displaying herself as beautifully as she possibly can, I have no doubt *that if any discerning stranger were to arrive and take into account the proud manners, the remarkable costumes, the ornaments more fitting for queens than for other women, he would think us not modern women but some of those magnificent ancient ones returned into the world. One, he would say, resembles Semiramis for her haughty bearing; another would be believed to be Cleopatra, to judge from her jewels; another could be seen as Helen, for her beauty; and still another be said to be in no way different from Dido, if one carefully observed her demeanor.* (EMF, 85; emphasis added)

The explicitly mentioned “discerning stranger” (“forestiere intendente”) is imagined as an embodied presence among the excited spectators, observing and taking into account (“considerate le contenenze altiere . . . guardando . . . bene mirando . . .”) the gowns, the jewellery and the general bearing of the women. Indicating a specific vantage point, the demonstrative pronouns “quella” and “quell'altra,” closely following one another, are suggestive of a gaze skipping around the field, perhaps even of the act of pointing the women out one by one. Under speculation is not only what this spectator would perceive, but also how he or she would interpret these perceptions, as indicated by the subjunctive and the conditional mood of the verbs (“giudicasse . . . si crederebbe . . . sarebbe creduta . . . si direbbe . . .”).

For Herman, hypothetical focalisation is a strategy that marks “diegetic indecision” (1994, 232): “doubt attaches now to the status of narrative agents (are they there or not?), now to that of their thoughts and behavior (do they do/think/perceive that or not?), now to that of their circumstances (is their world like that or not?)” (ibid. 246) By putting the “actual in the service of the virtual,” hypothetically focalised descriptions question the possibility of determining our relationship to the narrated world, thus appearing as “the formal correlative of scepticism, detachment, even paranoia” (ibid. 245). This is especially the case in the (post)-modern texts by such writers as Poe, Kafka and A.S. Byatt, to whom Herman refers, but he also notes that in realistic works by, for instance, Charlotte Brontë and William Makepeace Thackeray, hypothetical focalisation seems to perform an opposite function. Instead of compromising epistemological certitude, the momentary departures into the virtual serve to ultimately solidify, in an edifying manner, that which is known; they make the reader “pass through salutary doubts to achieve greater certainties” (ibid.). Hypothetical focalisation can therefore be seen, as Herman suggests, as a genre-defining feature which, in keeping with the Sternbergian Proteus Principle, can assume different functions depending on the context in which it is set.

In the fourteenth-century *Elegia*, epistemological indecision is not the primary framework with which to approach the device of hypothetical focalisation. Rather, I propose that *hypothetical focalisation serves in this work the construction of a manipulative narrator-narratee relationship* between Fiammetta and the *gentili donne* to whom she addresses her book. I hasten to add that questions of knowledge and truth do pertain to this relationship – just not in the sense of hypotheticality correlating with the shaking or reinforcing of the foundations of readers’ beliefs about reality, but rather in the sense of what Fiammetta as the author-narrator of her own tale is determined to make her narratee believe. Herman (1994, 242) observes that interior monologue, as a form that records inner thought, is the natural habitat of hypothesis, reflecting the way in which human beings engage in counterfactual speculation in their actual inner lives. In [16], even if Fiammetta is paraphrasing the thoughts of a human being not actually existing in her world, she is careful to modify her statements with “Né credo che” (“And I do not believe that”) and “non dubito che” (“I have no doubt that”), apparently to underscore that her descriptions of the stranger’s observations and judgments are to be taken not as facts but as propositions by someone who, as nature demands, must have only restricted access to other people’s thoughts and feelings. Yet despite these presumed concessions to natural limitations, it should be noted that the entire scene in which [16] is embedded strives towards establishing an objective perspective on the storyworld. Reminiscent of omniscient narration, Fiammetta offers a spatiotemporally unrestricted, panoramic view of the city’s festivities and the participants’ actions:

[17] Suole adunque essere questa a noi consuetudine antica che, poi che i guazzosi tempi del verno sono trapassati e la primavera con li fiori e con la nuova erba ha al mondo rendute le sue perdute bellezze, essendo con questo li giovaneschi animi per la qualità del tempo raccesi e piú che l’usato pronti a dimostrare li loro disii, di convocare li dí piú solenni alle logge de’ cavalieri le nobili donne, le quali, ornate delle loro gioie piú care, quivi s’adunano. . . . Quivi tra cotanta e cosí nobile compagnia non lungamente si siede né vi si tace, né mormora; ma stanti gli antichi uomini a riguardare, li chiari giovini, prese le donne per le delicate mani, danzando, con altissime voci cantano i loro amori: e in cotal guise con quante maniere di gioia si possono divisare, la calda parte del giorno trapassano. E poi che ‘l sole ha cominciato a dare piú tiepidi li suoi raggi si veggono quivi venire gli onorevoli precipi del nostro Ausonico regno in quell’abito, che alla loro magnificenza si richiede; li quali, poi che alquanto hanno mirato e le bellezze delle donne e le loro danze, quasi con tutti li giovini cosí cavalieri come donzelli partendosi, dopo non lungo spazio in abito tutto al primo contrario con grandissima comitiva ritornano. (*Elegia*, 112–13)

So when the rainy winter days are over and spring has restored its lost beauty to the world with flowers and green grass, it is an ancient tradition on the most important holidays to gather together the noble ladies at the knights' quarters, where they all come wearing their most precious jewels, because youthful minds are excited by the character of the season and more than ever ready to express their desires. . . . Here, among such a large and noble company, one does not sit or keep silent or whisper for long; rather, as the older men look on, the bright young men take the ladies by their delicate hands and sing aloud of their feelings of love as they dance, and in this manner and in as many joyful ways as can be imagined, they spend the hot part of the day. When the sun's rays begin to grow cool, one can see the honorable princes of our Ausonian kingdom arrive, clad as magnificently as their rank requires, and after having admired the charms of the ladies as well as their dances, they leave with nearly all their young men, knights as well as pages, and return shortly thereafter with a very large following, wearing costumes entirely different from what they had worn before. (*EMF*, 85–86)

Fiammetta refers to the “noble ladies” (“le nobili donne”) here as well as in [16] (“the local ladies” – “le nostre cittadine”) in the third person plural (“*they* all come wearing their most precious jewels . . . *their* delicate hands . . . *they* dance . . .”), as if she herself were not part of the events taking place *quivi*, over there. She also uses the passive construction “si veggono” in both excerpts: “si veggono quivi venire gli onorevoli principi del nostro Ausonico regno” (“*one can see* the honorable princes of our Ausonian kingdom arrive”); “le quali poi che alli teatri in grandissima quantità radunate si veggono” (“*when they are seen* assembled in large numbers at the theaters”).

Alan Palmer sees the use of the passive voice as one strategy for constructing intermental thought, and especially large-scale intermental thought, in novelistic discourse. Intermental thought “is joint, group, shared, or collective, as opposed to *intramental*, or individual or private thought” (2010, 41), and it is exercised in novels by units of varied sizes over varied periods of time. According to Palmer’s typology (*ibid.* 46–48), what separates “intermental encounters” and “small intermental units” (such as marriages, friendships, nuclear families) from “medium-sized” (work colleagues, neighbourhoods) and “large intermental units” (for instance, towns) is that in the latter two cases “the emphasis is less on individuals knowing what another person is thinking, and more on people thinking the same way,” which, in turn, tends to “produce a collective opinion or consensus view on a particular topic” (*ibid.* 48). Analysing nineteenth-century novels, Palmer finds that intermental units frequently feature spokespersons voicing the essence of the unit’s attitudes and beliefs (*ibid.* 85–87).

These insights prove useful in determining the effects of [16] and [17], where the passive voice seems to construct a kind of objective view of the festive scenes

irrespective of Fiammetta's personal opinion. Quantitative statements such as “cotanta e così nobile compagnia” (“large and noble company”) and “alli teatri in grandissima quantità radunate” (“assembled in large numbers at the theaters”) suggest the presence of a large number of people attending the events all over Naples (“in più luoghi della nostra città” – “in several parts of our city”), with the passive construction “si veggono” giving the idea of a collective perception of the ladies, knights and princes. Furthermore, the hypothetical observer, singled out from the crowd in [16], can be understood to serve as a mouthpiece for the spectators' judgment of the women, since towards the end of the section the shift into the passive voice detaches these judgments from the stranger's particular point of view to indicate the perceptions of *anyone* present in the scene: “Cleopatràs si crederebbe” – “another would be believed to be Cleopatra”; “l'altra . . . sarebbe creduta Elena” – “another could be seen as Helen”; “e alcuna, gli atti suoi bene mirando, in niente si direbbe dissimigliare a Didone” – “and still another be said to be in no way different from Dido, if one carefully observed her demeanor.”¹³¹

These findings are in line with Daniel Hostert's (2015) suggestion that hypothetical focalisation tends to be used in early modern narrative to portray experiences that are collective. Hostert's analysis of “hypothetical intermental focalization” (ibid. 176) in Thomas Dekker's *The Wonderful Year* (1603) demonstrates that the presence of a merely hypothetical rather than an “ordinary, singular (actual) focalizer” (ibid.) serves to convey more effectively the scope and devastation of the historical plague, since in this case hypothetical focalisation, shifting perception from intra- to intermental, has less to do with speculating as to whether anyone perceived that which the hypothetical focaliser did, than with rendering it more certain that everybody would perceive it (ibid. 175; emphases original). Similarly, in Robert Greene's *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* (1591), hypotheticality serves to illustrate not one specific encounter between a specific thief and a specific victim, but a string of similar activities taking place all the time all over London (ibid. 179).

