

PART TWO

READING THE WIDOWED BRIDE

Chapter 5

QUAE EST ISTA, QUAE ASCENDIT? (CANTICLES 3:6): RETHINKING THE WOMAN READER IN EARLY OLD FRENCH LITERATURE

***En romans traire*: Translating Reading Experience**

Few cultural developments of the High Middle Ages are more far-reaching in their consequences for later centuries than the definitive emergence in the later twelfth century of literatures in the European vernaculars—and few are so poorly understood. As argued at the outset of this book, the hypothesis that sees this development as a response to the needs of literate women for reading material is sooner a product of the habits and assumptions of the modern literate mind than a viable interpretation of historical evidence. Conversely, as demonstrated in the intervening chapters, the idea of the woman-as-reader has a history of its own within the textual culture of the twelfth century that we have scarcely begun to grasp.

We have seen how the song of the bride came to be understood as the fundamental Christian reading endeavour and how this bride's reading had been accomplished in the body, as history, by one woman, Mary. The same could be re-accomplished by any Christian soul who assumed Mary's position, that of the humility of the abject body, the receptive position of woman opposite the omnipotence of the (male) spirit. The reading of the Song of Songs as Mary's experience thus enabled a redefinition of the reading subject as female, weak and unlettered. This woman now read in and through the body and the media of its expression, which resulted in a new inclusion of both images and the vernacular. Alexis's bride is first interpolated into his story and then assigned a role as the complementary opposite of his attempt to obliterate the flesh; the text becomes the vernacular body of this new reading trajectory even as the pictures in the same codex appear as if the material realizations of a meditational practice, and each is to lead the reading bride to a heavenly embrace. This bridal reader was the epistemological fulcrum of a media revolution that began in the expansion of monastic reading—the aspiration to know the Word as experience—ostensibly to comprise non-learned subjects. The seemingly straightforward image of a woman reading in or reciting from a vernacular text thus appears as the highly compressed visualization of a much larger web of associations, one that, rather than simply cameoing the use of texts, instead visually encapsulates their place within a new range of mediary practices and their relationship to gnosis.

With the *Speculum virginum*, the reading position of the bride was expanded into a method of women's *lectio* that takes Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs as its two arch-texts, its authorizing models and prophetic prefigurations in scripture. In the next two chapters we will see how the same scriptural songs of the bride and her heavenly wedding were transferred to the vernacular stage, allowing us to witness the socio-linguistic

translation of women's *lectio* to the courts of the lay nobility. The two key texts, both in Old French and neither of them well known, could hardly be more intriguing, not only for their status as missing links but also, and most fortuitously, for the information we have or that they provide on their relationship to a literary and social context.

In the first case, known by the incipit of Psalm 44 as the Old French *Eructavit* and most likely composed between 1180 and 1187, reference to *ma dame de Champagne* and *la jantis suer le roi de France* have led to the conclusion that the text was commissioned by the celebrated patron of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie, Countess of Champagne.¹ This conclusion—while tenable in itself—foreshortens consideration of a larger argument revolving around Marie as the text's inscribed addressee. The text presents itself as an instructor's offering to Marie as his spiritual daughter; but this offering is none other, so it claims, than the *chançon* sung by a jongleur, David, to the heavenly couple at their wedding—that is, Psalm 44, here expanded into over 2,000 vernacular octosyllabic verses. In other words, the text represents a perfect transposition of the instructive communication articulated in the successive openings of the *Speculum virginum* onto the stage of courtly literature. It is addressed to Marie as the reigning princess of that stage. Whether or not she factually had an interest in the *Eructavit*, then, its author seeks her ear as a way of performing a marriage between sacred and secular poetic forms for his general audience. The text reshapes the Spirit's seduction of the bride into instruction for the woman seen to preside over the poetry of courtly seduction. By evoking Marie it is not, first and foremost, relating factual history. It is shaping itself as fact within a poetic history of the vernacular text and thereby creating the facts of such a history.

The Old French translation of the bride's reading of the Song of Songs is found in a commentary by Landri of Waben (ca. 1200), which survives in only one manuscript in Le Mans.² In an excursus redolent of courtly lyric, Landri makes a riddling reference to his "Lady," which scholarly commentary has most often taken as a reference to his patron. Closer attention to the text reveals that this lady and another, the bride of the biblical arch-text, are indistinguishable; once again the basic identification between bride and present female addressee is intertwined with the text's account of its genesis. The real patron, however, in the nearest approximation of fact available to our reconstruction, was no woman at all, but rather Baldwin II of Guines, eminently learned *illiteratus* and creator-collector (so we are told) of a veritable vernacular library. Taking the two ideas as they stand, we are confronted with a text that teaches Baldwin to read as Mary did,

1 "*Eructavit*," lines 3, 2079. Further references are parenthetical. The editor, T. A. Jenkins, "Introduction," pp. ix–ii, dated the poem 1181–1187; several revisions have since been proposed, the most recent and conservative, 1179–1198, by Ruini, "Appunti," 215; further literature is also found there. Philip Augustus, half-brother to Marie de Champagne, was crowned late in November 1179 and ascended the throne in September 1180; Marie died in 1198. While Marie's death offers the only firm *terminus ante quem*, Jenkins's argument for composition before 1187 should not be dismissed.

2 Le Mans, Mediathèque Louis Aragon (formerly Bibliothèque municipale) MS 173, on the dating, see below, 38.

and the elusive reference to the poet's lady serves as the point of variable identification enabling this reading.

A similar instance of riddling reference to a woman as audience occurs in a text of a very different sort, and the third to command our attention in the next two chapters: the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (1160–1165). In this case the author-narrator's bow to a *riche dame de riche rei* (powerful lady of a powerful king) among the imagined audience has led to the assumption that the poem was written for Eleanor of Aquitaine, mother of Marie and likewise presumed *grande doyenne* of new vernacular poetry, in particular of the adulterous persuasion. The assumption is as factually dubious as it is imaginatively suggestive; once again, it is the riddle and the identities it evokes as possible solutions that truly count. If Eleanor is potentially one of these, then she, like Marie, figures as a representative of the audience in any given performance of the text; her primary function lies not, or not merely, in the realm of historical fact. She rather figures as a link between the present performance and the author's project, a work that initiates the appropriation of pagan history—the *matière de Rome*—for a Christian and courtly audience and the vernacular stage.

The three texts would seem initially to make odd bedfellows, and they have doubtless never been considered as part of one argument before. Their association runs counter to several categorical distinctions habitually assumed to apply in medieval literary culture. No less within the texts than between them, liturgy meets entertainment, exegesis meets narrative, history meets fiction, pagan meets Christian, and sacred meets profane. Beyond the fact that each is purportedly addressed to a woman in whom scholarship has persistently also seen the historical patron, they would appear as a group to have only their French vernacular verse in common. But this seeming incongruity is instead the oddity that portends a discovery: to pursue "the problem of the woman reader"³ through early vernacular texts is to discover a body of texts and literary aspirations that is as apparently disparate as it is inwardly unified. It is, in fact, to discover a different history of the emergence of vernacular texts—a history as it was being written into the texts themselves.⁴ A fourth text and our only source of information pertaining to Landri's Song commentary, the Latin chronicle of the counts of Guines by Lambert of Ardres, provides us with just that: an account of the genesis of vernacular literature as if telescoped into the lives of two illustrious members of one family. The history being written in these texts is aware of the prominent position of certain key figures in a new cultural development and uses this prominence as a way of communicating, legitimizing, and aggrandizing the objectives and significance of the text at hand and, no less, of the vernacular literary project as a whole. In each instance, the woman invoked as the receiving ear of the authorial address is the centrepiece of a strategy for the transformation of the vernacular performance space into a restaging of Mary's reading, a poetics of the vernacular

3 Cf. Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4, quoted below, p. 208.

4 As argued of a different selection of texts in Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," chaps. 5 and 6.

text in which its performance becomes the site of the woman's audio-visual *lectio* and vernacular literature poses as a layman's scripture.

This female instance, in a sense, writes a different history of the emergence of vernacular texts, and it is the task of the remaining chapters of this book to explore this history. Despite the central position of notable patrons within it, whether supposed or confirmed, it is not a history of patronage any more than it is a history of new readers. It is a history of the reading bride and her successor, the widow; it is likewise a history of the new possibilities of written texts devised for oral performance. Finally and above all, it is a history of new ways of mediating the truth.

The idea that with vernacular renditions of the reading of the two great scriptural epithalamia, Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs, the project of a woman's *lectio* becomes one of a layman's scripture is, logically speaking, not difficult to grasp. The idea that a romance of antiquity, a seemingly endless account of warfare and revenge, the *Roman de Troie*, could share in such a project will meet with greater scepticism. Precisely this discovery, however, is what hinges on Benoît's riddle as to the nature and identity of his female addressee, the question, *Quae est ista?* that echoes like a refrain through the Song of Songs itself (Canticles 3:6, 6:9, 8:5).⁵ As others will after him, Benoît confronts his audience with this question as a call to assume the role of the reading bride. The gesture intrudes on the text at a highly conspicuous juncture, raising the equivalent of a red flag over the element of the tale most blatantly in contradiction with the author's claim faithfully to follow his historical source, the story of Briseida, which is entirely his own invention. This story of a woman vacillating between two loves presents readers with a conundrum, yielding no clear avenue of moral judgment, even while embedded in an epic tale of the immeasurable destruction wrought by the changeable love of women. As I will argue in the next chapter, Briseida's story is an exercise in learning to read as a woman, which, for Benoît (and for Landri of Waben no less), means learning to read love as suffering and suffering with a woman in love, that is, learning to recognize Eve's part in Mary and reliving Mary's transformation of Eve. This mirror of suffering love in itself contains the meaning of Briseida's story. Still better, it alone allows the meaning of the story of Troy, as Benoît retells it, to be understood. *La vertez*, the very truth, of the story of Troy is thus discovered through the interpolation of a woman's story into history and of woman's reading into learned tradition.

Several concepts rather surprisingly conjoin in this construction: the truth of history is subordinated to the truth of experience, and the key to this experience is a woman's suffering for love. The discovery of truth through such experience is the reading project shared by the various texts discussed in the conclusion of the last chapter, whether *La Chanson de Saint Alexis*, Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*, Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse*,

⁵ The words *quae est ista quae ascendit sicut aurora consurgens* ... (Canticles 6:9) began the liturgy of the Assumption feast at Lauds, thus more or less at sunrise. The response, *Hodie Maria virgo coelos ascendit* identified the woman who realized the truth of the prophetic text, in whose honour the feast was held. It seems reasonable to assume that even many lay people attending the celebration would have been well aware of the meaning of this much, if not more, of the chants. See Fulton, "Quae est ista," 104–5.

or the meditation on Mary's experience of the Passion, the "Quis dabit." Benoît flouts the rules of his own claim to truth, the claim to relate the story as told by an eyewitness, by inserting a fiction through which the audience could discover history not by "being there" but rather by "being her." The truth of the eyewitness is displaced by the woman's ability to mediate presence through affective experience. Briseida's role in the poetics of the *romans* recalls that of the suffering bride as a model for audience or reader identification; she is, like Alexis's bride, a prototype of the new widow in vernacular literature. Exegesis and history meet in the rediscovery of *historia* as reading through the body of Christ's humanity. As the later chapters of this book will argue, this is the project, in fact, that has thus far been discussed in the scholarship as "the discovery of fiction" in romance narrative of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. It is not a project committed to a literary experience "liberated ... from the horizons of religious meaning" (as Walter Haug most prominently argued)⁶ but rather, and most profoundly, one that articulates a layman's way of knowing the Word and produces a body of cultural monuments that affirm the place of lay identity within God's plan for human salvation.

If the idea of romance as the (re-)discovery of a narrative aesthetic of fiction has become the prevailing scholarly consensus, it is not least because the many attempts to discover how romance texts might transmit a religious meaning have met with little success. Research in this direction has, however, inevitably relied on hermeneutic models that derived either from the traditions of the schoolman's exegesis or from Latin antiquity.⁷ The very nature of the project, as understood here, predetermines the failure of such efforts. A literature that translates reading experience for the use and needs of the non-learned—and these texts are often emphatic, even belligerent, on this point—could not employ the hermeneutic methods of the *litterati* to effectively appropriate the layman's stage. But neither should such an adversarial stance be taken entirely at face value. Modern scholarship has had a good deal invested in the discovery of a literature ca. 1200 in which lay courtly culture lays the foundation for the secular literary aesthetic that flourished in later centuries. It has thus too readily embraced the assumption that this literature rejected not only the learned methods of religious reading but also the objectives they served.

For a cultural achievement that looms so large in the eyes of posterity, vernacular literature appears to have commanded very little attention within the literate and intellectual discourse of its own time, but notable exceptions exist, and one of them, found in Thomasin of Zirklare's *Der Welsche Gast*, will serve to inform us of a conservative cleric's critique in [chapter seven](#). Another, far more incidental, but better known and widely cited exception has been consistently misread as reinforcing the existing assumptions rather than revealing what it otherwise might. I am referring to the comments of Peter of Blois in his *Liber de confessione* on the tearful response of his contemporaries to

⁶ "... die neue, vom religiösen Sinnhorizont abgelöste Literatur," Haug, "Autorität," p. 124; similarly Haug, "Neue Poetologie," 70.

⁷ The last to receive serious consideration, *integumentum* theory, is decisively rejected as model for narrative poetics in Bezner, *Vela veritatis*, pp. 69–88.

Arthurian tales. Peter's words are worthy of detailed consideration, as they touch on the very juncture between sacred and secular that will be increasingly at the centre of our attention, that of a compassionating response to performance.

A consummate *litteratus* and familiar of some of the most fashionable and influential courts of his day (among them those of Henry II Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine), Peter of Blois composed his short treatise on the confession of sins towards the end of the twelfth century. The text would no doubt have remained obscure in our time but for its rare mention of performances of Arthurian tales, a passage seldom overlooked wherever such witness is sought. Only occasionally acknowledged, however, is Peter's extensive debt—we would call it plagiarism—to Aelred of Rievaulx, specifically to his *De speculo caritatis*, a treatise for the instruction of Cistercian novices written towards the middle of the century.⁸ Not only is nearly all of Peter's brief digression on tears lifted directly from Aelred's text, but this entire section of his text is likewise a patchwork sewn together from various sections of *De speculo caritatis*.⁹ In other words, Peter's text generally is engaged in a translation from one social milieu to another, from the spiritual discipline of a Cistercian monastery to the pastoral care of the courtly laity. Where Aelred evoked tales of tragedians and jongleurs and, for example, a "fellow called Arthur" as the spectres of a novice's distant past, for Peter's audience the last example is part of a very present and now literary (that is, written), reality.¹⁰ Comparison with Aelred's text thus reveals precisely how Peter handles this transition. The result is an amplification of the Arthurian side of the comparison on the one hand and of the specifics of compassionating response on the other, in addition to a parallelism in suffering that points suggestively to Christ's Passion. As printed below I have placed in italics the terms and phrases that constitute Peter's contribution:

Vera siquidem poenitentia non in lacrymis momentaneis, aut horaria compunctione consistit. Nulla etiam affectio pia meritoria est ad salutem, nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat. Saepe in tragoediis et aliis carminibus poetarum, in jocularum cantilenis describitur aliquis vir prudens, decorus, fortis, amabilis et per omnia gratosus. Recitantur etiam pressurae vel injuriae *eidem crudeliter irrogate*, sicut de Arturo *et Gangano et Tristanno*, fabulosa quaedam referunt histriones, quorum auditu *concutiuntur ad compassionem audientium corda*, et usque ad lacrymas *compunguntur*. Qui ergo de fabulae recitatione *ad misericordiam commoveris*, si de Domino aliquid pium legi audias, quod extorqueat tibi lacrymas, nunquid propter hoc de Dei dilectione potes dictare sententiam? *Qui compateris Deo, compateris et Arturo*. Ideoque utrasque lacrymas

⁸ The textual dependency was first noted, it seems, by Von Moos, *Consolatio*, pp. 213–14. See also Cotts, *Peter of Blois*, pp. 9, 14, 234; where extensive use of Aelred's *De spiritali amicitia* is noted in Peter's treatise on the same subject, but not the reliance on *De speculo caritatis* in *De confessione*.

⁹ From columns 1087 to 1089, at least four-fifths of the text is assembled and adapted from Aelred's. I have identified material that ranges from sections 23 to 66 of *De speculo caritatis*; there is undoubtedly more.

¹⁰ *De speculo caritatis*, 2:17, par. 50, p. 90. In Aelred's text Arthur is mentioned only once and then only by the novice in response. The master's remarks concern "fictitious" (*fabulosus*) tales generally.

pariter perdis, si non diligis Deum, si de fontibus Salvatoris spe scilicet fide et charitate, devotionis et poenitentiae lacrymas non effundis.¹¹

But true repentance does not consist in the tears of the moment or the compunction which lasts for an hour, for no pious disposition contributes to salvation unless it issues from the love of Christ. Often in tragedies and other compositions of the poets or in the songs of the jongleurs you will find descriptions of a man prudent, worthy, strong, amiable, and agreeable in all things. You will find also the account of the trials and injuries *cruelly inflicted on him*, just as actors repeat certain tales about Arthur and Gangano [Gawain?] and Tristan, at which *the hearts of the audience are stirred with compassion and pierced* to the point of tears. You therefore who are moved to pity by the recitation of romances, if tears are drawn from you by something pious that is read to you about the Lord, does that mean that you are able to make pronouncements about the love of God? *You who are moved to compassion for God are no less moved to compassion for Arthur. Therefore you are wasting your tears on both counts* if you do not love God, if you do not shed tears of devotion and repentance from the fountain of the Saviour; from the fountain, namely, of faith, hope and charity.)¹²

Almost invariably, ever since it was pointedly brought to the attention of literary scholarship by Erich Auerbach, this passage has been read more or less as Auerbach did himself: Peter was “obviously disturbed by the effect of courtly poetry on a public of developing sensibility,” and thus wished to make clear that

Tragic compassion with persons involved in earthly tragedies is not compatible with religion, which has concentrated all tragedy in the cardinal point of history, the divine sacrifice of Christ. This event has absorbed all the grief in the world; worldly grief has lost its independent value and has no further claim to tragedy in its own right. ... The tears shed over such tragedy are worthless, so much so that the tears shed over Christ by those who weep for King Arthur or Tristan lose their value.¹³

This is decidedly not what the passage says, not even in Auerbach’s translation (given above).¹⁴ No causal connection pertains between weeping for Arthur and vainly weeping, that is, worthless tears for Christ; the one does not impinge upon the other.¹⁵ What is at stake is readily grasped through context: Peter’s subject in this section of his

11 Peter has not only lifted and adapted the passage from *De speculo caritatis*, 2.50–51 but also included within it points made elsewhere in Aelred’s discussion. Thus, for example, Peter’s statement, “Nulla etiam affectio pia meritoria est ad salutem, nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat,” taken together with the last sentence of this passage, effectively summarizes Aelred’s point in section 63, where he specifically addresses Peter’s subject, tears and penance.

12 Translation slightly modified (see below, note 14) from Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 304.

13 Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 305–6.

14 I have modified only the statement on parallel compassion for God and Arthur. Auerbach’s text reads, “You who lament over God lament also over Arthur.” There is no mention of vocal lament; on the other hand, Peter’s use of *compassio* and *compator* merits retention.

15 This misunderstanding continues, despite more differentiated treatment in the most recent scholarship; see for example, *JP*, pp. 441–42; and Mertens Fleury, *Leiden*, pp. 6–7. More typical is Ursula Schaefer’s use of the passage to demonstrate “keen competition” between courtly and religious literature, thus resulting in the former’s “unconditional condemnation” in texts such as Peter’s; Schaefer, *Vokalität*, p. 98.

text is compunction; that is, distinguishing what can be judged to signal the soul's true repentance as opposed to mere outward display. In this regard, he rejects the simple testimony of tears: they are too transitory (*momentaneis et horaria*) and too easily feigned; that is, their true source is never assured (*nisi ex Christi dilectione procedat*).¹⁶ Here, *characteristically* similar responses to romance narrative serve his purpose: how can one claim that tears manifest true repentance, given that they are as easily shed in the aesthetic pleasure of entertainment? On the relative value of these tears versus those no point is made; still less do the protagonists of romance steal tears from Christ. Nevertheless: prompted by Peter's own modifications of the earlier text, one might well ask the converse question; that is, what to make of tears, whether for Arthur or for Christ, when they stem from the proper source, when the affective movement in either case indeed manifests a loving heart?

In this regard Peter's specific diction reveals something beyond or behind his foregrounded meaning. It tells us that tears for Arthur and those shed "over the story of our Lord's suffering when read or sung in church or pronounced publicly in a sermon"¹⁷ arose from a strikingly similar and intensely physical, no less profoundly painful response. One that shook the heart and pierced it, thus bringing forth its essence, tears.¹⁸ Tears explicitly ascribed—in Peter's preferred language—to a fellowship in suffering, a *con-passio*. Again, as if to underline this point, Peter speaks of "punctured" hearts, *compunguntur*; that is, he literalizes the term whose figural meaning is that centrally at stake: *compunctio*, the heart's repentance. This language of the punctured or pierced heart, which we shall have reason to revisit in later chapters, comes from the ancient exegetical tradition of another heart-wound, this time received by the bride through the "arrow" cast by the bridegroom.¹⁹ Hence, Peter's testimony on the reception of romance suggests that the response to Christ's Passion and the response to romance heroes could be felt as one thing; they did not (necessarily) differ in quality nor did they, judged in and of themselves (and not by their object), differ in value. Monastic devotion (as Aelred expounded it) and love *en romans* met, for better or worse, in the wounding of the compassionate heart—and Peter regarded the same meeting as a commonplace useful to bring his own meaning home to a lay, courtly audience ca. 1200.

This, as I hope to make clear, is no small contribution to our understanding of the reception and meaning of romance narrative at the time. The value of the remarks does not lie where most have seen their emphasis—in a comparison, favourable or not, between the achievements and sufferings of romance heroes and those of the Christian saviour; it lies instead in what they say on audience response and the way

¹⁶ As Peter says in the preceding paragraph (1088B), "Si ergo senseris in te gratiam compunctionis et affluentiam lacrymarum, non tamen ideo te statim arbitraris Domino reconciliatum."

¹⁷ Aelred, *De speculo caritatis*, 2.51.

¹⁸ "Hearts moved to tears," is to be understood literally, as the other verbs suggest. The heart was held to be the physiological source of tears no less than of blood. Many examples in Weinand, *Tränen*, pp. 127–29, 186.

¹⁹ Arising from the passage "Ego charitate vulnerata sum" (Canticles 2:5, Old Latin and Septuagint versions). See pp. 253–55, below.

this was understood. *Compassio* was proposed as the possible key to a religious experience of romance narrative long ago, in particular for Wolfram's *Parzival*;²⁰ it has been resuscitated in recent decades to some profit but without decisive success.²¹ To realize the full potential of the idea, it must first be recognized that what is at stake is not a key to interpreting the texts, a key to their moral or ethical "meaning"; still less is it an exemplary function of the hero for the audience. At stake is, instead, a model of audience—in fact "female"—participation in the experience of the text, which alone delivers the experience of a larger truth. Second, the premise that *compassio* as experienced for the suffering of fellow men and women could share in the meaning and religious experience of the *compassio* Christians increasingly sought in following Mary to the cross has been disputed on theological grounds, grounds that Peter's text has been wrongly assumed to endorse.²² His remarks do not so much deny this premise as they acknowledge its currency among his audience. As Katharina Mertens Fleury shows in her investigation of the meaning of *compassio* in courtly society of this period, the same premise finds prominent support in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, among others. The experience of one's own suffering was the foundation of the ability to recognize the suffering of others, of one's neighbour and thus of Christ, and this idea "was the basis of Bernard's Christology, which foresaw that Christ had to experience human suffering and human compassion to release the world from its sins through his own suffering. Thus, to gain experience of compassion for one's neighbour could be understood in some sense as an *imitatio Christi* and as affording access to God."²³ *Compassio*, in this historical and social context, could be seen as "engaged in hermeneutics, [as] an art of understanding."²⁴ Paraphrasing Peter with none of his possible misgivings then, we can surmise that the tears of compassion he cites as a commonplace of romance performances could be understood by those who shed them as evidence that the message had arrived, that they were touched by the suffering they saw in a way that afforded an experience of truth of the type first communicated to humankind by Mary's experience at the cross. This surmise contains in a nutshell what the ensuing chapters will derive from reading the bride's reading in vernacular texts that place their performance under her banner.

The history of the new vernacular text revealed here thus acknowledges no incompatibility between the sacred and the secular or even between the sacred and the profane. The texts are keenly aware of their position as mediating instances between *got*

20 Above all in three essays by Julius Schwietering: "Parzivals Schuld," "Wandel," and "Tristan."

21 Schwietering's ideas (see the preceding note) are taken up anew with stimulating insight by Krass, "Mitleidfähigkeit," 282–304; and further developed with reference to *Parzival* in Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*.

22 Störmer-Caysa, "Mitleid," pp. 64–93.

23 "Bernhard von Clairvaux leitet daraus seine Christologie ab, nach der Christus das menschliche Leiden erfahren und Mitleid erlernen musste, um die Welt durch sein Leiden erlösen zu können. So bedeutet in gewisser Weise sogar das menschliche Erlernen von Mitleid mit dem Nächsten noch eine *imitatio Christi* und einen Zugang zu Gott." Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 46, also pp. 24–27.

24 "*Compassio* [bietet] aufgrund ihrer Erkenntnisfunktion also eine Hermeneutik, im Sinn einer Kunst des Verstehens," Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 46.

und der werlde, the formula featured in more than one German romance for the balancing act between God's claim to the soul and society's claim to the body.²⁵ They likewise witness no true rivalry between clerical learning and the layman's vernacular stage. The new literature designed for this stage was, on the contrary, a bold attempt to use the advantages of the latter to better transmit the content—or rather the experience—of the former. Conceptually speaking, it was written by preachers to be performed by jongleurs. In actual fact the cleric doubtless appropriated the stage himself with the promise to deliver better—and in some texts he declares no less. In *Parzival*, conversely, we will overhear the narrator as knight-jongleur as he in turn ousts the cleric from the new literary experience the latter has only just established. But these literary rivalries no more reflect operative historical or personal circumstances than the women the texts purport to address were the actual patrons or necessarily the audience of their performances. The voice of the text instead makes use of such roles to communicate a new literary project, to define the relationship between audience, message and messenger such that, as proper to each case, the original communication of the Word to the bride is refigured and recreated and thus claimed for a present vernacular audience. The woman we have been trying to locate as historical patron is in fact constructed in the text to elude identification or rather to be available for identification with each new audience and audience member. She exists as much within the text as beyond it, is as much a member of the audience as she is an unattainable ideal or a figure of their reading process.

To discover this identity, the answer to the question, *Quae est ista?* from the Song of Songs, was the key to an experience of the vernacular performance as the embrace of the Word. The discovery begins with the beginning, as we have first encountered it: with Mary's experience of the Annunciation as the conception of the Word through the Spirit. This inimitable and miraculous gnosis is more and more overlaid with one that must have felt far more immediate, more accessible and likewise more present in the lives of the participants: Mary's experience of the sufferings of her son, bridegroom and saviour, in which the perfect connection between God and humanity was re-established through a communion in human pain, an epiphany of empathy.

Riche dame de riche rei? Eleanor of Aquitaine and Le Roman de Troie

In the account that went unchallenged for over a century, no historical personage was held to have played a more crucial and broadly influential role in the irruption of vernacular literature in France than Eleanor of Aquitaine (ca. 1122–1206), sometime queen of France, later queen of England, duchess of Normandy and Aquitaine, and countess of Poitou, Anjou and Maine. Eleanor has been credited with having brought troubadour lyric to the northern regions of France, being the driving force behind the adaptation of the great epics and legends of antiquity into French, and introducing the Celtic legends

25 Cf. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, lines 8016–17; Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, lines 10125–29; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, lines 827, 19–24; see also Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, pp. 428–30.

surrounding King Arthur into France where they gave birth to Arthurian romance.²⁶ Together with her daughter, Marie de Champagne, she is the object of satire in the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus (ca. 1185) as the female arbiter presiding over a cult of “courtly love” and has therefore been seen as the central inspiration not only for literary projects but also for their content.²⁷

More recently, this broad-stroke picture has been subjected to rigorous re-examination and revision. In a study of the patronage of both Eleanor and her second husband, Henry II of England, Karen Broadhurst shows that “not a single text can be said to have been commissioned by Eleanor”; moreover, only three texts contain even possible references to her.²⁸ One of these, found in Philippe de Thaon’s vernacular translation of the bestiary, is an explicit dedication, but it clearly postdates the work’s composition by at least two decades.²⁹ In a second, Bernart de Ventadorn sends off a poem to “the queen of the Normans.”³⁰ The third is doubtful indeed; it is the passage from the *Roman de Troie* that will occupy us shortly. Leaving aside all debate over the appropriate criteria for patronage, not one of these three references can be stretched into evidence of active interest on Eleanor’s part.

Broadhurst was not the first to have raised such objections, and the consensus today regards Eleanor’s patronage of literature as at best a probable conjecture.³¹ But the idea of Eleanor as a driving force behind this great literary birth is difficult to dispense with. A development as significant as the arrival of courtly vernacular literature in the twelfth century begs for an explanation of transformative proportions, and we have as yet found little to put in place of either Eleanor’s captivating and charismatic personality or the considerable power and influence she wielded for a large part of the twelfth century in all the crucial regions in question. More important, however, is the argument that Andreas’s characterization suggests. While his is the sole known representation of Eleanor as connected to the culture of literary developments that dates from her own lifetime, by the mid thirteenth century at the latest it seems she was often *understood* to have filled such a role, whether this was merely legend or remembered fact.³² This,

²⁶ The foundational studies are Lejeune, “Rôle littéraire,” 5–57; and Bezzola, *Littérature courtoise*, pp. 247–311.

²⁷ See Bourgain, “Aliénor,” 29–36; and Turner, *Eleanor*, pp. 196–200.

²⁸ Broadhurst, “Patrons,” 82. See also Broadhurst, “Patronage.”

²⁹ After the death of his former patron, Adeliza (d. 1151), the second wife of Henry I of England, Philippe—in one of three extant manuscripts (Oxford, Merton College MS 249)—re-dedicates his work (dated to 1121–1135) to Eleanor with a plea for her legal intercession on his behalf; it must therefore postdate her coronation in 1154.

³⁰ “Pel doutz chan que l rosignols fai,” *Bernart von Ventadorn*, p. 197; verses 43–45 read, “Huguét, mos cortes messatgers / Chantatz ma chanzo volenters / A la reïna dels Normans.”

³¹ Varvaro, “Corti anglo-normanne,” pp. 283–84, also 253–54; also Turner, *Eleanor*, pp. 167–93, 196–204. For Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 394–413, the revisionist view has in some cases gone too far. In Ferrante, *Glory*, pp. 112–18, the standard portrayal of Eleanor is still alive and well; likewise in Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 213–17, and 250.

³² The mention in Layamon’s translation of Wace’s *Roman de Brut* (early thirteenth century) that Layamon used as one of his sources a copy of Wace’s text that Wace had presented to Eleanor, may

I think, is the crucial point. Literature speaks to the imagination of its audience, and when the texts offer vague or suggestive allusions in the direction of historical figures, they may be accomplishing something entirely more useful to their reception than puzzles for future historians.

Given a closer look, Benoît de Sainte-Maure's supposed homage to Eleanor reveals itself as the textbook example of a rhetorical strategy that we will encounter repeatedly in other vernacular texts:

D'icest vers crien je estre blasmez
 De cele qui tant a biautez,
 Qui hautece a, pris e valor,
 Honesté e sens e henor,
 Bien e mesure e seinteé
 Noble largece e honesté,
 En qui mesfait de dames maint
 Sunt par le bien de li esteint,
 En qui tote sciënce abunde,
 A la quel n'est nul secunde
 Qui el mond seit, de nule lei.
 Riche dame de riche rei,
 Sans mal, sans ire, sans tristece,
 Puissez avoir toz jorz leece!³³

(But I fear much to be blamed for these verses by that lady who is of such great beauty, she who possesses nobility, esteem and merit, virtue, judgment and honour, goodness and temperance and holy purity, noble generosity and probity; she through whom the failings of so many women are by her excellence again undone; she in whom all knowledge abounds, and who is without equal in all the world, regardless of faith. O powerful lady of a powerful king, free of evil, free of anguish and of sorrow may you live forever in happiness!)

Critical judgment has vacillated over whether to call this passage a "dedication" to Eleanor or rather a "delicate homage" or, more recently, an "apology," but few indeed are those who have doubted that the lines are addressed to Eleanor.³⁴ One of these is Roberta

well belong in this category; see Broadhurst, "Patrons," 70–72. For an account of both the historical and legendary dimensions, each in its own right, see Owen, *Eleanor*, esp. pp. 37–42.

33 I cite the text from the partial new edition of the Milan manuscript, Biblioteca ambrosiana D55, ed. and trans. Baumgartner and Vielliard; here lines 13457–70. For passages not included there I have cited the earlier critical edition by Constans.

34 "Dedication" goes back to the text's first editor, Leopold Constans, *Roman de Troie*, pp. 189–90. For "homage" see Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire," 23, and Bezzola, "Littérature courtoise," p. 289; the French term *excuse* is used by Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 32. The *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age* (rev. 1992), speaks of a "dédicace allusive"; for Baumgartner and Vielliard, "Introduction," p. 18, "Tout permet de penser que la *riche dame de riche rei* longuement célébrée aux vers 13457–13470 est bien Aliénor d'Aquitaine"; similarly: Petit, *Naissances du roman*, p. 820; Flori, *Eleanor*, p. 409; and Green, *Women Readers*, pp. 213, 250.