The term “hypothetical intermental focalisation” could likewise be applied to [16], where it is linked to Fiammetta's persuasive goals regarding her own view of herself as a Dido-like sufferer. While the minimising of Fiammetta's subjective perspective in the construction of the scene through the grammatical means described above seems to indicate that she is not directly involved in the festivities,

¹³¹ According to the *Moden Italian Grammar*, the passive *si impersonale* construction expressing objectivity and impersonality has instructional connotations. Its subject corresponds to the English indeterminate subject “one,” with an indication of “everyone” (Proudfoot and Cardo 1997/2013, 30, 316).

she nonetheless *also* gives us to understand that she is, in fact, one of the women subjected to the crowd's evaluative gaze. This is done very surreptitiously, almost in passing, as the third-person plural is momentarily replaced by the first-person plural in the description of the hypothetical observer's – and thus, eventually, *everyone's* – thoughts: “non giudicasse *noi* non donne moderne, ma di quelle antiche magnifiche essere al mondo tornate” (“he would think *us* not modern women but some of those magnificent ancient ones returned into the world”). As already mentioned on several occasions, Dido is the tragic character with whom Fiammetta identifies the most; consequently, the *alcuna* seen to resemble Dido must be Fiammetta herself. This is further underlined by the fact that it is the *atti* – the “demeanor” or the conduct – of this lady, instead of her looks or dress, that give occasion to the Dido comparison. In the Middle Ages, Dido held a special place as the emblem of heartbreak and abandonment, and not least because Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* had admitted to having wept in compassion over Dido's fate in Vergil's *Aeneid* (Franklin 2006, 157). Fiammetta in her catalogue of ancient examples paraphrases Vergil's canonical version of the tale, focusing on the lone figure of the abandoned queen watching the receding fleet of Aeneas's ships: “Oh quanto senza comparazione mi si mostra miserevole, mirando lei riguardante il mare pieno di legni del fuggente amante!” (*Elegia*, 185; “How incomparably miserable she appears to me, as I see her looking at the sea crowded with the ships of her fleeing lover!”, *EMF*, 144).¹³² Describing herself, at various turns in her narrative, disconsolate among the celebrating crowds, Fiammetta reduplicates the powerful image of loneliness and exclusion Vergil creates by juxtaposing Dido's solitude with the dynamic progression of the fully-manned ships. Even though Fiammetta does her best to project a cheerful attitude at the many festivities to which she has been dragged against her will, she does not quite manage to hide her suffering which she constantly portrays as being observed from other people's perspective:

[18a] [N]on altramente che in una sola maniera mi videro, cioè con viso infinto, qual io poteva, ad allegrezza, e con l'animo al tutto disposto a dolersi . . . (*Elegia*, 102)

¹³² “Quis tibi tum, Dido, cernenti talia sensus, / quosve dabas gemitus, cum litora fervere late / prospiceres arce ex summa totumque videres / misceri ante oculos tantis clamoribus aequor!” (*Aeneid*, IV.408–11). “What feelings were thine then, Dido, to see such a sight, / What sighs didst thou utter, as thou from the citadel's height / Didst watch the widespread stir on the shore, didst view / The whole of the sea's surface, in front of thine eyes, / A busy confusion of men, an uproar of shouting!” (Virgil 2002/2004, 85).

I was perceived in only one way, namely, with a face feigning cheerfulness as much as possible, and with a heart entirely prone to lamentations . . .
(*EMF*, 77)

[18b] Certi ve n'erano di piú profondo conoscimento, il che mi dolea, li quali dopo lungo parlare dicevano: - La palidezza di questa giovine dà segnali d'innamorato cuore. E quale infermità mai alcuno assottiglia, come fa il troppo fervente amore? Veramente ella ama, e se cosí è, crudele è colui che a lei è di si fatta noia cagione, per la quale essa cosí s'assottigli. (*Elegia*, 103)

There were others with keener intuition who, unfortunately for me, after lengthy conversations said: "This young woman's pallor is a sign of a heart in love. What illness makes one so extremely thin except too passionate a love? She must really be in love, and if it is so, the one who causes her the kind of trouble that makes her so thin is cruel." (*EMF*, 78)

The above excerpts, presenting a group of people scrutinising Fiammetta's actions and demeanour, are particularised elaborations of the idea expressed in [16] in a more circuitous way through the collective perspective represented by the hypothetical stranger. Portraying herself here, in the eyes of others, as a lone figure whose marked suffering is recognised by them as being caused by the indifference of a cruel lover, and explicitly stating her strong identification with Dido elsewhere in the book, Fiammetta invites the reader to draw the conclusion that the lady in the tournament collectively judged to be "in no way different from Dido" ("in niente . . . dissimigliare a Didone") is herself.

What these observations indicate, then, is that hypothetical focalisation becomes in the *Elegia* less a formal representative of epistemological subversion than a manipulative rhetorical strategy employed by Fiammetta to establish interpretative authority over her narratee. Hence, the mitigating phrases "Né credo che" and "non dubito che," with their apparently natural epistemological restrictions, are shown in a different light: instead of introducing free speculation about what a stranger might perceive, they bring in *facts* about the storyworld and the protagonist, facts as defined by Fiammetta the author-narrator. When she says she does not doubt a discerning stranger – in other words, everyone – would recognise Dido among the women, she literally means she does not doubt that a discerning stranger would recognise Dido among the women. We seem to have here the classic justifications of unreliable narrators, augmented by the subtle creation of objective consensus, except that Fiammetta's narration is less an unconscious justification of a worldview than it is a

conscious attempt to *enforce* this worldview upon the narratee.¹³³ By putting forth the impression of a judgment shared by *everyone*, hypothetical focalisation serves, together with the related use of the passive voice, to prescribe a reading of the text authorised by Fiammetta, a reading which acknowledges that her experience is on a par with the tragedy of Dido which, moreover, suggests itself to be the one true reading of Fiammetta's book.

10.1.2 Ruling Out Dissenters: The Traitor Narrator

The hypothetical discerning stranger is just one concrete instrument in the coercive process by which Fiammetta extinguishes alternative perspectives in favour of a fixed interpretation determined by herself. Another scene, a segment of which was quoted in [18b], makes further use of hypotheticality as a prescriptive tool:

[19] [M]anifestamente scorgea molti di quelli, o quasi tutti, in me rimirare alcuna volta e quale una cosa del mio aspetto, e quale un'altra fra sé tacito ragionava, *ma non si, che de loro occulti parlari, o per imaginazione o per udita, non pervenissero gran parte alle mie orecchie. Alcuni l'uno verso l'altro dicevano:*

- Deh, guarda quella giovine, alla cui bellezza nulla ne fu nella nostra città simigliante, e ora vedi quale ella è divenuta! Non miri tu come ella ne' sembianti pare sbigottita, quale che la cagione si sia?

[a] E detto questo, mirandomi con atto umilissimo quasi da compassione delli miei mali compunti, partendosi, me di me lasciavano più che l'usato pietosa. *Altri intra sé dimandavano:* "Deh, è questa donna stata inferma?", *e poi a se medesimi rispondevano:* "Egli mostra di sí, sí è magra tornata' e iscolorita; di che egli è gran peccato, pensando alla sua smarrita bellezza."

Certi ve n'erano di più profondo conoscimento, il che mi dolea, li quali dopo lungo parlare dicevano:

- La palidezza di questa giovine dà segnali d'innamorato cuore. E quale infermità mai alcuno assottiglia, come fa il troppo fervente amore? Veramente ella ama, e se così è, crudele è colui che a lei è di sí fatta noia cagione, per la quale essa così s'assottigli.

[b] Quando questo avvenne, dico che io non potei ritenere alcuno sospiro, veggendo di me molta più pietà in altrui che in colui che ragionevolmente avere la dovia. E dopo li mandati sospiri, con voce tacita pregai per li coloro beni umilmente gl'iddii. E certo egli mi ricorda la mia onestà avere avute tra quelli che così ragionavano tante forze che *alcuni mi scusavano, dicendo:*

¹³³ Brownlee (1990, 68) also notes that Fiammetta seems set on pre-determining reader response in her *envoi*, allowing only for favourable readings. As the present chapter of this study attempts to demonstrate, this kind of coercive rhetoric permeates her entire discourse.

- Cessi Iddio che questo di questa donna si creda, cioè che amore la molesti; ella, più che alcuna altra onesta, mai di ciò non mostrò sembante alcuno, né mai ragionamento nessuno tra gli amanti si poté di suo amore ascoltare: e certo egli non è passione da potere lungamente occultare.