Krueger, who called attention to the immediate context of the remarks and pronounced the connection with Eleanor to be problematic at best.³⁵

Benoît's authorial intrusion interrupts the narration of the most celebrated love story in his voluminous romance, one also of his own invention: the ill-fated love of Briseida and the Trojan prince, Troilus.³⁶ Briseida is the daughter of the arch-traitor, the Trojan priest Calchas, who, leaving her behind, fled to the Greeks before the war had even begun.³⁷ Calchas later succeeds in negotiating his daughter's release from the city, and the scene preceding our crucial passage recounts the lovers' last night together and their parting. A narratorial digression deflates the scene's pathos entirely, however, by revealing that Briseida will quickly—"within three days"—bestow her love on another, the Greek hero Diomedes. The narrator's disapproving remarks broaden to become an indictment of women in general; these are the "verses" for which he fears reprimand: "Women's woe does not last long: she cries with one eye and laughs with the other." Worse, "no matter how grievous an offense they've committed or who may have seen it, as women would have it, they are never to blame. They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest."³⁸ The ensuing apology excepts from these remarks the one lady who is the object of his apposite praise.

Krueger's reservations are based on the "antifeminist framing" of the passage; she argues that the preceding remarks could only have offended a woman or women in the audience.³⁹ Indeed, if the apology is taken as directed at Eleanor in particular, its purported praise sooner smacks of sarcasm. Briseida is condemned for opportunistically changing horses, and sides, midway through the war. Assuming close association of the poem with Eleanor or her court, how could such an invention fail to evoke parallels with Eleanor's jilting of one husband's crown for another's? She is the one noted to have most avidly sought the annulment of her marriage to Louis VII of France, finally granted in 1152, and her second, to the king of England, Henry II, was completed within less than two months. The parallel is intensified in that her former husband was reputed (much in Troilus's vein) to have doted on her somewhat desperately. Is an apology to Eleanor then more in order than one might have believed?

If that is the case, Benoît's gesture can hardly suffice. Its exorbitant praise only exacerbates the wound by flying in the face of what was popularly believed and chronicled of Eleanor's behaviour. As early as 1146–1149, when Eleanor and her retinue accompanied Louis on the second crusade, if not before, the rumours of

³⁵ Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 5–7, although she still sees Eleanor as "a recognized patron for many early works" (*Women Readers*, p. 4). See also Varvaro, "Corti anglo-normanne," p. 284; Jaeger, "Patrons," p. 57; and Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, p. 150.

³⁶ Modern readers recognize Troilus's beloved as Cressida. On her remarkable literary afterlife, furthered by no less than Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare, see Barbara Nolan, *Roman Antique*.

³⁷ Curiously, Benoît attributes royal descent to this lineage, calling Briseida "Fille de rei," near the end of the romance (*Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, line 27947).

³⁸ Lines 13441–544, see below, pp. 260–61.

³⁹ *Women Readers*, pp. 5–7.

Eleanor's infidelities—to that point evidenced by no more than her husband's obsessive jealousy—were treated as certainties.⁴⁰ Later times would enlarge these into stories of her running off with the pagan ruler, Saladin.⁴¹ But even the most reliable contemporary sources—most notably John of Salisbury, writing in the 1150s—do not paper over the fiasco of Antioch. The royal couple was received there by Eleanor's uncle, Raymond, “and his constant, indeed almost continuous conversation with her, aroused the king's suspicions.”⁴² Other contemporaries explicitly report a sexual affair.⁴³ His jealousy now given apparent cause, Louis made to leave early, but Eleanor refused to accompany him, with Raymond joining in her entreaties to remain at Antioch. Louis, not to be duped, then resolved the issue by conducting a night-time kidnapping of his wife! But perhaps even more significantly, John reports that it was at Antioch that Eleanor first announced she wanted the marriage annulled, at which “the king was deeply moved.”⁴⁴

The historical accuracy of these reports is not the issue here. They leave beyond doubt that amorous adventures, political scandal, and even disloyalty in war were an established facet of Eleanor's celebrity by mid-century.⁴⁵ They likewise show that popular understanding of the divorce saw it as her ardent desire; this, coupled with her swiftly contracted marriage to Henry, would have made her appear to Benoît's audience in a rather worse light, even, than his Briseida. The ensuing “apology” would then be nothing of the sort, but rather a thinly veiled jab in Eleanor's direction encouraging the audience to make an unfavourable comparison. And the sole textual support for Eleanor's encouragement of new vernacular narrative would be quite irretrievably lost.

Still, what remains in its place? As Krueger tellingly stated, Benoît's *Roman de Troie* “marks an important step in the development of courtly romance's literary self-consciousness. It also marks the beginning of the woman reader as a problem.”⁴⁶ Krueger's understanding of “the woman reader” nonetheless misses the point in that

40 On the crusade and in particular the episode at Antioch as the origin of the “légende noire” surrounding Eleanor, see Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 295–335. Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 107, summarizes the progressive elaboration of the events over the ensuing century, and concludes, “In Eleanor's progressive vilification regarding her relationship with her uncle [Raymond of Antioch], we have seen her possibly tactless behaviour the subject perhaps of general rumour followed by spiteful hints, then accepted as a guilty liaison, and finally turned into a poisonous brew of half-remembered history laced with lust and treason.” See also McCracken, “Scandalizing Desire,” pp. 247–63.

41 Owen, *Eleanor*, pp. 104–5. See also Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 311–12, 328, 332.

42 John of Salisbury, *Historia pontificalis*, as translated in Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 104; also Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 318–19.

43 Owen, *Eleanor*, pp. 104–5; Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 315–21.

44 John of Salisbury, *Historia pontificalis*, as translated in Owen, *Eleanor*, p. 104.

45 Flori, *Eleanor*, pp. 302–7; 323–24; O'Callaghan, “Tempering Scandal,” pp. 248–50. Even the passage in Wace's *Roman de Rou* (1160–ca. 1174), so often cited as a dedication to Eleanor along with the patron, her husband Henry, acknowledges that Eleanor and Louis “went to Jerusalem on a long pilgrimage” where “each suffered distress and pain. / When they came back, by counsel of their baronage / the queen left him with her rich kin” (p. 208, lines 27–30, as trans. in Ferrante, *Glory*, p. 112). See also Pappano “Marie de France,” p. 358.

46 Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4.

she assumes that a woman apostrophized or represented in the text was identified by the medieval audience as a representation of women *as opposed to* men, or of women as “woman.”⁴⁷ Benoît’s gesture, on the contrary, first undercuts audience sympathy with his protagonist by declaring her depraved “as all women are,” then undercuts this stance in turn by protesting that one woman’s excellence nevertheless disallows such generalization. Women—or a hackneyed battery of misogynist jibes—are compared with one woman, and it is our sympathy that is at stake and called to judge between the two. The position of the audience is that of the recipient placed between opposite manifestations of the equation between woman and body, Eve and Mary, and understood as identifying her own position between the two. The identities at stake are left unnamed, and this, along with the pointed narratorial address, is the signal that the audience itself is included among them.

On the surface of things, Benoît’s romance remains authentically placed in a pagan world whose protagonists know only of *li deu*, the multiple gods of antiquity.⁴⁸ But his praise of an unknown model of female perfection can easily be read as a signpost for the Christian audience to a new and better world that began in Mary. One manuscript actually supplies such a reading:

Riche fille de riche roi,
Sanz mal, sanz ire et sanz tristece,
De vos nasquié tote leece
Le jor de la Natevité:
Vos fustes fille et mere Dé.⁴⁹

(Powerful daughter of a powerful king, without evil, without anger or sorrow, from you all joy was born on the day of the Nativity: you became daughter and mother of God.)

Through a mere exchange of feminine for masculine pronouns, the lines preceding this passage in the same manuscript (13457–69) are addressed to God.⁵⁰ The alteration is not entirely successful and in any case shows little appreciation for the subtlety of Benoît’s riddle. But it demonstrates how easily this catalogue of female excellence could be transferred to divine persons in the minds of the medieval audience. The original text almost indisputably invites a similar interpretation. The woman “through whom

47 Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 3–4, 6, 12–13, 30 and *passim*.

48 Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, pp. 249 and 327–31; this is not to deny that the characters frequently invoke “deus,” that is, one god alone.

49 Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal MS 3340. The manuscript is dated in a colophon to 1237. These verses would correspond to 13468–70 a, b, c. They are printed in Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 138, and *Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, 6, p. 25. Benoît’s complex gesture would seem to have puzzled not a few of the poem’s later copyists: while seventeen manuscripts retain it, four of these omit the crucial line, *riche dame de riche rei*. In another thirteen manuscripts, the entire passage is omitted. As noted by Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 32, the changes occur independent of the filiation of the manuscripts and therefore require a different explanation.

50 “Dicés vers crieng estre blasmez / De celui qui tant a bontez.” This (following Constans’s critical apparatus) renders lines 13463–64 incoherent: “Qui les mesfaiz des dames veint / Sont par le bien de lui esteint.” See also Jung, *Légende de Troie*, p. 138.

the failings of other women are again made good" can hardly be identified as anyone but Mary; the list of her virtues includes sanctity (*seintée*), in her all knowledge abounds, and in all the world—under any faith (*lei*, or "law")—no woman can second her.⁵¹ The passage immediately following (lines 13471–91) sees the rare intervention of biblical authority as Solomon underscores the narrator's opinion with his praise of the *mulier fortis* ("fort femme") from Proverbs 31:21–24, who was understood to prefigure Mary or the church awaiting Christ's return. Moreover, the words *riche dame* need not be altered to *riche fille* if one considers Mary as the *sponsa et mater*, the position that corresponds to her reversal of woman's failing.⁵² Benoît has not only offered a persiflage of Eleanor, he has identified the praise that would be hers with a model to which she cannot compare. Eleanor, if she figures here at all, is left aligned with Briseida; more certain is that Briseida, as Mary's counterpart, is another Eve.

Thus, the juxtaposition of "women's failing" as represented in Briseida with the narrator-poet's praise of an anonymous female ideal rather more suggestively inscribes Eleanor in the text than would either alone. The narrator steps forward in the guise of the author who appears to take his bow before a woman as ultimate judge of his work, but in so doing invites his audience to locate their own response to the narrative somewhere between two opposing representations of woman, one inside, one outside the text; that is: one whose qualities and dilemma they "see" before them and doubtless understand, the other, supposedly among them, whose qualities constitute the first woman's indictment and rejection—and are all but unattainable. The result is an ingeniously crafted trap in which the audience must either reject the narrator's judgment to identify with Briseida's dilemma or align its response with one only allowed a supreme model of female moral perfection. The ploy recalls the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). If the narrator takes the lead with his verbal lashing, the audience is left inclined to hold its moral punches, suspended, for the time being, in Bloch's conundrum of the "contradictory abstracted double," which "no living woman can resolve."⁵³ Certainly Eleanor could not—and this may be the real meaning of the author's wink in the direction of the most powerful woman of his time. But the experience of narrative, the experience offered the audience-as-woman, can, and it will. The elucidation of this experience in Benoît's text awaits us in the [next chapter](#).

Benoît's "Apology" is the only point at which the narrator problematizes "out loud" the reception of his text, and women, or a woman, are chosen to represent this act.⁵⁴

51 These phrases in particular receive a neutralizing treatment in the translation of Baumgartner and Vieliard (*Roman de Troie*, pp. 287/89): *seintée* becomes "pureté," *toute science* becomes simply "sagesse," and the phrase *de nule lei* (under any law or faith) is suppressed.

52 Gautier de Coinci frequently refers to Mary with the adjective *riche*, and calls her a *rich dame*. See *Miracles de Notre Dame*, 1:140, 173; 2:23.

53 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 91.

54 As Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 6–7, writes: "What is remarkable about this digression in its entirety (lines 13429–94) is the way it so conspicuously problematizes the woman within and beyond the text ... Benoît's dedication inscribes the problem of gender and interpretation. The clerk signals the female reader's centrality to the project he is undertaking: "she" is the only member of the audience whose response he so engages."

In construction, posture and relationship to the narrative in which it is embedded, this gesture found clear successors, the most notable in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*; but we shall also encounter it shortly in Landri of Waben's commentary on the Song of Songs and in Thomasîn of Zirclaria's *Der welsche Gast*. Krueger was indeed correct to identify Benoît's text as "the beginning of the woman reader as a problem,"⁵⁵ but not in the sense she intended: this is the beginning, in courtly vernacular literature, of the problem of reading as woman, of woman as the key to a poetics of vernacular texts in performance and to their claim to deliver sacred truth.

As for Eleanor, then, her position and reputation are in play, but not by way of flattery, solicitation or even thanks. She represents a point of vulnerability, a point of entry through which the tale hits home. It is no less the point that serves Benoît to communicate the audience's position in relationship to *la letre*, as he refers to his Latin sources, and thus to justify the mediating position of his text between these and the vernacular performance space. In this way, Eleanor's presumed role as hub of a vernacular literary wheel undoubtedly enlarges the significance of the gesture and is perhaps even why it is there.

Benoît's romance, as evidenced by the number of extant copies and adaptations of his text, was without doubt among the most popular of its time, demonstrably more popular than any by Chrétien de Troyes, and this popularity extended over two centuries, if not more.⁵⁶ And yet, if it has found modern attention, then rarely as more than a prototype of its genre, a contrast or prelude to study of Chrétien's romances. But we have little indication that contemporaries even recognized such a genre. Vernacular romance narrative was not born as the singular project our literary canon often lets it appear to be. Rather, the same interest in vernacular writing that produced these texts transgresses indiscriminately our definitions of genre and subject matter and evinces rather different interests from those fancifully ascribed to an impetuous and passionate queen furthering a new doctrine of love. The texts considered in this and the [next chapter](#) are a reminder of both the breadth of those interests and of the fact that scholarship has only very selectively attended to them.⁵⁷

Translating Scripture for *Ma dame de Champagne*

Compared to those of her mother, the literary interests of Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne, are better documented. They were not limited to illicit or adulterous love,

⁵⁵ Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Three manuscripts survive from the late twelfth century to around 1200, one of them complete. Another thirty-three copies have survived in at least fragmentary form from the thirteenth century alone; see Jung, *Légende de Troie*, pp. 19, 22–23. As noted in Kelly, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 1, these numbers far surpass those associated with the romances of Chrétien or, for that matter, of any other twelfth-century romance. In addition, and also beginning in the thirteenth century, Benoît's romance was the object of multiple prose adaptations in French as well as two verse translations into German, the first already around 1200.

⁵⁷ For a parallel discussion of the same period in the Middle High German tradition, see Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 281–310.

the witness of Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus notwithstanding. While the former attributed *matiere et san* of his *Chevalier de la Charrette* to Marie, and the latter placed her “judgments” in the “courts of love” alongside similar ones attributed to her mother—both purportedly insisting that true love existed only outside marriage—Marie is equally well attested as the patron of literature of religious instruction and biblical exegesis.⁵⁸ One such text, a commentary on Genesis by a poet who identifies himself as Evrat, was first edited in 2002.⁵⁹ Another, the so-called “paraphrase” of Psalm 44 known as the *Eructavit*, has found more attention, but far less than it deserves.⁶⁰ The *Eructavit* is extraordinary for its manuscript transmission alone, which comprises fifteen copies of the full text.⁶¹ No fewer than ten date from the thirteenth century, ranging geographically from the southern to the northern reaches of France.⁶² The text demonstrates an acute awareness of Marie’s celebrated literary position: the princess of a purported cult of adulterous love stands in here for the contemporary audience of courtly vernacular literature as a whole and of romance in particular; by evoking her as the poem’s audience, the poet makes the religious instruction for a courtly lady that it is announced to be into a reformation of the vernacular performance and its audience in the image of Mary’s conception of the Word. Marie as courtly audience is another Ooliba; the poem’s performance is the means of her transformation into the New Eve. No text more clearly illustrates the hybrid project of adapting women’s *lectio* for the courtly audience and the vernacular performance space, a new form of cultural mediation between the clerico-monastic and the courtly elites, and this fact doubtless largely accounts for its pre-eminent position among comparable texts of the twelfth century.⁶³

An adaptation of David’s “chançon de chambre” (2075), or epithalamic psalm, undertaken for a prominent noblewoman in the second half of the twelfth century could scarcely have been seen otherwise. As noted in the discussion of the *Speculum*’s *audi-et-vide* address, the eleventh verse of the psalm was seen as David calling Mary to the perfect act of seeing and hearing at the Annunciation; this verse and another from the same

⁵⁸ *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, lines 1–2 and 26–27. Marie is the most frequently cited authority for decisions in Andreas’s “courts of love”; see Andreas Capellanus, *Art of Courtly Love*, pp. 167–77. On the evidence for Marie’s literary interests, see Zaganelli, “Corte di Champagne,” pp. 303–25; and Benton, “Court of Champagne,” 551–91.

⁵⁹ *La Genèse d’Evrart*, edited by Wilhelmus Boers, PhD diss., Leiden University, 2002. See also *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. 6.2, no. 1824.

⁶⁰ Three contributions since 1999 offer a foundation for further study: Ruini, “Appunti”; Powell, “Translating Scripture”; and McCash, “Sacred Love.” Ruini provides an overview of the scant previous scholarship and main questions surrounding the text.

⁶¹ Among other biblical verse “translations” of the twelfth century only one is transmitted in more than two or three manuscripts: see Varvaro, “Traduzioni,” pp. 496–97.

⁶² Jenkins listed fifteen manuscripts in his edition, one of which merely excerpts the concluding Gloria, lines 2131–68 (Le Mans 173, see note 2, above). Unknown to him was the thirteenth-century copy contained in St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Fr. F. v. XIV 9 (fols. 264r–277v); since described in Ducrot-Granderye, *Etudes*, pp. 73, 241; and identified for *Eructavit* scholarship in Powell, “Translating Scripture,” p. 102; see also Ruini, “Appunti,” p. 216.

⁶³ See Varvaro, “Traduzioni,” pp. 496–97, 505, 508.

psalm (Psalm 44:3) were seen as prophetic images fulfilled in the Annunciation, and the *Speculum* demonstrates how Mary's experience was to be relived in women's reception of the text. The wedding that calls the *Eructavit* into existence is identified as that between God and holy church (86) and, shortly thereafter, as Mary's *conceptio a voce*: Deus ... an son precieus cors se mist / a la voz que li angles dist" (God ... entered her precious body through the voice [word] that the angel spoke) (119–21). Accordingly, communication is very much at the centre of the *Eructavit*'s presentation, constructed in a distinctly parallel configuration to that seen in the *Speculum*. David, as "uns des prophetes," is granted a vision of Heaven that is recommunicated through the poet's delivery of his song; with the same song and in the same "voice," however, David calls the heavenly bride to the embrace of the bridegroom. The frontispiece of the *Speculum virginum* displays the same transfer and simultaneity of communication on three analogous levels: the prophets receive and communicate God's plan above, Peregrinus reiterates this communication to Theodora below—and both exchanges are equally involved in the communication at the centre, which portrays Mary's reception of the common message as her conception of the Word. The purpose of this construction is the same in either case: to demonstrate that what happens in the central communication, the wedding of the Word and the soul, happens in analogous form on its borders, that is, in the framing before and after of prophetic and present-day communication.

The *Eructavit* identifies neither its author nor its recipient by name. The text instead foregrounds a relationship between an unnamed personal spiritual adviser and a woman named in the poem's opening lines only as "ma dame de Champagne." He is her "true friend" who "has taught her all she knows."⁶⁴ The poem literally performs a fusion of prophetic speech and oral performance, of religious instruction and courtly *chanson*, that is suggested in its opening lines:

Une chançon que David fist
Que nostre sire en cuer li mist
Dirai ma dame de Champagne,
Celi cui Damedés ansaigne
Et espire de toz ses biens

(1–4)

(A song that David composed
That our Lord placed in his heart
I will recite to my Lady of Champagne,
She whom God teaches
And inspires in all her virtues)

⁶⁴ "Li bons maistre don vos avez / Retenu quanque vos savez, / Si comme il est verais amis," lines 2097–99; s.a. line 3. Based on this relationship, the author has been conjectured as Adam de Perseigne, who is known as the spiritual adviser of several prominent noblewomen and members of Marie's family and to have been called to her bedside before she died. The poem offers no further indication of his identity.

The chain of communication suggests an equation between God's, David's, and the poet's songs and instruction that is amply born out in the poem as a whole.⁶⁵ The equivalence is manifest as an apparent simultaneity, accomplished through a continuous blurring of boundaries between David's audience, the poet-instructor's and the narrating performer's. One example is reminiscent of Benoît's supposed address to Eleanor:

Rèine estes de riche cort,
 Veez la joie qui vos sort!
 ...
 Ceste chançon que ge vos chant,
 Par quoi je vos guarnis avant
 Ainsi con Dex le me consoile,
 Vos dirai je pres de l'oroile
 Quant ceste joie iert avenue
 Que j'ai en vision vëue
 (1951–1960)

(You are the queen of a powerful court
 See the joy that awaits you
 ...
 This song that I sing to you
 —With which I prepare you in advance
 As God advises me to do—
 I will whisper in your ear
 When this joy has come to pass
 That I saw in a vision.)

These lines are ostensibly addressed by David to the heavenly bride, another vivid reminder that Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei* need not refer to a worldly woman at all. But here, as there, the full meaning can only be grasped by allowing the worldly and the heavenly audience a moment of conjunction, as two images superimposed. The vision David evokes as past (line 1960) in fact makes up much of the poem's narrated present; it is the vision that allows David to attend the heavenly wedding and thus both to receive and to deliver his song as his knowledge of those events. As part of the same vision the bride has no use for advance preparation for the wedding or *joie*; in this David can only be speaking to his "daughter" the church.⁶⁶ From the audience's perspective, however, the lines read as addressed by the poet-instructor to his lady. Like the woman addressed as the bride of the psalm in the original opening of the *Speculum virginum*, she is the bride, the daughter, and the representative of the present audience. This suggests a portrayal of the several senses of scripture through the persons of various brides, all

⁶⁵ Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 85–91 and passim; also Zink, "Dédicace," pp. 591–600, esp. p. 596.

⁶⁶ As the narrator explains of the eleventh verse: "David, qui sainte eglise apele / Sa fille comme une pucele / Qui de son paranté fu nee" (1343–45).

simultaneously the recipients of one communication, and the poem does indeed stand as a recasting of such a quadripartite understanding.⁶⁷ But to read it as such would be to efface precisely what the author's work of translation has accomplished: to suffuse such theological knowledge, or rather the truth it expresses, into the experience of narrative and performed speech. For the audience, this truth is an experience grasped through the simultaneity of various levels of communication in performance, an experience they grasp on their own terms and in their own language and even through their own literary experience.

The author's initial identification of his audience as "Ma dame de Champagne" is not the result of mere reticence over the use of her name. In the opening lines of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Chrétien used the identical phrase to make the extraordinary claim that Marie, not otherwise named, was responsible for both the content and the meaning, *matiere et san*, of his romance of adulterous love between Lancelot and "la reine."⁶⁸ This queen in turn is named only after more than a thousand lines as *Guenievre*.⁶⁹ The *Eructavit* poet's only subsequent allusion to the identity of his addressee, near the end of the poem, apostrophizes her with a circumlocution that emphasizes her royalty: "La jantis suer le roi de France" (The noble sister of the king of France) (2079);⁷⁰ while David's addressee is named as *la reine* throughout. The use of a phrase identical to Chrétien's in the same crucial position and for the same purpose—only one of several allusions to Chrétien's *oeuvre* in this poem—announces the poem's overarching objective of claiming its place on the courtly vernacular stage.⁷¹ More than this, it implicitly evokes Marie (and with her the courtly audience) as a "queen" poised in her literary life (her life as audience) between the scandalous love of Guenievre and that of the true bride and queen. The same idea may echo behind the sole remarks the poet makes on her character: she is given to an excess of largesse, which may "all too often trouble a noble nature with worry and hardship."⁷² Chrétien had written (at the outset of his *Cligès*) of Largesse as the queen of courtly virtues; in romance generally it has a more ambivalent role to play.⁷³ In particular one thinks of Arthur's ill-fated boon that puts his queen's life in jeopardy

⁶⁷ The church as *sensus allegoricus*, Marie or the present audience as *sensus tropologicus*, and the queen of Heaven as *sensus anagogicus*. Mary is also amply present as the *sensus historicus*.

⁶⁸ *Charrette*, lines 1–2 and 26–27. The romance is usually dated from 1177 to 1181.

⁶⁹ Guenievre is named at line 1099. While consistent with Chrétien's *oeuvre* as a whole, in which Arthur's queen is rarely named, the fact remains remarkable in a romance that turns so entirely around her person.

⁷⁰ See note 1, above.

⁷¹ Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 92–93 and n20; the reverse hypothesis (that Chrétien's "dedication" alludes to the *Eructavit*) is argued (unconvincingly, I think) in Zink, "Dédicace." On other allusions to Chrétien, see note 78, below.

⁷² "Largecē et li hauz despans / Metent cusançon et espans / Mainte foiz an jantil corage" (lines 11–14, s.a. 6–9).

⁷³ Que largece est dame et reine / Qui toutes vertuz enlumine" (*Cligès*, lines 193–94). Zaganelli, "Corte di Champagne," pp. 318–19, sees a possible reference to problems arising from the largesse of Marie's husband Henry, which was so notable as to provide his epithet, "the Liberal."

and thus sets in motion the entire plot of the *Charrette*, eventually leading to the queen's excessive "largesse" towards Lancelot. *Ma dame de Champagne*, whether or not she is truly the poet's patron and avid pupil of religious wisdom, is in any case evoked in her position as the *grande dame* of literature *en romans*, she presides over this courtly performance space as the queen of Heaven (with the king) presides over David's. She presides no less as a psalter-reader; this text is a reading of the psalm as fit for a queen of courtly literature—it is "her" reading, presented for us as a poetic performance. *Dame*, bride and the present audience are all one, and this fusion of identities is content and objective, *matiere et san*, of this poem, the central purpose of which is to bring Mary's reading to the courtly vernacular performance space.⁷⁴

To further collapse the distance between the original and the present communication, David, not the courtly poet, poses as the *jongleur* in the authorial duo. The poem tells the story of David's original composition and performance of his *chançon* as one of many *jugleor* who, upon hearing news of the impending heavenly wedding, set out to perform there. The song he performs is, however, not simply the text of the psalm. Instead the verses of the biblical text are embedded in a presentation that expands them to over 500 lines, or a quarter of the Old French text. To perform the verses "God placed in his heart" for his audience, guests at the heavenly wedding, David adapts and expands upon them. The poet of the Old French *Eructavit* does the same in his turn: the narrative frame that stages David's performance is itself the result of the poet's *dire*, his retelling of the Song for Marie de Champagne and the courtly audience. The narrative context and exegetical comment that make up this "third saying" (God's, David's, poet's) constitute expansion by another 1500 lines. This despite the poet's claim to "add not a word, except where rhyme requires using a different one with the same meaning."⁷⁵ That is: the expansion is a necessary aspect of proper translation of the message as appropriate to a new audience. The author's narrative embedding of the poem and its staging as David's performance are part and parcel of translation into *romans*.

The poet's narrative begins with the announcement of a great feast: "It is the custom and a familiar one, that a king who wishes to crown his son or give him a bride spreads the news well in advance. ... God who is king and lord acted similarly in his own realm" (cf. lines 21–25, 35–36). The focus of the analogy is the communication of knowledge, the way "the news" is made known. With this idea the poet situates his vernacular

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that, of the text's ten thirteenth-century copies, only one, MS B in Madrid, is thought to originate in Champagne (Varvaro, "Traduzioni," p. 502). Two can be situated on its northern reaches (the St Petersburg MS possibly comes from Soissons; see note 62, above; as does MS I, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 25532). Four thirteenth-century manuscripts are notable for expunging the two references to Marie. Three of these (H, I, K) possibly do so by way of appropriating authorship of the poem for Gautier de Coinci, whose *Miracles de Nostre Dame* they also transmit. Conversely, reference to Marie was retained in roughly half of the thirteenth-century transmission, showing that her role in the text implied neither personal nor geographical limitation. See also Ruini, "Appunti," pp. 233–27, 247–48.

⁷⁵ "Oianz toz bons clers dist il bien / Qu'il n'i a antrepris de rien / Fors la androit ou rime faut: / S'i met le mot qui autant vaut" (lines 141–44).

exegesis in relationship to courtly poetry and liturgical performance in relationship to court entertainment. In the earthly sphere, the news is spread by the purveyors of vernacular poetic entertainment and through its familiar forms:

Jugleor font sonez noviaus,
 Chançons et notes et fabliaus,
 Que droiz est que chascuns s'ator
 Contre la joie de la cort.

(31–34)

(The jongleurs spread the news,
 Songs and melodies and tales,
 That everyone should make ready
 To attend the court celebration.)

This description stands in complementary apposition to a description of God's messengers, called prophets, "Por ce qu'el verroient de loing / Et nonceroient sa venue" (because they saw from afar and announced the Lord's coming) (48–49). Their role is described in similar, but liturgically transposed terms: their "songs" too, are "read and sung" by holy church as messengers of the *joie* to come, now formulated as "la joie de paradis" (66).

The phrases *joie de la cort* and *joie de paradis* thus encapsulate the entire analogy, and the former phrase is once again a pointed citation of Chrétien. At the court of Champagne it could hardly fail to remind the audience of the grand concluding *aventure* of *Erec et Enide* (ca. 1170). In Chrétien's text, the name of this exploit, *joie de la cort*, comes to comprise all that the hero, Erec, seeks and must deliver, leading to a double coronation in conclusion on Christmas day.⁷⁶ The *Eructavit* poet reminds the audience from the outset that they know the psalm from its recitation *en latin* within the Christmas liturgy (lines 15–17). Both at the *joie de la cort* and at the earlier wedding of his protagonists, Chrétien gives memorable accounts of the variety of entertainers present at great court feasts and their arts.⁷⁷ The sum total of this positioning is to place the *Eructavit* and its performance in dual analogy to the various forms of secular poetic entertainment on the one hand and to the liturgy on the other. The poet/performer injects the liturgy into the court literary context and performs his own song for the "guests" of the weddings of courtly romance. Thus, the wedding recounted in the course of the *Eructavit* is treated not only as a heavenly dimension of Chrétien's romance; it is also an appropriation of its voice, the voice of vernacular poetry, to a more exalted end—the same rhetorical appropriation implicit in the address to *ma dame de Champagne*.⁷⁸ Identified as both prophet and jongleur, David

⁷⁶ *Erec et Enide*, lines 5459–60, 6551–54.

⁷⁷ *Erec et Enide*, lines 2031–50 and 6371–79; see also Powell, "Translating Scripture," p. 92.

⁷⁸ McKibben, *Eructavit*, p. 43, saw "a strong resemblance in style and rhetoric to Chrétien"; see also Jung, *Etudes*, pp. 230–31; Sampoli Simonelli ("Parafrasi francese," 28–36) attempts to demonstrate a direct dependence on *Erec et Enide* and the poems of Bernard de Ventadorn. At the least, the author of the *Eructavit* is well versed in courtly poetry and imitates its masters intently and adeptly.

himself authorizes the assimilation of poetic modes; indeed, he proclaims its arrival and its special privilege as a layman's key to the gates of Heaven.

As David sets out with high hopes of performing at the wedding, we are told that he was well aware that through his descendant, Mary, God would be born of a woman.⁷⁹ The poet apparently alters history to allow this to come about, as he explicitly places David's vision at 714 BC, some 300 years later than the standard account of David's life found in patristic sources, but also at a point subsequent to the first biblical announcement of Christ's coming, Isaiah's prophecy on the *virga ex radice Iesse* (Isaiah 11:1–2).⁸⁰ The same foreknowledge will emerge as crucial to his plea for entry into Heaven. Here as in the *Speculum virginum*'s "Tree of Jesse," then, David is Mary's direct predecessor in the gnostic event whose recommunication is the central objective; he partakes of and authorizes the same privileged gnosis.⁸¹

The crucial scene for the entire narrative restaging of the *Eructavit* is found in David's encounter with the guardian of the gates of Heaven; without it, there would be no visionary experience of the heavenly wedding and thus no song to relate. The scene has no direct trigger in the text of Psalm 44. It derives instead from an ingenious conflation of three psalm verses, of which one is from a different psalm entirely. The idea of audio-visual reception from verse 11 is conflated with the second verse as a statement on composition ("My tongue will write faster than any scribe"); together these serve to unite all levels of communication in the same mode, the mode of the eleventh verse.⁸² The idea of entry or opening the gates of Heaven, however, belongs to the tradition of Psalm 70, verses 15–16: *quoniam non cognovi litteraturam introibo in potentiam domini* (Because I have had no training in letters I will enter the dominion of the Lord) (Psalm 70:15–16). What the poet has done is highly intentional and unmistakable to his contemporary audience: the privilege of an illiterate's access to divine knowledge is identified with the signal text of women's *lectio* and the prefiguration of Mary's conception of the Word—and all together are claimed in no uncertain terms for the oral performance of vernacular poetry.

David arrives to find the gates securely closed—with the sword of the angel who drove Adam and Eve from Paradise—and, not daring to knock or call, he strikes up a song with his *vielle*, or fiddle ("Por ce qu'il n'osa apeler / Si comança a vieler" 201–2). The song is the elaboration of the psalm's first verse, *Eructavit cor meum*, and forms a humble entreaty for entry that is at once the poet's appeal for divine inspiration: "Sainz esperiz, ovrez moi l'uis! / Je chanterai s'antrer i puis" (Holy Spirit, open the gate for me! If I am allowed to enter, I will sing) (211–12). The guardian's reply contains the first echo

⁷⁹ Bien sot que de ses hoirs seroit / La virge ou Deus s'aomberroit; / De ce n'ot il nule dotance / Ainz I mist tote s'esperance, / Que puis que Deus naistroit de mere ... (lines 87–91). The passage continues in an extended discussion of the Annunciation and Incarnation (lines 87–134), to which I will return below.

⁸⁰ Jenkins, "Introduction," pp. xxiii–xxiv.

⁸¹ Powell, "Picture Program," pp. 141–42.

⁸² Powell, "Translating Scripture," pp. 88–89.

in the poem of the *Audi, filia et vide* (Psalm 44:11); tellingly as well, the doorman does not so much refuse entry as he chides David for wanting to see “what no man of the flesh may know”:

Li rois se desduit et repose;
Ne seroit pas sēure chose
A ton hues oïr ne veoir
Ce qu'hon charnés ne puet savoir;
Ne puet savoir nus hon charnés
Qués est la joie esperités.

(220–22)

(The king is taking his pleasure at rest;
It is not at all likely he will hear or see
Your clamouring:
What mortal man cannot know,
Can be known by no mortal man;
That includes the heavenly wedding.)⁸³

The second verse of the psalm is then introduced by way of the guardian's suggestion that David content himself instead with written transmission:

Mais la chançon que tu viaus dire
Escri la en chartre ou en cire,
Et je ferai bien tant por toi
Que je la mosterrai le roi.

(225–28)

(But this song you want to sing
Write it on parchment or in wax,
And I will do this much for you:
I will show it to the king.)

This suggestion is met with David's defiant defence of his art:

Merci, sire, ce dist Daviz,
Se je laianz antrez estoie
Avuec mes moz viêleroie.
Juglerre sui, sages et duiz;
Se le roi plaisoit mes desduiz
Ce sai je bien que les sodees

83 The phrase “a ton hues” can mean “to your good,” but the resulting translation is less satisfying and introduces a contradiction. The issue is not whether entry would do David any good, but rather a categorical exclusion from the ultimate good. It is thus preferable to assign *oïr ne veoir* to the king and assume a derisory use of *huëiz*, for which Tobler/Lommatzsch gives “Geschrei, Kriegslärm.” Not surprisingly, the manuscripts show a good deal of confusion over this line.

Me seroient mout granz donees.
 Ne dites pas que je l'escrive;
 La langue cui li cuers avive
 L'escrivra sanz doiz et sanz mains
 Assez miauz que nus escrivains.
 (232–42)

(Thanks, sire, says David,
 But if I could get inside there
 I would accompany my words with the fiddle.
 I am a jongleur, skilled and adept,
 If my entertainment pleases the king
 I know well that there will be
 Plenty of coins coming my way.
 Don't tell me to write it down;
 The tongue, which the heart quickens,
 Will write it without fingers or hands
 Much better than any scribe.)

Writing has no place in the art of performance. The spoken word delivered in physical presence is privileged to a more immediate apprehension of truth—writes faster than any writer, to use the formula of the biblical text. What happens next resoundingly affirms David's belief: the guardian repeats at length that no "man born of woman" (line 243) can ever enter the gates or see what lies beyond them until the sins of his ancestors are atoned for and God comes to earth in the Incarnation. David refuses to despair, and begins to implore (*losangier*, line 282) the guardian to open the door just a bit so that he may see

Commant li glorieus fiz Dé
 Vandra par naissance novele
 En la sainte dame pucele
 Qui doit estre de mon lignage.
 (288–89)

(How the glorious son of God will by a new birth come into the holy virgin lady who is supposed to descend from me)

He then rests his case in a humble attitude of prayer. At this point, the doorman's cat-echism is apparently tossed to the winds, as with a great thunderclap God opens the door.

While David's art precludes the resort to writing, it is the twin significance of his affinity, in the literal sense, with Mary that finally forces the gates of Heaven and allows him to perform. This woman will bear a man who opens the gates of Heaven for all, at least inasmuch as the Word will be revealed in its full meaning. But the same woman is the bride and the *filia*, as audience in turn indistinguishable from the other Marie, countess of Champagne, even as the mode on which David insists is the mode of the present performance of the poem. In seeking entry to Heaven, moreover, David's rejection of writing begs a privilege for the art of oral performance claimed in Psalm 70 not for Mary,

but for the *illitteratus*.⁸⁴ On these combined terms, which in the poet's contrivance have become inseparable, God agrees.

The construction of David's visionary authority thus proceeds along lines very similar to those chosen by Theoderic for Hildegard's.⁸⁵ Theoderic's account of Hildegard's visionary awakening explains that "all this had been opened to her by David's key, the key that 'opens and no one closes, closes and no one opens.'" The scriptural image comes from Isaiah 22:22, but it is repeated in Revelations, where David's key becomes a key to the gates of Heaven and one that affords visionary knowledge. Admonished continually to see and to hear, John is told "these things saith the Holy One and the true one, he that hath the key of David; he that openeth, and no man shutteth; shutteth, and no man openeth" (Revelations 3:7); and "I have given before thee a door opened, which no man can shut" (Revelations 3:8). Theoderic thus fused the idea of psalter literacy with the revelatory notion of David's key, as suggested by the tradition of Psalm 70:15–16, to establish a woman's privilege to visionary knowledge. To arrive at his scene in which David rejects written communication as a way of begging entry into Heaven, the *Eructavit* poet combined these ideas with the second verse of Psalm 44, *lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis* and recast the whole as a narrative of David as jongleur. The illiterate's entry into visionary knowledge thus becomes the privilege of the oral performer, and (in the context of a vernacular *chançon*) the privilege of his lay audience—who in this case is the *filia* of Psalm 44 and the audience of women's *lectio*.

The poet's idea of David as *jongleur* is not a new one, but his activation of this idea to grant special entry to Heaven to an itinerant performer certainly is, and it stands in stark contrast to the church's view of performing artists. In keeping with Jerome's indictment of "poets and comedians ... and ... pantomimic actors," they were seen to manifest satanic, not salvific, forces, and to rely on a seduction of the senses aligned with woman and carnal desire.⁸⁶ Honorius Augustodunensis put it bluntly: "Habent spem joculariores? Nullam" (What hope have jongleurs of salvation? None).⁸⁷ John of Salisbury admitted the giving of alms to jongleurs—the *soudees* David is so sure of—only if they had previously renounced their profession.⁸⁸ The resort to flattery, or *losangier* (the use of the same verb in our poem appears gratuitous in that David does not fulfil its action) was frequently noted as one of the jongleur's standard vices.⁸⁹ Christopher Page has argued that

⁸⁴ The understanding of *litteraturam* in Psalm 70:15–16 shifted between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries from the Augustinian idea of an opposition between the letter of the law and the grace of salvation to one between learning and simplicity and finally even the *litterati* and laymen; see Ohly, "Wolframs Gebet," 5–12.

⁸⁵ See above, pp. 38–39 and 83–84.

⁸⁶ Casagrande and Vecchio, "Clercs et jongleurs," 25–43.

⁸⁷ *Elucidarium*, 1148; see also Page, *Musical Life*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ *Policraticus*, p. 241. Not renouncing this profession left them to burn in Hell. Such opinions were the clerical commonplace; see Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 15–19.

⁸⁹ Casagrande and Vecchio, "Clercs et jongleurs," 915; Faral, *Jongleurs*, p. 154; Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 21–22. The verb occurs once more in the *Eructavit* to evoke the Devil's flattering temptation of sinners (line 649).

a more tolerant attitude towards jongleurs can first be detected with Peter the Chanter in 1183—contemporary, then, with the composition of the *Eructavit*. Peter and others in his circle cautiously differentiate between “good” and “bad” jongleurs, and damnable and useful aspects of their art.⁹⁰ But David makes no effort to distinguish himself as a *joculator dei*; on the contrary, his attitude is doubly provocative in that he is assigned behaviour and remarks that play on the standard points of the invective against his proudly announced profession.⁹¹ There is more afoot here.

The “vernacularization” of this psalm makes the performing voice of vernacular poetry into the audience’s key to Heaven and their access to Mary’s knowledge of the Word. “The tongue quickened by the heart” that David claims for his art is the performing complement to the reception of “the voice that touches the heart.” David’s song is received via the ear (and the eye) by the heart—whether originally, in God’s voice, or as David repeats it to the bride and the poet delivers it to his *dame*.⁹² David sings of this voice once more on the occasion of the verse *Diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis* (Grace pours forth from your lips) (Psalm 44:3), beginning: “La vostre bele sainte boche / Don la voiz ist qui les cuers toche” (Your beautiful, sacred mouth, from which comes the voice that touches hearts) (375–76). As mentioned earlier, this verse was another understood to prefigure the Annunciation, and the continuation of the passage makes clear that the Word of John 1:1–3 is rendered in this poem as voice.⁹³ Thus Mary experienced the conception “A la voiz que li angles dist” (through the voice that the angel spoke) (line 120). In performance, as the *Eructavit* shows, the voice of the text is both here and now and one with the voice as originally received. The voice that inspires David’s song is one with the art of the jongleur; and the same voice is the Word that entered Mary’s body to become flesh. The *conceptio a voce* applies equally to all “brides” of the performed Word.⁹⁴ With this idea, the *Eructavit* demonstrates in programmatic form one of the most fundamental tenets of a new vernacular poetics of truth and offers its own contribution to the history of the same.

Later in the poem, when David reaches the eleventh verse and addresses the bride, the point of his song will be to summon her to the same knowledge the gatekeeper had

⁹⁰ Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 19–33. To David’s credit, Peter and his circle are most generous in their concessions to “string-players who also sing” (Page, *Musical Life*, pp. 25–26).

⁹¹ As noted by Casagrande and Vecchio, “Clercs et jongleurs,” 917, Bernard of Clairvaux compares himself with a jongleur as a gesture of humility and identification with the basest of men—and at the same time with the image of David as dancer. Such a humility pose illustrates at once the topos on which the *Eructavit* author can draw and the reversal implicit in the positive inflection he has given it.

⁹² See lines 1399–400 and 1423–28.

⁹³ “Puisse si les noz cuers tochie / Que vers vos nos face aprochie. / Ce est la fontaine et la doiz / De quoi sordra la sainte voiz / Dont sainte eglise iert replenie / Et confermee et estable” (lines 377–84).

⁹⁴ Cf. also the passage that explicates the “bow” as the Old and New Testament, with its arrows as “la voiz et la parole ... Qui si perce li cuer del vandre” (lines 724–26), thus renewing Mary’s conception of the Word among all humanity.

denied him: “Hear, daughter, and see, ... for the king desires your beauty.” Where the gatekeeper begins by dismissing David’s entreaty—“David, trai t’en sus!” (David, get out of here!) (217)—David’s address will coax the bride to draw near: “[Un] po va avant et si voies / Se Dex a bien la chose faite” (Go just a little closer and see if God has done his work well) (1402–3), or, “Vien avant, file, oeuvre les yauz” (Come forward, daughter, open your eyes) (1413). Finally, the formula of the psalm, *Audi filia et vide*, occurs, but only in the perfect tense:

File, or as öi et vëu;
Trop auras le cuer decëu
Si tu n’i mez si t’antandue
Que ta biautez li soit randue.
(1423–26)

(Daughter, now that you have heard and seen;
Your heart will be much deceived
If you do not make it your sole intent
That your beauty be rendered unto him.)

The paraphrase of the eleventh verse is reserved to express a seduction accomplished. This is a transformative touch, for it makes the entire preceding thousand lines, in which David praises the bridegroom (Psalm 44:3–10), into the content of her seduction. The bride’s response is one brought about by the present performance, and the entire psalm, in effect, is delivered for “her” benefit—exactly as the parallels in the staging of the poem would demand.

I suggested at the outset that the opening lines of the poem implicitly position its female addressee somewhere between the adulterous queen of Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette* and the queen of Heaven, that is, somewhere between the Old and the New Eve. Both ideas are fully realized in David’s instruction to the bride (lines 1423–686), which also encapsulates the essential process of the bride’s transformation as encountered in the *Speculum virginum*. Through the audio-visual presentation of her instructor, she progresses from the false to the true woman, manifest as the deceptive exterior versus truth in intention, inner as opposed to mere outer beauty. From the outset, the poet makes clear that this “women’s instruction” is intended for all Christians. “Every baptized soul ... is espoused to the king” (cf. 1377–80), and therefore “Se doit öir, que dist Daviz, / Ses enseignemanz et ses diz. / Ce qu’il dist et ansaigne a l’une / Doit a son oés öir chascune” (All should hear what David says, his teaching and his words. / What he teaches for the one / Should be heard for the good of everyone) (1381–84). Once again, this poem makes explicit what is elsewhere implicit. Thus, when the bride is told “to beware above all things, that your love prove false or feigned” (cf. 1488–89), that “God never had any love for hypocrites,” and to “preserve her body from all taints” for the embrace of her bridegroom—with this latter fully elaborated as the embrace of lovers in the language of the Song of Songs (cf. 1535–76)—all this is addressed, in fact, to “Bishops, abbots and deacons,” to “canons, priors, nuns, lay bothers and monks,” as it is to “barons, kings and counts, ... and all the lesser folk”; in short then, to the entire church (cf. 1503–32).

The warning against the failings of the false virgin is followed by a description of the true, Mary—whom David must address prophetically. The text focuses once more in detail on the physical fact of Mary's virginal conception and bearing of Christ; this idea of the divine enclosed in Mary's "sainte vantree" (holy womb) (1647) corresponds, as the commentator then explains, to Mary as a manifestation of beauty as inner truth:

Sa biautez fu de grant merite
 Qu'ele venoit devers le cuer;
 Dedanz en ot plus que defuer.
 (1664–66)

(Her beauty was of such great merit
 Because it came from the heart within;
 She had more of it within than without)

Mary's beauty, the beauty of the Incarnation, is that of the diaphanous body, the woman who has ornamented herself from within:

El cuer sont les frengetes d'or,
 Li trecëor et li anor,
 Le jöel, li tissu de soie
 Que la pucele li anvoie
 (1673–76)

(In her heart are the golden fringes, the hairpins and earrings, the jewels, the silken cloth that the young girl offers him.)

Mary is the archetype of the perfectly instructed woman who has assimilated the seductive finery of the daughters of Sion to her inner life. As such she is not only the one-and-only who will experience the miraculous conception and birth; she is in that specific experience a model for the addressee of this religious instruction for *ma dame de Champagne*. To realize this form of beauty is to relive or actualize the conception and incarnation of the Word, because it manifests the truth in and through the body.

The analogy with which the poem opens, between a heavenly and a courtly wedding, is therefore first and foremost an indication to the audience of how they are to experience the poem. The heavenly wedding is not merely to be imagined as a more glorious version of those seen in the world; it is the event for which the poem prepares, or "dresses" its audience, a bride *in spe* poised between the Old and the New Eve. Both in mode and in process, the instruction of monastic "virgins" is restaged for the courtly audience. But the implications for the further development of my argument are greater still.

As the poem nears its conclusion, the poet offers a dramatic "translation" of heavenly joy into the audience's own realm, the fulfilment of the *joie de la cort* announced at the outset of the poem. At the fulfilment of all things, they are promised an entry into David's experience: "Lors overra li rois sa gloire / Si verrons la procession / Que David vit en vision" (Then the king will reveal his glory, and we will see the procession that David saw in his vision) (1743–44). The performance as experienced in the present then offers the next best thing, what the poet calls a "samblance," which allows "us to hear

and to perceive" (*entendre et aparçoivre*) "la grant joie" (1755–56). He first asks for his Lady's special attention: "Cist vers après conte la joie, / Si est bien droiz que ma dame l'oie" (This next verse tells of the rejoicing, it is thus most fitting that my lady hear it) (1750–51), and then conjures once again "the way it is done in the world when the king summons a high court" (cf. 1761–62)—but this time the celebration is of a coronation. The ensuing description bears all the marks of a skilled dramatic artist, setting the stage, evoking the assembled nobles—so many that the earth trembles beneath their feet—the pressing crowds, the ringing church bells. But the culmination turns out to be the entry of the queen: "Toz li siegles fremist et bruit / Vers la reïne esguardent tuit" (All the world trembles and murmurs / and all gazes turn to the queen) (1774–75). The point of the *samblance* is to evoke the queen's "great joy," "the consolation," and "the sweetness that infuses her heart," such "that she entirely forgets herself."⁹⁵ Finally, the poet makes clear that this is the experience that David's vision promises us all:

Cel joié que la reïne a
Ansi con Dex li destina,
Ce dist David, et mout greignor
Avront devant notre saignor
Cil et celes qui sauf seront.

(1783–87)

(This joy that the queen knows as God ordained for her, David tells us—and greater still—will know before our Lord those men and women who are saved.)

The audience is to identify with the experience of the bride as a foretaste of their *joie* to come but also as the culmination of a process of their own transformation through the text; they not only will know as she does in this *vision*; they do know, in part, as she does, through their experience of the poem.

The truth of the text's "analogy," what it calls a *samblance* and the audience sees as the staging of scriptural images in a narrative of their world, is revealed in this experience. It seeks moments of identity between the woman's experience inside and outside the text and thus reveals continuity between our *historia* and sacred *historia*. *Memoria*, the act of revivifying the *historia* of a sacred life, occurs as a process that calls upon the participants to recognize and perceive, *entendre et aparçoivre*, continuity between Mary's *historia* and their own as the key to knowing the truth of the images of the sacred text, to unlocking the experience they contain. This process is what I have called Mary's reading.

The remanifestation *en romanz* of this experience as derived from the Song of Songs will concern us shortly. With his narrative redelivery of Psalm 44, the poet of the *Eructavit* offers the other biblical ephithalamium to a lay audience; but more than this, he transforms the liturgical experience of *memoria* and identification as just described into one fully accessible to that audience. This gesture is not presented as a second best,

⁹⁵ "Ele s'oblie antre lor braz / De la grant joie et del solaz; / Une douçors au cuer le vient / Si que de li ne li sovient" (1779–82).

but rather as one that depends in its very efficacy and authenticity on delivery in “their” world by “their” entertainers to a bride who is placed among them, given historical existence as Marie de Champagne. The *Eructavit* makes explicitly manifest as does no other work in this period the continuous relationship between the bride of the Word, the vernacular audience, and the individual woman whose presence, whether as character or inscribed audience, is “living proof” that the transformation of the bride, the realization of the heavenly wedding, is happening “here and now,” in the event of the text as performance, “in the very specificity and reality of the ... vernacular community.”⁹⁶

We are on the threshold here of a meeting between sacred and secular narrative that occurs as a meeting between the truth of Mary’s *historia* and its remanifestation in the lives of her “daughters”—queens, *dames*, and *puceles*, who live and walk not only in the layman’s world, but also in that of the new layman’s narrative. Both through Marie’s presence as “audience” and through the analogy of the heavenly wedding with the *joie de la cort*, the *Eructavit* poet acknowledges and exploits this meeting as the venue of his own poem, accomplishing its crucial identification in concert with the voice of vernacular narrative as represented by Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien’s romance of the *joie de la cort* does not conclude with a marriage but rather with a double coronation; the protagonists are married at the conclusion of the *primerain vers*, the initial cycle of the story, which requires another, much longer double to achieve true union between them. The narrative development of the relationship produces the true “marriage”; this then corresponds to the enormous celebration of the coronation—and Enide’s triumphant reinstatement to her rightful place—which follows Erec’s successful accomplishment of the *joie de la cort*. If we cannot finally know how intentionally the conclusion of the *Eructavit*, with its celebration of an earthly coronation as a figure of the bride’s fulfilled *joie*, is meant to recall the structure of Chrétien’s romance, it is hard to deny that that structure itself would have called to mind Mary’s *historia* as the path of the *sponsa annunciata, dolorosa et derelicta, regina assumpta et coronata*—not as an allegory concealing hidden meaning, not as personification or *imitatio*; not, then, as one whose “true meaning” is contained in Mary or church as signified but rather as an experience that authenticates “our part” in salvation history, because through it the truth of Mary’s experience is remanifest as “our own.”

No less an idea may lie behind the *Eructavit* poet’s modest term *samblance*. It occurs only once previously, in the opening exposition, where it denotes the *imago dei* and the physical body that Christ assumed in the Incarnation.⁹⁷ That is, rather than “analogy” or allegorical figure, the poem’s concluding *samblance* seeks the expression of the spiritual in and through the historical and corporeal, *historia* and *corporalia*. It stands in the same relationship to the truth of the Word as does the poet’s female addressee to the scriptural bride, and I am suggesting no less of Enide. The most extraordinary feature of Chrétien’s first romance is undoubtedly the fact that its narrative path can only

⁹⁶ Uitti, “Women Saints,” p. 259.

⁹⁷ “Por voir bel homage li fist [that is, Christ to his father] / Quant an forme d’omme se mist, / Et li douz pere voirement / Li redona an chasement / Toz cés qui sont en sa samblance” (95–99). Similarly, Mary is said to *faire samblant* when she gives birth to the Christ child (125–26).

be completed in that the bride, Enide, accompanies her bridegroom, Erec, every step of the way—to the extent that their successful reconciliation is first signalled when they together ride one horse. Enide's path is itself a *samblance*, the earthly transposition or bodily translation of another narrative; it stands no less as the path of the audience, who also “rides along” on Erec's adventures.⁹⁸ The bride “reads” through love and suffering both inside and outside the text. Chrétien's emphatic inclusion of the woman-in-the-narrative has a function that is closely related to Marie's vis-à-vis the wider audience of the *Eructavit*: Marie is not only audience, possibly patron but, like Enide, also a character in a text, the mirror of audience participation in its reading path. The inclusion of *ma dame de Champagne* acknowledges the arrival of a layman's narrative that is built around identification between the seeking and suffering bride and her “accompanying” audience—and Chrétien's Enide may best be understood in the same way. We cannot know what role she was given in Chrétien's sources, the oral versions of the story contemptuously rejected in his prologue as the “shredded and corrupted” account given by “those who make their living telling tales.”⁹⁹ With the intervention of this author—thus his unparalleled boast—there begins a new *historia*:

Des ors comenceraï l'estoire,
Que toz jors mais iert en memoire
Tant con durra crestientez.
De ce s'est Crestiens vantez.¹⁰⁰

(And now I will begin the story that will remain forever in memory so long as Christianity endures. This proud claim Christian has made.)

Is this merely a better story, more high-brow, no tall tale to fetch a meal? Or does it claim to be a new Christian narrative, to *renew* Christian narrative? What project—assuming my suggestion is correct—would be more deserving of this claim? Wolfram von Eschenbach, the German “adaptor” and continuator of Chrétien's last romance, *Le Conte du Graal*, is given to boasts similar both in tenor and content and, as we shall see, leaves no doubt that the claim they stake is serious, indeed.

With his “translation” of Psalm 44, the *Eructavit* poet has explicitly realized the sacred dimension of this new reading model by presenting one of its arch-texts as a poem in which exegesis is performed through narrative and women's instruction becomes *romans*. In so doing, he reveals for us with a backward glance, as it were, where “the problem of the woman reader”—one should better speak of an epoch-making opportunity—opens onto the problem of truth in fiction. The constitution of

98 The idea that Enide's service and suffering alongside Erec might be read as a transposition of Mary's alongside Christ finds, in fact, ample suggestion in the text—suggestions that become still more explicit in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*. The attempt to resolve the analogy in an interpretation of Erec's path through *aventure* as *imitatio Christi*, however, proves unsatisfactory—as do all readings that fail to place polysemic play at the centre of the experience of the text: cf. for example, Tobler, “Ancilla Domini.”

99 Cf. *Erec et Enide*, lines 20–22.

100 *Erec et Enide*, lines 24–26.

meaning through the experience of the text as process is the idea around which the thesis of the twelfth century's "discovery of an aesthetic of fiction," or "fictionality," has been advanced, most influentially by Walter Haug.¹⁰¹ But what appears from our point of view as a radical new beginning emerges from the contours drawn here, in its own time, as the development of the idea of narrative actualization of truth as a "reading" of the arch-text, a renewed experience of *la letre* that occurs through identification in performance. More important, however, than the dispute over the innovative quality of the "discovery" is the difficulty in accounting for a claim to truth—what must, by the poets' own acknowledgement, be a sacred truth—in view of what Haug evokes as a new "literary autonomy," a "liberation from all subservience to theology, philosophy, and ethics, as well as political interests."¹⁰² We have just brushed up against one solution to this problem, one that points to the same identification with the woman-as-reader with which the present journey through the landscape of medieval concepts of gender and use of media began. This solution would reveal Haug's idea of literary autonomy as, in the medieval understanding, both programmatic—how else make "a new *historia* that will endure to the end of time?"—and exaggerated. Achieved is an autonomy from lettered and learning-based models of the mediation of sacred truth—but not from this truth itself. Chrétien's statement illustrates a claim to deliver better, to deliver an experience, no less, in which the truth *reveals itself*, rather than an *argumentum* or *allegoria* in which it is concealed. An experience that partakes, somehow, of one that Mary had, one time for all; the experience that David and his courtly adaptor orchestrate through the simultaneity of their performances, that of identification achieved between the audience and the bride of the Word.

101 Argued extensively in *LDMA* (1985), reiterated under consideration of the ensuing scholarly debate in the second, revised edition of 1992 and continued in a variety of more recent essays, many of which are collected in Haug, *Wahrheit der Fiktion*; see therein esp. "Autorität," pp. 115–27; and "Entdeckung," pp. 128–44; also Haug, "Poetologie"; and Haug, "Mündlichkeit."

102 "Poetologie," 70: see also note 6, above.

Chapter 6

EGO DILECTO MEO ET DILECTUS MEUS MIHI (CANTICLES 6:2): MARY'S READING AND THE EPIPHANY OF EMPATHY

WE ARE ON the edge of a discovery: what began as an inquiry into the historical value of references to women as patrons of new vernacular literature has led instead to a conception of truth in the experience of text that is equally the object of and authority for the vernacularization of scripture and the inscription of vernacular tales. The "history" of the Word is suddenly of one stuff with stories of heroic adventure cast and performed as if in "our world," of our experience. Sacred and secular reading have conjoined in a movement that proceeds equally from the opposite poles of *Scripturae* and *cantilenas*, and this conjunction is revealed in the woman as bride and reader, mirror of suffering in love and audience of text in performance.

This discussion only seems to have strayed far beyond the bounds of Benoît's project. His riddle, the trap that suspends his audience between the poles of the "contradictory abstracted double" of woman as body, Eve and Mary, remains intrinsically relevant. Nor should it be forgotten that his project is a *romans*, a vernacular recasting of crucial events from a collective past, history conceived of as collective *memoria*. No less a *romans*, in its author's parting words, is the text that concerns us next, a so-called "commentary" on the Song of Songs written near the end of the twelfth century by one Landri of Waben. Our literary vocabulary fails here. The text actualizes the reading experience of the bride for a courtly audience, it brings about a remanifestation of the "historical" dimension of the biblical text in the audience's present—just as did the *Eructavit*. Both texts engage in commentary, as they also engage in paraphrase, but they are thereby no more accurately described than a romance is adequately described by the various techniques that make up its narration. The problem is here: all three texts, the examples of courtly exegesis and the courtly history, are *romans*, they pour a reading experience from one mould into another, from the Latin-mediated textual community of the monastery or cathedral school to the vernacular-mediated and equally textual community of the aristocratic courts. This is their genre distinction, what makes them coherent and distinct elements of the medieval world of reading.¹ As Friedrich Ohly wrote, with Landri's *romans*, "the exegesis of Canticles stepped for the first time into a new world ... We find it uprooted from the theological schools and the monasteries and transplanted to the courtly garden of a dukedom."² *Romans* describes cultural appropriation accomplished as a new reading

¹ The debate over the meaning of *romans* in the twelfth century, that is, whether it is still strictly linguistic or rather was already associated with new narrative genres, and thus secondarily with narrative invention, is thus, in my view, committed to anachronous distinctions.

² Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 280.

experience. The genre's various representatives—narrative or exegetical, historical, or fabulous—approach this common ground from different directions rather than departing from an existing norm in new, divergent directions. This last idea is verified with singular clarity in an account of the genesis of Landri's text found in Lambert of Ardres's Latin *History of the Counts of Guines and the Lords of Ardres*, to which we will turn later in this chapter.

Benoît's *romans* of ancient history and Landri's of monastic *lectio* display surprising complicity in overall objective and the way this is communicated and made accessible to the audience. The story of Troy's fall is the story of a world that collapsed as the result of a woman's desire or desirability. Rather than telling Helen's story, however, Benoît interpolates one of another Eve, Briseida, a story whose outcome and message—the narrator's claims to the contrary notwithstanding—must first be discovered as narrative experience, as the revelation of truth in the abject body. The story effects the redemption of Eve and even of Helen herself but can do so only through the woman's painful recognition of her own weakness: to love is her nature and her excellence as it is her fall. The romance bends the ancient tale of pagan warfare and revenge into a succession of narrative realizations of the widowed bride, in effect anticipating a model of Christian reading *avant la lettre*, or allowing its audience to re-read ancient history through a lens borrowed from the experience of the reading bride. The effect is to recuperate that history and its figures for a Christian world-view, which amounts to a revaluation of human history such that it mirrors and participates in God's plan for human salvation.

Landri's text, on the other hand, fuses the images of the Song of Songs and their explication into a continuous dramatic narrative staged for several voices. The prophetic images of God's plan for the union of *humaine et divine nature* are recast as *historia*, the staging of truth in and through human experience. The human protagonist is the fallen bride, the *sponsa derelicta* who, like Eve before her, seeks to regain a lost state of union, the kiss of Canticles 1:1. The text is a process that continuously renews the redemption of Eve; that is, to read this text is to experience the reversal of the fallen body and the possibility of its renewed elevation to join with the divine as this occurred once and for all time in the Incarnation, but will recur in Landri's text as befits the widowed bride, through communion in the "blackened" flesh of the Passion, the experience of *compassio*.

What Benoît's romance effects upon pagan history differs from Landri's reshaping of reading through the fallen bride not in nature but only in kind: what the one effects as the renewal of a sacred love story the other undertakes as the recuperation of a mythical past; each is a *romans*, even as in each the new reading experience is conceived for *puceles*, that is, for a vernacular, lay audience. Accordingly, each announces this fact through a riddle on the identity of the elusively present, singularly significant woman-as-reader. And each aims at the same end: the realization of truth in the body as an epiphany of empathy accomplished through woman as the suffering body of love. This woman-as-reader is to be able to speak the words of Canticles, *Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi* (Canticles 6:2), as an expression of union in shared human pain.

Espeuse and Damoisele: the Song of Songs en romans

Landri's adaptation of the Song of Songs has two outstanding features, one of which has been repeatedly recognized as such, although its significance is somewhat disputed. The other has sooner bred confusion. The first is the author's expansion of the scriptural text into dramatic dialogue, a kind of commentary that is cast in large part as the textual voices elaborating—as we heard Christ and Mary do in Rupert's commentary—on their own experience as the reconstitution of a narrative context. The second is that the poet appears to state that his text is written at the behest of an anonymous lady; the same statement would imply that he is her spiritual adviser or religious instructor, yet also remove her to the highest reaches of power. Dramatic re-presentation of scripture and a woman who presides over its performance: these are the same pillars that sustain translation from *lectio* to performance, women's instruction to *romans*, in the *Eructavit*. There, too, the bride has several identities, among them one grounded in the audience's historical reality, Marie de Champagne. In Landri's poem, neither the bride nor his *dame* are given proper names, and indeed, this is possibly because the poem was in this case known to have a male patron, Count Baldwin II of Guines; the bride and the lady, “cele por cui jo travail,”³ cannot so easily assimilate his identity to their own. Put differently, Baldwin cannot so easily assume a role in the *dramatis personae* of this poem as Marie could in the *romans* of Psalm 44. Landri's “patroness,” moreover, like Benoît's, is only evoked once the poem is well under way; she emerges as the result of a performance in progress. It is thus highly likely that the poem's two outstanding features are interrelated; that is, that the poet's address to his *dame* is itself part of and to be understood through the *mise-en-scène* of the Song of Songs.

The definition of roles and distinction between their voices is the first concern the author puts forward, once he has introduced his audience to the *matere*, or content, of this biblical *saint livre*, “which is entirely made of love” (1–32, cf. 7). The lead role is held by the *espeuse* or *amie*, the bride, who speaks nearly a third of the entire text and two-thirds of all that is not left to the poet-narrator. This bride is given two identities, if not names, as holy church and the devout soul (27–28). The narrator then turns to his audience with an address that acknowledges both the novelty and the difficulty of the approach:⁴

Or aiez bon entendement:
Quant vos orrez diversement
Parler ceste sainte escripture,

³ Landri of Waben, *Song of Songs*, line 2367. The text is cited, with corrections, from Pickford's edition, which remains the only one available, despite the unanimously devastating appraisal of its quality by scholarly reviewers. As there is only one extant manuscript, I have been able to remedy this problem for my purposes by first consulting the extensive lists of corrections offered in the reviews and then comparing them myself with a microfilm of the manuscript. Translations are my own. On the edition, see Hunt, “O.F. Commentary,” 267–80, esp. 278 (where the reviews are also listed); reviews I consulted for corrections to the text are listed with the edition in the list of works cited.

⁴ There is thus little point in arguing that the dramatic presentation merely reflects sermon technique, as does Hunt, “O.F. Commentary,” 274–78.

Por cho ne vos soit pas obscure,
Ne soit de ço nuls esmariz.

(43–47)

(Now be sure to listen carefully:
When you hear in diverse voices
This holy scripture speak,
Let it not therefore be obscure to you,
Nor anyone be troubled by this.)

The poem is thus announced as a dramatic presentation of holy scripture, and throughout its “first book” (lines 1–1446, somewhat less than half of the poem), the unidentified narrator who makes this announcement remains just that. No authorial “I” is allowed a voice, still less an identity, either in the prologue’s exposition or in the text.⁵ The narrator’s interjections generally supply necessary context, accomplishing transition from one exchange to the next, addressing his audience with explanatory remarks on the action—and at times with instructive indications as to how to understand the speakers. These last can expand into a rudimentary form of commentary, but this is experienced as the voice of a narrator who presents the dramatic action to the public, directs their attention, orchestrates their absorption into, and reflective distance from, what is seen and heard. He is more a puppeteer than an exegete, a performer who exploits a special space between audience and action—the mediator of a *romans*. In fact, he is as much a player as the other voices cited, takes on multiple roles (author, narrator, exegete, instructor and lover), and at times assimilates his own voice to those of bride and bridegroom.