[c] “Ohimè!” diceva io allora fra me medesima “quanto sono costoro lontani alla verità, me innamorata non reputando, perciò che come pazza negli occhi e nelle bocche de’ giovini non metto li miei amori, come molte altre fanno!” (*Elegia*, 103–04; Emphases, underlining and brackets added)

I clearly perceived that many if not all of them sometimes stared at me and wondered silently to themselves about one aspect or another of my appearance, *but in such a way that much of their hidden talk would reach my ears either through imagination or hearsay. And some would say to others*: “Oh look at that young woman; her beauty was without equal in our city; look what she has become now! Don’t you see how bewildered she looks; what could be the reason?” [a] Having said this, they looked at me in a very humble way as if they had been moved by compassion by my misfortunes, and when they departed they left me feeling more sorry for myself than usual. *Others asked themselves*: “For goodness’ sake, has this woman been ill?” *And then they answered themselves*: “It seems to, since she has become so thin and emaciated, and it is a great shame, considering her loss beauty!” *There were others with keener intuition who, unfortunately for me, after lengthy conversations said*: “This young woman’s pallor is a sign of a heart in love. What illness makes one so extremely thin except too passionate a love? She must really be in love, and if it is so, the one who causes her the kind of trouble that makes her so thin is cruel.” [b] When this happened I must say that I could not restrain myself from sighing as I observed more pity for me in others than in the one who should have reasonably felt it, and after giving way to my sighing I humbly and silently prayed to the gods for those people’s well-being. And certainly this reminds that my virtue so impressed those who reasoned in this way that *some of them justified me by saying*: “God forbid that anyone should believe this woman has love troubles; she is more virtuous than any other; she never showed signs, not was any rumor ever heard among lovers about a love affair of hers, and certainly this is not the kind of passion that can be kept hidden for very long.” [c] “Alas,” I said then to myself, “how far from the truth these people are if they believe that I am not in love only because I do not place my love affairs, like a fool, before the eyes and on the lips of young people as many other women do!” (*EMF*, 78; emphases, underlining and brackets added)

The pattern *some would say to others – others asked themselves – there were others who said – some of them said* creates what Palmer (2010, 82–3) would call “intermental rhythm”: the different perspectives on Fiammetta, represented by different groups of people, are chained into a string of diverse perceptions and evaluations as to what is causing Fiammetta’s visible distress. Palmer proposes that the tone of intermental discursive rhythm in narrative tends to be playful and ironic (*ibid.* 82), and he finds the

technique to be motivated in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) by authorial interest in “the messiness or complexity” of collective thinking (ibid. 83). The intermental rhythm in the *Elegia* has different aims, which is why I hesitate to even call it by that designation; rather, I would use the term *ruling out* to describe the function of the technique in [19].

First of all, we cannot be entirely certain whether these statements are actually pronounced and heard in the storyworld (“per uditā,” which is misleadingly translated as “hearsay” in the English edition) or exist only in Fiammetta’s imagination (“per immaginazione”), in which case they would represent mere speculation on how she *might* have been talked about by the people at the party observing her emaciated figure. But, as with the discerning stranger, I do not think that this element of hypotheticality is intended to communicate epistemological doubt interfering with readers’ attempts to construct a coherent storyworld (cf. Herman 1994, 246: “are they there or not . . . do they do/think/perceive that or not”). I would rather suggest that the phrase “per immaginazione” points to the author’s role as a creator of fictions. By modalising the entire scene, by introducing the possibility of viewing the different conversations as projections, as inventions by the writing Fiammetta, it transforms these pieces of conversation into a device of persuasion: in other words, it draws attention to how a set of words, which perhaps were never uttered in the storyworld, are conjured up at a specific moment in order to make a specific rhetorical point. What rhetorical point is that? The answer lies in the groups’ varied reactions.

The group commenting on Fiammetta’s lost beauty only makes her feel sorry for herself [a]. The one concluding that she cannot be in love is met with disdain [c]. Out of the three groups quoted by Fiammetta, it is the one with the “keener intuition” (“di piú profondo conoscimento”), understanding the true reason for her pitiful state and feeling compassion for her, that she responds to with kindness, stating that she prays for these people’s well-being [b]. Significantly, then, it is those who read Fiammetta *correctly*, not only in the sense of discerning the reason for her sadness, but also in the sense of sharing her view of her love affair (as opposed to the final group whose words imply that no virtuous woman enters into a love affair), who receive her blessing in the reciprocally beneficial tale-telling process. In this way, the imagined compassionate reaction by the second group, the one that remains after every other option has been ruled out, can be understood to represent a model attitude to be adopted by the narratee; it is, in other words, a more indirect means of telling the *gentili donne* to pardon Fiammetta for her crime – a plea that she elsewhere

gives directly, in words reminiscent of Dido's rhetoric in the *Heroides*:¹³⁴ "Ma perdonatemi, se penitenzia data al peccatore può, sostenuta, perdono alcuna volta impetrare" (*Elegia*, 32; "But if penance given to and borne by the sinner can sometimes obtain forgiveness, do forgive me", *EMF*, 22).

Whereas [19] points to the correct interpretation in a relatively discreet manner, retaining at least a semblance of choice, Fiammetta's authoritative attitude manifests itself more clearly elsewhere:

[20] *Né a questo s'appicchi alcuna*, dicendo a lei privato il regno, i figliuoli e il marito, e ultimamente la propria persona essere stato, e a me solamente l'amante. Certo io il confesso; ma la fortuna con questo amante trasse ogni felicità, e ciò che forse alla vista degli uomini m'è felice rimasto, è il contrario, però che il marito, le ricchezze, li parenti e l'altre cose tutte mi sono gravissimo peso, e contrarie al mio disio . . . Dunque più gravi le pene mie che alcuna delle predette *meritamente giudico*. (*Elegia*, 190; emphases added)

Do not any of you ladies argue with me by saying that, while I was deprived only of my lover, she [Jocasta] was deprived of her kingdom, sons, husband, and ultimately her own person. Of course I admit this, but with this lover Fortune took away all happiness, and what was left to me may appear happiness in the eyes of men, but is the opposite, because husband, possessions, relatives, and everything else are a heavy burden and contrary to my desire. . . . Therefore, *I correctly judge* my own pains more severe than any of those already mentioned. (*EMF*, 149; emphases added)

The passage is part of the catalogue of misfortunes Fiammetta compiles at the end of her book. A standalone piece embedded into the surrounding narration, the catalogue is an *exemplum* in the term's classical rhetorical sense; as Fiammetta openly states, it is meant to demonstrate once and for all, through a comparative method, the truth of the statement that she is the most sorrowful of all sufferers: "after weighing carefully all aspects of other people's anguish, I judge my own misery to be much greater than that of everyone else; and this has brought me no small glory, since I can say that I alone am the one who has sustained more cruel pains while alive than any other woman" (*EMF*, 142; "secondo il mio giudizio, compensata ogni cosa degli altrui affanni, li miei ogni altri trapassare di gran lunga dilibero; il che a non piccola gloria mi reco, potendo dire che io sola sia colei, che viva abbia sostenute più crudeli pene che alcuna altra", *Elegia*, 182–83). The demonstration follows the pattern *giving the name(s) of the suffering figure(s) – admitting that they did suffer much – stating that their suffering does not compare with that of Fiammetta, and explaining why*. At times, as

¹³⁴ "[S]um tamen admissi tarda pudore mei. / da veniam culpae!" (*Heroides*, VII.104–5). "I am late because I have confessed / my awful crime, I come in shame, forgive me" (Ovid 1990/2004, 61).

seen above, the explanations acquire a somewhat blunt and imperative tone that, to borrow Smarr's characterisation of Fiammetta's discourse in total, seems "more monumental than persuasive" (1986, 146). Besides blocking resistance and underlining the correctness of her own vision ("meritamente giudico" – "I correctly judge"), as she does in [20], the catalogue consists of Fiammetta replacing erroneous assumptions with what she presents as facts (that is, the superiority of her own suffering) to be adopted by everyone:

[21] *Sono ancora molti che crederebbero Cleopatras reina d'Egitto pena intollerabile e oltre alla mia assai maggiore avere sofferta, però che prima veggendosi col fratello insieme regnante e di ricchezza abbondante, e da questo in prigione messa, senza modo si crede dolente . . . Oltre a ciò, se ella di Cesare rimase sconsolata nel suo partire, sarebbero, chi non sapesse il vero, di quelli che crederebbero ciò esserle doluto; ma egli non fu così . . .* (*Elegia*, 193; emphases added)

There are also many people who would believe that the afflictions of Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, were intolerable and that her suffering was much greater than mine. Because she first saw herself riding along with her brother and abounding in riches and then was made a prisoner by him, it is thought that she was extremely unhappy . . . There are also many people who not knowing the truth might believe that being left disconsolate at Caesar's departure was painful to her, but it was not so . . ." (*EMF*, 151; emphases added)

Here, as well as in the hypothetical passages, Fiammetta steers the interpretation of her text in the direction that suits her by modelling acceptable responses supporting her views on herself and more or less bluntly extinguishing others. However, she also seems to point the narratee in the opposite direction. The majority of the speaker- and addressee-oriented expressions contained in her catalogue are so-called mental-state verbs related to mental action, such as understanding, reflecting and judging: *pensare* ("to think"), *figurare* and *immaginare* ("to imagine"), *investigare* ("to examine"), *credere* ("to believe"), *vedere* ("to see"), *rivolgere* ("to turn over in one's mind"), *considerare* ("to consider"), *discernere* ("to perceive"), *dire*, *giudicare* and *estimare* ("to judge, to evaluate, to estimate"), *tenere* ("to maintain"), *conoscere* ("to know, to experience") and *sentire* ("to feel") are all included, as Fiammetta attempts to make her reader understand that the sorrows of ancient figures pale in comparison to hers. Here is Fiammetta about Jocasta and Hecuba:

[22a] Oh quanta miseria, *bene investigando* di Giocasta gli avvenimenti, *vedremo noi* avvenuta tutta a lei pertinente ne' giorni suoi, possibile a turbare ogni forte animo! (*Elegia*, 188; emphasis added)

Oh, how much misery *we will perceive* if we *look carefully into* what happened to Jocasta: everything capable of upsetting any strong mind happened to her in her lifetime! (*EMF*, 146; emphasis added)

[22b] . . . tornandosi a mente il sangue del suo marito . . . e l'aver veduta Troia . . . abbattuta tutta; e oltre a ciò il misero sacrificio fatto da Pirro della sua Pulissena, *con quanta tristizia si dee pensare che il riguardasse?* (*Elegia*, 191; emphases added)

. . . *and can we imagine* what sadness she must have felt as she remembered the blood of her husband . . . and when she saw Troy . . . destroyed, and in addition to this, when she looked upon the dreadful sacrifice that Pyrrhus had made of her Polyxena? (*EMF*, 149; emphasis added)

In my analysis of the manipulative strategies in *Troilus and Criseyde* (Chapter II: Section 7.2), I suggested that calls to turn over in one's mind a certain argument can easily backfire in that they may lead the recipient to form the opposite conclusion from what was intended. By encouraging the reader to consider whether what is being presented is in fact valid and reasonable at all, such cognitive prompts may serve as tools for critical thinking. It is possible to argue that Fiammetta's discourse operates much in the same way: her method of urging the narratee, through employing a variety of mental-state verbs, to carefully consider ("*bene investigando di Giocasta gli avvenimenti*") the afflictions of classical heroines in order to acknowledge the superiority of her suffering may have exactly the opposite effect, especially since she pairs these prompts with highly detailed accounts of the heroines' agonies:

[23] Oltre a questi pensieri miserabili mi si para davanti la tristizia della dolente Ero di Sesto, e vedere la mi pare discesa dell'alta torre sopra li marini liti, ne' quali essa era usata di ricevere il faticato Leandro nelle sue braccia, e quivi con gravissimo pianto la mi pare vedere riguardare il morto amante sospinto da uno dalfino, ignudo giacere sopra la rena, e poi essa con li suoi vestimenti asciugare il morto viso della salata acqua, e bagnarlo di molte lagrime. (*Elegia*, 185)

I imagine the melancholy of that doleful Hero of Sestos, and I seem to see her descending from the high tower to the seashore where she used to welcome her weary Leander with open arms; and here I seem to perceive her weeping grievously while looking at her dead lover pushed ashore by a dolphin and lying naked on the sand; and then with her gown she wipes the salty water from his dead face and drenches it with innumerable tears. (*EMF*, 145)

Creating a powerfully vivid audio-visual image (rolling seashore, naked corpse, grievous weeping), the passage, and several others like it, makes for an energetic description that is literally shown to take place before Fiammetta's eyes ("mi si para davanti . . . e vedere la mi pare . . ."). By intensely calling forth the suffering of the ancients, thus urging the *gentili donne* to vicariously imagine what she considers their lesser fates, Fiammetta strengthens the instructional core of her catalogue. Yet at the same time she seems to be vigorously digging her own grave by reminding us, in the most powerful manner possible, of the discrepancy between her suffering and the large-scale disasters involving fallen kingdoms, incestuous marriages and slaughter of families.

In the scene featuring the discerning stranger, attention is similarly drawn to the act of reflecting itself: it is through careful observation ("gli atti suoi *bene mirando*") of Fiammetta's demeanour that her similarity with Dido becomes obvious – and not merely that of Fiammetta to Dido, but of the other "local ladies" ("le nostre cittadine") at the tournament to Semiramis, Helen and Cleopatra as well: "quella, per alterezza, dicendo Semiramís simigliare; quell'altra, agli ornamenti guardando, Cleopatràs si crederebbe; l'altra, considerata la sua vaghezza, sarebbe creduta Elena" ("One, he would say, resembles Semiramis for her haughty bearing; another would be believed to be Cleopatra, to judge from her jewels; another could be seen as Helen, for her beauty . . ."). It has been suggested that Fiammetta does not comprehend the scriptural and moral implications of these comparisons to figures that are widely associated with damnation, appearing in the same order as they do in Dante's *Inferno* (ll. 52–66), where they represent examples of adulterous lust (Smarr 1986, 145). I propose that the comparisons do not so much serve to draw a picture of fallible underreading as they do to bring in one more way in which Fiammetta manages to undermine her ethos as a pleader. For the comparisons she makes about her fellow citizens involve a hidden insult. The "local ladies" echoes the wording of the motivational speech given by Venus to the hesitant Fiammetta. To be sure, most gods and goddesses have had their share of extramarital flings, but so have Neapolitans: "ma la tua città solamente rimira, la quale infinite compagne ti può mostrare; e ricorditi che niuna cosa fatta da tanti, meritamente si può dire sconcia" (*Elegia*, 30; "Let us not even consider the rest of the world, which if full of people like you; just look at your own city, which can show you an infinite number off of women like you, and remember that nothing which is done by many people can rightly be called disgraceful", *EMF*, 21). The argument resurfaces in Fiammetta's catalogue: "E in questo io non sono prima, né sarò ultima, né sono sola, anzi quasi tutte quelle del mondo ho in compagnia, e le leggi contro alle quali io ho commesso,

sogliono perdonare alla moltitudine” (*Elegia*, 189; “And I am not the first, the last, or the only one in this; on the contrary, I have the company of nearly all the women in the world, and the laws I have transgressed usually are applied leniently to the multitude”, *EMF*, 148).

This kind of *ad populum* justification (“thousands of people can’t be wrong”; Tindale 2007, 105–8), in itself a reflection of the *Ars amatoria*, can be an argumentative fallacy. On the one hand, it is vitally important to establish a connection with the audience by appealing to common knowledge and commonly held beliefs (*ibid.* 105), and this is indeed what Fiammetta, as recalled, does with consummate skill in her *exordium*, imagining for herself and the *gentili donne* a gender-based collective identity to serve as the basis for understanding and compassion. On the other hand, there are certain risks involved if the collective experience starts to gain less than flattering tones through indicating guilt by association. Besides subtly incriminating the narratee by basically calling each woman in Naples an adulteress, Fiammetta is keen on remarking that her reader *kenoms*, without her going into detail, as to what kind of desires were stirring in her body and soul at various points of the affair: “Quanto questo mi piacesse, credo che senza scriverlo il conosciate” (*Elegia*, 34; “How this pleased me I believe you know without my writing it”, *EMF*, 23); “dell’opera non dico, ché so che, se a ciò state non sete già, d’esservi disiate” (*Elegia*, 36; “of the deed itself I make no mention, since I know that if you have not done it, you wish to do it”, *EMF*, 25) (cf. also Example [2A]). There is thus a rather nasty rhetorical trap in the common ground established in the *exordium*, which paints a picture of Fiammetta as the lonely petitioner turning towards the wise and compassionate listener in whom she claims to recognise herself (“le quali io per me medesima conosco”): through combined flattery and inculcation, Fiammetta brings her narratee down with her, in an act of literary betrayal in which one can perhaps hear reverberations of Proverbs 5:3–4: “For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.”

The comparisons made by Fiammetta efficiently destroy her ethos, rendering her narrative voice discordant with her various writerly aims: betraying the trust of her narratee clashes with the plea for forgiveness, and the attempt to prove the superiority of her suffering threatens to collapse with the risk of opposite interpretation contained in demanding careful readerly contemplation of the painful classical fates. Again, these elements, if taken to represent the “unintentional self-incrimination” (cf. Zerweck 2001) of an unreliable narrator, are at odds with the absolute control that Fiammetta at the same time exerts over her narration: more

than to the narrator's shortcomings, they point to an authorial experiment with a self-destructing discourse. The same could be said about the following excerpt, which seems to throw the suitability of Fiammetta's comparisons into sharp relief by juxtaposing them with the comparisons made by Panfilo at the tournament:

[24] [A]l quale io alcuna volta, ragionando esso con essi, quanti ne correvano uddi agli antichi così giovini, come valorosi vecchi assimigliare. Oh quanto m'era ciò caro ad udire, sí per colui che'l diceva, e sí per quelli che ciò ascoltavano intenti, e sí per li miei cittadini, de' quali era detto! . . . egli nella lunghissima schiera mostrava Agamennone, Aiace, Ulisse, Diomedes, e qualunque altro Greco, Frigio o Latino fu degno di laude. *Né poneva a beneplacito cotali nomi, anzi con ragioni accettevoli fermando li suoi argomenti sopra le maniere de' nominati, loro debitamente assimigliati mostrava*; per che, non era l'udire cotali ragionamenti meno dilettevole, che il vedere coloro medesimi di cui si parlava. (*Elegia*, 115–16; emphasis added)