Landri’s exposition introduces the story on two levels, corresponding to the two identities of the bride and referred to as the meaning according to *allegorie* and *moralité*, respectively (113–20). The first is the story as it has already once been completed. This bride enters as Eve, though named only as *la damoisele* (35), laments the loss of her beloved through the eating of the apple, *sun ultrage* (36, see also 87–92), and longs for the kiss that would reconcile her with him. Her lament can serve as an example of the emotional immediacy the poet achieves with his dramatic elaboration of the words of the biblical text:

Repairs a moi, viengne e me baist,
Por Deu sen maltalent abaist!
Port moi le baisier de sa boche,
C’est ço ki plus al cuer m’atoche!
Ja mais n’avrai ne bien ne aise,
Se ses baisiers ne me rapaise!

(75–78)

⁵ An unobtrusive exception occurs at lines 699–700: “Cele respont—si com jo pense / al paroles nient al sens.”

(May he return to me, come and kiss me, and put off his ill humour for God's sake! Bring me the kiss of his mouth [Canticles 1:1], that is what my heart most dearly desires! Never more will I be at ease, unless his kiss bring me peace!)

This desire was fulfilled in the Annunciation to Mary (cf. 89–98), when God “came to reclaim his bride, and bestowed the kiss that had been so ardently desired” (cf. 97–100). In this kiss “divers cuers” (differing hearts) and two bodies were joined, “Si s’assemblerent sens desjoindre / Deus natures: humanitez / L’une, l’autre fu divinitez” (110–12). From this perspective of salvation history, then, the *damoisele* is, properly speaking, Eve’s daughter, holy church.

Thus concludes the first account of this text, its “sentence premeraine” (113). At this point the narrator introduces the meaning according to *moralité*, in which “there is more sweetness and devotion” (118). “Al cuer touche plus dolcement / Cho ke chascuns de soi entent” (That which each understands as pertaining to himself touches the heart more sweetly) (119–20). This “new meaning” begins exactly as the other did: the bride is introduced in the midst of her lament, which repeats in large part the first one, but this time with no mention of a sin or fall. She is likewise tormented, but her torment arises from languishing in love (*languir d’amour*, cf. Canticles 5:8); her dilemma is that love will not let her remain silent, whereas she hardly dares speak for fear she will displease. The motivation for this shame is identified only vaguely as “si mal,” her faults or unworthiness (125). The tension between speech and silence in the loving heart, which might seem a first feature of courtly cultural adaptation, becomes a leitmotif of the poem and is bound up with its inner meaning. Here, as in what follows, *amor vincit omnia* and compels her to make the same daring plea: “May he come, my sweet, and kiss me, and with one kiss put my soul at peace” (cf. 147–48). The main difference between this presentation and that of the first bride is that the bride herself, not the narrator, elaborates on what the kiss means: “Sa presence me doinst sentir, / Cho est le baisiers ko jo desir. / A soi me joigne par esperit” (That he let me feel his presence / This is the kiss that I desire. / That he join me to him in spirit) (149–52). The fulfilment of the kiss is now projected into the future and follows from fidelity in loving and serving God. She who fulfils this charge, as this bride has “found it written, is one spirit with him,” *un esperiz est avec lui* (157–58). The objective of this reading of the Song of Songs, then, is for this bride to regain a feeling of the presence of the Word, of oneness with Christ.⁶

Neither bride offers a suitable presentation of “her” meaning of the text, the allegorical or tropological senses; rather, each serves as the focal point of a narrative that dramatizes an understanding of the prophetic text, the first as it occurred once, in history and the second as it occurs now, “in our lives.” Beyond the opening exposition, both the exegetical terminology and the distinction between two meanings recede entirely into the background. Eve’s story is not presented as another level of meaning but is nevertheless ever-present, because this story is simply a repetition of that one or an attempt to relive its meaning, an experience of the union, separation and reunion of *humaine e divine nature*. Such reunion occurs as moments of identification between the

6 Similarly, Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, pp. 58–60.

original *sentence*, Eve's and Mary's story, and that of the bride who instructs this audience. Recurrent references to and recapitulations of the capital events, the Incarnation and the Passion, accompany and punctuate the text, for these are the windows through which the new bride will experience the kiss of reunion, the events that open onto a revelation of the divine in the human. The identities of Eve and Mary as the original brides thus always loom behind the text and its present characters.

Reading and performance, prophetic image and narrative realization, the Word and its (present) fulfilment in the life of the bride: all are combined here as they were in the *Eructavit*, with the positions shifted as appropriate to the biblical text and the voices it reveals. What these two *romans* finally show is that the act of adapting *la letre* to the venue and audience of vernacular poetry, *en romans traire*, is one of narrative expansion that renders truth as an experience grasped in performance. This experience operates both through identification with a protagonist (David/bride) and through the text as process; that is, the protagonist in the text is not only a figure in a narrative, but also a figure of how narrative is read, how the audience reads in the body—the way I suggested earlier that we should read Enide. These brides are vernacular translations of the reading life of the *sponsa derelicta*. The later emergence of poet-exegete and then *dame* in the text, presented as the very communication that renders it as a present performance, are, as we shall see, a demonstration of this renewal of scripture as experience; their emergence into speech shows the power of the text in action as it applies to different readers.

Beyond the first book extensive stretches of the text are spoken by an exegete to the audience, and he frequently announces his interventions as such. This exegete at times consults other *livres* or *feuills* to interpret what the speakers say, but he also presents his commentary as his own experience of the *saint livre*.⁷ “Jo vos dirai cho ke j'en sent” (I will tell you what my feeling is about this) (1501), is the way he announces his first intervention in book 2; he also claims God's inspiration for the same: “Cil ki tot seit, Deus, m'I ensent” (He who knows all, God, instructs me) (1502).⁸ The intervention of the exegete or instructor does not mean that the original dramatic conception has been abandoned or displaced. Something quite different occurs, something that was significant enough to divide the poem into two parts and bring an author and exegete to step forward and speak in his own voice.

The transition from the first to the second book rather remarkably interrupts a crucial address by the bride, which then continues in the second book; that is, the transition does not correspond to a division in the biblical text but rather interrupts the treatment of one of its parts, the description of the bed and litter of Solomon (Canticles 3:7–10).⁹ This is because the event it announces is the “awakening” of the exegete out of

⁷ Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 290–91.

⁸ *Ensent* could also be read as a subjunctive (as proposed by Hasenohr, Rev. of Pickford, 292; see note 3, above), which would see the poet requesting divine inspiration rather than claiming to receive it. In view of the way this authorial emergence is staged, I think the indicative reading is justified. See also lines 1438–39, 1799–800, 2362–64, 3159–60.

⁹ Hunt's conjecture—that this division corresponds to the end of Bernard's commentary and the beginning of Geoffrey's continuation—is of little help: Bernard's sermons conclude with Canticles

the "sleep" of the bride: she reports her own experience of the biblical text at this point as a *vision* received in sleep, while she was "gone to the world, rapt in God," and now reported to her "followers," the *puceles*, once she awakes (1323–26).¹⁰ The vision, which appears not to derive from previous commentary, shows the bride Solomon's palace.¹¹ The author/exegete emerges seamlessly from between the lines of the bride's account with the words, "Volez ore ke je vos die / Kel preu cho fait a nostre vie?" (Shall I tell you now / What boon this brings to our lives?) (1357–58). From this point on, a new communication between this exegete and his audience occupies the stage side by side with the dramatic exposition.

The division between the two books, which occurs slightly later, constitutes the formal introduction of this communication. The new *jo* identifies itself as one "in the school of love" (1443) and requests permission to speak: "Deu le souverain pere / Parler me doinst a son plaisir, / O se che non del tot taisir" (God the sovereign father grant that I speak to his pleasure, or, if not, that I remain entirely silent) (1438–40). But silence is no more an option for him than it was for the bride, as it is love that spurs him on to "enter the second book" (cf. 1445–46). Book 2 then begins with the explanation that love cannot be held in any prison; once it has progressed so far as to burn the heart, it will not be silent, it must be made known, whether in speech or actions—as evidenced in abundance "par les paroles de cest livre" (by the words of this book) (1447–54). The drama resumes with the words, "L'Espeuse ne s'i puet taisir, / E ne.l fait pas por mielz plaisir, / Mais grant amor ki son cuer art / Le torne tot de se part" (The bride cannot keep silent, and she does not speak merely to please; rather the great love that burns her heart turns her entirely to its purpose) (1455–58).

The text has staged the emergence of an authorial communication through an experience of loving identification with the bride. The entire passage is introduced when the bride announces she will ensure that holy church will embrace the beloved just as she has; to this purpose the bride-protagonist prepares "a beautiful bed in [the] heart" of the reader-as-bride.¹² In fact it is the author-exegete who, awakening as the reading bride, now knows something of the experience of love that the bride has thus far related; his voice thus takes its place alongside the others of the biblical text and with an authority like theirs. In the text as it progresses, the same voice is frequently indistinguishable from the bride's; it also displays a special complicity with her, occasionally addressing her directly in the second person familiar. The exegete shares in the love of the "damoisele"—and thus in her vision and authority to expound on the *matere de cest saint livre*, love.

3:1—some 260 lines earlier in Landri's text—as Hunt concedes. See idem, "O.F. Commentary," 271, 274 and 289.

10 The exegete himself will refer to the account as a vision: "Ne cuidés pas k'en vision / Aviengne riens se por nos non" (1357–58).

11 Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 289; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 293–95.

12 "Se le bien vult, n'i faldra mie: / Pose a k'il l'apele s'amie. / Tant ferai jo k'ele l'avra, / E en son cuer le gardera. / La li ferai un molt bel lit, / Molt precios e molt eslit. / Ja nel laira, s'ele m'en croit, / Ainz le tenra molt bien estroit" (1225–32).

This emergence of the exegete in the text is strongly reminiscent of Rupert's exegetical awakening and the way it transformed not only his text but also exegesis itself. In Rupert's treatment the crucial point of conjunction between his experience and the bride's occurred at the opening verses of the fifth chapter of Canticles, where the half-waking vision of a young woman allowed his experience to become the double of Mary's and thus take the place of hers in Rupert's text as the historical dimension of the biblical images. The same juncture of the biblical text is the site, in Landri's work, of a second lengthy passage (to be examined later) in which the bride relates her experience for her audience, the *puceles*, to follow, this time called an *aventure*.¹³ Experience has equal authority in either text; it can reveal truth whether "inside" or "outside" scripture, that is, this experience can occur in sacred history or in our history. Increasingly in this text the exposition works to put forward human experience, as known by the bride, as a double of the divine meaning of the text and as revelatory of that meaning.¹⁴ When the exegete steps forward to introduce a meaning "in our lives," he initiates a process through which the communication experienced by the audience is included in and fuses with that between bride and bridegroom, in which it is equally engaged in revealing the truth of the biblical text.

All the more significant, then, is the emergence of a relationship between poet-exegete and "Lady" that completes a parallel between the "original" (divine) communication of the text and its recommunication in the (human) present. Most immediately revealing is the manner and place in which the poet steps forward to pay his respects:

Ceste nostre exposicions
 Que nos de ces deus venz faisons
 Solonc le sens que Dex nos done,
 Plairoit a une altre persone.
 Mais cele por qui jo travail,
 Quar tot est suen, se jo rien vail,
 Certes most s'esmerveilleroit
 S'ele altre chose n'en öoit,
 Quar jo li ai maintes foiz dit
 Qu'aster signe Saint Esperit.
 Cist sens li plaist, cestui atent,
 Cist li savroit plus dolcement.
 E quant jo sai le sien plaisir,
 Jo ne m'en puis mie taisir,
 Quar faire vueil qu'ele por moi
 Prie son ami, li Sovrain Roi.

(2363–79)

¹³ Discussed below, pp. 247–50.

¹⁴ Particularly emphasized by Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 295–302, esp. 298–99, who saw the text as daringly innovative in this regard, possibly even heretical (Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 300).

(This exposition of ours
 That we make of these two winds
 According to the meaning that God gives us,
 Might please another person.
 But she in whose service I labour—
 For all is hers, if I'm worth a jot—
 Would surely be much surprised
 If she did not hear something else thereof,
 For I've told her myself often enough
 That the South Wind announces the Holy Spirit.
 She likes this meaning, it's what she expects,
 Its savour to her is the sweeter.
 And when I know her pleasure,
 I cannot help but speak accordingly,
 For I wish her to speak on my behalf
 To her beloved, the sovereign king.)

Once again, the author thematizes speech and silence, thus echoing his earlier emergence into the text. This echo accounts for the judgment that the passage at hand contains hidden homage of “courtly” love to the poet’s patron, but there is no mention of the “school of love” or the poet’s burning heart here.¹⁵ The same idea already confuses the supposed patron with the bride of the earlier passage and a love supposed to exist outside the text with one experienced inside it. The confusion is difficult to avoid. In fact, it is the very point of the newly introduced relationship, as the last line above already suggests: this woman and the bride are intimate with the same beloved.¹⁶

The parallels with Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s apology are notable. The poet’s confidant is the powerful *amie* (queen?) of a powerful king; this woman’s displeasure over a preceding statement is the scandalon that forces the poet to explain himself in a direct address; he acknowledges that she would much prefer a different tune. She thus takes a position as the ultimate judge of his work, a position that places her among its audience—whether or not she is physically present. But most importantly, despite the implication, here quite marked, that she might be understood as the patron, neither poet names his all-important *dame*; that she finds mention at all appears an accidental consequence of the poet’s position between two audiences, one with a general interest in the text, the other especially, even intimately implicated in its composition.

¹⁵ For example, Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 282–83.

¹⁶ At line 2378, the manuscript reads “Prist son ami,” which yields little sense; both Hunt and Hasenohr, *Rev. of Pickford* (see note 3, above), correct it as given here. A similar doubling of identities troubles reading of the epilogue in the only other mention the poet makes of this relationship. Verses 3497–500 can only be resolved, as I see it, by taking their seeming contradiction as the overlay of two relationships: on the one hand the poet “presents” his lady (his charge as instructor) to God, on the other, no doubt as Mary, she is to plead with God for him. Thus once again identity is circumscribed with a riddle.

In both cases, the remarks are a riddle teasing audience participation in their conceit. This is where the differences between the two become of interest: missing in Landri's address is the contrast drawn between this woman and one in the narrative itself and thus the opposition between Mary and Eve; instead of enumerating "his lady's" praises, then, the poet remarks obscurely on the content of his conversations with her, further defining their relationship. In Benoît's riddle, it is above all the terms of the contrast that point to the lady as Mary; in Landri's, identity is invested in a contrast between two readings of one passage of the Song of Songs.

The two contrasted readings—in the preceding passage, the poet identifies the south wind with prosperity and the north wind with adversity; in the apology to his *dame* he refers to a reading that sees them as the Holy Spirit and the Devil, respectively—are not treated in the commentary tradition as either competing or contrasting but sooner complementary. They occur alternately within the same texts, notably in the poet's preferred source, Geoffrey of Auxerre, but also in earlier commentaries, among them the *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* of Honorius Augustodunensis.¹⁷ The question, then, is rather one of the significance of the lady's preference. "Who is she," the audience is led to ask, "for whom this distinction should be of such importance?" *Quae est ista?* And the riddle's solution is found—at least for us—in Honorius's first commentary on the Song of Songs, not the *Expositio*, but the *Sigillum beatae Mariae*.

The *Sigillum* was written as an explanation of the verses within the Song of Songs that had become a fixed part of the Assumption liturgy. Its project is announced as revealing how these verses could apply *specialiter* to Mary's life, when they also apply *generaliter* to the church.¹⁸ On the "South Wind," then, Honorius has something else, or something more, to relate than in his later *Expositio*. In words originally spoken by God and reported by "Christ of his mother," the text defines the north wind as the Devil, "who shall have no part in you," and the south wind as "the Holy Spirit, who shall possess you as my garden. 'And its spices shall flow,' that is, through you shall my only Son become flesh." The next verses of the biblical text, beginning "Veniat dilectus meus" (Canticles 5:1), are treated as "the words of the Virgin, desiring Christ to enter her."¹⁹ In a Marian understanding, then, the Holy Spirit blowing through the garden is the prophetic image of Mary's conception of the Word. This is not a different or competing meaning, but rather one that manifests the biblical text as a single, historical event, to which one "lady" in particular especially holds—for it is (and was) *her* experience.

¹⁷ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*, p. 349, lines 15–17, and p. 268, lines 19–20; Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio*, 429C–430A. Other corroborating readings are given in Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," 292. For a detailed overview of the commentary tradition see Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, pp. 895–910.

¹⁸ On the importance of the Marian reading as Honorius treats it, see Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion," 102; and *JP*, pp. 247–88.

¹⁹ Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum beatae Mariae*, 508A–B. Rupert of Deutz reads the bride's "veniat" and the bridegroom's "veni" (Canticles 5:1) in the same way as Honorius does, but does not explicitly identify the blowing of the south wind with the Spirit's descent into Mary's womb (*CCC*, 4, pp. 93–95).

"Ecce in medio nuptiarum sumus" (We are now in the midst of the nuptials).²⁰ Thus Rupert opened the fourth book of his *De incarnatione Domini*, which had arrived at this same passage, crucial in his treatment, describing the bride as the garden enclosed, the *hortus conclusus* (Canticles 4:12–16). The biblical text at this point reaches the culmination of the bridegroom's praise of the bride, which will lead, as both Rupert and Honorius saw it, to their union in Mary's conception through the Spirit. At this stage of Landri's text, in the midst of book 2, the passages spoken by the biblical voices are generally introduced as such and thus made discreet from the commentator's elaboration on them. This procedure continues through most of the bridegroom's praise of the bride (Canticles 4:1–10; lines 1715–2282), but at its culmination in Canticles 4:11–16, all distinction between the voice of the bridegroom and that of the exegete disappears, and the audience hears instead one lyric voice in loving praise of the bride (lines 2283–356). The poet, in effect, borrows the voice of the biblical text to praise a female addressee as yet unannounced. This vocal harmony concludes when the poet is obliged to acknowledge that *his* lady requires a reading of the Spirit in the garden *specialiter*, according to her experience, thus also acknowledging her presence as his "special" addressee.

The poet-exegete in Landri's text has staged the emergence of his *dame* much as he previously staged his own: his experience there was the mirror of the bride's on Solomon's bed; it was "awakened" by hers to speak and thus remanifests in the here and now the love she felt there and then. Here, in "the golden hour,"²¹ the address to the bride is suddenly acknowledged as one made to a lady here and now—an address made in the voice of the bridegroom about to descend into his garden, the womb of the mother-bride. The voice that is made flesh in a woman's reception of the Word is identified with the poet's speech to his lady; indeed, this voice causes their relationship to take shape in the text. In this moment, then—in a rhetorical gesture that, as in other texts, doubles as a colophon—the text has accomplished the identification of audience and the *sponsa et mater*, of poetic voice and the voice of the Spirit, that is the objective of women's lectio and reading as Mary did.

Quae est ista? The lady's identity is a mystery and a riddle because her very significance depends on its multiplicity; the riddle is meant to initiate reflection on the different possible meanings of the scriptural image for differing manifestations of its "female" audience. Benoît's version, cast in terms of the distance from Eve to Mary, best suits his project as the recuperation of pagan history for a Christian present. Landri's version points to the origins of the multiple identities of the bride in exegesis itself. His *dame* represents a reading as *historia*, one of special importance to a specific woman who is here, among us—and also as far removed as the queen of Heaven. This woman is my patron, the poet says—"because, after all, everything is hers, if I'm worth a jot" (cf. 3678). That is: if I have anything to say to you, it is because she gave it to me; without her,

²⁰ CCC, 4, p. 85.

²¹ "Quant bise cesse e auster vente, / E la dolce ore se presente (2395–96). The translation, which assumes a pun on "gold" and "hour," is Ohly's, *Hohelied-Studien*, p. 283.

the text could not be “ours.”²² This lady brings both poet and audience into the presence of the Word as personal experience. Her specificity, her “historicity,” we might say, makes her experience of the text a “real” one, and this is why she and Mary appear to be one. Through her, the two experiences of the text, the one historical in time, the other *historia* as renewed experience of *la letre*, are collapsed into one. “Cele por cui jo travail” is then no conceit, no mere “patroness,” no ploy to curry favour with a woman or women. She is the *clef-de-voute* of this textual architecture, the point at which all arcs of meaning meet. This is her role as well within the same architecture in other texts; Landri’s *Song of Songs*, however, shows us the construction returned to the text that is the original authority for the reading path it describes.

Landri’s *romans* delivers the Song of Songs as the song of two voices longing to be joined, and the event that is announced as its objective, the kiss between divinity and humanity, is accomplished when the song of a woman’s suffering for love elevates human experience and human weakness to the point where the audience can know what Mary knew. The primary focus of this knowing shifts, however, from Mary’s conception of the Word to her perfect *compassio* at the cross, God’s descent into the pain of human flesh. The divine and the human approach each other equally, each in the attempt to know the other’s pain. As conduit and enabler of this experience, Mary is the image of a possibility of human empathy in which physical individuation is overcome and the bride can say to the bridegroom, “I am you,” or, in the words of the biblical text, “Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi” (I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me) (Canticles 6:2). This experience is not simply that of union in compassion with the suffering Christ but also, and primarily, a realization of human pain and compassion as a mirror of the divine. For this reason, it too depends essentially on identification with the woman as spectator and audience. She collapses the distance between the human and the divine even as she allows sacred history to become human history—and, finally, for this is where our argument aims—allows an *estoire* that reproduces a similar experience of empathy to partake of the same epiphany, an experience of truth in stories of human suffering, or “fiction.” But before we follow through on this idea as it is articulated in Landri’s text, let us see how his fellow at the court of Guines, Lambert of Ardres, represents the same literary developments in a larger context.

Lambert of Ardres, the Counts of Guines, and the Mutations of Lay Literary Identity

Not to apprehend the riddle on the woman-as-audience as such is clearly to miss an opportunity. In the scant scholarship on Landri’s case it has meant a double loss: the idea that the poet’s “Lady” is his patron or at least a historical personage who inspires his writing has obscured the value of a rare witness to the genesis and nature of the text. In his *History of the Counts of Guines and the Lords of Ardres*, Lambert of Ardres

²² The formula “Quar tot est suen,” applied to the lady in this line is another nod to her divine status. At line 2484, the bride makes a similar statement of her dependence on God: “Or face tot, quar tot est sien.” Elsewhere, Mary is referred to as “Ki de totes est damoisele” (line 2876).

leaves no doubt that “Landericus de Wabbanio” wrote his “translation” of the Song of Songs at the behest and for the personal edification of a prolific male patron, Baldwin II of Guines.²³ Such a text was almost certainly an *unicum*, not only one of a kind but quite likely the first of its kind anywhere in Western Christendom. Nowhere else, so far as we know, had anyone undertaken to make the monastic reading experience of the Song of Songs into a *romans* for a secular court, and when word got out in the Picard region just south of Flemish-speaking Guines that someone had, the Cistercian General Chapter of 1200 ordered that it, in particular, be burned, “and any other such books along with it.”²⁴ Lambert, as we shall see, is in full agreement on the capital significance of this particular *romans*, and the text found in MS Le Mans 173 concludes with a gesture perhaps intended to temper the scandal: “Mais tant requier que cist romanz / Unques ne viengne en main d’enfant” (But I stipulate that this *romans* should never be given into a child’s hands) (3505–6). And yet, solely on the basis of Landri’s riddling nod to a lady “for whom I labour,” some scholars would have us believe that, at the same time and in the same region, a second (female) patron and another author ventured the same thing—rather than, that is, entertain the idea that Baldwin might lurk behind the poet’s *dame*.²⁵ The greater loss, however, may lie in missing the converse opportunity to see in this supposed contradiction the simple truth, for once, about “the problem of the woman reader” in the history of vernacular literature: the woman as audience stands in for an audience-as-woman. Baldwin’s patronage does not stand in contradiction to the *dame* who enables and inspires the poet’s work; it is simply the wax into which this seal, the seal of Mary’s reading, was impressed.

Lambert’s *Historia* is itself a *mise-en-scène* of the arrival of vernacular literature. As such, it yields very little in terms of historical “facts,” but does offer something in many ways much better: a unique “glimpse into the budding awareness around 1200 of the way the various elements [Lambert] evokes began to constellate as the image of an

23 Lambert of Ardres, *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

24 “Praecipitur abbatibus Ursi campi et Caricampi, ut venientes ad Carolilocom, librum qui dicitur: *Canticum canticorum* translatum in romanum [MS J]: in vulgari gallico], incendi faciant, et si quos huiusmodi libros aliquis abbas invenerit in domo sua faciat eos concremari.” *Statuta Capitulum Generalium*, p. 255, par. 34. The location in question is Chaalis, today in the department of the Oise. Vernacular books became the object of incendiary orders elsewhere at this time as well; see Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, pp. 447–48.

25 Pickford, “Introduction,” pp. xxiv–xxv, deemed Landri’s authorship a “possibility rather than a probability,” because of “the reference ... to a Lady for whom the author was working.” Baldinger, Rev. of Pickford (see note 3, above), reiterated the objection, while Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, pp. 54–55, attempted to resolve the “contradiction” by proposing that Baldwin’s wife, Christine, “perhaps showed more interest in the work than he did”—a suggestion that is chronologically prohibited by Christine’s death in 1177. The following regard the attribution to Landri as established: Bonnard, *Traductions*, pp. 152–62; Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” pp. 164–66; Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 282–83; Ohly first proposed the idea that Landri’s *dame* should be seen as a “Kunstfigur.” Curschmann also rebuts the additional objections based on dating raised by Hunt, “O.F. Commentary,” pp. 271–72, who makes no mention of the issue of Landri’s *dame* (see also note 38, below).

epochal turn.”²⁶ Lambert seeks a representation that will “render this radical turn comprehensible, both as such and in its consequences” as he perceived them.²⁷ Under this lens, nothing is mentioned for its own sake, but rather only “by way of measuring and testifying to cultural activity.”²⁸ All the more valuable, then, is the testimony given on a text that we still possess—once this is appropriately evaluated.

The advent of vernacular literature is featured in Lambert’s chronicle as part of the “praise of princes” that necessarily makes up a large part of its content. He divides the development into three clearly discernible stages, two of which take shape in two successive chapters of the history of Count Baldwin, in whose employ Lambert spent most of his life. The third is reserved for the reign of Baldwin’s son, Arnold II of Guines (r. 1206–1222). The first stage, entitled *De sapientia comitis Baldwini*, is entirely devoted to the “astounding” contradiction between Baldwin’s status, *omnino laicus et illitteratus* (in all ways a layman and illiterate) and his achievements in learning: “he was an indescribable man of both wonderful ability and wit, a pupil of every philosophy, and a most learned son!—although he was, as I have just said, completely ignorant of the arts,” Baldwin was able to dispute with the best doctors and get the better of them.²⁹ Lambert makes it explicit that Baldwin’s learning occurs as a result of his clerical instructors’ oral vernacular delivery of Latin texts. He “was a most diligent retainer of what he had heard,” Lambert writes, and “was more instructed in many things than he needed to be by the clergy.”³⁰ The content of Baldwin’s learning is given as defined by the scriptures and their deeper meaning, and its imparting is treated as a marvel that has all the qualities of an illumination: “Since he was no deaf auditor of theological writing, he grasped and heeded with his attentive hearing the pronouncements of the prophets and not just the literal meaning of divine histories and evangelical doctrine, but also their mystical power. ... Indeed, he received divine eloquence (*divinam eloquium*) from them.” It is at this point that the “matter” of vernacular poetry is introduced: “in exchange [Baldwin] told and related to them popular trifles (*gentilium nenias*) that he got from story-tellers (*a fabulatoribus*).”³¹

The precise value of this last, seemingly incongruous gesture becomes apparent in the second stage of the account, which is the subject of Lambert’s next chapter, *Quomodo translata fecit multos libros* (How he had many books translated).³² Because “he was

26 “Was wir damit an liebgewordenen Gewißeiten punktueller Art verlieren, wird allerdings mehr als wettgemacht durch den Gewinn an Einsicht in das Bewußtsein, dem [sic!] sich die herangezogenen Details bereits um 1200 zum Bild einer epochalen Wende zusammenfügen,” Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” p. 166.

27 “... diesen Umbruch als solchen und in seinen Konsequenzen verständlich zu machen..., das ... wollte Lambert offensichtlich,” Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” p. 165.

28 “... als Maßstab und Zeugen kultureller Aktivität,” Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” p. 165.

29 English translation, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from Lambert of Ardres, *History of the Counts of Guines* trans. Shopkow, here 80, p. 113.

30 *Counts of Guines*, 80, p. 113.

31 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 80, p. 598; *Counts of Guines*, p. 113.

32 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598; *Counts of Guines*, p. 114.

not able to retain all knowledge in his heart," Baldwin begins to commission written translations into the vernacular.³³ This change reflects neither one in his reading abilities nor one in reading practice. Baldwin remains *omnino illitteratus*; the translations are rather read to him out loud over and over again: "sepius ante se legere fecit."³⁴ Rather than listening to an ad-hoc prose translation, however, he now hears a fixed text, doubtless in verse (as in Landri's *Song of Songs*), and can thus memorize rather than simply "retain." Eventually this activity expands to include the Sunday Gospel readings and the appropriate sermons, the life of St Antony, treatises on physics and philosophy and even the craft of building and architecture. Finally, although their recording is never made explicit, his library is said to include as well a comprehensive collection of vernacular literature, from the *chansons de geste* to courtly romance to the fabliaux (*cantilenas gestoriae, eventuras nobilium, fabulas ignobilium*).³⁵

It is unlikely, to say the least, that the Christian equivalent of an Alexandrian library could be compiled by a minor provincial lord to comprise a literature that had only just begun to appear in writing during his later lifetime. But Lambert's appraisal aims elsewhere. It is retrospective and establishes Baldwin as a major force in a development that had likely not reached anything approaching such proportions until shortly before his death, if at all within his lifetime. That is, Lambert is projecting the logically constructed account of an epochal transformation onto the history of the houses of Guines and Ardres. He shows us that transformation as his patrons preferred to remember it and have it remembered. The recording of the stuff of vernacular poetry, layman's entertainment, is inserted into an account of one lay nobleman's extraordinary desire for instruction and learning; in an imperceptible transition, it is assimilated to that same endeavour just as its texts are listed as part of the same library. Oral tales figure as part and parcel of an exchange between cleric and nobleman that results in their in-scription; they become books, and this in itself places them in the same library, so Lambert's text would have it, as Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite. Moreover, this inclusion is seen to result not from Baldwin's interest but from that of his clerical instructors!

The vernacularization of exegesis and the inscription of vulgar tales, then, approach the same centre of interest from different directions. This centre of interest is an interchange of knowledge and poetic forms between clerical and lay culture; its medium becomes the oral performance of written vernacular texts. And at the point of transition from the ad-hoc interpretation of orally expounding instructors to the creation of new literary experience inscribed in the vernacular, Lambert gives priority and pride of place to one text in particular. Thus begins his crucial account of "how Baldwin had many books translated":

But because the count avidly embraced all learning and was not able to retain all knowledge of all things in his heart, he commissioned, while the county of Ardres was in his dominion, the services of the most erudite master, Landri of Waben, to translate the Song of Songs for him from Latin to French and then read it to him frequently; a translation to

³³ *Counts of Guines*, 81, p. 113.

³⁴ *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

³⁵ *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598.

be made not only according to the letter, but also according to the mystical understanding of spiritual interpretation, so that he could both understand and taste the mystical power of the words.³⁶

The passage goes on to mention other texts as named above. By comparison with the remarks on Landri's text, however, the other works are little more than items in a list. The parallel with the description of Baldwin's wondrous learning in the preceding paragraph is only too clear: Baldwin "grasped ... not just the literal meaning of divine histories ... but also their mystical power. ... Indeed he received divine eloquence from them."³⁷ That is, the remarks on Landri's Song of Songs stand as the model of a project and a procedure in which the others are included; moreover, this particular text is made the keystone within that project. It is featured as the foundation for a new level of experience of the same material, one shaped around a new form of delivery with a fixed text, which insures that the experience is the same from one performance to the next—and allows the listener "to taste" in their full power the words of the Spirit. The impetus for change thus stems, apparently, from an extension of the use of texts in performance to include and exploit the power of the vernacular and its poetic forms.

What Lambert tells us is doubtless of little chronological value. The circumstances surrounding the transfer of power in Ardres from Baldwin to his son, Arnold, are complex, such that Lambert's time frame—Baldwin's dominion over Ardres—is open to diverse interpretation, even should it be accurate in itself.³⁸ But the more important point is this: Landri's text need no more truly have been the chronological *primus* in

36 "Sed cum omnem omnium scientiam avidissime amplecteretur et omnem omnium scientiam corde tenus retinere nequisset, virum eruditissimum magistrum Landericum de Wabbanio, dum Ardensis honoris preesset comes dominio, Cantica canticorum non solum ad litteram, sed ad mysticam spiritualis interpretationis intelligentiam de Latino in Romanum, ut eorum mysticam virtutem saperet et intelligeret, transferre sibi et sepius ante se legere fecit." *Historia comium Ghisnensium*, 81, p. 598. The translation is my own; cf. *Counts of Guines*, p. 114.

37 *Counts of Guines*, 80, p. 113.

38 This question is in need of further investigation. Baldwin's dominion over Ardres began in 1176, but partial rights of rule were conferred on Arnold well before Baldwin's death in 1206, apparently with great reservation (see *Counts of Guines*, 92, p. 125). On the date of this probatory transfer of power, Shopkow is willing to state only that it "seems to have happened sometime after 1177" (*Counts of Guines*, p. 231n310); while Bonnard, *Traductions*, p. 154; and Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," p. 271, state conclusively and without explanation that Baldwin ruled Ardres from 1176 to 1181, apparently taking the date of Arnold's knighting as decisive (if so, this deduction finds no support in the text). Pickford, and after him Curschmann, "Höfische Laienkultur," p. 150, state (likewise without explanation) that Arnold's rule began in 1187. Based on Lambert's words *dum Ardensis honoris preesset comes dominio*, the date of Landri's text could fall anywhere between 1176 and 1206, when Arnold fully assumed all his father's powers. Similarly in need of review is Hunt's objection ("O.F. Commentary," 271–72) that Landri's text, because it relies on Geoffrey of Auxerre's *Expositio de cantica canticorum*, cannot be dated earlier than about 1200. According to the *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, Geoffrey was born between 1114 and 1120; as for his death, we know only that he was still alive in 1188. But if his commentary was not completed before the mid 1190s, as Hunt, following Geoffrey's modern editor, maintains, then he wrote the lengthy work at a very advanced age.