I heard him compare young and valiant old riders to the ones of antiquity. Oh, how glad I was to hear this, and I rejoiced for the one who was saying it, also for those who intently listened to it and for my fellow citizens about whom this was said. . . . in the endless troop she showed Agamemnon, Ajax, Ulysses, Diomedes, and every other Greek, Trojan, and Latin who was worthy of praise. *Nor would Panfilo name them casually, but sustained his argument, giving acceptable reasons about the manners of those named and would show that they were properly compared*; thus, listening to his arguments was no less entertaining than watching those of whom he was speaking. (*EMF*, 88; emphasis added)

Panfilo sustains his argument, his comparisons are proper, he gives acceptable reasons – could there be a more direct call to also consider the acceptability and appropriateness of Fiammetta's comparisons? In some ways, one could treat this in terms of multiperspectival conflict by which some narrators may be revealed as less reliable than others (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 101; Hansen 2007, 241–2). Such “internarrational unreliability” is based on the contrasting of voices through juxtaposing several versions of incidents by several narrators (Hansen, *ibid.*). While this is not exactly the case in the *Elegia* – we do not get to hear competing versions by Fiammetta and Panfilo of the same event – the idea of finding fault with one narrator's report when compared to another is nonetheless present. Undoubtedly, this contrasting technique may say something about Fiammetta as a person, but [24] also serves as a playful cue to sensitise the reader of the text to the potentially problematic and perhaps not so *accettevole* nature of Fiammetta's comparisons. Such a sensitising function can likewise be assigned to “dicenti alcuni di loro essere troppo assimigliarmi a deà, e altri rispondenti in contrario essere poco il simigliarmi a femina umana” (*Elegia*, 112; “some of them said that it was an exaggeration to compare me

to a goddess, while others retorted that it was not enough to compare me to a mortal woman”, *EMF*, 85). Furthermore, is it merely a rhetorical question when Fiammetta asks “Why do I labor recounting one by one all these infernal pains?” (*EMF*, 114; “Perché ad una ad una le infernali pene mi fatico io di raccontare?”), *Elegia*, 149), or can it also be thought of as an *actual* question, the answer to which is that she recounts the pains of those ancient examples because Boccaccio *wants* her to recount them, in order to reveal the discrepancy between her pain and theirs.

In sum, all these instances seem to point directly at Fiammetta’s discourse as a game of interpretation orchestrated and controlled by Boccaccio – rather than being indicators of the deficiency of Fiammetta’s perception, they are thought-provoking nudges that grant Boccaccio’s readers an interpretative leeway that is denied from Fiammetta’s subjected and insulted narratee propelled towards the only acceptable reading while everything else is monumentally ruled out. In this sense, the hypothetical observers Fiammetta employs to strengthen her controversial arguments can be said to represent another example of the kind of negative mirror characters that I discussed in relation to the grieving crowds in *Silence* (Chapter I: Section 2.2), suggesting that the grieving crowds served as a readerly test the purpose of which was to ask the actual audience, aware of the dramatic irony, to *not* mirror but to resist the emotional reactions depicted in the narrative. The hypothetical observers in the *Elegia* could be approached in similar terms. Whereas Fiammetta apparently intends their judgments and evaluations to be emulated by the narratee, the actual readers should exercise critical reflection and not subject themselves to the kind of accommodating behaviour that is required of the *gentili donne* by Fiammetta.

10.2 Obsessed and Deluded, or Varied and Amplified?

To recapitulate, there are a number of features in the *Elegia* which encourage a modern reader familiar with the concept of unreliable narrator to apply to Fiammetta this naturalising psychological frame and, consequently, to read her as a woman who, in Smarr’s words, becomes “obsessed with her own degeneration,” and “[l]ike Milton’s Satan . . . prefers to rule hell than to be second best in heaven” (1986, 141). Besides telling her own tale consisting entirely of solipsistic inspection of her morally problematic plunge into self-chosen despair, Fiammetta’s narration is directed to a text-internal narratee and, as we have seen, it is packed with “pragmatic” and “syntactic” indicators of unreliability as well as internal contradictions. Likewise, her use of hypothetical observers to collectivise and objectivise her view of herself, and

the way that she coercively rules out contradiction, are easy to explain, with the help of the perspectival mechanism of integration, as textual metaphors for a mind suffering from grandiose delusions and seeking not only to justify, but to enforce upon the narratee a worldview supposedly not endorsed by the (implied) author.

However, as I have shown, this clash between author and character perspectives on the told is only one way of looking at the matter, and it tends to be opposed by the unnatural inconsistencies that inevitably come into view when attempting to assign perspectival coherence to Fiammetta's discourse. Therefore, I have suggested to read the *Elegia's* signals of unreliability – the elements that *look* like signals of unreliability – as authorial demonstrations of some ethos-crushing strategies that simultaneously serve to instruct the actual reader of the book to maintain critical thinking, as opposed to the obliging readerly position required of the narratee by Fiammetta.

There is one final reading strategy that I want to explore, one that further brings to light the artefactual aspects of Fiammetta's experience. I mentioned earlier the self-referential potential of the magnitude of Fiammetta's suffering, suggesting that the superlative rhetoric can be explained through what I called the exhibitiv principle: rather than illustrating Fiammetta's suffering in itself, the sheer quantitative volume of the text of the *Elegia* can be seen a demonstration of Boccaccio outdoing his predecessors in length and self-consciously exhibiting the work as a voluminous expansion of the *Heroides*. Fiammetta's principal argument for the thesis that her anguish surpasses that of the classic figures is that their pains lasted for a short period of time. For instance, Byblis, Myrrha and Canace either perished or were transformed into inanimate objects: "Che dunque dirò, mostrando la mia pena molto maggiore che quella di queste donne, se non che la brevità della loro è dalla mia molto lunga avanzata?" (*Elegia*, 184; "What more can I say to demonstrate that the brevity of this sorrow of theirs is greatly surpassed by my own, which is longer lasting?", *EMF*, 144). As for Tristan and Isolde's double suicide, this too must be considered a lesser pain on account of its brevity:

[25] E oltre a ciò, diciamo pure che gravissima sia ragionevolmente: che gravezza diremo noi che possa essere in cosa che non avvenga se non una volta, e quella occupi pochissimo spazio di tempo? Certo niuna. Finirono adunque Isotta e Tristano ad un'ora li dilette e le doglie, *ma a me molto tempo in doglia incomparabile è sopra gli avuti dilette avanzato*. (*Elegia*, 187; emphasis added)

Moreover, let us reasonably say that doing it may be extremely difficult: how serious – we will ask – can something be that happens only once and takes up very little time? Certainly not serious at all. So Tristan and Iseult ended

pleasures and pains at once, *but the lengthy period of my incomprehensible [sic] grief surpasses the pleasures I have had.* (EMF, 146; emphasis added)

It is tempting to read the above references to the duration of Fiammetta's sorrows as alluding to the length of the book in which these sorrows are *literally* contained and which Fiammetta imagines lying as a tangible object in her readers' hands:

[26] Ma tu, o santissima pietà . . . reggi li tuoi freni in quelli con più forte mano che infino a qui non hai fatto, acciò che trascorrendo, e di te più parte che 'l convenevole dando, non forse di quello che io cerco ti convertissi in contrario, *e di grembo togliessi alle leggenti donne le lagrime mie.* (*Elegia*, 131; emphasis added)

But you, most blessed Pity . . . keep a tighter rein on those hearts that you have done so far, lest, that by outdoing and giving more of yourself than suitable, you change into the opposite of what I am looking for and thereby *deprive my women readers' lap of my weeping head.* (EMF, 100; emphasis added)

As both Brownlee (1990, 66) and Armstrong (2013, 319–20) have noted, the tear-stained appearance of the book becomes a surrogate for the unkempt Fiammetta herself. Here, a connection is established between Fiammetta's tears and the words in her book that she pictures in the concluding chapter as a talking entity standing in for her voice: “a lei la fortuna essere mobile torna a mente . . . da' quali se pure se' veduto di' . . . sgridalo dalla lunga e di'” (*Elegia*, 200–1; “remind her that Fortune is fickle . . . and even if you should be seen by them, tell them this . . . scold him from afar and say . . .”, EMF, 157–58). Thus, as Fiammetta's voice merges with the voice of the book itself, we can hear them both in [25]. As Fiammetta/the book points out, her grief surpasses the pleasures she has had, which is true also in the most material sense of her text: the love affair itself occupies only the first two chapters, whereas the final seven chapters focus entirely and with unprecedented detail on what it feels like to be abandoned. The duration and quantity of Fiammetta's pain therefore surpasses that of the others in the sense that its narration has been extended over a hundred leaves; the *Elegia* is, in other words, a *tour de force* of *amplificatio*, of “dressing up naked matter” that has not yet been embellished (“*materia nuda uestienda*”; PP, 4.143) and artificially inflating a tale that otherwise would be very quickly told (“a woman meets a man; the man leaves”).