Baldwin's patronage of translations than we need seek a lady at his court to stand in for Landri's *dame*. Both features tell us something, instead, about how the text was conceived and received. Together, they suggest that the recasting of the bride's reading for a courtly audience-as-woman was seen as the key to a new layman's learning and an enabling precondition of the phenomenon that follows: the vernacularization of letters and the in-scription of vulgar entertainments.

What of Lambert's third stage in the development? The actual emergence of vernacular literature in its own right and its patronage by the lay nobility he reserved for the next generation. As Curschmann elucidates, Arnold, who succeeds his father as Count of Guines on the latter's death in 1206, is provided with all the trappings and experiences of a new layman's chivalric culture (including a youthful romance gone awry, in which he ends up disgraced and imprisoned as just dessert for pursuit of a wayward beauty). Along with the texts it produces, this culture ascribes spiritual aspirations and legitimacy to the life of the *miles* by way of promulgating its emancipation from clerical caretakership.³⁹ Arnold's orally expounding instructors—and such they are, no less than his fathers' were—are not only clerics, but also older noblemen whose areas of expertise now divide along the lines we know from other (literary) sources: the matters of Britain, Rome and France. In similarly comprehensive fashion to the catalogue of his father's library, this vernacular “learning”—*veterum eventuras et fabulas et historias*, which are made the vehicles of *moralitatis seria*—now receives expanded treatment, including, in addition to the general categories, mention of histories of the crusades and tales of the orient, Tristan and Isolde, Gormond and Isembard, Merlin, and Solomon and Marcolf.⁴⁰ That is, the content of Arnold's *sapientia* is now given almost entirely through the “history” of his own kind. The last item in the list is then a history of the lords of Ardres, “de Ardentium gestis,” a fact that reflects tellingly on the place of Lambert's own work, which culminates in Arnold's reign, although remaining, unlike the *veterum eventuras* of which he reports, committed to the Latin language.

With this transition the Lord who rivals the *doctores* in his illiterate learning (*quasi litteratus*) is transformed into one whose “illiterate's literature” rivals Latin tradition as a vehicle of knowledge and truth. Taken together with the representation of audience in Landri's “Song of Songs”—where, as we shall see shortly, *seignors* become *puceles* who follow the bride, herself encoded in a parallel communication as the poet's *dame*—we also witness a transition in which the cleric's instruction for the illiterate layman is displaced by Mary's reading. The same basic building blocks that make up Lambert's representatively staged and ideologically charged transition we will find similarly and still more noticeably configured to advance romance as a layman's scripture in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Wolfram, and Lambert no less, uses this argument as a platform from which to launch his own claim to mediate truth for his audience. But Lambert still casts himself as the literate, mediating cleric; Wolfram, as is well known, steps forward in the pose of a militant illiterate.⁴¹

39 I am summarizing in this paragraph from Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” pp. 158–61.

40 *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, 96, p. 607; *Counts of Guines*, p. 130.

41 See Curschmann, “Höfische Laienkultur,” pp. 149–51, 166–67.

Reading as the New Eve—*en romans*

According to Lambert of Ardres, then, Landri of Waben's *romans* on the Song of Songs was a bridge to new realms of knowing, exemplifying an extension of the illiterate's learning into new reading experiences, an extension that founded an autonomous tradition in so far as this learning was no longer dependent on the oral recapitulations of another's reading. And so far as this momentous claim is concerned, Lambert's testimony can be affirmed, because Landri's text is every bit an attempt to render the Song of Songs as a reading path both accessible to the "weak" and body-bound and leading to Mary's embrace of the Word. It is a layman's initiation into how to read as a woman, as Eve on the way to becoming Mary.

The poet's emergence in Landri's text occurs as a reading performance that models identification with the love and suffering of the bride. What remains to be seen is how, and in what terms, this experience is constructed for the larger audience: the *seignors* whom the narrator apostrophizes only once, when he first intervenes in the exposition to comment on the plaintive lament of the second bride. By way of explaining the oddity of Canticles 1:2, in which the bride praises her beloved's *mameles* (breasts) (165), the narrator delivers a crucial point behind a touch of humour:

Seignors, ci nos convient entendre
Ke nos en puissoms raison rendre,
Kar mameles, al dire voir,
Seulent femmes nient homme avoir.
Or sachiez donc ke par figure
Parole ici Sainte Escriture.

(173–77)

(My lords, here we must exercise good sense to recognize what is meant, for breasts, in truth, only women have and not men. Know therefore, that here holy scripture is speaking metaphorically.)

As with the reference to meanings according to *allegorie* and *moralité*, the poet masks the innovation undertaken in his adaptation of *lectio* to *romans* behind conventional terminology. The notion that the bridegroom can be seen to have breasts *par figure* suggests that, in this text, women may be men and vice versa. The *seignors* receive no further mention, because they are to see themselves throughout the text as *puceles* or *jovenceles*, terms we have encountered before as equally applicable to young women, to nuns, and to those who follow the bride, her *adulescentulae*. Landri defines them several times in his text; they are "those who have just begun to love" (cf. 1492), who are "less wise" for lack of experience (cf. 251–52). The common denominator to all these identities is the weakness or incapacity proper to the female as body; we have also seen how this overlaps with both illiteracy and the privilege to a different gnosis, the defining characteristics of Lambert's portrait of Baldwin. "Outside" the experience of Landri's text, Baldwin is an illiterate lay nobleman; "inside" that experience, he is one among the *puceles* who seek to read as Mary did. As surprising as it would seem to an uninitiated modern reader, Baldwin is no less the type of the psalter-reading woman than Hildegard was—but where she used this platform to step forward as a prophet and visionary, in

Lambert's portrayal of Baldwin it is presented as the self-image of a male patron of vernacular *letteratura*.

Until the poet/exegete emerges at the end of the first book, the primary, directive address of the poem comes not from a narrator addressing an audience, but rather from the bride to her *puceles*. Just as in Rupert's commentary, the audience is drawn into the biblical drama through the role of the young women, who serve as a witnessing "chorus" to the dialogue between bride and bridegroom. Landri of Waben expands the possibilities of this technique by interpolating several occasions for which no prompt exists in the biblical text and by making the bride's addresses into explicit directives to follow after her. The two most important sections of the text in this regard are the bride's vision of Solomon's palace and her later *aventure*, mentioned earlier. But the bride's first address to her followers is that of the "black bride" in Canticles 1:4, which could hardly be more opportune for this poem and its project. The narrator comments by way of introduction that "the bride ... exhorts [the young women] to follow her well, by her example she encourages them to seek a glorious life" (cf. 259–62). The bride then explains the words "I am black but beautiful" as referring to her inner beauty in an ignoble exterior:

Se jo sui noire par defors,
Dedenz sui clere come ors.
...
Dedenz le cuer, la o Deus voit,
Est ma beltez, com estre doit.
(297–98, 307–8)

(If I am black on the outside, inwardly I am bright as gold. ... Within the heart, where God sees, lies my beauty, as it should.)⁴²

The narrator concludes: "The bride speaks thus to her young women, whom she wishes to render inwardly beautiful" (cf. 311–12).

Thus begins the bride's explicit instruction to her followers, couched in the now familiar rhetoric of inner truth vs. outer appearance, here seen as a blackened exterior and a golden heart. With this initiation of her followers as young women seeking the beauty of the abject exterior, the diaphanous body, the bride has implicitly identified their search for the "kiss"—a reunion of divinity and humanity—with a mirroring-in-the-body of Christ as the divine in abject human form. The New Eve follows the same reading path here, in a text for *seignors*, as she did in the *Speculum's* instruction for virgins. Both groups read in the body because the body is their way of knowing the Word. The black bride's body, moreover, is such in one sense because her *amis* "discoloured" her (299) and, in another, because of the blows and insults, the humiliation she suffers at the hands of sinners (300–304). All of this is as it should be, "For he on my account suffered sorrow, and I want to suffer the same for him."⁴³

⁴² This passage is distinctly reminiscent of the treatment of the black bride and the problem of inner truth and outer appearance in Abelard's third letter to Heloise; see Powell, "Listening to Heloise," pp. 272–78.

⁴³ "Mais sofri por moi ennui / E jo le vueil sofrir por lui" (305–6).

When Landri's text next evokes the "blackness" of human flesh—towards its end—it will be to recall this same idea of inner beauty, but a beauty manifest as *compassio*, as a suffering in the heart that mirrors Christ's bodily suffering on the cross. The black bride's introduction opens the same parenthesis as do the words of the seeking bride in the initial narrative staging of the poem. Her blackness corresponds to the shame that makes it so difficult for her counterpart to speak; the golden interior is, as we shall see, the sincerity of the loving heart, *devociions de cuer*, as Landri calls it. It is finally the sheer weakness of this loving heart—that is, its inability to remain silent despite its shame—that testifies to its sincerity. In a later passage that displays all the art of Landri's text, this fragrance of sincerity all but delivers the response to the question of the choric refrain, the *quae est ista* of the biblical text. Canticles 3:6 enters the drama such that the bride's heart produces the "tendrill of smoke rising from the desert, fragrant with frankincense and myrrh" of the biblical verse.⁴⁴ This smoke is like incense or "the powders of all perfumers" because it is produced by the heart of the bride burning on the coals of love, and is thus "dear to God" (1304).

How the bride's path is accomplished from the disadvantaged position of weakness and simple understanding is in large part communicated by the other two most prominent passages of her instruction. The first contains the bride's *vision* of Solomon's palace, but actually extends, despite interruptions by the bridegroom, the commentator, and the author, from line 1172 to line 1604. The bride begins—in an address to the *puceles* that has no corresponding prompt in the Song of Songs—by saying, "Ladies, I want to tell you of this lord for whom my heart yearns, in what way I seek him, and what trouble I have taken in this search. Much there is that you can learn, if you will only lend me an ear. I remember well that I was lying then in my bed and resting."⁴⁵ She concludes in a passage inspired by Canticles 3:11, calling the *damoiseles* forth to see Solomon in his glory for themselves, after which the narrator summarizes:

Par tels paroles les envie
Totes l'espeuse, sains envie.
Ne vuelt pas seule avoir se joie,
Mais les altres en met en voie.

(1601–4)

(With these words the bride encourages them all, selflessly. She does not desire to keep her joy for herself, but rather sets the others on her path.)

The text seeks to lead its audience towards the bride's experience of *joie*, and offers this experience by allowing them to be present as she recapitulates it, sharing her visionary experience as an imitable reading path. That it is, indeed, imitable, is then revealed by

⁴⁴ The biblical text in the margin reads, "Que est ista que ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi ex aromatibus mirre et thuris et universi pulveris pigmentarii?"

⁴⁵ "Damoiseles, jo vos vueil dire / De cel Seignor o mes cuers tire, / En kel maniere jo le quis, / E al querre kel paine mis. / Molt i porrez de bien aprendre, / Se vos a moi volez entendre. / Bien m'en sovient ke jo gisoie / Ja en mon lit e reposoie" (1171–78).

the emergence of the authorial voice, which reports to the audience as if *he* had only just awakened from *her* sleep.

The same is true of the later passage, lines 2489 to 2684, only here the bride's search in the biblical text, Canticles 5:2–8, is announced with the words "A ses compaignes s'est torne / E lor raconte une aventure" (She turned to her companions and told them a story) (2486–87). This "story," which is thus introduced as the audience knew storytelling from minstrels or jongleurs and romances, begins much as the last one did: "I am sleeping, but my heart keeps watch, this marvel occurs not seldom" (cf. 2489–90). The subsequent verses that recount the bride's waking, the mysterious touch of the beloved's hand "through the hole," and her ensuing search for him are then taken as a past experience in which she "held her Beloved in the fealty of love" (cf. 2492). At the conclusion, the narrator reports: "Tot cho conte la Deu Amie / As puceles, puis se lor prie / Que, s'eles voient son ami, / Ne.l oblient, mais dient li" (All this is related by God's beloved to the young women, and then she begs them not to forget, if they should see her beloved, to tell him) (2631–34). The narrator thus makes a parenthesis of the address to the "daughters" at Canticles 5:8 such that it both opens and closes the account, framing verses two to seven of chapter five as an *aventure* related for their benefit. This *aventure* is, in fact, another "visionary" experience, one not unlike Rupert's, in which the Word is known as presence in a loving embrace. The conclusion, however (here the biblical text, *si inveneritis dilectum meum annuncietis*, perfectly fuses with the author's purpose), would indicate that the bride's audience relives the same story, or undertakes the same *aventure*, also called "une ancienne entrepresure" (an ancient quest; 2488), such that they might encounter the beloved in her stead. What are they to tell him? Just as the biblical text says, "how she languishes in love for him" (cf. 2636 and Canticles 5:8). This they will know not only because she has told them, but also because they have felt it themselves—just as, at the earlier juncture, the poet revealed of his own experience on the bed of contemplation.

Reading through *aventure*, in this case an extraordinary experience retold by the protagonist to whom it occurred, follows the previous, analogous presentation through *vision* as an alternative way of staging Mary's *lectio*. It is in fact the bride's *aventure* that most closely resembles the story of Rupert's *adulescentula* as "the foundation of mystery in historical things";⁴⁶ the same recalls the *Eructavit* poet's use of a *samblance* to allow his audience "to see and hear" the *grant joie* felt by the triumphant bride. *Historia* in this understanding is very close to story; it is a way of understanding figures of scripture through their contextualization in situations and relationships, a world of human contingencies that allows the words to appear as if spoken by persons like "ourselves," with motivations and emotions that relate to "our" experience. We are at the productive centre of a realm of imaginative representation that allows the report of a woman's visionary gnosis to overlap with the report of the bride's experience as *aventure*, with both offered as ways of presenting scripture for *puceles*, that is, *estoire* for "simple folk," as we shall see shortly. The apparent equivalence between the two derives from the

46 See above, p. 69.

capacity they share to deliver an experience of presence. Refracted as it is in Landri's text through the commingled voices of poet and exegete, lover and instructor, this call to follow the bride through her visionary and narrative experiences is a call to experience how a woman loves and reads, or reading as a profession of love. Loving devotion to this "Lady" is a commitment to a reading path of empathy, a desire to become one with her desire. What we see here, then, is the same identification with the feminine that motivated the transformation of reading among the male monastic elites—a sustained preoccupation with a woman's way of knowing the Word and the construction of corresponding reading practice—which has in this case precipitated into a *romans* of the life of the *sponsa derelicta*. The narrative dimension of women's reading experience is now the poetic vehicle for its presentation to a courtly, lay audience.

The vehicles of vision and narrative are privileged, here as elsewhere, for mediating an experience of presence that is the reward of those who seek the beloved in the simplicity of loving devotion alone. The text frequently indicates that its instruction is not intended for *sage gent*; but rather offers the milk that is appropriate to the immature—its final warning against "the hands of a child" notwithstanding.⁴⁷ Just preceding the bride's *aventure*, then, the narrator speaks of the different groups that have found their place in the "spiritual garden" of the beloved—the same garden through which the South Wind blows—and special, final mention goes to "the fervent hearts" who in earthly life were dependent on mediation through their instructors (*maistres*), "E ki de pure estorie peurent / La simple gent, quar plus ne seurent" (And who nourished themselves on pure *historia* / The simple folk, for they knew nothing more) (2459–60). This bride who relates her experience as a coalescence of *vision* and *aventure* is presented through *historia*, or rather, she re-presents, makes present the historical dimension of the biblical images. As she relates it, moreover, her visionary experience makes this *historia* into a layman's access to the presence of the beloved that can dispense with, or "bypasses" learned intervention.

In a surprising passage that precedes her vision of Solomon's palace—expressly introduced as showing "in what way I seek him and what trouble I have taken in this search"⁴⁸—the bride tells how she first asked her way of "the good masters who know the depths of the scriptures." But it was only by "passing beyond" (*trespasser*) these "guards" that she finally found her beloved—and she clarifies: "It is fitting that one leave them behind," because "many of them tell us much that is useful, but don't practice what they preach ... mere words without actions will never find him."⁴⁹ The only true precondition is found in the heart and divine grace: "Devociions de cuer le trueve, / Kant il Deu plaist ke il l'esmueve" (Devotion of the heart finds him, / When it pleases God to be so moved)

⁴⁷ Here lines 185–98; see also 1571–76, 1983–86, 2027–40. Further passages are discussed below.

⁴⁸ See the text in note 45, above.

⁴⁹ "Li buen maistre, quant il s'an painent, / Ke del parfent de l'Escriture / Sevent traire buene peulture. / Kant ses guardes oi trespassé, / Donc trovai je le desirré. / Pluisor nos dient molt de bien, / E il meisme n'en font rien. / En cho covient c'on les trespast / Ainz ke om Deu tiengne e embrast, / Kar par dirre e neint ovrrer / Ne le puet om mie trover" (1199–208).

(1209–10). The path reserved for these simple but pure of heart is then revealed in her vision of Solomon's litter with its purple ascent (Canticles 9–10): "The steps leading to it were steep it is true, but charity had softened the slope. For the weak, for the *puceles* who have only begun to love, the king made a passage between the other steps that was much easier."⁵⁰ The exegete (awakening from the same vision), elaborates, interpreting the litter much as he will later the "spiritual garden," enumerating the different "hearts" that repose there—the martyrs, who arrive by their blood, the doctors by their eloquence, and *nos foibles* (we the weak), the "little ones," the *jovenceles*, who arrive by the tempered ascent of love (cf. 1549–80).

This is how, then, the audience is taught to read as a woman. The bride's experiences, communicated as *vision* and *aventure*, are ways of initiating an unlearned, lay audience into its own way of seeking the beloved, the equivalent of Gregory the Great's *historia* in pictures wed to Mary's *lectio*. By locating the ability of the soul to know the Word in *historia* and *pictura*, Mary's experience and Ooliba's gaze, Rupert of Deutz had implicitly pointed the way to this layman's gnosis in which the weakness of humanity before God, figured as female, meets the incapacity of the *illitteratus*. In figures such as Hildegard and Christina and even Marie de Champagne, historical women's lives could be conceived of as the bodily remanifestation of Mary's experience, *sponsae corporaliter* who represent fulfilment of the historical dimension of scripture as "our history," in our world, among us. The license to translate the Word into bodily media, shaping new experiences of presence, walks hand in hand with an understanding of human experience as revelatory of the divine. The woman as a figure of suffering in love is the lightning rod and original vessel of a divine descent into human form, the crucible of a transformative moment in which divinity is "visible" in base matter, experienced as a symmetry of inner truth and a knowing from heart to heart. To the question why this should be the case, Landri's text articulates a response that perfectly reflects the most far-reaching devotional developments of the later twelfth century, one that takes the position of Alexis's *espuse* a step further and sees the woman's capacity for compassion as the way her bodily weakness mirrors and reciprocates Christ's supreme sacrifice.

This poem is the song of humanity seeking its complement in the divine—but not through an ascent that leaves the flesh behind. The flesh and body as bride seek their complement in Christ as the flesh and body of divinity in an act of reciprocal recognition and reciprocal wounding—through a gaze—that allows each to know the other in the experience of human pain.⁵¹ Beginning from opposite poles, the two are to meet in a chiasmic symmetry of the body diaphanous, the original image of which is Mary's union in suffering with Christ as "flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone,"⁵² Mary's suffering as bride and mother who could speak the words *Ego dilecto meo et dilectus meus mihi* in

50 "Vairs est ke roiste ert la montee / Mais charitez l'a atempree. / Por les foibles, por les puceles / Ki d'amer estoient noveles / Fist le rois entre les degrez / Une voie legiere asez" (1489–94).

51 In addition to the passages discussed below, see 1007–16 and 2683–712; see also Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien*, pp. 287–89; and Ruh, *Frauenmystik*, p. 59.

52 See above p. 185 note 143.

their most uniquely fulfilled sense: “I am of him as he is of me.” The locus of Mary’s suffering was her heart, both because it occurred through love and because Simeon’s prophecy of the *gladius doloris* that would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35) was identified with Longinus’s spear piercing the heart of the crucified son.⁵³ She felt there—some said all the more intensely—all that Christ felt physically.⁵⁴ In this experience, the twelfth century discovered the Passion as the humanly comprehensible and physically sensible counterpart of the noetic union of the conception and Incarnation. Landri’s idea of *devotions de cuer* as the loving devotion that merit’s the embrace of the beloved from the position of human weakness thus empties into a union that sees conception and compassion as one. With a notable difference: Mary’s loving devotion in the Passion could be relived as human suffering in love, and for love, of others.

The Incarnation as a “leap” in which God “took flesh from the Virgin” finds repeated mention in the text, also occurring in conjunction with corresponding review of Christ’s suffering in the Passion.⁵⁵ But the key passage chosen to allow the bridegroom to speak of his descent is Canticles 4:9: “You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and one of the locks of your neck.” Here, contrary to more established tradition, the wound is not seen simply as Christ accepting the Passion and Crucifixion on humanity’s behalf, that is, for man’s redemption.⁵⁶ Instead, it is inflicted by an “arrow of love,” as a heart-wound that moves God to embrace his bride, that is, to assume human flesh. The wounding of the Incarnation, as a later passage makes clear, consists not so much in real wounds as it does in knowing another’s pain:

il prist char en la pulcele
 Ki de totes est damoisele.
 Par cui nos Deu trovons plus prest,
 Quar or seit il coment nos est,
 Seit voire par experiment,
 Se reguarde plus dolcement
 A nos, e a no povreté,
 Que il prist par sa volenté.

(2873–82)

(he took flesh in the Virgin who reigns as lady over all others. For this reason we find God closer to us, for now he knows how it is with us, he knows truly by experience, and thus looks more kindly on our miserable state, which he took on by his own will.)

⁵³ See pp. 182–83, above.

⁵⁴ See p. 180, above. Landri’s principle source, Geoffrey of Auxerre, refers to the same idea in company with the *gladius doloris* as part of his discussion of the “wounded heart” of Canticles 4:9: *Expositio*, 3, p. 243.

⁵⁵ For example, lines 865–70 and 879–82, and lines 1757–64.

⁵⁶ For an overview of the patristic tradition, see Cabassut, “Blessure d’amour,” 1727–29; for the Middle Ages, Schleusener-Eichholz, *Auge im Mittelalter*, pp. 787–97. Discussion and commentary on specific examples in Ohly, commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, pp. 841–46.

The Incarnation is not only an act of grace in which the divine becomes knowable to humanity; here it is also the act of a loving will that wishes more completely to know its beloved.⁵⁷ This insistence on reciprocal identification is then also what motivates the innovative treatment of Canticles 4:9, *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea, sponsa*, ... The passage's meaning is revealed through the image of a reciprocal gaze between the bride's contemplative eye, seeking in vain to comprehend the divine, and God's own gaze, which "the king" explicitly adds to the equation:

Cho dist li Rois:—Espose, suer,
Molt as parfont navré mon cuer
D'un te tes crins et d'un tien ueil
Cui jo resguart, si con jo sueil,
Molt m'atalant tes mameles
Ki tant sunt nobles e tant beles.
(2211–15)

(Thus speaks the king: "Bride, sister, you have deeply wounded my heart with one hair of your head and one of your eyes [Canticles 4:9], which I look upon as is my wont. Your breasts greatly arouse my desire, so refined and beautiful they are [cf. Canticles 4:10].")

This heart-wound so moved the king that he "descended into the virginal womb" to assume our humanity.⁵⁸ The central passage intertwines past and present even as it entangles gazes divine and human, the ever-recurrent desire to understand and the unique descent of the Incarnation:

Li altre uels tent a le haltesce⁵⁹
Nostre Seignor e sa grandesce,
Mais comprendre ne puet mie
Parfaitement en ceste vie.
Cist esgarde cum cist est pius,
Cui comprendre ne puet nuls lius,
E vint el ventre virginal

⁵⁷ Hunt, "O.F. Commentary," p. 294, finds no source for this passage. The ideas expressed may be indebted to Bernard of Clairvaux, although not to his sermons on Canticles. As Bernard relates, before the Incarnation, Christ existed in a blessed state of impassivity (*impassibilis*) like to the father, "sicut miseriam vel subjectionem expertus non erat, sic misericordiam et obnientiam non noverat experimento. Sciebat quidem per naturam, non autem sciebat per experientiam" (*De gradibus humilitatis* 3.9; as cited in Auerbach, *Literary Language*, p. 69). See also Köpf, *Religiöse Erfahrung*, pp. 214–16; and Miquel, *Expérience spirituelle*, pp. 56–82, esp. pp. 61, 63.

⁵⁸ The reciprocal gaze was perhaps suggested by Geoffrey's *Expositio*, which speaks of the wound as struck by the bride's gaze, or *aspectus*, with *spicula* (arrows), and then evokes Christ's reaction with the words "Aspectus aspectum provocat" (her gaze provokes his) (*Expositio*, 4, p. 339). The idea of the "eye" as the soul's *intentio*, or inclination towards God, and of the one hair as her *cogitatio*, or attempt at understanding, likewise occur in Geoffrey's text (*Expositio*, 4, pp. 339–40), but the development of these ideas as found in Landri's text appears to be very much his own.

⁵⁹ Lines 2231–36 first discuss the eye of "the active life."

Prendre armes e destruire mal.
 Il esgarde la pieté
 Par cui Deus prist humanité,
 E que por nient, u por petit,
 Done as siens le souverain delit.
 Cist est li uels ki Jesu Crist
 A si plaié, com Il nos dist.

(2237–50)

(The other eye is turned to the loftiness of our lord in his magnificence, which it cannot possibly comprehend perfectly in this life. This eye contemplates the great mercy of his gaze whom no vessel can contain, but who entered the virginal womb to take arms and destroy evil. This eye sees the compassion that moved God to assume our humanity, that grants to his own the greatest gift for next to nothing. This is the eye that so wounded Jesus Christ, as he tells us himself.)

There was precedent for reading Canticles 4:9 as Christ's or God's words on his own descent into the flesh, but it was, as one would expect, confined to the understanding of the text as Mary's experience rather than the church's or the individual soul's.⁶⁰ Rupert of Deutz provided what may be the earliest such reading, in terms that find distinct echoes in Landri's complex passage: Mary's eye is for Rupert, too, an eye of contemplative prayer, her exclusive orientation to the will of God; and with this gaze, as Christ tells her, "with this one of your eyes you wounded my heart, whence in your regard I could not restrain my inner longings" (*viscera mea*). The result? "You are mother and virgin, and this is the fruit of one of your eyes."⁶¹ It is Rupert, too, who (uniquely) identifies the lock of hair with a sharpened dart or arrow thrown by Mary.⁶² As Landri goes on to explain:

De celui crin ki l'a navré
 Vos redirai la verité
 La sainte arme dont nos parloms
 A crinz, ses meditacions,
 Ki li naiscent de la pensee

⁶⁰ The Middle High German *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied* (ca. 1160), begins its remarks on Canticles 4:9 with the words "this was spoken to the mother of God" (cf. 54,10) and then says it was her loving gaze that brought Christ to descend to this world (cf. 54,15). As Ohly notes, the Marian reading originates in the twelfth century (commentary to *Trudperter Hohelied*, p. 841, see also p. 843).

⁶¹ "In hoc uno oculorum tuorum vulnerasti cor meum, unde et viscera mea super te continere se non potuerunt" (*CCC*, 3, p. 80). With regard to Canticles 4:10, in which the bridegroom praises the bride's breasts, Christ then announces, "Amici ascultant haec, ... quia mater et virgo es, et hunc esse fructum unius oculorum tuorum ..." (*CCC*, 3, p. 81). The text thus gives Mary a role in bringing about the Incarnation, a remarkable motif that it once again shares with the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied*; see the preceding note. As part of the same exposition, Rupert has Christ remind Mary of the lament of the sterile Anna, whose tearful prayers so wounded God's heart that he granted her a son (*CCC*, 3, p. 79; cf. 1 Samuel 1:2–20).

⁶² "... unum illum crinem tuum ... in me iecisti veluti spiculum praeacutum, et vulnerasti cor meum" (*CCC*, 3, p. 80). Rupert apparently transports this arrow from the traditional reading of Canticles 2:5 (see the following note).

Ki chiés del anme est apelee,
 Ausi come li crins del cors
 Naiscent del chief cha de defors.
 Un en a cui Deus tant aime
 Que saiete d'amor le claime
 Quar il dist qu'il en est navrez
 Si com vos oï avez.

(2251–62)

(Of this same lock of hair that wounded him I will recount the truth to you: the holy weapon that we're speaking of, the strand of hair, are her meditations, born of her mind, which is called the soul's head, just as locks of hair on the body are born of the head to extend outward. One among these is so beloved of God that he calls it an arrow of love, for he says that it has wounded him, as you have just heard.)

The "arrow of love" properly belongs to the tradition of a different verse, Canticles 2:5, as it was known from the Septuagint version: *Vulnerata charitate ego sum* (I have been wounded by charity/your love). In this case, the wound was inflicted by Christ, who, as an arrow or sword, filled Mary or the soul with love and longing.⁶³ Rupert's reading imports the arrow of love from this tradition into the reading of the obverse wound, which itself had long been identified with Christ's Passion. Odo of Morimund relies on the same understanding when he speaks of an "arrow of love" that Christ "had accepted at [Mary's] hand," and that he returns to her in his gaze from the cross, thus identifying either gaze and either wounding with Canticles 4:9.⁶⁴ Landri's text, in adopting the Marian understanding of Canticles 4:9 along with the arrow of love, reflects a coalescence of the two readings and the two woundings that develops over the course of the twelfth century: both Mary and Christ are twice wounded, at the conception and at the cross, and either event is a reciprocal wounding for love inflicted through a reciprocal gaze.

Landri's treatment of Canticles 4:9 thus provides a particularly pregnant demonstration of what occurs in his text as a whole: the singular events of Mary's experience provide the basis for, the very origin of, his portrayal of the bride and thus for the audience's understanding of the biblical text; moreover, they model that text as experience here and now. The focus of attention is thus not contrition or remorse over Christ's suffering for our redemption, but recognition and gnosis, a knowing as Mary knew, experienced as reciprocal vision that induces, or rather inflicts, a symmetry of suffering in love. One more witness to the wound of love in Mary's experience, from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs, makes these ideas particularly clear. Speaking for his part of Canticles 2:5, Bernard says, "The special love of Christ" came to Mary in the conception and "not only pierced [her] soul but penetrated through and through [cf. Luke 2:35],

⁶³ The "arrow of love" entered commentary on the Song no later than with Origen's reading of Canticles 2:5 and was known to the Middle Ages through him; cf. Origen, *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*, 3.8, p. 194. John of Fecamp saw this love-wound in reciprocal relationship to Christ's wounds; see Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles*, p. 74; and JP, pp. 169–70.

⁶⁴ See above pp. 180–81 and 183–84.

so that even the tiniest space in her virginal breast was permeated by love." The arrow (or sword)

transpierced her thus that it might come down even to us, and of that fullness we might all receive. She would become the mother of that love whose father is the God who is love. ... In this process she experienced through her whole being a wound of love that was mighty and sweet. I would reckon myself happy if at rare moments I felt at least the prick of the point of that sword. Even if only bearing love's slightest wound, I could still say: "I am wounded with love" (Cant. 2:5 Septuagint version).⁶⁵

Bernard's passage incorporates the language of Simeon's prophecy on the *gladius doloris* even as he speaks of the conception and Mary being filled with the sweetness of love; the arrow (*sagitta*) cited at the beginning is, further on, called a sword (*gladius*). Meditation on the embrace of the Word is poised between the two events, Conception and Passion, and for this reason, Bernard, in this sole instance in his sermons on the Song, makes use of Mary as the protagonist of the text: her experience makes the two embraces into one and knowable as such, "that it might come down even to us."⁶⁶

With the idea of the Incarnation as provoked by Mary wounding the heart of the bridegroom we have arrived once more at a point of surprising convergence between the reading brides of vernacular exegesis and secular narrative. Chrétien's *Yvain* likewise conjures the image of a "god of love" descending to his *pucele* as the result of a wounding through love's dart: "he ... would have had her love no man if not himself. To serve her he would have changed himself into a man, would have given up his divinity and wounded his own body with the arrow whose wound does not heal."⁶⁷ The oddity derived from Amor wounded by his own arrow only recalls the reciprocal wounding native to the sacred image and the fact that God's plan effects the wound; it is thus self-inflicted. That Landri's *pucele* is likewise a "reader" in her garden is suggested not solely by the metaphor of the eye's vain attempt fully to understand the divine, her *meditations*. The passage we have just examined is part of the bridegroom's praise of the bride, which turns next to the "garden enclosed" and the north and south winds, where the author is brought to speak of reading the text (in a garden?) with his own lady-bride. Both author and *sponsus* are equally smitten with their "reading" *damoisele*, and her reading culminates in the wounded descent of "the God who is love" (to use Bernard's words) to claim her as his own; the Holy Spirit blows through the *hortus conclusus*, the garden enclosed. I suggested in [chapter 1](#) that Chrétien's young bride-to-be who reads aloud from a romance in the secluded garden while Yvain looks on as an uninvited guest is the "secularized" double of Laudine's suffering reading; that is, as we can say now, she stands at the conclusion of a narrative transformation of the grief of the *sponsa derelicta*

⁶⁵ *On the Song of Songs*, 29.8, pp. 109–10.

⁶⁶ Similarly, *JP*, pp. 304–6.

⁶⁷ *Yvain*, ed. Hult, lines 5374–78; see above, p. 17. Chrétien may be playing as well on Apuleius's story in which Cupid strikes himself with his own dart for love of Psyche; this story, however, was all but unknown to the Middle Ages until Boccaccio. See Kern, "Iwein liest 'Laudine,'" pp. 396–97.

into the image of another form of reading—as the fulfilment of the idea that both reading brides enable a special gnosis, itself a fusion of desire and empathy, love and suffering.