Geoffrey of Vinsauf identifies eight types of *amplificatio*, which are repetition, periphrasis, comparison, apostrophe, personification, digression, description and opposition (PN, 218–694). As remarked in Chapter II: Section 5.1, the point of *expolitio*, as a method of repetition, was to reiterate a single thought in multiple forms

– to vary its robes, as Geoffrey wrote – and in that way to create the impression of saying a number of different things while actually dwelling on one and the same point. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, this is considered the mark of a skilled orator, since it constantly keeps the audience aware of the strongest argument which “like blood is spread through the whole body of the discourse” (*RH*, IV.45.58; “sed tamquam sanguis perfusus est per totum corpus”), subtly implanting it in the hearers’ minds. From this technical point of view, the hypothetical observers in [16] and [19] appear as tools for varying the arguments that Fiammetta hopes her reader to absorb (i.e., that she is a tragic Dido-like sufferer and that she is to be pardoned for her crime); moreover, this function can also be assigned to her catalogue of misfortunes as a whole, which reworks over and over again the seminal point about Fiammetta being the most sorrowful of all sorrowful people in the annals of history. In fact, the rhetorical purpose of the digressive description of the spring festivities, which embeds the segment featuring the hypothetical stranger, the rhetorical purpose is openly communicated:

[27] Quale lingua sí d’eloquenza splendida, o sí di vocaboli eccellenti facunda sarebbe quella che interamente potesse li nobili abiti e di varietà pieni interamente narrare? Non il greco Omero, non il latino Virgilio, li quali tanti riti di Greci, di Troiani e d’Italici già ne’ loro versi discrissero. Lievemente adunque, a comparazione del vero, m’ingegnerò di farne alcuna particella a quelle che non gli hanno veduti palese. *E ciò non fia nella presente materia dimostrato invano; anzi si potrà per le savie comprendere la mia tristizia essere, oltre a quella d’ogni altra donna preterita o presente, continua, poi la dignità di tante e sí eccelse cose vedute non l’hanno potuta intrarompere con alcuno lieto mezzo.* (*Elegia*, 113; emphasis added)

What language is either so splendidly eloquent or so rich with wonderful words that it can completely and entirely describe the noble attires and their full range? Neither Homer the Greek nor Virgil the Latin, who have already described many Greek, Trojan and Italian rites in their verses, could do so. In a lighthearted manner, therefore, as an imitation of reality, I will try my best to share them in some small way with those ladies who have not seen them firsthand. *And may this not be an irrelevant demonstration in the present account; on the contrary, with the help of ladies who are wise one will understand that my wretchedness is unceasing and beyond that of any other woman past and present, since the dignity of the many lofty things seen has not been able to destroy it with any happy means.* (*EMF*, 86; emphasis added)

The justificatory remark (“And may this not be an irrelevant demonstration?”) seems to consciously echo John of Garland’s cautionary advice that a writer should digress from the subject only to better explain a difficult matter or to instruct one’s audience,

at the same time making sure to avoid incongruous digressions by carefully sticking to the subject matter itself, “as when a place or castle or the like is described” (“ut quando describitur locus uel castrum uel aliquid tale”) or to what is not part of it, but properly related to it, such as a fitting simile (*PP*, V.25). Accordingly, Fiammetta stresses that she will digress simply to prove her point, and the reference to the wise ladies helping out the less accomplished readers once again raises the idea of there existing one correct interpretation, authorised by Fiammetta, of the book and the nature of the experience documented in it.

From the narratological perspective, this coercive-instructive element, which is likewise present in the digressive catalogue, strongly suggests the discourse of an unreliable narrator; as stated throughout this chapter, here we seem to have a deluded and depraved woman revisiting thoughts with obsessive repetition and seeking to impose them on the narratee in order to justify her crime. From the perspective of medieval poetic theory, however, the repetitions are self-conscious variations of the text’s central points: again, one could describe them as see-through moments in Fiammetta’s discourse which purposely foreground Boccaccio’s agency as the true author of the *Elegia*, which as a text comments upon the rules of poetry-making.

One of the intentions and effects of varying the subject matter was to increase and maintain audience’s alertness, for monotonous expression, as John of Garland wrote, was “the mother of satiety” (“mater ydemptitas sacietatis”) producing “revulsion” and “boredom in the audience” (“ducit auditores in tedium”) (*PP*, 5.94–109). Boccaccio’s variations contribute to readerly vigilance and attention, as part of the pleasure of reading the text lies in finding out just how many different ways the author can devise to amplify his subject in developing a scant premise into a book-length narrative. On the other hand, the sheer bulk of the text would seem to directly defy its own mission, walking the thin line between feeding and cloying the senses: “But see that your style blossoms sparingly with such figures, and with a variety, not a cluster of the same kind. From varied flowers a sweet fragrance rises; faulty excess renders insipid what is full of flavor” (Nims, transl., 60).¹³⁵

Due to its excessive length, the *Elegia* seems to consciously play on the idea of variety itself *as* monotony, presenting what could almost be called a sardonic joke on amplification, especially since the penultimate chapter heading states: “Madonna Fiammetta le pene sue con quelle di molte antiche donne commensurando, le sue maggiori che alcune altre essere dimostra, e poi *finalmente* a’ suoi lamenti conchiude” (*Elegia*, 182; “Lady Fiammetta, comparing her pains to those of many ancient ladies,

¹³⁵ “Sed floreat illis / Sparsim sermo tuus, variis, non creber eisdem. / Floribus ex variis melior redolentia surgit; / Quod sapit, insipidum vitiosa frequentia reddit” (*PN*, 1230–33).

demonstrates that hers are greater, and then *finally* concludes her lamentation”, *EMF*, 142; emphases added). Such “extrafictional structures” (Lanser 1981, 124–31) as chapter headings and epigraphs may serve as additional arenas for authorial commentary. It is possible to hear a note of feigned exasperation in the extrafictional *finalmente*, which perhaps echoes the sentiments of the reader who has been brought to the brink of suffocating by the sweet fragrance of Fiammetta-Boccaccio’s flowers. It also reminds us that this tale has successfully reached its end, while the possibility is alluded to that it was only a fraction of the whole. Fiammetta’s cry “Oh, it would be too long and tedious to recount how many other things I repeated over and over!” (*EMF*, 82; “Oh quante piú altre cose ancora dissi piú volte, le quali lungo e tedioso sarebbe il raccontarle!” *Elegia*, 109) opens a view into a text that *could* have been, and by doing so couples the “disnarrated” (cf. Prince 1988) with exhibitory goals: an even *more* amplified narrative might have been expected, had there been a less skilled, a less controlled poet in charge, which, again, on the level of the storyworld invests the young girl Fiammetta with quite unnatural literary powers.

Yet, the possibility cannot be discounted that the excessive rhetoric is inherently related to Fiammetta’s gender; for one reason or another, Boccaccio decided to experiment with this type of voice not through a male but a female character. Medieval misogyny associated women with loquacity and garrulousness (Bloch 1991, 14–18), and excessive use of language involving repetition and vain words was seen to go hand in hand with intellectual deficiency also in later humanist polemics (Kivistö 2002, 135–36). Fiammetta’s linguistic vices are typically female ones: her gender is a fallibility which must be seen in connection to her failing ethos. To the extent that the bombast and inflation of Fiammetta’s rhetoric is meant to reflect the character’s female nature, the *Elegia* can indeed be said to constitute a type of “unreliable narration,” in which case we can recognise an opposite rationale for its existence from the one that Zerweck (2001, 161, 170) sees as the basis for the “birth” of the unreliable narrator in the late Victorian period: it stems not from epistemological scepticism besieging the modern mind, but rather from epistemological *certainty* about essential female qualities and the manner in which these qualities would manifest themselves in writing.

However, as I have been arguing throughout the present chapter, it is more profitable to think of Fiammetta’s “unreliability” in terms of questions of authorship and readership. *Auctrix* Fiammetta presents herself as a verbal success, surreptitiously placing her skills of description on par with Virgil and Homer in [27]. Yet her writerly standards are quite different from Boccaccio’s ideal of the independent reader. We have seen above how Fiammetta’s narrative strategies

induce the narratee to read the tale from Fiammetta's point of view, extinguishing dissenting voices and reinforcing her experience of herself as the arch sufferer. In a Bakhtinian sense, her word is an authoritative word which "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own" (Bakhtin 1981, 342) in an act of allegiance: there is no room for optional views. Hence, it could be said that Fiammetta writes against the very essence of rhetoric, the purpose of which is to communally negotiate probabilities instead of establishing certainties, in a language which, malleable as wax, keeps the question of truth always at arm's length.

A remarkable exploitation of this aspect of ambiguity, and one that is useful to recall here for the sake of contrast, is the doubt-fostering rhetoric by Heldris that I discussed in Chapter I. Dealing most suavely with anticipated resistance, the Commentator-I clothed the possibly controversial view on the heroine's state of mind in rhetorical *occultatio* ("I'm not saying that") and a *sententia* about the human heart, thereby making the audience feel as if they themselves were the source of the conjectures about the character's emotions, yet also inviting them to contemplate the validity of these collectively negotiated judgments. I pointed out that this kind of communally oriented narrative voice seems to value the notion of transferring the last word on the matter to the audience. A similar orientation can be seen in Boccaccio's ambiguous treatment of Fiammetta's culpability through a proleptic dream which seems to evade final answers for the benefit of endorsing readerly autonomy. Ginsberg (1983, 98) regards this attitude, which seems to pervade Boccaccio's literary output, as directly influenced by the Peripatetic exercises in declamation that were practiced in medieval schools and which aimed at arriving at *some* degree of probability by debating an argument from both sides (*disputatio in utramque partem*). True to this tradition, Boccaccio gives us ambivalent characters who, according to Ginsberg, do not settle moral questions but rather make both sides of a question seem equally valid, giving answers that are "probably true" (ibid. 117) and leaving the reader to use his or her discretion in deciding, for instance, whether Fiammetta exemplifies the virtues or vices of love (ibid. 102). This is very different from the practice of *auctrix* Fiammetta, who adopts at each and every turn the most conclusive tone regarding the nature of her affair and the sentiments involved. Boccaccio's "probably true" is juxtaposed with Fiammetta's "necessarily true."