No less important is the complementary extension of the same wound to the general audience that, in Chrétien's *Yvain*, causes the relationship between the narrator and his audience to participate in the relationship between Yvain and his reading brides or between the god of love and the *pucele*. Both texts see wounding in love as a moment in which the divine can be revealed in the body—and as the result of participation in a reading process that occurs both “inside” and “outside” the text, or rather itself creates continuity between readers then and now, here and there. Chrétien's *pucele* doubles the narrator's delivery of the text not because young women often prelected romances in secluded gardens, but because a woman's knowing is the image and medium of this experience. The same doubling occurs in reverse when, in Landri's text, the poet emerges with his wounded heart from the bed of the bride's vision.

How did such a parallel come about? Was the distance between Champagne and Guines less significant, were communications more frequent than we might expect? Is there a common textual ancestor that might have served equally well for either poet? The full answer may comprise such factually traceable connections, but another applies in any event, that between Marie de Champagne and Baldwin of Guines as patrons of literature *en romans*, of the *dame* and the *illitteratus* as the twin focal points of the construction of a new reading experience whose claim to truth is equally dependent, in either case, on the idea of an audience-as-woman inside and outside the text.⁶⁸

For now, though, our central concern is with the wounded God whose wounding embraces his earthly bride, making her suffering his and his suffering hers. I mentioned earlier that the idea of the bride's “black flesh”—that which reveals her inner beauty—resurfaces late in the poem as the suffering of Christ in the Passion. Christ is “blackened by tribulation,” by “humiliation, pain and derision” (cf. 2779–80); which is then enumerated as the injuries that deformed his flesh in the Passion (2785–90), of which the bride herself says:

De cez griétez chascune amaine
Noirtume a la char humaine
Dont coverte est la deiteiz
En Jhesu Crist, bien le saveiz.

(2791–94)

(Each of these wounds brings blackness to the human flesh with which the deity is covered in Jesus Christ, as well you know.)

68 Composition of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Le Chevalier au Lion* is widely acknowledged to have been concurrent, taking place between the years 1177 and 1181. Moreover, the allusions to the central problem of the *Charrette* in *Yvain*, which embed the former narrative in the latter, all but force the conclusion—in the absence of conflicting evidence—that Marie is the operative addressee of either romance. In “Missing Prologue,” Barbara Sargent-Baur argues that the prologue to the *Charrette* should be taken as applying to both romances. More important to my argument, however, is the idea of the two centres of literary activity, each with a prominent patron who is given literary representation as such.

But the same blackness reveals even as it conceals. It is the black hair that covers a head of fine gold, “that does not allow the head to be seen in all its true beauty” (2803–6). “This hair is the nuptials of the Virgin, and her restoration after childbirth; it is the place where the child was born and the manger where he was found ... all of this covers the purity of the holy head, and the truth” (2809–16). In other words: Christ’s blackness, the flesh that obscures his divinity, is also the very humanity that allows his bride to know him—the equivalent of the “cloud” as an intervening medium mitigating the brilliance of divinity otherwise intolerable to human eyes.⁶⁹ In blackness, then, in the shame and compassion that make her flesh the mirror of his on the cross, she is also closest to him, she becomes “one spirit with him,” receiving the “kiss” she sought at the outset of the poem:

L'espose Crist ki tant est sage,
 Quant se porpense k'il sofri
 Sains son mesfait e tot por li,
 Les comps tant durs e les liens
 Que il sofri, tien ele a siens.
 Li clous k'il eut par mi les piez,
 Est en son cuer fort enfichiez.
 Les clos des mains, tot la croiz,
 Met en son cuer li granz destroiz.
 Cele corone del Saint Chief
 Li fait al cuer dolors molt grief.
 Trestot par compassion sent
 Qua[n]qu'il sofri corporeilment.
El est uns espirz avec lui,
 Se sont comun tot li anui.

(2075–92, emphasis added)

(The bride of Christ, who is wise, when she considers that he suffered with no fault and all for her, feels the heavy blows and the bonds that he suffered inflicted on herself. The nail that pierced his feet is fixed hard in her heart. The nails in his hands, the entire cross makes her heart seize up in pain. This crown on the holy head brings a dolorous pain to her heart. Verily she endures by co-passion whatever he suffered in the flesh. She is one spirit with him, all the injuries are common to each.)

The text itself announced this moment as the culmination of the bride’s desire when she described the kiss she sought with the same words (157–58). Three times this passage locates the bride’s compassionating pain in her heart. It is not the exterior, physical affliction that constitutes the “kiss,” but rather one that pierces the heart; a fulfilment of perfectly reciprocal suffering in love, or *devociens de cuer*. To enter into this radically loving empathy as Mary did is to manifest the same truth that she did, the truth of the body diaphanous, which becomes in its abnegation of exteriority the manifest vehicle of inner truth, the female humility that merited conception and bearing of the

⁶⁹ See above, pp. 30–31, 33; and Deshman, “Disappearing Christ,” 520–29.

Word—and merited the *gladius compassionis*, the sword of “co-sufferance” that made Mary’s suffering of the heart into the mirror of Christ’s in the flesh.

This is a momentous conjunction. Where the kiss of the Annunciation joins the kiss of the Passion, the search for truth in and through the blackened exterior—the *materia* of our experience that, in all its abject, fallen unworthiness, is nevertheless and for this very reason the humanity that Christ displayed on the cross—joins the ineffable, unknowable bliss that was Mary’s own in the original conjugal embrace of the Word. Therein lies a dimension of the new devotion to Christ in his humanity, and with it a dimension of devotion to the Passion and of the *imitatio Christi*, that has thus far been largely overlooked. The promise it holds was by no means Landri’s invention—as we saw earlier, the reciprocal wounding of *sponsus* and *sponsa* in love was articulated beginning early in the twelfth century as the conjunction of suffering and knowing, pain and love human and divine, that made the cross itself not so much the site of a victory over human flesh as a sinking into and embrace of its weakness, a marriage of Heaven and earth: “The Mediator of God and men hangs midway between Heaven and earth, unites the heights with the depths and joins the things of earth to the things of Heaven. Heaven is aghast, earth marvels.”⁷⁰

Devotions de cuer is the site of this conjunction, the humbly inadequate human reciprocation of Christ’s inestimable pain that by its very incapacity wounds the heart of God and moved/moves him to descend to this most abject point, to the cross, where his sacrificing love could become one with the loving devotion of his bride. This integration of human pain and suffering *for love* into the hermeneutics of the Word is among the most momentous cultural achievements of the High Middle Ages. What was unknowable as bliss became knowable as pain, what the Spirit had performed “without the intervention of man” and, most incredibly, without the slightest injury to human flesh; this, or some part in it, could now be re-experienced through the loving embrace of a body lacerated, mutilated, crucified at the hands of men. An experience perhaps more accessible, but requiring a capacity for suffering and a tolerance to pain—pain of the heart—that the medieval imagination did not reserve for male stoicism but rather for the body of humanity, the mother whose love could not turn away—whatever her fear, whatever the agony, finally without regard for self-preservation.

It is all the more startling to find such a moment placed at the centre of meaning of one of the earliest attempts to make a *romans* of the Song of Songs, to shape a layman’s way of knowing the Word out of an only recent transformation of monastic reading. The most essential point for our inquiry is that a different “historical” truth is made in the idea of the truth of truths of the Christian faith: if God became man in order “to know our experience,” then we know God through that same. The Song of Songs is the arch-text of this reciprocal knowing, because it contains the prophetic images, once fulfilled and ever to be renewed, of the same mystery. If “every woman’s” experience can manifest that of the bride, if Marie is Mary, *dame* is *sponsa*, then truth resides not finally and not only in what happened once in the historical fulfilment of the sacred text, but in a

70 Aelred, *Rule*, p. 89.

renewed experience of text that makes it happen now—and this same idea is itself the “why” of the mystery lady, whose identity, even as it is withheld, is also made essential to the genesis and meaning of the text. Just as our experience, our history becomes a manifestation of sacred history, so the truth of “being there” (the truth of history as an eyewitness account) gives way to a truth of “being her”—a truth of empathy in which human experience can reconstitute the epiphany of inner truth originally accomplished in the continuity between Christ’s flesh and Mary’s. And, surprisingly enough, it is just this point that brings us full circle, back to the concerns that lie at the centre of Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie*.

Mutations of the Old Eve: Reading Woman as History

Two points of difference stand out between Benoît’s *romans* and, on the one hand, the texts of vernacular exegesis just considered, and later Arthurian romances on the other. Both are essential to an understanding of the position of the *Roman de Troie* in the development of a new poetics of truth in narrative. For Benoît and his audience this narrative is not a “romance,” but rather history, the re-presentation of past events.⁷¹ The poet’s task is not to make the events “believable,” but rather to make them present, to allow his audience to experience them anew. Second, Benoît does not overtly assimilate his narrative into a Christian world-view; true to the historical nature of his project, its characters act in a world that still awaits its salvation. Benoît’s task is to perform on secular history an operation that allows the capital tale of pagan warfare and destruction to open onto a redeeming Christian reading experience. Briseida’s story is the fulcrum this *translatio*, because, being Benoît’s invention, it can replicate Helen’s story as one in which the audience is asked to seek itself somewhere between opposed images of the identification between woman and body.

A femme dure duels petit,
 A un oil plore, a l’autre rit.
 Molt müent tost li lor corage,
 Assez est fole la plus sage:
 Quant qu’el a en set anz aimé,
 A ele en treis jorz oblié.
 Onc nule ne sot duel avoir.
 Bien lur pareist de lur saveir:
 Ja n’avront tant nul jor mesfet
 Chose ne rien que si seit let,
 Ce lor est vis, qui que les veie,
 Que l’on ja blasmer les en deive.
 Ja jor ne quideront mesfere.
 Des folies est ce la meire.

(13441–54)

⁷¹ Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 153–55; and, more generally, Knapp, “Historische Wahrheit,” 581–635, and 585–87 on Benoît specifically; also Knapp, “Fiktionales Erzählen,” pp. 3–22.

(Women's woe does not last long: she cries with one eye and laughs with the other. Their hearts are quick and easy to change and even the wisest among them is but a fool. Though she might have loved for seven years, she'll forget it in three days! Not one of them knows what it is to suffer—that's clear enough from the way they see things: no matter how grievous an offense they've committed or who may have seen it, as they would have it, they are never to blame. They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest.)

The most remarkable thing about the narrator's misogynist excursus in the *Roman de Troie* has consistently been overlooked in modern discussion: it is not prompted by Helen. Scholars have recognized in Briseida's story a chiasmic parallel to that of Paris and Helen, with the woman passing from a Trojan to a Greek prince rather than the other way around.⁷² Rarely noted is the way Briseida's story both plays out and problematizes the audience's expectations of Helen. Helen was held up in the courts of France and Germany around 1200 (still) as the epitome of a negative female example; indeed, her story was so depraved as to be better left untold—especially where “young women” were concerned: “Young ladies cannot better their understanding through the story of the beautiful queen in Greece of those days; she did wrong whoever first read it, for bad examples sorely distort good manners and good instruction.”⁷³ Thus a churchman from Friulia, Thomasin of Zirclaria, posing as mediator of French courtly mores for the courtly world of the German empire, pronounced judgment on the value of “reading Helen.” The reasons for this judgment would have been apparent enough. In his Latin history of the Trojan War, written at the Angevin court ca. 1180, Joseph of Exeter's abhorrence of Helen is equalled only by the indulgent eroticism of his description of female desire: “With all her heart she opens up her loins; with eager mouth she steals his dormant love, ... For shame, foul whore!”⁷⁴

The discordant note in Benoît's emphatic gesture derives from two expectations, one fulfilled and the other denied. Affirmed is the idea that women's conduct in love plays a crucial role in the story; oddly disappointed and displaced is the expectation that Helen is the reason. For where Benoît's narrator spares no quarter in his condemnation of the female sex with Briseida as its representative, Helen's relationship to Paris can be read as expressing a courtly ideal,⁷⁵ and the reflection on women's treachery with regard to a minor and unknown character finds no complement in the portrayal of history's most treacherous woman.⁷⁶

72 O'Callaghan, “Tempering Scandal,” p. 308; see also Nolan, *Roman Antique*, p. 110.

73 Thomasin of Zirclaria, *Der welsche Gast*, lines 773–78. Translations are my own; for the original text see below, p. 287. Further citations are parenthetical.

74 Joseph of Exeter, *Trojan War*, as cited in O'Callaghan, p. 306. On the importance of the fall of Troy in the medieval view of world history, see Jung, “Storici Troiani,” p. 179.

75 O'Callaghan, “Tempering Scandal,” pp. 305–8, with other scholarship cited there; see also Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 20–24.

76 An exception might be claimed to this statement near the poem's conclusion, when Helen, having been taken from the sacked city by the Greeks, arrives in Crete with her former husband, Menelaus (lines 28425–34). As Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, pp. 273–74, argues, however, this passage can only be read in the light of the romance as a whole, which has made more than clear

Omissions frequently serve as the signpost of authorial intent in Benoît's romance, and this is one of his most conspicuous. Briseida's story is held up to the audience as a surrogate for their expectations of "reading Helen"; that is, of the Trojan War as proof of the wanton destruction wrought on the world through the daughters of Eve. In this way the poet invites the audience to consider Briseida's story—his invention—as the potential key to their experience of his retelling of historical *verité*. One suspects already that the truth is not found in the old interpretations of Helen, and if that is the case, then neither does it lie in the traditional poetics of body, for—as Thomasin likewise informs us—Helen constituted the archetype of woman as the false exterior. Benoît's project is no small undertaking, whether for history or for the idea of truth in narrative: to redeem Helen would be to redeem the body itself; conversely, to embrace the body as vehicle of truth, Helen must yield a different story, or at least a different way of reading.⁷⁷ Precisely this is what Benoît makes manifest through the audience's experience of Briseida's story.

With his narratorial trap Benoît communicates the point of conjunction between the pagan past and the audience's reading present, the way their experience of a secular narrative can remanifest Christian truth. When Briseida's story is juxtaposed with Solomon's *forte femme*, a scriptural ideal, Helen's story meets Mary's reading; the history of Eve—"our" history—is projected onto the account of pagan history such that her salvation through Mary—from a perspective available to the audience alone—comes into view as the vanishing point of Benoît's narrative geometry. "Reading Briseida" becomes a test of the narrator's credibility (in condemning women) on the one hand and of the audience's own worthiness (who recognizes itself in the fallen bride) on the other. The narrative then orchestrates an experience in which the audience will discover far more sympathy with Briseida than the narrator's judgment would allow; her story is not one of contemptible opportunism and deceit but rather one of suffering and remorse over temptation unsuccessfully resisted and a loving heart unsuccessfully repressed. The story thus displays its narrator as an unreliable witness; Solomon's scriptural authority, which he cites in support of the same conventional wisdom, fares little better. In their place is left the experience of the audience-as-woman, the audience who reads as the bride through the discovery of itself in her. The new truth of Benoît's history is born of this experience, of reading woman's suffering as object of desire and object of exchange, object of war and object of peace, as lover, concubine, wife, queen, and, in every case, bereaved bride. The truth of history as presence, purportedly mediated by eyewitness account, is in fact revealed through the truth of empathy, the experience of truth in narrative as self-recognition. This is the meeting of history and Rupert's *historia*, the identification of what happened then and there with an experience of the same as it happens now, of the truth of being there with the truth of being her.

that Helen was not the cause of the war. Its refrain of "par qui ... par qui ..." with reference to all that has come to pass "through her" can thus only be read as a reflection on history and not on a woman's conduct, on which the passage is once again notably silent.

77 Helen is in fact Thomasin's prime example of improper reading, that is, a stage of perception that cannot see beyond the (false) exterior. See below, pp. 287–89.

Benoît's prologue insists above all on *verité*, defined as the reliable reporting of truth in history, and he aligns himself with classical tradition by insisting on the account of an eyewitness to events. Homer is summarily rejected for having lived far too long after the fact; in his place Benoît relies on Dares, whose status as an eyewitness to the Trojan War was an established tradition.⁷⁸ All this is a fanfare for reversal, or rather a stage set for transformation. Benoît's expansion of Dares's terse brevity into well over 30,000 lines of octosyllabic verse reaches far beyond the bounds of simple *amplificatio materiae*, a patent fact he pretends to deny:

Ci vueil l'estoire commencer:
Le latin sivrai e la letre;
Niul autre rien n'i voudrai metre
S'ensi non cum jel truis escrit.
Ne de mie qu'aucun buen dit
N'i mete, se faire le sai,
Mais la matire en ensirrai.

(138–44)

(Here I wish to begin the story. I will follow the Latin text to the letter; I would not include anything except what I find and as I find it written—unless it be to add a few good words here and there, as I am able, but always faithfully following my source.)

The tongue-in-cheek tenor of this limiting statement is reinforced by the flexible limits of the term *dit* (142), which can mean anything from a few words to a short descriptive or narrative poem.⁷⁹ Like the rest, this claim is not made for factual value but rather to alert audience attention to the questions of historical truth and source translation and their respective value in assessing his *romans*.⁸⁰

Benoît's version of the fall of Troy most notably amplifies the story by multiplying women's fates as objects of exchange in love and war. He launches his *estoire* with one of the most expansive examples: the story of Jason and Medea; for the same reason he insists the cause of the war resides in the first destruction of Troy by Hercules and the resulting rape of Hesione (Priam's sister and thus Helen's precursor in the previous generation). Dares had included brief mention of Jason's story—so brief, indeed, that it did not even mention Medea: "Thus, reembarking, they [Jason and his companions] departed from Phrygia, and set out for Colchis, and stole the fleece, and returned to their homeland."⁸¹ For Benoît the treasonous heroine constitutes the very centre of interest. With this narrative preamble of over 1,300 lines he attunes his audience to the point of the sequence of love stories, which becomes increasingly prominent in the latter half of his text. Each is the story of a woman changing sides in an epic struggle; in all but

⁷⁸ See lines 45–116; Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 153–55; and Jung, "Storici troiani," pp. 182–83.

⁷⁹ See Godefroi, *Complément*, p. 397, and the entry "dit" in *Electronic Dictionary of Chrétien de Troyes*, www.atilf.fr/dect (accessed August 12, 2019).

⁸⁰ See, for example, Haug, "Autorität," pp. 121–22; *pace* Knapp, "Fiktionales Erzählen," p. 22.

⁸¹ *The Trojan War*, p. 135.

Briseida's case this action also clearly jeopardizes or (in Polyxena's case) could save a people: the course of history hinges on a woman's heart. These women are daughters of Eve. And yet, just as he will later Helen, Benoît all but exonerates Medea; in his account she is the victim of love ill-bestowed (2030–44). Her filiocidal revenge receives no mention, making up another of his conspicuous omissions, and for this fact Benoît then makes his "source"—that is, *verité*—responsible! Concluding, he takes another ironic bow, asserting that no more is known to him of Medea's fate because Dares told no more (Ovid, from whom he lifted the rest, certainly did), and Heaven forbid that he should "lie":⁸² "Ne Beneeiz pas ne l'alonge, Ne pas n'i acreistra mençonge" (Benoît neither enlarges on his source nor does he amplify it with lies) (2061–66). The message, for those who knew "the truth" in Medea's case, is twofold. On the one hand, truth is to be constituted differently in this romance than through exclusive reliance on the eyewitness; on the other, preconceived moral distinctions—with reference to women's stories in particular—are highly questionable.

Benoît's restoration of Medea as a central figure highlights what the narrator will make unmistakable with his intervention preceding Briseida's story: women's stories are the thing wherein he means to catch the conscience of his *dame*—the audience in general. With his misogynist excursus the trap is set; it is sprung only gradually, as the narrative reverses the tale of woman's treachery to offer portrayals of woman's suffering in its place. The succession of love stories continues in Helen's with Paris, Briseida's with her two loves, and Polixena's with Achilles. These become the narrative backbone of Benoît's *roman*, "devising a space for love in material traditionally dominated by the theme of warfare."⁸³ But they accomplish far more: the men's epic of the siege and destruction of Troy plays the supporting orchestra here to a succession of soloists' arias on women's treason for love and its final inversion—and of their suffering in either case. The injection of these women's fates redirects audience identification in the same way observed in *La Chanson d'Alexis* but with appropriately substituted pre-Christian identities, that is: from the heroism of pagan warriors to the suffering of their proto-Christian widows.

With the exception of the preamble on Jason and Medea, the couples' stories are concurrent and carefully interwoven with each other and with the account of the war. The increasing interdependence between the two culminates in the story of Achilles and Polyxena, in which the very outcome of the war hangs in the balance of love.⁸⁴ The chronological interweaving of the latter three stories allows their conclusions to occur as a trio of women's laments, moving monologues of self-examination and remorse that have few equals among Benoît's vernacular predecessors or contemporaries. These are distributed over the last third of the narrative in a rising crescendo, and their effect is

⁸² For Benoît's reliance on Ovid, see Nolan, *Roman Antique*, pp. 99–102.

⁸³ Green, *Beginnings*, p. 156; see also Nolan, *Roman Antique*, pp. 96–118, esp. 117. The original study of the love stories as the structural key to the *Roman de Troie* is Lumiansky, "Structural Unity." Thereafter, see Adler, "Militia et amor"; Jones, *Theme of Love*, pp. 43–59; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 86–164; Petit, *Naissances du roman*, pp. 463–83; and Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, pp. 111–21, esp. pp. 116–17.

⁸⁴ Petit, *Naissances du roman*, p. 475.

a resounding reversal of the narrator's blanket condemnation of women's fickleness in love and incapacity to suffer; above all, they give the lie to the fault he singles out as their worst: "They will never believe they have done wrong, and of all follies this is the greatest." The narrator's misogynist excursus is the starting point of a narrative transformation that will conclude in the image of its reversal: the golden likeness of Polixena as a woman's sorrow transfixed for eternity, a sorrow so truly represented that "no one ever looked upon it without believing that she wept."⁸⁵ The virgin "widow" of the story's most formidable hero stands bearing his funerary remains atop a monument ostensibly erected to his memory, making of the same a monument to women's sorrow that will endure not merely for three days but rather, we are told, "until the end of time."⁸⁶

Of these three stories, only Briseida's case, the case of the fictional invention, is traced in detail, or rather, from the inside; in this way it stands as the centrepiece of reflection through which to interpret the others, the "historical" figures. By contrast, beyond the account of her initial submission to Paris during the sea passage, we are privy to nothing of Helen's inner life or development; the same is only more true of Polixena, who before her final monologue is evoked only as the object of Achilles's love and negotiations with her parents. Once again, conspicuous absence is a key to authorial intent. The absences are filled, so to speak, with the unique tale of a woman gradually falling in love,⁸⁷ which thereby acquires a weight in the poem far exceeding quantitative proportion.⁸⁸

The author's rant against women's inconstancy emerges from similar remarks about Briseida (13828–37). The word "soon" repeats three times in these nine lines alongside other adverbial expressions emphasizing speedy change of heart; slightly later the narrator will specify that it took four (not three) days (13859–61). Briseida's story, however, is told in four scenes that span a period of more than two years and only in the last does she finally acknowledge and declare her love for Diomedes.⁸⁹ If the story complies at all with the narrator's initial description of women, then only in that Briseida's affections do change; why they do so or precisely when remains inscrutable. We are told repeatedly that Diomedes's incessant attentions avail him nothing, not so much as a favourable word—until the conclusion of the third scene, when, following another lengthy and eloquent protestation of love, Briseida—without comment or explanation—gives him her right sleeve to bear into battle. Even the final scene is no lovers' tryst, as Diomedes lies moribund with a wound suffered at the hands of Troilus and we see and hear only Briseida, who delivers not a fervid declaration of love, but rather a lucid and mournful confession of her own guilt.

⁸⁵ *Ja hom l'image n'esgardast, / Ne li fust vis qu'ele plorast* (22471–72). The image, we are told, is no less visible to and no less admired by the Trojans (lines 22479–82).

⁸⁶ Cf. lines 22489–90.

⁸⁷ Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 236.

⁸⁸ Other points support this judgment: the poem's midpoint occurs within the scene in which Briseida gives her sleeve to Diomedes—the first indication of a transfer of her affections. Similarly, in Benoît's catalogue of characters that precedes the outbreak of the war, Briseida is introduced at the point of transition from the Greeks to the Trojans (lines 5275–88).

⁸⁹ Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 235; O'Callaghan, "Tempering Scandal," p. 304.

Briseida is decidedly, as her initial description states, “a woman who was much loved and loved as much” (5285), and in this role her behaviour is, or becomes, duplicitous. The moral conundrum that results is not meant to yield conclusive judgment but rather to be experienced in all its ambiguity and complexity, such that the audience finds an easy way into Briseida’s dilemma but no easy way out. If we accept her loving heart as her nature and thus her love as a mark of sincerity, then she cannot be condemned. Certainly, the narrator’s charge of never recognizing her own fault is soundly contradicted, as it will be in other women. But is the weakness of a loving heart sufficient justification? Can *devotions de cuers* excuse a heathen harlot?

On this point biblical authority ought to be decisive. Solomon, however, figures as its only prominent representative in this text, and his testimony works to similar effect as the narrator’s. Nothing in the world is more rare, Solomon chimes in, than a “fort femme” who combines beauty with a firm disposition that is proof against “fols corages” (13471–81). But it is not Solomon’s *mulier fortis* who turns out to offer the measure of virtue as the story progresses but rather his own (notorious) experience in love and that of other men, notably the story’s premier hero, Achilles. Before the *mulier fortis*, Solomon is evoked twice in the text: once, prominently, in the prologue and again in a somewhat obscure reference to Jason’s spurs. The connection to Jason may not be trivial, as it would point to the two heroes’ *confrerie* in the medieval catalogue of men who were fools for love. The same allies them with Achilles, an idea made explicit in the only two other mentions of Solomon in the poem. In these later references Solomon is no guarantor of wisdom but rather proof that no degree of strength or wisdom, male or female, can resist the force of love. This perspective carries double credibility, being first represented by Achilles, who evokes Solomon’s example alongside David’s and Samson’s in his own defence (18043–50), and subsequently espoused in almost identical form by the narrator commenting on Achilles’s demise: “Who can keep his wits in the face of love? ... Solomon fell under love’s spell, and little good all his wisdom did him then. With all men, love does as it wills. Belief and faith, father and lord, even great lands and kingdoms have been abandoned more than once on its account. He who falls into the grip of love has no refuge in sense or reason.”⁹⁰

Solomon as “fool for love” belongs in a discourse on the power of women who brought great men to their fall—precisely the perspective Benoît has omitted from his tale of Helen’s Troy. What Benoît offers instead is the parallel portrayal of a woman’s (Briseida’s) and a hero’s (Achilles’s) fate, placed severally under Solomon’s aegis and confronting love in conflict with loyalty and reputation. Within this understanding Solomon might sooner have lamented his own moral inferiority to the *mulier fortis*. Once again, the shoe is on the other foot. How should Briseida resist, in all her female frailty and desolate state, where the greatest of heroes cannot? The question is pressed on the audience by the way Benoît interlaces the concluding episodes of Briseida’s story with the progress of Achilles’s *fole corage*. By the time Briseida finally succumbs to her new love the Greek hero’s fate is likewise sealed; to keep his agreement with Hecuba and

90 Cf. lines 18044–50.

Priam for Polixena's hand he has pled with the Greeks to abandon the siege and forbidden his Myrmidons to fight. Moreover, the parallel undoing of the two protagonists—the Greek hero smitten with the Trojan woman and the Trojan woman resisting the Greek hero—can only underline the reversal of the narrator's authority along with Solomon's: not only does love make putty of men's moral constitutions as easily as of women's, but the woman also resists, in fact, far longer than the man does. Achilles needs no three days, still less two years, to turn his back on the Greek cause; rather, like Diomedes, he is instantly and entirely the slave of love once he lays eyes on Polixena's beauty.

"Women may fall," Shakespeare would write, "when there's no strength in men!"⁹¹ Such was also the argument presented on this point in the contemporary literature of women's instruction, where it serves to underline women's inability to deny the flesh—and thus her search for an inner integrity that shuns all outward display of virtue.⁹² The woman, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, seeks to embrace her weakness with an inner humility that reveals a different truth through the abject exterior. The difficulty in assessing Briseida, the fascination she holds in a narrative world accustomed to clear moral distinctions, lies here: her outward behaviour and its results prove to be an inadequate measure of her inner integrity; and where her inner strengths prove unequal to the challenge of her social destiny, this fall exhibits neither insincerity nor opportunism nor even inner inconstancy; on the contrary, it is represented as an eruption, long restrained, of pure feeling and its genuine manifestation.⁹³ This accounts for the primary oddity of her story: that she must fall in love differently from medieval convention, not immediately but only gradually and over time, as only this allows her predicament to develop and the audience to feel its way in; only this allows her and the audience alike to see how Diomedes suffers for her sake, such that she finally suffers for his sake and the audience for hers. Briseida is to be judged not against her promise of fidelity to Troilus but rather against the contemporary judgment of Helen. Likewise, Benoît shows his audience, his story of Troy is meant to display a new woman, not she who is the downfall of men (such as both the narrator and Solomon might have wished), but she who manifests truth in the corrupt flesh of our humanity.

It is not solely the narrator's comparison between Briseida and the woman whose virtue redeemed the faults of others of her sex that aligns Briseida with Eve. The poet dresses her as such before she enters into the story of her inevitable fall. Briseida dons a rich gown for her departure from Troy, a kind of investiture of all that she once had and

⁹¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 3. The verses chide Romeo for his despair over exile.

⁹² After citing David and Solomon among examples of men who fell to the desire for worldly praise, the *Speculum virginum* exclaims on the even greater danger to women as the weaker sex: "mirum non est, etiamsi humilitatis callem professus est, quod vero mulier, quo sexu nihil fragilius est, in alta levatur, monstro simile est" (SV, 6, p. 173).

⁹³ Here I emphatically differ with (among others) Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 234, who speaks of Briseida's love as a "rational" and "fundamentally prudent decision." According to Briseida, it is rather the inability to deny her own heart that leads her to abandon her better instincts; see lines 20275–76, and 20281–82. Only retrospectively, and by means of reconciling herself to this failing, does she declare "Des jués partiz ai le meillor" (20298).

will now lose: "She adorned her body and dressed it with the richest garments that she owned," are the words that open the lengthy description.⁹⁴ The main attraction is a gown that "shaped her body so well that there was nothing else in the world she could have worn that suited her better."⁹⁵ The material is magical in origin and comes from "upper India"; "neither the rose so red nor the lily so white would retain their brilliance held next to it."⁹⁶ Its ornament contains all creation, for "there is under the sun neither flora nor fauna of which the gown did not display portraits, forms, semblances and figures."⁹⁷ The fur lining displays all the colours of God's creation; neither balsam nor incense nor thyme emits a more delightful fragrance; the fur of its border is of beasts that live in the river of Paradise, and so on.⁹⁸ What Briseida wears before her fall is the sum of the gifts man received when placed in the garden of Eden, the *stola prima amissa*, the original and lost garment that must be regained by "donning the new man," Christ.⁹⁹ That she wears this robe of bodily perfection is another, but different, sign of her impending demise, because with it she assumes the body of humanity and its fate.

Benoît never defines *fine amor*, the term that describes her love for Troilus, but he does, through Briseida, define its opposite, *male amor*, which would seem to be his own (and thus also her) invention.¹⁰⁰ Briseida accuses Diomedes of *male amor* when he has Troilus's horse, seized in battle, brought to Briseida as a prize to further his unrelenting suit. To his messenger Briseida replies:

"Di mei," fet ele, "ton seignor
 Que ci me porte male amor;
 Quar, se rien se fait bien de mei
 ...
 Tant com vers mei iert depreianz,
 Nel deit laidir ne damagier:
 Co qu'est de mei aint e ait chier.
 Bien sai, s'il m'aime de neient,
 Que mieuz en sera a ma gent:
 A toz en deit porter manaie."
 (Constans, ed., 14326–35)

⁹⁴ Cf. lines 13331–32; the description extends to line 13409.

⁹⁵ "... un bliaut ... / Qui fu riches e avenanz / E a son cors se bien estanz / Qu'el mont n'a rien, que le vestist. / Qui plus de ce li avenist" (13335–40).

⁹⁶ Cf. lines 13341–46.

⁹⁷ "Si n'est soz ciel beste ne flors / Dont l'on n'ie veie portretures, / Formes, senblances e figures" (13348–50).

⁹⁸ Cf. lines 13369–71, 13392–93, 13396–400.

⁹⁹ Speaking of the new garment of salvation, Peregrinus states in the *Speculum virginum* (4, p. 111), "Fontis gratia ista contextitur, ut homo stola prima amissa in secundo Adam decentius adornetur."

¹⁰⁰ On Benoît's idea of *fine amor*, see Kelly, "Briseida's Story," 234–36; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 106–31, esp. p. 120; and Schöning, *Rezeption der Antike*, p. 283.

("Tell your lord for me," she said, "that with this he brings me false love; for if he cared a bit for me as he has professed often enough, he should spare me from offense and harm: That which is mine he should hold dear. Well I know, if he loves me at all, then he will show more kindness to my people and should have mercy upon them all.")

Male amor acts in pride and self-interest; true love, in Briseida's view, would put the needs and feelings of the beloved above even one's own desire. To seek one's own in love is not *fine amor*, but vanity. It is the inner intention that is all-determining and not the outward show of favour or service—or fidelity.

This idea is at the centre of Briseida's moral conundrum. From the moment she enters the Greek camp, she shows more concern for her own reputation and safety than she does for her earlier love; in other words, she resists Diomedes more out of personal shame (concern for appearances) than out of inner fidelity to Troilus.¹⁰¹ Where she is able initially to upbraid Diomedes for such false intention in professed love, in their next, and final encounter, the roles are reversed. If Diomedes seems at first the opportunistic seducer—of which his gift of Troilus's horse is the emblem—he now becomes the epitome of self-deprecation and suffering in *fine amor*. The narrator accordingly underlines his sincerity even as he maligns Briseida for calculating manipulation.¹⁰²

The scene begins when Diomedes comes upon Briseida still contemplating the horse, wishing she could return it to Troilus. The initial image of continuing fidelity is undercut, however, in that her earlier promise to see the horse returned "within four days" has given way to concern for social position and personal well-being: "the lady does not dare, for fear of shame and displeasure; gladly she would have returned it, but she might have been the worse off for it and brought the wrath of the Greeks upon her."¹⁰³ Thus the apparent image of her constancy—her attention fixed on Troilus's horse—is in fact one of the opposite. If Diomedes sent the horse out of "false love," she evinces the same towards Troilus by retaining it.

The seemingly inscrutable reversal of Briseida's affections in this second scene comes about as a result of her susceptibility to "praise." Concern for appearances and others' perceptions makes her persist in feigned fidelity rather than faith of heart, while at the same time her delight over Diomedes's blandishments makes her for the first time a wilful coquette.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, when Diomedes, oblivious to her slights to his honour, accepts Troilus's horse for safekeeping, he not only accepts a rebuff of his former pride, but also agrees to care for the steed of his enemy because it is dear to his beloved (15136–40). Briseida's change of heart, or sleeve (which is all we know for sure), marks her acknowledgement of this change even as it marks her own slide into

101 See lines 13649–62; and Nolan, *Roman Antique*, p. 112; Hansen, *Frauengestalten*, pp. 64–68, shows how the concern for reputation links the fates of Briseida, Helen, and Polixena.

102 See lines 15019–24, 15033–45, 15063–78.

103 "Se la danzele l'osast faire, / Que n'en crensisst honte e contraire, / Voluntiers li eüst tramis, / Mes tost l'en peüst estre pis, / Car trop en fust en l'ost haïe" (15087–91).

104 That Briseida has a reputation to protect with the Greeks we learned earlier, when her entry into the camp finds her showered with praise: "Molt fu la danzele esgardee, / Molt l'unt entr'elz Grezeis loee: / "Molt est bele" ce dient tuit" (13815–17).

manipulative self-interest in pride over her new conquest. The narrator's judgment of her, however, shifts at the scene's end in the opposite direction, from the vindictive to the ambivalent: "Ja est tochee de la veine / Dont les autres font les forfeiz, / Qui sovent sunt diz e retreiz" (Now she is tainted with the trait that has led to so many other tales of transgression told and retold) (15180–82). Victim as well as perpetrator, Briseida's failing is now not distinctly female, but sadly all too common human history. Nothing less and nothing more is the judgment demonstrated by the story as a whole—manifest with particular relevance to Briseida through favourable contrast with her traitorous father (whose manoeuvrings got her into this mess), and again by comparison with the behaviour of Achilles in his love for Polixena.¹⁰⁵

Briseida's new position, while certainly duplicitous, is not yet that of the "fallen" woman—she still refuses to surrender her love to Diomedes, whether in public acknowledgement or private fulfilment. It is only after another lengthy interlude—with seven more battles fought, separated by truces lasting from one month to a full year—that the decisive point is reached. But here we find no further trace of the triumphant coquette. Instead, fear for her new suitor's life coupled with compassion for his suffering bring Briseida to Diomedes's pitiable state; she is no more the master of her affections than the "perilous wound" he has suffered in battle is within her control to heal. Her fall thus takes place not as a continuation of self-interested calculation (such would at this point dictate loyalty to the victorious Troilus), but rather as an eruption of true sentiment.¹⁰⁶ Hers is the loving heart that cannot help but speak: "Mes ne puet pas son cuer covrir, / Que plaint e lermes e sospir / N'isent de le a neisun fuer" (She can no longer hide her heart's desire and prevent her laments, tears and sighs from breaking forth) (20205–7). As a result, and very like Landri's bride, she suffers as intensely for shame and compassion as she does for a love whose sincerity will not be silenced. Moreover, this shame is no longer that of revealing her infidelity to others. This concern she tosses to the winds. It is rather remorse over a double unworthiness:¹⁰⁷ she has not been worthy of the sufferings of Diomedes on her account, but in her compassion for these she becomes unworthy of all that she earlier held dear. It is this dilemma and the self-effacement it demands that manifests her own *fine amor*: "From this moment she loves him," the narrator affirms, "From now on all can see that she has turned entirely to him her love, her heart and her thoughts."¹⁰⁸ No sooner is this said than the subject turns to her intense remorse: "E si

105 Tellingly, Achilles makes a similar comment on his own fate (lines 20812–13). With reference to Calchas, see lines 13862–66 and 13721–75.

106 Briseida's story can only be evaluated together with the relevant events of the warfare with which it is interlaced. In the preceding two battles, Troilus's fame in war reaches its apogee; in addition to Diomedes, he has also wounded the Greek commander Agamemnon.

107 The poet underlines her expression of grief and compassion over Diomedes's wound as an explicit reversal of concern for "reparlance" (others' opinions) (line 20214) and for the maintenance of appearances to which Calchas—the arch-traitor—would hold her by means of "reproaches, threats and interdictions" (cf. lines 20222–25).

108 "Des or l'aime, des or l'en tient, / ... / Des or puet hom apercevoir / Que vers lui a tot atorné / S'amor, son cuer e son pensé" (20217, 20226–28).

siet bien certainement / Qu'ele mesfeit trop laidement" (And she knows only too well that she is committing a most repugnant fault) (20229–30).

Is she a picture now of self-serving infidelity or of suffering for inner integrity? Briseida's final monologue is no expression of new-found love, but rather a searing self-indictment, full of sadness and remorse—including the recognition that her new love will never be free of suffering over the circumstances that gave it birth (20308–17). Most of all, however, it operates as the manifest reversal of all that the narrator first promised, because in it the self-recognition earlier denied all women but one—her “through whom the failings of other women are again made good”¹⁰⁹—is most eloquently attested to by her antipode, the woman who is the bane of her sex. Thus Briseida speaks as Eve after the Fall:

Harront mei, et grant dreit avront,
Les dames qui a Troie sunt:
Honte i ai feit as damaiseles,
Trop leide, e as riches puceles.
Ma tricherie e mon mesfet
Lur sera mes toz jors retret.
Peser m'en deit, e si fet el.
Trop ai lo cuer muable e fel.

(20257–64)

(They will all hate me, and well they should, the ladies of Troy: I have disgraced the ladies in the worst way, and the noble maidens as well, for my treachery and my misdeed will be held against them forever. This cannot help but burden my soul, and so it does. I own a heart too fickle and mean.)

In short, her constancy fails, but only under sore and desperate trial; she will suffer without end from the pangs of her conscience, and in recognition of her own failings she can be faulted only for lack of leniency. If she cannot be vindicated, she can certainly be pitied—that is, the audience recognizes and feels her pain. But more than this, if she “falls,” she finally does so out of an experience of suffering for another as he has suffered for her. Not as stated, but rather as experienced, Briseida's story turns the tale of woman's weakness into one of an adulterated but no less authentic inner truth, that of knowing another's pain as one's own—with the *additional* pain of remorse over personal unworthiness. Briseida's experience transforms Helen's story into the story of Eve, but this is Eve as we met her in Landri's *romans*: Eve as the *sponsa derelicta* in search of regaining the kiss of redemption, Eve as the loving heart all but stifled for shame, Eve as the “reading bride” who seeks to join Mary at the cross. For the audience as Benoît evoked it, “reading Helen” has become an exercise in self-recognition, an exercise in compassion in which the suffering of the other acts as the mirror of weakness in the self.

The conclusions of Helen's and Polixena's stories reiterate and magnify the reversals in reading woman that Briseida's story first performs. Helen grieving over Paris's body

¹⁰⁹ See lines 13463–64 and p. 206, above.

is the image of inconsolable self-incrimination and remorse, indeed, "Her grief surpasses all other sorrows, no one ever knew greater distress." So much for the idea of the woman who "knows not what it is to suffer," or never assumes blame: "Oh may the earth no longer bear my weight, nor ever again a woman cause such terrible grief as have I!" Helen cries, and in this remorse she feels herself united for life, and death, with her dead husband:¹¹⁰

Ja sui je vostre douce amie,
 Cele qui por vos se forsene,
 Qui riens ne conforte n'asene,
 Cele qui por vos sent la mort,
 Cele qui ainc ne vos fist tort,
 Ne qui ainc jor de votre vie
 Ne pensa vers vos vilenie,
 Cele qui ne desirre rien,
 N'autre confort ne autre bien,
 Ne mes m'ame o la vostre seit.'
 (22992–3001)

(Always I will remain your sweet beloved, she who mourns you without measure, whom none and nothing can console, she who suffers death in your place, she who never once wronged you nor ever once in your life wished you harm, she who desires nothing, no other consolation or boon, than for my spirit to be united with yours.)

Helen the whore has become the image of fidelity even beyond death, the faithful wife who magnifies Briseida's suffering even as she evinces a higher level of personal integrity in the chastity and penance of the widow. The audience's intended response is amply displayed: Priam and what is left of the royal family now both love and honour her as never before, and as for the people of Troy, "Ne la poeit riens esgarder, / Hom ne femme, jounes ne vielz, / Qu'el ne feïst plorer des ielz" (No one could look upon her, man or woman, young or old, without tears coming to their eyes) (23026–28).

This final verdict on Helen finds its equivalent in the response to Polixena, whose statue fixed at the top of Achilles's tomb "no one ever looked upon ... without believing that *she* wept." In Polixena the woman who recognizes her own guilt is displaced by the image of a woman who suffers for the guilt of all—just as her commemorative likeness is admired equally by Trojans and Greeks, from inside or outside the city walls.¹¹¹ This likeness as *virgo dolorosa* oddly forecloses on her fate, which is only sealed more than 4,000 lines later:¹¹² Thus Benoît postpones the final aria until after Troy's fall. Likewise,

110 Cf. lines 22916–29. Helen's monologue extends from line 22920 to 23011, followed by the narrator's comments (lines 23012–28) and a second scene in which Paris is laid to rest and others' sympathy and admiration for Helen is emphasized (lines 23073–88).

111 See note 85, above.

112 Polixena's monologue, the first and last time she speaks, occurs at lines 26475–539; Achilles's tomb is described at lines 22405–91. In the interim we learn only that Eneas absconds with Polixena at Hecuba's request during the sacking of Troy (lines 26190–94).

the praise due the widow gives way to that merited by the virgin martyr, as Polixena's morbid defiance before her Greek executioners shows:

Ne refus pas ma destinee
 O ma virginité morrai.
 Biau m'est, quant jo ne maumetrai
 La hautece de ma valor.
 Ne dei aveir ja mais amor
 O rien vivant: Ja Deus nel doint!
 (26510–15)

(I do not refuse my destiny and will die with my virginity. Happy I am that the nobility of my birth will suffer no corruption. God grant that I never again love any living man!)

As she walks to her death, Polixena's beauty recalls Mary's symbols of the lily and the rose. The same were evoked in the beauty of Briseida's robe, and Polixena's beauty similarly comprises all of Nature's perfection.¹¹³ Polixena's virginity is the mark of her perfect sacrifice: though she could never truly love, she would willingly have been exchanged for peace;¹¹⁴ had she changed sides it would have been not treason but her people's salvation. But she is not a mere allegory of Mary nor only a sign of Mary's coming. Polixena is slaughtered on the altar of human vanity, on the ambitions and ideals of a world inveterately committed to the pursuit of honour and revenge, a world that has not yet found its saviour—whose coming her golden likeness awaits in sorrow that will last “to the end of time.” Her anguish and her suffering belong to all, and her image elevated to the heavens is the elevation of human pain to a level of recognition in which it will be worthy of divinity's descent into female flesh—the blackened body that is all that remains of Briseida's once splendid gown.

In her own defence, Briseida's final reflections recall her desolate state:

E n'eüst pas ensi esté
 Se encor fusse en la cité:
 Ja jor mis cuers ne porpensast
 Qu'il tressaillist ne qu'il chanjast;
 Mes ci esteie sans conseil
 E sans ami e sans feeil;
 Si m'ot mestier tiel entendance
 Qui m'ostast d'ire e de pesance.
 (20283–90)

(And all this would not have been if I were still within the city walls: Never once did my heart then conceive that it could waver or change; But here I found myself without counsel, without even a friend to confide in; I had great need of some confidence that might relieve my pain and suffering.)

113 “Pitié en ont, n'est pas merveille / Le lis e la rose vermeille / Sunt envers li descoloré; Quant que ot Nature de beauté / Mist ele en li par grant loisir” (26449–53).

114 See Constans, ed. lines 21227–33.

Briseida, too, is a worldly bride bereaved. Without hope of regaining her beloved Troy or Troilus, she must remain true to memory in a life of exile among enemies. Such was no less the language of Christ's virgins; the *Life of Christina of Markyate* describes her position no differently—although she struggles bitterly to escape betrothal to a second spouse, where in others' eyes she has none. Benoît's *romans* presents the pagan history of Troy through the multifaceted refraction of the *sponsa derelicta*, seen once through this mutable fate of the "married woman," the woman who knows worldly love; next through the widow, Helen, and finally through the virgin martyr, Polixena. In the resulting succession of women's reflections on their place in the destructive march of history, the *romans* presents the progress of this female consciousness on the way to a Christian recognition of self, a self that acknowledges and embraces its bodily weakness—its femaleness—as the sole source of its redemption.

With his *Roman de Troie*, Benoît, like Landri of Waben or the author of the *Eructavit*, offers his courtly audience the translation, in both the spatial and the linguistic sense, of a reading experience from the world of Latin learning to that of the layman's vernacular stage. "Le voudrai si en romanz metre / Que cil qui n'entendront la letre / Se puissent deduire el romanz" (I would like to put it into *romans* so that those who are not lettered may take delight in the *romans*) (37–39). Once again the term *romans* as clearly signals the mediation of knowledge for a new group of "readers" as it mediates in itself as a new literary form, what we would call a *genre*. This reformation of a literary experience promises as well a new or different truth. For although the *estoire* is "rich and great, telling of great acts and great feats" and "knowledge of how Troy was lost has been drawn from many sources; the truth has scarce been heard" (40–44); *la vertez est poi oïe*. What is at stake in this claim to truth is not entirely or even truly identified with the dismissal of Homer for Dares (and later, Dictys); rather, Benoît initially piggy-backs on the idea of the eyewitness as guarantor of factual truth in history to construct something quite different, a truth not of facts, but rather of experience, and a witnessing that is not dependent on the chronological proximity to events, but rather on restoration to the present of a true experience. Benoît's real eyewitnesses are, finally, the contemporary, present members of his audience, who witness the story in the immediacy of the vernacular performance and recognize truth by entering into the experience of characters who are most like themselves.

With his implicit exoneration of Helena-Briseida and the romance's multiplication of brides raped and bereft, Benoît orchestrates a reorientation of audience response away from a peremptory condemnation of woman as the root of all ills and towards an identification with women's inner struggle for integrity and fidelity in a world that cannot sustain "her" weakness. If Helen can be seen as a Christian widow, then only because Briseida's story has turned hers inside-out, such that it is judged not by her apparent actions or their consequences but by the testimony to inner integrity given by her final monologue. Briseida's story brings the heroically over-burdened tales of Medea, Helen or Polixena down to a level where the audience is forced to judge for themselves and of themselves; neither the narrator nor even a representative biblical authority prove to be of any help. Only the implicit recognition of a different, perfected image of woman evokes the truly Christian dimension of this task—and at the same time shows the

audience itself in Helen's mirror. This *fictional* amplification of historical "truth," the fusion of "being there" with "being her," allows Benoît to transform the tale of tales from pagan antiquity into a kind of prefiguration of sacred scripture. By requiring his audience to descend into woman's failing, to know the body's fall from the inside rather than judging from without, Benoît squeezes the Christian truth out of the pagan past and, in so doing, offers a key to the experience of invented narrative as revelatory of sacred truth. The discovery must have captivated contemporaries and later generations alike, as is amply witnessed by Briseida/Cressida's extraordinary literary career.

Benoît's use of the Eve–Mary paradigm to orchestrate identity between his audience's experience and Briseida's shows us the point at which "reading as Mary did" becomes independent of the exegesis of scriptural texts to manifest itself entirely as truth in the body, truth found in narratives of the layman's *historia*. The point of such narratives is not to discover or uncover some symbolic arch-referent to which they defer for their meaning, but rather to offer an experience in which we rediscover our own weakness, our corporeality, its limits and its possibilities, its origins in Eve and its future in Mary; in which we discover ourselves in the other, then; "I am you" as also union with that which is most desired, the Word of God. This is the beginning, truly, of "the problem of the "woman reader" in romance. But "the problem" does not begin with romance or with courtly narrative nor can it be grasped through study that subscribes to genre distinctions indebted to our own literary experience. It signals a convergence of sacred and secular "reading" around a model of the experience of truth as presence that derived its legitimacy from the position of the woman as embodied bride. By identifying the reception of text with this identification between audience and bride, the narrator of vernacular poetry communicates that his performance of the text is a present manifestation of the life of the bride, an assimilation of truth to personal experience that mirrors Mary's conception of the Word.

Chapter 7

A NEW POETICS FOR *ÂVENTIURE*: THE EXPOSITION OF WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH'S *PARZIVAL*

Swelhem wîbe volget kiusche mite,
der lobes kemphe wil ich sîn:
mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn.
(Where a woman keeps company with chaste modesty I'll be the fighting
champion of her praise; her grief is my heart's sorrow.)

(*Parzival*, lines 115,2–4)

THERE ARE FEW more conspicuous junctures in medieval romance narrative than the so-called “Apology” between books 2 and 3 of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*.¹ The excursus comes at the audience with the force and belligerence of a jousting charger. It is sandwiched between narrative events of no less impact, events that form a radical transformation in the life of Parzival’s mother, Herzeloide. In the space of this transition (ca. 270 verses), the queen of three lands and wife of the flower of chivalry is widowed, becomes a mother, and then abandons both her crowns and her courtly existence. She is the figure who—quite “literally,” as we say, but the fact is emphatically physical, a pregnancy of bodily meaning—carries the narrative and its hero from book 2 to book 3, from the old story to the new, as she brings them from her womb into the world. *Both* are “flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone.”²

The three verses cited above form the midpoint of the narratorial excursus; they are the pivotal point of a renewal that was first announced at the conclusion of the poem’s prologue:³

ein mære wil i’u niuwen,
daz seit von grôzen triuwen.
(4,9–10)

(I will renew a tale for you that tells of great faith and devotion.)

1 The division of the text into sixteen books reflects manuscript evidence and cannot be attributed to the author with any certainty. The division between books 2 and 3 is, however, clearly authorial. See Schiroke, “Einführung,” pp. 84–87. The paradoxical use of the term “book” for these units—where the author/narrator explicitly forbids the same term—has unfortunately not been questioned in the scholarship and I retain it despite misgivings. The scholarship on *Parzival* is vast, most especially on the passages under consideration in this chapter. I cite below only the most recent or significant contributions on most points. For a general introduction and overview, see Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. Scholarship on the relationship between the Gahmuret and Parzival narratives is reviewed in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 1:394–407.

2 See p. 185 note 143, above.

3 Wolf, “Meditationsgeflecht,” 9–73. I do not subscribe, however, to a “typological” understanding of the relationship between the two stories; that is, Gahmuret’s story is not an “Old Testament” to the “New” revealed in Parzival’s (cf. Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 1:396–402).

With these words, an unnamed poet embarks on the unspecified tale of an unnamed protagonist, for this latter is, in a curious turn of phrase, “as yet narratively unborn,” *mæreshalp noch ungeborn* (4,25). Neither the tale’s hero nor, in some sense, the tale itself yet exist; the introduction of either awaits the conjunction of *niuwen* and *triuwen*, a renewal through suffering in love and loving devotion that is the key to Wolfram’s narrative poetics and is first realized in the description of Herzeloide at the conclusion of book 2, where we learn:

hiest der âventiure wurf gespilt,
und ir begin ist gezilt:
wand er ist alrêst geborn,
dem diz mære wart erkorn.

(112,9–12)

(Here at last *âventiure* has cast her dice and her beginning has its direction, for only now has he been born for whom this tale was destined.)

This image of woman is then the basis of the narrator’s proud claim, *Swer nu wîben sprichet baz, deiswâr daz lâz ich âne haz*” (Should anyone now give a better account of women, truly, I’d be the last to object) (114,5–6); her transformation is the moment that enables this narrator to emerge and lay claim to his tale, no less than, by giving birth to its hero, she enables the tale to begin.⁴ The hiatus that follows, the passage so long misunderstood as an “apology,” should rather be seen as the work’s second prologue: it is the delayed and indispensable continuation of the first. It is likewise a poetic credo of a sort that had never before been heard.⁵

The narrator’s part in this transition is staged as if also a poet’s conversion from the flattery of courtly love lyric to chivalric narrative, from a previous “misreading” of woman to a new song in her true praise; that is, this moment is a kind of narrator’s metanoia. “Ich ... Wolfram von Eschenbach” (114,12)—who, no less a character in this performance than any of the others, introduces himself for the first time here—has rolled three more “births” into the one: the woman, the story and its narrator are all born anew—born, as was all humanity, of a woman.

These observations notwithstanding, the portrayal of Herzeloide’s transformation is most notable not for the account of Parzival’s birth but rather for the surprising images which precede and follow that event. The first sees her acknowledge her husband’s death and the child’s coming in an auto-lactation; that is (in her words) she “baptizes” herself into a widowed maternity by pressing milk from her own breasts (110,22–111,12). In the second she describes herself as if a *Madonna lactans*, nursing her son as Mary nursed Christ (113,17–26), while the narrator’s remarks have been seen to evoke a pietà, saying she feels as if by nursing her son she also holds her dead husband to her breast (113,13–14, 113,27–114,3).⁶ The entire crescendo is rhetorically orchestrated to

⁴ Kuhn, “Wolframs Frauenlob,” 200–202. On the significance of Herzeloide’s name, see below, note 36.

⁵ Curschmann, “Erzähler,” 25; see also Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:365.

⁶ I am suggesting only that the descriptions spring from the same visual ideas—and not from examples in visual art. The earliest examples of the *Madonna lactans* date from the late twelfth

fix this visual moment in memory, absorbing the rush of events into an iconic stasis that extends over thirty verses (113,5–114,4).⁷ With this eruption of the sacred into the text and Wolfram's quasi-iconographic invention of grieving lactation, a *Lactans dolorosa*, something is achieved that constitutes the essence of his narrative project and that only the narrative arc from the first prologue to this transition could accomplish, something that brings forward the authentic voice of a new tale—one that is to be seen and heard, in particular by women, so long as they recognize that it will tolerate “no help from books” (cf. 115,8–10, 21–30). Herzeloide's transformation is the microcosm of a much larger web of meaning; a woman is once again the keystone of an intricate poetic architecture in which the myriad forms of a narrative world, the world of *âventiure*, combine and collude to shape an experience of Christian truth.⁸

As Alois Wolf puts it, “Herzeloide is the exposition of Wolfram's *Parzival*.”⁹ Moreover, with the insistent coalescence of divine and human, sacred history and human history that confronts us in her transformation, “Wolfram had arrived at an art of integrating the Bible into the earthly world of romance narrative that was entirely new.”¹⁰ For Karl Bertau, the concluding image of Herzeloide marks an “epochal” divide, “heralds a new human authenticity,” and shows Wolfram “lending voice to the discoveries in human sensibility of his time.”¹¹ Others have made similar statements, but dissenting opinions and even disapproval have been no less common.¹² Still more controversy surrounds the exposition that Herzeloide so iconically comprises, the argument that must begin in the first prologue and find its at least preliminary conclusion here. The integral interpretation of this exposition remains the unsolvable puzzle confronting our understanding of Wolfram's Grail romance.

The preceding chapters have put key pieces of this puzzle into place. The woman who holds both a dead beloved and a baby to her breast is, in the reading of Rupert of Deutz, Mary's description of herself as the fulfilment of Canticles 1:12 (“A bundle of myrrh is my beloved is to me; he shall abide between my breasts”), as the woman who became *prophetissa* when she knew present joy and future suffering all in one loving embrace. Wolfram's Herzeloide is very much a narrative re-embodiment of Rupert's Mary, of Mary's knowing as fulfilled in “our” lives. Wolfram's text recalls Rupert's in myriad ways, but one is evident already in that Herzeloide's awakening into wisdom, as it might be called, prompts her narrator's emergence into his own text. But Wolfram's “bride” is (unlike Landri's) neither female ideal nor reading abstraction; like Briseida, she is presented as a woman of flesh and blood “who was much loved and loved as much,” whose headstrong character and moral duplicity are as undeniable as they are

century; those of the *pietà* are more than a century later. See Bertau, “Regina Lactans,” pp. 259–85; further literature in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:358–59.

7 Wenzel, “Herzeloide und Sigune,” p. 221.

8 See esp. Schröder, *Soltane-Erzählung*; and Wolf, “Meditationsgeflecht.”

9 Wolf, “Meditationsgeflecht,” 13.

10 Wolf, “Meditationsgeflecht,” 15–16.

11 Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 284–85.

12 An overview is found in Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:333–34; also Heckel, “Interpretation der Herzeloide,” pp. 35–52.

inscrutable. Thus, she too serves to force the issue of a woman's worthiness in suffering and love to the centre of audience attention, prompting a narrator's intervention in which the nature of woman and the proper reception of the tale—the discovery of meaning and truth, no less—are all at stake. The resemblance is by no means fortuitous or incidental, but neither need it point to textual dependency. Herzeloyde is like Briseida because each in her turn is a cousin to Landri's fallen bride, the *sponsa derelicta*; Herzeloyde demonstrates how a woman's suffering for love can elevate human experience and human weakness to the point where the audience knows what Mary knew. Wolfram's *Lactans dolorosa* is a logical extension into vernacular narrative of the way Mary's union with Christ as one flesh in the conception was reiterated and revealed anew through her suffering at the cross.

The point of this demonstration is, appropriately, a regeneration of narrative, for in it, through it, courtly vernacular narrative is relocated within a hermeneutics of truth that sees suffering for or with others as a way of embracing and revealing Christ's love of humanity in our lives. Benoît de Sainte-Maure used this idea to shape the audience's discovery of Christian truth through the fates of his own bereaved brides. The last chapters of this book finally reveal why the portrayal of women's suffering, and in particular women's grief, takes such prominent place in new vernacular narrative and why it is portrayed in such extremity. When Herzeloyde baptizes herself into life as widow, she does no less for the project of vernacular narrative, which Wolfram thereby formally initiates as an exercise in reading women's suffering. This was, however, not his invention, nor did he seek to present it as such. In a later excursus on Sigune, Herzeloyde's niece and personal extension into Parzival's story, he flags Laudine, the widowed bride of Chrétien's *Yvain*, as the romance touchstone of a widow's worth. Neither the relationship between this gesture and Wolfram's poetic exposition nor the relationship of either to Chrétien's romance has as yet been explored. These relationships will be at the centre of attention in my last chapter, as they are of capital significance for the understanding of either author's idea of romance as a mediation of truth.

If the relationship between narrator and Lady at the crucial juncture of Wolfram's exposition recalls the readers of reading brides, his narratorial persona is not therefore a "young woman."¹³ On this stage it is emphatically the *miles*, the warrior in his specifically courtly guise as knight servitor, who claims the legitimate mediation of truth and the true praise of woman. Moreover, unlike the purveyors of *romans* we have thus far considered, "ich Wolfram von Eschenbach" does not pose as a cleric mediating reading for a lay audience; unlike his predecessors in German and French romance, neither does he claim qualification through a cleric's learning. The polemical and notably unapologetic stance of his narrating knight has a clear forebear, nonetheless, in the portrayal of David as an oral performer in the *Eructavit*. Translated to the stage of *aventure*, this stance proclaims the arrival of a layman's literature that is to be seen and heard in defiant rejection of clerical models of learning and knowing. The voice that David claimed as

13 In a riddle on the lady's identity in the epilogue to book 6, the narrator appears to deny this very possibility: "Only from the mouth of one born by different feet than those wagging in my stirrups" will he assume the authority to continue his tale; cf. 337,27–30.

authority for this privilege was none other than that of the Spirit in Mary's ear. Once we have traced the development of Wolfram's poetic positioning from its beginning back to this point, we will see that his own claim is no less ambitious. The objective is to establish an autonomous layman's reading experience with Mary's bodily gnosis not only as its authority but also and above all as a generative moment that gives birth to an all-inclusive narrative universe.

Already in its own time Wolfram's poem must have been seen as a narrative that exceeded all bounds, conformed to no model, and, in many ways, subsumed all others. As the speaker in the first prologue puts it: "You show me three such fellows as I, each of them no less capable a story-teller, and they would still need a wild imagination to manage the tale that I'm about to tell you on my own. It would keep them busy indeed!" (cf. 4,2–8). Wolfram's 24,000-verse Grail romance, completed by ca. 1210, is the romance of romances; it subsumes the Arthurian and the "historical" worlds, the Christian and the pagan, Occident and Orient, the antique, the heroic and the burlesque. Beyond its dependency on Chrétien's unfinished *Perceval* and the knowledge displayed of his other romances,¹⁴ its explicitly cited literary horizons include Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneit*, Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* and *Iwein*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Spruchdichtung* of Walther von der Vogelweide, and the *Minnesang*. Implicit reference can be found to a number of other works in the vernacular tradition,¹⁵ and the narrator delights in displaying medical, astronomical, and other areas of "scientific" knowledge.¹⁶ Overarching this panoply is the search for the Grail, the ultimate layman's entry into communion with the divine. Wolfram's *Parzival* is more than anything else a romance of reading, that is, of the nature, limits and possibilities of knowing.¹⁷ Its attempt to comprise and inscribe a layman's literature is akin in spirit and scope to the achievements of the counts of Guines as Lambert recorded them, but its aim is still more ambitious: if they had vulgar tales recorded and placed in a library alongside the church fathers, Wolfram is out to make a layman's library of romance in itself. And all of this, it turns out, is subsumed under the question of who speaks best for, of, or to, women.

Wolfram communicates with his audience primarily through a battery of metaphors that are grounded in a contemporary debate over knowledge, its legitimate apprehension and adequate transmission, which this book has sought throughout to discover

14 Nellmann, "Wolframs Bildung," argues plausibly that in composing *Parzival* Wolfram most likely used a compilation of Old French romances such as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1450, which begins with Benoît's *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas* and inserts Chrétien's romances into Wace's *Roman de Brut*. Curschmann, "Erzähler," 11–32, suggests he was no less familiar with the Old French continuations to *Perceval* that were available before 1200.

15 Kern, "Iwein liest Laudine," pp. 399–400, sees Wolfram establishing a literary canon together with his fictional audience. See also Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 171–76; and Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, pp. 10–12 and 207–9.

16 In addition to the literature in Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, p. 7, see Kästner and Schirok, "Bücher," pp. 61–152; esp. 114–17.

17 Later scholarship has emphasized themes of perception and recognition, for example, Greenfield, ed., *Wahrnehmung im Parzival*; Bumke, *Blutstropfen*; and Green, *Art of Recognition*.

anew. Without an awareness of the interrelated significance of the woman, the incapacity of the unlearned, seeing and hearing, performance and reading, inner truth and bodily cover—to name a now familiar few—in this debate, the would-be interpreter is adrift in a sea of indeterminate signs. The prologue itself has been pronounced irretrievably removed from our understanding, if not by reason of historical and cultural distance, then by reason of wilful obscurantism that is the author's own.¹⁸

Wolfram's argument for the presentation of his narrative puts forward the emancipated layman's literature as if superimposed on a map of the argument justifying woman's alternative reading. As such it becomes a poetological history of the genre and the manifesto of new narrative art. Such a *tour de force* is inconceivable without an audience that was both capable of anticipating the general thrust of the argument and familiar with its signal terms. In a new approach to the puzzle presented by the first prologue, I illuminated the basis of this communication by pitting Wolfram's argument against that of his clerical adversaries, as represented by Thomasin of Zirclaria.¹⁹ The juxtaposition leaves no doubt over what was at stake in either author's understanding: the legitimate authority over the layman's reading path to salvation. Moreover, their confrontation shows that each was acutely aware of the need to displace the other's claim to the stage. *Âventiure*, whether for its champion, Wolfram, or its detractor, Thomasin, is no merely attractive new literary entertainment, still less is it an experiment in an as yet unarticulated poetics of literary fiction.²⁰ As Thomasin sees it, *âventiure* pretends to a capacity and an authority that are properly his own, those of the clerical instructor in mores and morality, and has all but succeeded in convincing his German-speaking audience to accept its claim. In this confrontation, then, we overhear something that scholarship has otherwise sought in vain: an account of the contours, the status, and the intellectual place of romance narrative within the lettered culture and larger developments of its time, expressed in terms appropriate to the courtly audience of German vernacular literature.

My larger concern, both in this chapter and in my earlier article, is to show how Wolfram's prologue presents a lucid and tightly structured progression through familiar ideas of the mediation of knowledge to in fact orchestrate an initiation of both audience and narrative into the female poetics of body and truth. This project can now be completed, and once again, Thomasin reliably traces—by way of rejecting them—a

18 "Der Prolog gehört zu den dunkelsten und schwierigsten Textpartien der Dichtung." This was Joachim Bumke's appraisal in the seventh edition (1997) of Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*; it remains unchanged in the latest edition (2004), with an addition to contradict directly the claims of the most recent interpretations: "Der Prolog enthält kein zusammenhängendes poetologisches Programm. Er enthält eine Reihe von Aussagen, von denen nicht sicher ist, ob sie sich auf die eigene Dichtung beziehen," (8th ed., pp. 40, 204). See also Ohlenroth, "Wolframs Widerpart," 28. I consider the most fundamental and troublesome issues to be resolved in Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog," and rely on these insights here.

19 Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog."