In propagating for the "probably true," Boccaccio's practice seems to stand quite apart from the modern rhetorical approach to narrative, which envisions narrative as a basically smooth cooperation process between the triangle of author, reader and text (Phelan 2005, 18). According to Phelan, the rhetorically oriented reading process

consists of attempts by the “flesh-and-blood reader” to become part of the authorial audience to whom the implied author has designed the text; the value of this approach lies in the communality it fosters over individual readings in offering opportunities “to encounter other minds,” including that of the author and those of other readers (ibid. 18–19). Yet individual readings were valued in the Middle Ages. Carruthers cites Petrarch’s *Secretum*, in which the poet imagines his interpretation of the cave of the winds episode in the *Aeneid* being praised by Augustine: “whether Virgil had this in mind when writing, or whether without any such idea he only meant to depict a storm at sea and nothing else, what you have said about the rush of anger and the authority of reason seems to me expressed with equal wit and truth.” As Carruthers explains, Petrarch shows himself here as responding tropologically to Virgil’s words, his *verba*, which serve as a route to the text’s *res*, its sense, that Petrarch amplifies and adapts to suit his own situation, deriving, as an individual reader, a lesson concerning anger, which Augustine finds convincing. Whether or not this was ever Virgil’s intention is unimportant; what matters is the truth that Petrarch finds to reside within the text itself (Carruthers 1990/2008, 236–37; 209–10). Petrarch thus writes in line with the medieval understanding of the *intentio auctoris*, authorial intention, which in biblical study and the scholarly *accessus ad auctores* was equated with the words of the text, and not with the author (ibid. 235; see also Minnis 1984/2010, 19–29).

Likewise, at the more specific level of Boccaccio’s *Elegia*, which appears set on thoroughly disabusing readers of the notion that any kind of certainty can be achieved, the attempt to join the authorial audience and in that way to feel oneself part of a harmoniously revolving communicative triangle, seems to me like drifting towards an eventually unproductive road. That said, I do not deny that my reading of the work must be regarded as an “authorial” reading (cf. Rabinowitz 1987, 22–23), in the technical sense that it approaches the text from the point of view of the particular interpretive community to which Boccaccio wrote; it would not make much sense to contest that he had in mind a hypothetical audience that knew that literary characters had a typological dimension or that specific attention should be given to the beginning of a work. The point of my critique, meant to draw attention to the differences between medieval rhetoric and what is considered rhetorical in today’s rhetorical narratology (defined as the communication of a specific message to a recipient: “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened”), is rather that the many strategies of the *Elegia* that I discussed above – the planted classical allusions, the strategically placed dream and the inconsistent use of rhetorical *expolitio* – seem designed to *foil* the notion of

harmonious communication between Boccaccio and his reader. Instead of mediating a solid vision that the audience is invited to share, the work sends them on a path where the interpretation of poetic visions by readers is shown to be contingent upon readerly competence. Offering springboards for interpretation that prompt the reader to lift the veil in a process that trains their perception and memory, introducing interpretative angles and possibilities, Boccaccio stops short of revealing what lies under that veil. In all of my case studies, classical rhetoric and simulated audiences serve as means to introduce questions instead of providing answers: could it be like this instead of that, should one internalise the “truths” presented in the narrative or not, is the narrator worth listening to or not.

This kind of ambiguity effectively blocks the kind of thought exchange about values that is an important part of Phelan’s view of fictional narration as a “layered ethical situation,” where the author’s treatment of the events and the narrator will serve as signals from which the author’s ethical principles can be gauged, followed by an evaluation of whether his or her treatment of and attitude towards a character is fair or somehow problematic (cf. Phelan 2005, 20–21; 2007b, 215). Such evaluations are not easily obtained from the *Elegia*. As already pointed out earlier, the interpretation of Fiammetta as a fallible/untrustworthy narrator hampered by her femaleness, although interesting in itself, tends to be circumstantial and perhaps somewhat beside the point; whether for Boccaccio Fiammetta’s behaviour was, as Calabrese argues, “irrational, deluded, and self-indulgent” (1997, 23), is impossible to glean from the text alone, and must be based on intertextual hints and historical probabilities. There are no clear textual signals that would help us gauge Boccaccio’s attitude towards Fiammetta and her sin; as I have suggested, it is more profitable to read the incongruities in Fiammetta’s account not as ironising disclosure functions that would help us decide on where the author stands in relation to the character and how he wished for his work to be read, but as components of an artistic whole that through play with order and the allegorical mode of reading and writing encourages author-independent contemplation on difficult moral choices and literary stereotypes. In such a strategy, which seems to support Ginsberg’s view of Boccaccio’s poetics as a poetics of the probably true, and also falls in line with the medieval disregard for readings that would be endorsed by the composer, the key point seems to be the fundamental possibility of a *lack* of understanding and harmonious similar-mindedness between author and audience. What the individual reader takes away from the text may diverge – and is indeed almost *encouraged* to diverge – from what the author, Boccaccio, may have felt about it.

What he *may* have felt about it is perhaps conveyed, in keeping with the text's aesthetics, through yet another conundrum. The omission of certain allusive names, which I discussed above in Section 8.2, sensitises the reader of the *Elegia* to absences. By highlighting the absence of Juno, the text makes us ask: are there perhaps others who have been left out, and if so, who? I already mentioned Arachne's hubristic pride criticised by Boccaccio. It is perhaps telling that each of Arachne's tapestries that she weaves in contest with Athena depicts a woman tricked and taken sexual advantage of by a disguised god, including the abduction of Europa and Proserpina's encounter with the serpent (*Metamorphoses* VI.8–208); in other words, Arachne weaves what Fiammetta writes. Moreover, Arachne's tale is a warning to mortals to not place themselves on an equal level with the gods. In doing just that, by challenging authorities and by imagining a singular fate eclipsing all others, the spidery prose of *auctrix* Fiammetta ends up tangling itself in multiple knots.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate experiencing minds in three high and late medieval works of fiction based around the genre of romance. At the same time, the aim was to find out if and how the specific features of the medieval ways of composing, transmitting and performing tales transcend the scope of the theoretical frameworks for fictional minds put forth in modern narratological studies. The analyses conducted showed that the case studies tend to approach the characters' thoughts, emotions and states of mind – all of which fall under the modern blanket term “consciousness representation” – from angles that might be called *audience-oriented* and *exhibitory*.

Audience-oriented experientiality constructs characters' states of mind in conscious dialogue with the recipient. This can be put down to the influence of classical rhetoric on medieval poetics, and the presence of a live audience in oral performance can also be seen as a contributory factor. This makes for a rhetoric of experientiality which foregrounds the Bakhtinian notion of the internally dialogic word directed towards an active and responsive understanding; in other words, the texts studied draw, through various narrative strategies and often explicitly, on the common experiential field existing between author and audience as inhabitants of the same extra-textual world, sharing similar knowledge about everyday social reality and about the conventions of literary expression (their so-called “romance memory,” a term which I adopted from Carol Dover). What all of my case studies have in common is that the heightened awareness of audience structuring their exploration of characters' inner lives links to thematic and didactic goals concerned with questions of inevitability and change, and of active and passive reception. Besides the awareness of audience as an active participant structuring the narration, it is notable that the audience's viewpoint can also be, as my analyses of *Silence* and *Troilus* showed, concretely incorporated into the texts, in the form of simulated audience responses.

The second defining feature is that the three case studies tend to direct attention from the characters themselves to the discourse that brings them into being, turning the characters' minds into *exhibitory artefacts* attesting to the poet's compositional skills. The analyses illustrated that the texts by Heldris, Chaucer and Boccaccio do not easily let their audiences forget the essence of the sentiments undergone by the characters as recyclable *materia* that has been worked and re-worked upon by several

poets. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the most intensely private, soul-searching monologues by the protagonists were seen to be equipped with authorial signposts that establish the undercover presence of the poet through text-internal and intertextual echoes underlining the constructedness and layeredness of the characters' experiences. Likewise, the essential unnaturalness of Fiammetta's intensely harrowing inner experience was allowed to show in the deliberate see-through slips revealing her narration as a man-made lamentation by a woman – even to the extent of her exceeding sorrow being interpretable as referring to the ostentatiously amplified quality of the work itself. Moreover, it was argued that the text offers itself to be read as a game of interpretation, where Fiammetta's experience was new and singular more in the textual sense of mixing familiar elements into a new combination. One of these familiar elements reworked by Boccaccio was, for instance, the classical simile of the embers that *Le Roman de Silence* used to demonstrate the birthing process of literary verisimilitude as an accumulation of poetic representations in readerly and writerly consciousness. All in all, the analysis of Heldris's enigmatic similes revealed that these figurative expressions, ostensibly employed to illuminate the characters' sentiments, were more concerned with representing a processual, collaborative creation of these sentiments in the act of narration, thus relegating the characters' inner states to glosses of their own conventional nature.

Many of the readings leading up to the theoretical formulations described above were enabled by placing the texts in context and not allowing the modern theoretical frameworks for fictional minds to exert a potentially blinding influence. For instance, it is the lack of quotation marks in the manuscript context that permits one to abandon the interpretation of an emotional passage in *Troilus* as a multi-voiced head-internal debate by a character, which is enforced by the linguistic speech categories, and to see in its place a simulated audience response serving didactic purposes instead. This, and the fact that the emotional interjections in *Silence* made much more sense when read as representing the viewpoint of the audience, suggests that medieval narrative requires and makes possible an approach to voice that is more liberal compared to the traditional narratological model resting on a natural understanding of narrative voice as either that of the narrator or a character.

Natural parameters also proved insufficient to address the strategic hesitations and uncertainties in *Silence*. Bringing these passages into dialogue with medieval rhetoric and poetics made it clear that the reason for the experientialising rhetoric fluctuating between omniscience and doubt about the characters' sentiments was not the attempt to maintain natural epistemological limitations, but the thematically and pedagogically inspired desire to elegantly and inadvertently challenge the verisimilar,

to suggest *otherwise* from the romance tradition. Ethos-building was at stake also in Boccaccio's *Elegia*. Here the first-person discourse reminiscent of unreliable narration capturing the reality of a troubled psyche was explainable, in light of medieval poetics and Boccaccio's own theoretical writings, as an exercise on *amplificatio* as well as a demonstration of flawed ethos-building based on coercion and abuse of the narratee.

What these strategies have in common is that they, as stated, tend to turn the experiencing minds of characters into platforms where certain thematic and didactic questions can be negotiated. Representations solidified by literary tradition and the related idea of truth constructed through repetition were identified as key thematic concerns in all of the texts; these were understood to arise from the emerging literary self-consciousness identified in research literature as a central intellectual force propelling high and late medieval authors seeking to validate their output alongside the *auctores*. In *Silence*, we saw these themes developed through experientialising rhetoric inviting the audience to consider the characters' sentiments in a particular situation from the point of view of their own experience as human beings; pitting this real-world experience against the verisimilar experiences of heroes and heroines, the technique encouraged a critical awareness of the potential gap between life and literary *fama*. A similar pedagogical function was given to the simulated audience responses that I suggested modelled and provoked a kind of sentimental and superficial readership, which fails to see the thematic import beyond the veiling surface of the text and accepts as given whatever is presented in the narrative. (A function which was also allotted to the aggressive *ad hominem* rhetorical questions and the somewhat naïve confirmatory statements regarding the characters as they were presented in the fabricated original *estorie*.)

The text of *Troilus* was seen to advise caution against experiential inevitability constructed through various strategies of source-shedding and frequency. By portraying characters basing their decisions on a set of internalised maxims that nonetheless lead to failure and dishonest choices, the text makes a point about uncritical absorption of ideas dressed as lawlike truths. Moreover, it was argued that Chaucer keeps his readers aware of the illusory authenticity and inevitability of certain emotional patterns through habitual-generic mode of narration which, besides the everyday sphere of human experience, is also associated with intertextual force of habit. Passive internalisation was also present in the coercive first-person narration of the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, where the text-internal narratee was forced by the demanding narrator into quite a different position from that of Boccaccio's authorial audience. Extinguishing freedom of interpretation, Fiammetta seeks to inveigle the narratee into accepting one fixed and correct interpretation of

her conventional experience of love as unique and solitary – a prospect that is quite impossible for Boccaccio’s audience well-versed in the conventional emotional imagery of romance employed by Fiammetta.

In encouraging critical readership and in playing on the cumulative logic of literary verisimilitude through their exploration of the characters’ experiences, the case studies give us fictional minds that could be described as allegories of composition and reading. This marks a concept of storytelling that is far removed from the idea of narrative as “mediated human experientiality” (Fludernik 1996, 36). In fact, it begs the question whether the category “consciousness representation” itself becomes, in part, suspect. Of course, to a large extent, the classification of medieval cases as direct, indirect or free indirect thought is perfectly valid and illuminating, and even more so as it is based on the classic theory of three poetic voices recognised by medieval grammarians. But often, as this dissertation has attempted to show, medieval narrative eludes this framework, approaching characters’ emotions and inner states through additional strategies stemming from classical rhetoric and using it as springboard for other concerns.

In view of this, is it reasonable to treat these strategies as consciousness representation, adding them to the seven categories of medieval consciousness representation proposed by Fludernik (2011a), or would it be more profitable to consider the option that the employment of such a “system-immanent” narratological concept as consciousness representation may well prove to be misleading? What is more, my analysis of Heldris’s epic similes indicates that the presence of this device in Fludernik’s listing (under the heading of “virtual direct speech”) should perhaps be carefully reconsidered, since it was seen to obtain alternative functions from consciousness representation; as stated above, instead of prioritising the characters’ sentiments as such, the device brought blatantly into focus their collaborative construction out of recycled elements.

This switch of focus from characters to authors and audiences underlines the social aspect of fictional minds, but in a manner different from Palmer’s emphasis on the natural processes of mind-reading as the defining feature of fiction (“We follow the plot by following the workings of fictional minds”; Palmer 2010, 9). In their specifically intertextual and recycled nature, medieval fictional minds are profoundly and “unnaturally” social to begin with, which is something that the authors of my case studies are seen to exploit, creating in their works narratees that are equally aware of the links existing between different texts and thoroughly versed in romance expression. Besides intertextuality, the three texts variedly involve their audiences in an intellectual speculation about the validity and applicability of

established forms. Using the characters' sentiments as focal points for such speculation, the texts, in other words, engage the readers' past in order to shape their future.

This is a mode of experientiality that flies under the radar of Fludernik's cognitive model, which gives a central role to the mediation of a human-like experiencing consciousness. Moreover, it is a mode which only emerges when the texts are considered in the historical context of their writing and reading, and by applying to them the period's own set of tools put forth in rhetoric and poetical theory. These tools, as this study has shown, help to bring to light the full complexity of how medieval texts put to work the audiences' personal and literary experience. The medieval audience – reader, listener – appears as a much more competent and multifaceted entity than the reader postulated by the cognitive theories, and the possible pleasure and profit gained from the medieval tale as much more rewarding than the operation of narrativization performed according to natural cognitive schemata.

Although narratology provides us with the familiar vocabulary with which to begin to approach medieval texts, perhaps even helping to characterise some narrative phenomena that medieval theory does not address, its results tend to be defective or, at times, misleading, unless treated in conjunction with medieval theory. The experientiality of medieval literature cannot be reduced to the representation of human experience, and achieving the most amount of experientiality in the sense of foregrounding an experiencing consciousness as the measure of full narrativity overlooks the richness of the medieval art of storytelling. This indicates that, rather than striving for definitions of narrative that would have universal scope, it makes more sense to approach the concept of narrative as a historical variable.

The theoretical reflections drawn from the three case studies should be considered as tentative proposals. By all means, I do not wish to create an illusory truth effect claiming that an audience-oriented and exhibitory take on the characters' minds is descriptive of the whole of medieval literature. Given the small corpus of texts explored, the development of a systematic poetics of medieval experientiality was not the goal of this study; instead of seeking to define the exact principles governing the representation of characters' interiorities, the focus was on identifying and illustrating certain common features of the strategies used to mediate states of mind by three authors from three different cultural and linguistic backgrounds over a span of about a hundred years.

A selection of texts reaching across national boundaries provided a broad perspective from which one could at least *try* to make some very cautious

generalisations regarding the representation of consciousness in medieval romance type of writing. In part, the findings are conditioned by the fact that the case studies all originate from a post-Chrétien period, when the conventions of the romance genre had already become so established as to enable the kind of self-conscious interaction between poet and audience that the analyses have attempted to tease out. In part, the findings are also a consequence of the three authors being well-versed in classical rhetoric and their contemporary literary theory. (We know this for certain with Chaucer and Boccaccio. Although we know nothing of Heldris's biography, his sophisticated craftsmanship becomes, as the analysis has shown, more than evident from his work.) Yet a more fragmented approach, investigating excerpts from a wider corpus of texts and including more marginal cases, would have made it impossible to bring out in a detailed way the thematic and didactic aspects that have been identified in this dissertation as fundamental aspects of medieval literary experientiality, at least in the three case studies. The wider validity of this and the other findings would need to be tested in a range of medieval romances from other centuries and language areas – for instance, Middle Dutch romances, or the works of the German romancers Wolfram von Eschenbach and Hartmann von Aue, who frequently engage in audience-oriented rhetoric. Other genres should be considered as well.

Finally, it could be pointed out that, despite the efforts made in this dissertation to pin down some salient characteristics of medieval fictional minds, these literary constructs do a good job of resisting being described in essentialist terms. Protean and slippery, as malleable as the wax in the accounts of the grammarians, they can change shape from tragic to silly depending on a prelector's choice of tone; winding back to the layered poetic voice that self-consciously produces them, they point past themselves to other minds, mirroring an almost never-ending series of like reflections – of readers and authors, as much as characters.

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