20 For Haug and those who followed in the fictionality school, the prologue is the manifesto of the new fictional narrative: see *LDMA*, pp. 155–78; and Haug, "Konzept," 211–29.

startlingly complete outline of the woman-as-reader and the arguments that serve the new poetics of body and narrative.²¹

Reading Women False and True: The Cleric's Instruction

Thomasin's *Der welsche Gast* is a work of nearly 15,000 verses, completed, as he tells us, in 1216 by a prelate from today's Friulia for an audience of the German-speaking nobility. He is himself "the guest from *Romania*" who seeks, with his instruction in courtly mores and the ways of the world, a place in their "house."²² The guest entreats the "German lands" to receive him as a *hûsvrouwe* (lady of the house) should one "who lovingly serves your honour."²³ This feminization of the German audience goes hand in hand with its identity, especially in the early stages of the work, as *diu kint*, "the children." In Thomasin's usage this term is best understood simply as those in need of instruction, regardless of age; it is the counterpart to *wîse liute*, or "wise folk," who dispense the same and among whom Thomasin counts himself (61–62). This treatment of the audience as at once "lady" and the immature is only the first indication of Thomasin's attempt to assume native dress, the operative arguments for an alternative layman's *lectio*.²⁴ As he states with reference to his decision to write solely in German, "der zûhte lêre gewant sol gar / von sime gebote sin einvar" (the objective of moral instruction and its medium should be of one colour) (37–38). His prologue features this idea most particularly in relation to his use of German, but it is no less evident in the representation of delivery through performance and even extends to an accompanying cycle of pictures that visualize his moral instruction on the page.²⁵

The guest is thus at pains to insert himself on a foreign stage, which he acknowledges in the same breath as the stage of Arthurian romance. Begging indulgence for his possibly awkward German verse, he apostrophizes the audience as if they embodied its protagonists:

ich heiz Thomasîn von Zirclaria:
boeser luite spote ist mir unmære.
hân ich Gâweins hulde wol,
von reht mîn Key spotten sol.

(71–78)

21 In Powell, "Parzival'-Prolog," the argument was limited to the prologue's first half, the so-called "men's prologue"; similarly, I did not consider Thomasin's presentation of Helen as "bad reading," which follows below.

22 Cf. lines 55–95. Thomasin's adjective *welsch* designated the entire romance-language area, or *Romania*, as opposed to the German territories; he thus makes no distinction between his place as *welscher gast* and that of the new literature adapted from Old French, or rather intentionally allows the two to seem identical.

23 See below, note 26, for the original text and the full passage. The *hûsvrouwe* is apostrophized again at the prologue's end, line 127.

24 See Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 364–65; and Powell, "Parzival'-Prolog," 55–56.

25 Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 361–63, 365–68.

(My name is Thomasin von Zirclaria. The scorn of scoundrels is no matter to me: if I'm in Gawain's good graces, then Kay's mockery is only to be expected.)

His remarks to the "lady of the house" then likewise acknowledge his predecessors in mediation from French to German: "You have often enjoyed hearing what is taken from *romans* (*welsch*), as adapted for you by German people. And so you shall hear today whether a man from Romania can perhaps treat in German such things as will please you."²⁶ Thomasin's ambition is thereby clearly announced and his later showdown with *âventiure* programmed in advance. The feigned indulgence of the opening is all part of the pose; this moral instructor is out to displace a literature that he considers—when he speaks candidly—little better than a highway to Hell. The "pretty dress" of the key passage in fact says as much, although the attack is cloaked in false assurances:

die *âventiure* sint gekleit
dicke mit lüge harte schöne:
diu lüge ist ir gezierde krône.
ich schilt die *âventiure* niht,
swie uns ze liegen geschiht
von der *âventiure* rât,
wan si bezeichnenunge hât
der zuht unde der wârheit:
daz wâr man mit lüge kleit.

(1118–26)

(These tales of *âventiure* are richly clad in a most beautiful covering of lies: deceit, indeed, is their crowning glory. Far be it from me to scold such tales—what matter that their counsel land us in a liar's bed?—for they do contain signs at least of virtue and truth: the truth is simply clothed in lies.)²⁷

Thomasin's text offers one of only a very few contemporary witnesses to the reception of new vernacular narrative that have come down to us; as a discussion of *âventiure* per se, his is the only one we possess, whether from France or Germany. As a result, these lines (and the rest of the excursus, lines 1079–162) have found much scholarly discussion, and I have argued elsewhere that they at best consign *âventiure* to an understanding of narrative, body, and truth that is diametrically opposed to what this book has thus far discovered.²⁸ Thomasin goes on to discuss *âventiure* as the medieval equivalent of the comic book (of which his own illustrative programme is oddly reminiscent), citing Gregory's apology for pictures as the appropriate medium for, as he would

²⁶ The whole passage reads: "Tiusche lant, enphâhe wol, / als ein guot hûsvrouwe sol, / dise dînen welhschen gast / der dîn êre minnet vast. / der seit dir zûhte mære vil, / ob du in gern vernemen wil. / du hâst dicke gern vernomen / daz von der welhsche ist genomen, / daz hânt bediutet tiusche liute. / dâ von solt du vernemen hiute, / ob dir ein welhscher man / liht ouch des gesagen kan / tiuschen daz dir müge gevallen" (87–99).

²⁷ Translations of the text are my own, though I have also consulted the sole integral modern translation, recently provided by Marion Gibbs and Winder McConnell.

²⁸ Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 371–84; and Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog," 55–62.

have it, *kindes muot*, a childish disposition. Those who have not yet progressed beyond the understanding of a simpleton or a peasant can “find their ‘pictures’ there” (1091–92). Thomasin’s term is *bilde nemen*, “to take examples.” A double conflation occurs here that is most revealing for his argument. The one, between Gregory’s *picturae* and exemplary behaviour, is made possible by two meanings of the Middle High German *Bild*, “image” and “example” (as in modern German *Vorbild*). The power of the image is admitted only as a cliché (literally speaking): it must transfer its value directly as if from one body to another. The other takes this use of moral models as interchangeable with a proposition that is, in terms of visual evidence, quite the opposite: truth hidden in allegory, or *bezeichnenunge*.

The common denominator between the two possibilities Thomasin allows for truth in *âventiure* is given by his own bias: both are standard vehicles of clerical instruction for the layman. Morally exemplary character and the readable sign (*bezeichnenunge* or *significatio*) stand here together, and exclusively so, for the legitimate mediation of truth, whether through narrative or in his own instruction. Of particular interest as well is the way Thomasin treats proper application of such vehicles as dependent, above all, on the idea of *muot*, with which he acknowledges the differing capacities and dispositions of different groups. Wolfram (as we shall see) had constructed his prologue with the same building blocks to reach an opposite end. As far as Thomasin’s project is concerned, the following applies: he concedes to new courtly narratives a part in the legitimate models of truth only to reveal with the same gesture that that part is all but non-existent. To identify before a courtly audience this reduced value as suitable fare for peasants betrays the same intention. A later comment on Arthur works to similar effect: Thomasin speculates that, should Arthur be in Hell, then our high opinion is of no use to him; on the contrary, “our praise heaps sin on his sin, because he gives us reason for great lies without cease.”²⁹ With these underhanded arguments, the tales of *âventiure* are forced from their own stage; in their place there should stand, unchallenged, the purveyor of “true” moral instruction:

werz gerne tuon wil,
der mag uns sagen harte vil
von der wârheit, daz waer guot.
er bezzert ouch unsern muot
mit der wârheit michels baz
denn mit der lûge, wizzet daz.
(1143–48)

(Anyone who truly wishes to can tell us a great deal about the truth, and that would be best. He does us far more good by relying on the truth than by resorting to lies, be sure of that.)

Thus the supercilious gatekeeper reasserts his authority over the layman’s access to knowledge.

²⁹ Cf. 3539–45; Powell, “‘Parzival’-Prolog,” 58.

Thomasin is no less familiar with the opposite argument than he is aware of the appeal of the alternatives it serves, which is why so many of its requisite components turn up in his own. This becomes all the more evident when one considers the excursus on *âventiure* in the context Thomasin provides: as the culmination of a discussion of good and bad reading material, or “waz diu kint suln vernemen unde lesen” (what the young should hear and read) (1026–27). For the purpose of speaking to a lay courtly audience “in their own tongue,” he in fact understands the entire problem of “reading”—the choice of subject matter, media and mode, as well as the nature of the audience’s receptive experience—as defined by the nature of woman and the considerations governing her instruction.³⁰

Thomasin couches this entire discussion within the contrast between the “false” and the “true” woman as the embodiments of false and true instruction; at the same time, he implicitly casts his audience as *juncfrouwen*, and this identification is constructed through a repeated insistence on the dichotomy between exterior form and inner truth. Beauty is once again synonymous with lies and deceit, even moral depravity, and the entire discussion of *boesiu mære*, depraved reading material, is carried by one figure alone: Helen of Troy. Thomasin’s knowledge of vernacular narrative may thus be more penetrating than he has generally been given credit for.

The discussion begins by proclaiming that the *kint* should limit his “reading” to “guotiu mære” (virtuous tales) leaving aside “boese geschiht” (wicked stories) (761–65). This audience is then renamed as “wîp unde man” (woman and man) (767), and a few lines later Thomasin begins his prescriptions, starting, or so it would seem, with “wicked tales” (*boesiu mære*, line 779) and reading advice for young women (*juncvrouwen*, line 773). Some 250 lines later he announces his task as accomplished, *boesiu mære* have been properly defined, and now he will turn to “what young people should hear and read, and what can be of use to them” (cf. 1023–28). There follows a catalogue of “good” examples from romance narrative (a mere fifty lines), divided between *juncvrouwen* and *juncherren*. I will return to this passage below. But the implicit dipartite division between the sexes is never carried through. The much longer passage preceding never shifts from the young women to the young men, despite Thomasin’s claim to have fulfilled his promise. Moreover, only two short passages within it, lines 773–82 and lines 821–28, give any explicit advice on “reading” material, and within them only one example is given of *bæsiu mære*: Helen. What Thomasin instead presents, and with tiresome repetition, is a continuous, if shifting, reflection on woman as the negative embodiment of the inner/outer dichotomy. Represented variously as *schæne/sinne*, *schæne/zuht*, *schæne/gemüete*, *lîp/sin*, and *lîp/muot* (beauty/wits, beauty/upbringing, beauty/character, body/intelligence or meaning, body/disposition), this basic opposition is what in fact unites the entire passage—and what ties it both to Helen and to reading. The advice offered, whether it pertains to morals and mores or to the choice of appropriate examples, applies not to women alone but to the audience generally and to women in particular. This last point is revealed through repeated shifts of address.

30 Argued in greater detail in Powell, “Instruction for Religious Women,” pp. 383–96.

Helen is introduced with the remarks cited previously in [chapter 6](#):

Juncvrouwen bezzernt klein ir sinne
 von der schœnen kûneginne
 diu wîlen dâ ze Kriechen was;
 diu tet unreht diuz êrste las,
 wan bœse bilde verkêrent sêre
 guote zuht und guote lêre.

(773–78)

(Young ladies cannot better their understanding through the story of the beautiful queen in Greece of those days; she did wrong whoever first read it, for bad examples sorely distort good manners and good instruction.)

But this gives way almost immediately to thoughts equally applicable to women's condition generally: "swa ein wîp hât reinen muot, / hœret si dan übel ode guot / daz mag ir werren nihtes niht" (Provided a woman has a pure heart, it will make little difference whether she hears evil things or good ones) (783–85). In turn, these reflections, which pertain to the potentially harmful effect of Helen as *boesiu mære*, are then applied to both men and women with the phrase "swelich wîp und swelich man" (whatever woman and whatever man) (795). The advice on reading for *juncvrouwen* becomes a general comment on the ability to distinguish between good and bad for both sexes—an ability in which Thomasin has little faith as far as his specific audience is concerned. Thus his meditation on inner truth and outer form is launched.

Immediately attention shifts back to women: "Sumelîchiu wîp sint gemeit" (Some women are happy) (800), and then broadens to comprise men as well: "der und diu triegent sich gar" (man and woman alike are only fooling themselves) (812), and just as quickly shifts back to women: "dâ von ein biderbe wîp sol" (thus, a worthy woman should) (845). In the meantime Thomasin has all but abandoned the discussion of reading and ventured into general moral education. He picks up his ostensible subject, Helen, again at line 821, but this turns out to be only another tack in the same strategy. Helen is presented as the example of a woman who possessed "vil schœne und lützel sinne" (great looks but poor wits) (826). At this point, Thomasin has staked out the ground he wants to build on. The rest of the passage follows the same pattern of shifting address from woman to general audience and back again, as it expounds over and again on its one theme: the inherently deceptive quality of the bodily exterior and the necessity to "read" beneath it for the truth. Thomasin no doubt felt quite at home reading Tertullian and other representatives of the patristic poetics of gender and the body.

Behind this lengthy elaboration on her own nature Helen fades from view altogether, but she is more than a mere pawn. She is the point of departure for the whole discussion, because she constitutes the epitome both of the beautiful exterior that may deceive the immature "reader" (this Thomasin concentrates on in the first passage devoted to her) and, in her own dependency on *schœne* lacking *sinne*, of an unsuccessful "reader," one who has fallen to the seductive exterior. Through her alignment with the body, the woman is both the seductress and the seduced, both the *boesiu mære* and its misguided recipient. *Reiner muot*, the pure disposition, elsewhere placed in opposition to the *lîp*, or

body, guarantees surety against such deception—that is, only the woman who has overcome her proclivity for external attraction can successfully read through the deception of external form.

To read woman is to read the world—as a woman. This is the underlying equation that subsumes the male readers under the category of the *juncvrouwen* or *wîp* and assimilates instruction on the inner and the outer to reading advice for women. The corollary is also true: to read the body, or *corporalia*, is to read as a woman. Thus the woman as embodiment of the inner/outer dichotomy is both reader and text, viewer and image: here too, the mirroring of the body is operative. These are the same equations to which Benoît and Wolfram subscribe. In Thomasin's case, however, they provide not a justification for women's reading or reading as a woman but rather a statement of her inevitable fallibility or "bad reading," which thus cannot dispense with the cleric's mediation of the truth.

If Benoît undertook to upend Helen's story, redeeming the body by redeeming its most infamous representative, Thomasin is under no lesser onus to reinstate her as she was previously known. Thomasin in fact stages his discussion of reading in the body—*boesiu mære*—in distinctly parallel fashion to Benoît, for he, too, makes a sudden heartfelt declaration of personal admiration to Helen's opposite at the passage's end, extolling the *mulier fortis*, who embodies continuity between beauty and chastity, truth and representation:

ist triuwe, stæte und senfter muot
 an schœnem wîbe, so ist si guot.
 diu mac mich âne netze gereichen,
 durch sî wil ich mîn herze weichen,
 und wil daz ir einvaltic herze
 sî gar mîn angel âne smerze,
 daz si mich ziehe swar si wil:
 swaz si gebiut, dunkt mich niht vil:
 wan guotes wîbes reiner muot
 den widerwîget dehein guot.

(1013–22)

(When devotion, constancy and a gentle disposition are found in a beautiful woman, then is she good. Such a one can catch me without a net. For her sake my heart would soften, I would gladly accept her simple heart as my painless hook and follow wherever she leads: whatever she commands, it seems to me not much. For the pure disposition of a good woman is truly an incomparable possession.)

Benoît had placed his audience between Briseida-Eve and the *mulier fortis* to force consideration of what, in the audience's knowledge, was unworthy: Helen's story, the story of Ooliba. The audience was thereby engaged in a narrative process that revealed truth in the fallen body, the body in search of its saviour. When Thomasin wrote, Wolfram had gone one step further and posited a new female ideal as one realized through that process; the woman, in effect, redeemed the narrative body. For Thomasin neither

possibility could apply. As indicated above, the strategy is always the same: Thomasin indulges *mære/âventiure* only long enough to expose its immanent failings and induce his audience to “leave behind childish things” (cf. 1 Corinthians 11), that is, to hearken to his own moral teaching as the unadulterated truth.

Consequently, when Thomasin tells the story of reading in the body, the audience remains transfixed between clear moral models, images of evil and good, depravity and purity. The final alternatives are no different from those Benoît first frames in his misogynist intervention, and thus we find Helen restored as the image of the depraved woman, where Benoît had made her conspicuous by absence. Thomasin’s scorn for “she who first read Helen’s story”—an otherwise unclear remark—is quite possibly a side-swipe at Benoît’s *riche dame de riche rei*, in this case limited to her identity as Benoît’s ideal audience. But whether or not he has Benoît’s Helen or Wolfram’s exposition in mind, Thomasin is, at the least, fully aware of the significance of this “reading woman” to the layman’s narrative. He undertakes to invert her significance entirely, and with it a competing poetics of body and truth. There can be no redeeming value in following a Helen or a Briseida through the struggle of a New Eve, for Thomasin posits no process for her transformation. Her value lies instead in her immutability, which serves as a warning to shun seductive form. The body and woman alike are here inherently suspect; no less suspect, then, is the “pretty dress” of lies that he ascribes to *âventiure* generally. Nevertheless, for him as for his rivals, the two, woman and *âventiure*, are one and the same. His indictment of this new reading is merely the reversal of a subversion, the reconstruction of a traditional view of gender and body in relation to truth built on the foundation of his opponents’ best arguments.

Before turning to Wolfram’s opposite treatment of these questions, it remains to consider the positive examples that Thomasin does cite from the world of the layman’s narrative before making his definitive charge at *âventiure*. The catalogue initially makes no distinction between the Arthurian, the antique and the *chanson de geste*, listing Arthur alongside Charlemagne or Alexander. In conclusion, however, Thomasin focuses solely on *âventiure*, waxing apparently enthusiastic in imitation of romance poets: “wartâ, wartâ, wie si drungen, / die rîter von der tavelrunden, / einr vûrn ander ze vrûmkeit” (Look! Look! how they strove, those knights of the Round Table, to surpass one another in bravery) (1053–54). The examples that immediately precede (1051–52), however, deliver the real point: Segrarnors (oddly obscure, but not so for Thomasin’s purpose) was the brash and reckless youth who ended up shamefully unhorsed in the snow. Kalogrenant, the next listed, tells a story of such shameful deport that Yvain/Iwein must set out to rectify it—which produces another tale of *âventiure* (we shall revisit this crucial juncture in the [next chapter](#)). And the inveterate adulterer and fool for love, Tristan, can hardly be taken seriously as a model of *vrûmkeit*, upright virtue, from the mouth of a churchman and moralist.³¹ All this then sets up Thomasin’s regretful conclusion: Key, the

31 Haug (*LDMA*, p. 234), concludes similarly; see also the broad comparison of these characters across the different Arthurian tales in Düwel, “Lesestoff,” 67–93, esp. 72.

ubiquitous heckler and troublemaker of Arthurian narrative, is not at all dead (much to the contrary of Hartmann von Aue's statements in the prologue to his *Iwein*).³² His own "children," or emulators, are so common that "I hardly know where to turn," Thomasin says (1062–66). As the *coup de grâce*, then, he concludes with a feigned lament, not on the dearth of apposite Gawans in the audience, but rather over Parzival: "of his kind it seems none are alive. ... Alas, where are you, Parzival?" (1065/1075). Thomasin is explicit on his reasons for the choice: such a one would break another of Key's ribs—as Wolfram's Parzival does in the same scene and by reason of the same singularly inimitable moral oblivion that delivers Segrarns into the snow (1072–74).³³ Moral ambivalence is found even here. As an object of *bilde nemen*, Wolfram's anti-hero is the least suitable of choices, and this is finally the point. Just so much *nütze*, or useful value (cf. 1028), lies in such a story, for a literature that cannot serve as a moral mirror, that offers no imitable models, is no *litteratura* at all but rather childish foolishness.

Thus, if the didactic churchman dons the mediary mask of a new layman's literary culture, then it is because he understands himself to be competing with the poets of *âventiure* for rightful authority over the layman's moral instruction. It is not that the new narrative art is a mere pack of frivolous lies that disturbs him. His entire stance proceeds instead from the assumption that *âventiure* must and does make its own claim to a mediation of truth; and truth, for him as for his audience, means that which legitimately leads to the soul's redemption. In this undertaking a new presence had emerged, a new way of articulating the relationship between layman and Logos that derived from an alternative women's *lectio*. In Thomasin's treatment, therefore, the woman's reading quest for an integration of body and truth is bound back into the old opposition between deceiving exterior and *sensus moralis*. Such was the usefulness of "new media" and alternative gnosis to this reactionary revisionist. His argument provides us with very nearly the photographic negative of the entire complex of questions at the centre of this revolution in reading. This extends right to his epilogue, in which the completed instructive compendium is sent into the world—"nu var hin, welhisch gast" (now be on your way, romance guest) (14681)—with the instruction to avoid lodging with a wicked man (*boesewicht*) and to seek out different audience groups, each defined by a qualification that assures his or her "good reading": "vrume rîr und guote vrouwen und wîse phaffen suln dich schouwen" (Brave knights and virtuous ladies and wise clerics are to be your beholders) (14695–96).

The formula *pfaffen—leien—frouwen* (clerics—laymen—women) had some currency in early Middle High German texts, possibly as a way of acknowledging differing receptive tasks in one communication and communicative space.³⁴ Wolfram's Parzival prologue

32 Hartmann's prologue laments the loss of the "historical" figures of the Arthurian world as true moral models to claim we are nonetheless all the better off to be able to feel their presence through literary works. See *Iwein*, lines 4–20, 50–58; also *LDMA*, pp. 122–29.

33 At stake is the extraordinary scene in which Parzival remains transfixed before three drops of blood in the snow, which proves no hindrance to his ability to best the best of Arthur's knights when attacked (lines 282, 23–300, 5). The scene has a literature all its own; see Bumke, *Blutstropfen*.

34 Curschmann, "Hören-Lesen-Sehen," 251; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 306, 311–12, 369.

addresses the same three audience groups and elaborates on his project through a discussion of their differing reading capacities and objectives—their *mout* and the *zil* of their participation. For Wolfram, however, these differences become the justifying argument for a new way of mediating knowledge with no lesser claim to deliver the soul's salvation than Thomasin's. For Thomasin the formula serves merely the reiteration of his moralist's aesthetic: placed in the epilogue it evokes not so much what his readers bring to the performance as it does the moral imprint his instruction is to leave on each audience group.

Reading Women False and True: The Knight's Narration

Sîn lop hinket ame spat,
Swër allen vrouwen sprichet mat
Durch sîn eines vrouwen.

(115,5–7)

(He who lauds his one and only such that all other women are left without hope, delivers crippling praise.)

Thus Wolfram's narrator continues after his declaration of suffering service to the suffering woman: "der lobes kemphe wil ich sîn: / mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn." Clarification is overdue on the connection of this declaration to Herzeloide.³⁵ The verses avoid a direct identification, which in part explains why many have been reluctant to accept *herzen leit* as a pun on Herzeloide's name.³⁶ Here, as so often in Wolfram's art, the deflection or defamiliarization of an image in fact reveals its true significance, one that is always more and less than simple identification: "I'll be the fighting champion of her praise; her grief is my heart's sorrow." The narrator's affective identification with his heroine, his ability to know her pain, is the key to her identity. The reverse is also true: this moment, in which the speaker reveals his new female ideal, allows him to declare his identity. At the same time, by not naming Herzeloide, Wolfram does not single out one woman but instead the experience she embodies, one that is therefore open to all women, an idea underlined in the otherwise oddly unmotivated verses on the "crippling praise" of only one.³⁷

³⁵ First argued as such by Kuhn, "Wolframs Frauenlob," 200–202.

³⁶ The reluctance (see, for example, Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:366–67, where the issue is passed over in silence) is not entirely comprehensible: such *klingende Namen* are all but a habit of Wolfram's, especially where major female characters are concerned: Sigune's name is an anagram of "Cusine" (she is Parzival's cousin), Condwiramurs's name means "love-guide," Orgeluse's name is likewise derived from the French "orgueilleuse," Cunneware's suggests "true witness" or "true knowledge," as well as *verecundia*—to name only the most prominent. As has been noted before, *leide* would, in Wolfram's Bavarian dialect, have sounded much like *loyde*. Whether or not one can locate possible French inspirations for the name (such as have been proposed are considerably less compelling) is beside the point: the audience is far more likely to have made the connection available in their own language; indeed, it appears abstruse to argue that they could have missed it.

³⁷ The images have long been recognized as borrowed from the *Minnesang* poet, Reinmar der Alte; see Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:377–79. The overlay of a position inherited from clerical authors with features from the *Minnesang* is characteristic of the second prologue.

The verses in fact offer the solution to a riddle on Wolfram's female ideal that is initiated in the first prologue. They make up only the first of several such riddling representations on a female identity in his text, the *quae est ista* with which we have made repeated acquaintance.³⁸ Tellingly, this riddle, too, is announced by a pun on the name of a woman, but one who represents the opposite relationship of body to truth:

manec wîbes schœne an lobe ist breit:
 ist dâ daz herze conterfeit,
 die lob ich als *ich solde*
 daz safer ime golde.
 ich enhân daz niht für lihtiu dinc,
 swer in den kranken messinc
 verwurket edeln rubîn
 und al die âventiure sîn
 (dem glîche ich rehten wîbes muot).

(3,11–19, emphasis added)

(Many a woman's beauty is admired far and wide, but where the heart is false, the woman I appraise accordingly, as a bauble in a gold setting. But he who works into base brass all the *âventiure* of a noble ruby, this I hold to be no small feat—to this I compare the true woman's disposition.)

These verses constitute the first positive statement in the prologue on Wolfram's art as opposed to what he previously is concerned to reject, and I will discuss their larger context shortly.³⁹ The subject is once again, ostensibly, the true praise of women, and at this point the speaker aligns the false woman, that is, the false exterior, with a stock image of that discourse, the glass bead in a gold setting. This he would praise "as he should" (*als ich solde*) or, with more pregnant meaning, as *Isolde*. The opposite image, a ruby worked into "base brass," is linked to *âventiure*, and here again Wolfram obscures the simple identification. Woman is not *âventiure*; rather, the power of her inner truth is so named.⁴⁰ Moreover, the "name" of the opposite woman, Isolde's counterpart, has been cleverly withheld. In fact, if we are at all prompted (beyond knowledge of the topos) to see the false-hearted woman as an allegory of poetic representation, then it is because her counterpart is upstaged by an

38 The others are well known (though their significance has gone unrecognized): the "one" woman against whom Wolfram rages in lines 114,8–18; the woman who must desire the continuation of the tale in the epilogue to book 6 (lines 337,27–30), and the woman named as a triple hypothetical in the final epilogue to the entire poem (lines 827,25–30). Yet another play on the gesture occurs at the beginning of book 3, discussed below. Clearly, it is the idea of the changeable rather than fixed identity of this female instance that is at stake.

39 The full text of the prologue, with translation, is found in the appendix.

40 Schnyder, "Frauenpassage," 5–7 and *passim*. The medieval idea that the ruby possessed an endogenous light makes it an apt image for the truth that shines through a base exterior; see Engelen, *Edelsteine*, p. 81. But contrary to all previous readings, Schnyder shows there is no lexical support for the idea of *âventiure* as such a "wondrous" or "magical power"; Wolfram's image therefore identifies the image of the ruby's inner light metaphorically with his narrative art—and both with the true woman (thus earlier also Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," p. 435).

image of (poetic) craftsmanship. Woman is no longer the subject under comparison, tenor and vehicle of the metaphor all but change places: her excellence is not equivalent to a ruby in base brass (dim praise, taken as such); rather, the craftsman who can work the power of the ruby into a base material is the true master—and this (by the way) is akin to *rehter wibes muot*, the disposition of a true woman.

To invoke the woman's position in this way anticipates a renaming of Eve and Mary as obverse archetypes of the identification between woman and flesh. Thomasin supplied Helen as the woman who falls victim to the false exterior, Benoît supplied a misogynist rant on women in general, by way of not naming the same "one woman." Wolfram, it has often been claimed, supplies Isolde as a reference to Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.⁴¹ Such a reference would indeed be relevant if not chronologically precluded, but it is by no means necessary.⁴²

Isolde (and not Gottfried's *Isot*) was one of the best-known female figures of contemporary vernacular narrative, whether written or not, although previous written versions of her story existed in Germany as well as France. Wolfram evokes her as a point of reference in the layman's literary experience as such; moreover, he did not need to invent the pun himself, nor even its use as a reference to rhetorically ornamented beauty. In his *Erec*, Hartmann von Aue's knight-narrator declines to describe Enite's beauty "als ich solde," that is, with the rhetorical flourish exhibited by other poets in the description of female excellence.⁴³ Enite/Enide figured as an "anti-Isolde" through the idea of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* as an "anti-Tristan," a romance in praise of marital fidelity. The poetic appraisal of Isolde's beauty figures for Hartmann (as for Wolfram) as a *non plus ultra* in the use of ornamental rhetoric, plainly with no possible reference to Gottfried, but all the more in a moral rejection of rhetorical show—which Wolfram's prologue aligns with the clerical mediation of knowledge.

The visual tradition offers another suggestive image of the popular understanding of Isolde (figs. 7.1 and 7.2). The lover's tryst in the orchard, with King Mark hiding above them in a tree, was the predominant medieval image of the Tristan story, serving in

41 Brall, "Programmatik," 26–32, gives a review of the overall thesis of a literary rivalry between the two authors; accepted by Haug, *LDMA*, p. 175. Nellmann, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 450–51, rejects the connection to Gottfried.

42 Those who argue for an allusion to Gottfried's *Tristan* see Wolfram later amending his text in reaction to Gottfried's remarks in the celebrated passage in praise of vernacular poets (*Tristan*, lines 4619ff., completed after *Parzival*). The allusion would be problematic in other ways as well, as detailed in Nellmann's commentary to the Deutscher Klassiker edition, pp. 450–51. If Wolfram alludes to any specific text, it is far more likely to be Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristrant*, as argued by Bertelsmeier-Kierst, "Verortung," p. 38.

43 *Erec*, lines 1590–603. The connection between the two poets' attitudes is striking: Hartmann professes incapacity by calling himself a *tumber kneht* who lacks the rhetorical expertise of the *wiser man* (lines 1592, 1595), thus setting up the same *tump-wis* opposition that Wolfram uses in his prologue (see below pp. 298–300). The entire gesture occurs as the poet's reaction to the change in his heroine's dress. She lays off the humble rags in which Erec first found her for the rich dress of the court. The narrator reminds us that her true beauty shone forth clearly enough before (lines 1585–89); his unwillingness to describe her now thus appears as an insistence on a more innate beauty.



Figure 7.1. Tristan and Isolde in the orchard, bone casket, 1180–1200. London, British Museum, nr. 1947,0706.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.



Figure 7.2. Tristan and Isolde in the orchard, ivory mirror case, first half of the fourteenth century. Paris, Musée de Cluny–Musée national du Moyen-Âge, Cl. 13928. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Gérard Blot.

numerous extant examples "as the pictorial emblem of the Tristan legend as a whole."⁴⁴ This distillation of the story as icon was constructed as if superimposed on the iconography of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge, resulting in a "visual conjunction of deceitful love and original sin."⁴⁵ Wolfram evokes Isolde as this manifestation of Eve within an autonomous culture of vernacular narrative and does so as a way of defining an alternative model of reading in the body.

The riddle, however, contrives to leave the counterpart to Eve/Isolde unnamed, instead shifting the terms so that the power of *âventiure* is compared to a true woman and the centre of interest becomes a craftsman's commitment to the inner truth. Like the other open questions of the first prologue, this one defers to the narrative, postponing its resolution to the second prologue, where the craftsman of *âventiure* names his female ideal, once again through a pun that refers to his response, his *lob* (praise). The same woman is not to be mistaken as "one and only," because she represents an ideal of a different sort than Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei* or Thomasin's courtly adaptation of the *mulier fortis*. This woman has more in common with Briseida, the new Helen, than she does with such a nonpareil, the woman whom "no other can second." She too serves a poetics of identification in love and suffering, and the images of her loving suffering, which re-embody Mary's experience, constitute proof of the same truth, one available to all who can feel her pain. Thus the parenthesis is closed once the new woman has emerged as the narrative embodiment of the new poetics.

All this has so far been couched in terms of the artist's relationship to his art (or to women). At the outset of the new narrative, the beginning of book 3, the Eve-Mary equation is reiterated and transferred explicitly to the audience. The opening address places the audience squarely in the familiar position, between opposite images of women: "It pains me to the quick, that so many claim the name of woman," the narrator begins, "many of them rush into falsehood's embrace, yet others are utterly free of deceit" (116,5–9). He next evokes the Christian ideal of poverty, espoused by an unnamed woman who is praised in terms that initially suggest the New Eve: "die dolte ein wîp durch triuwe: / des wart ir gabe niuwe / ze himel mit endelôser gebe" (Such poverty one woman endured for the sake of *triuwe*; thereof she made a heavenly offering both endless and ever new) (116,19–21). The audience—men and women alike—is then put to a shaming (self-)examination:

ich wæne ir nu vil wênic lebe,
die junc der erden rîhtuom
liezen durch des himeles ruom.
ich erkenne ir nehein.
man und wîp mir sint al ein:
die mîdantz al gelîche.

(116,22–27)

⁴⁴ Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," p. 16; on the body of medieval visual artefacts of the Tristan legend, see Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," pp. 7–8. "Nearly half" of these show the scene in question.

⁴⁵ Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," p. 16.

(I'll wager there are precious few alive today who would in youth abandon worldly wealth and fame for the glory of Heaven. I can't make out even one! Whether man or woman makes no difference: they shun the idea all alike.)

Quae est ista? If not Mary, then surely another female saint similarly beloved. The following lines respond: "frou Herzeloyde diu rîche / ir drier lande wart ein gast: / si truoc der freuden mangels last" (Lady Herzeloyde, once rich and powerful, abandoned her three kingdoms: she bore the burden of joyless days) (116,28–30). Thus the narrator not only concludes his affirmation of Herzeloyde's testimony but also now explicitly recommends her "reading" model to his audience.

In this resumed narration, the very name "woman" has acquired a value of which one must first prove one's worthiness; Wolfram evokes *wîpheit*, womanhood, as an "order" whose true nature—the substance of its rule, one might say—is found in *triuwe*: "wîpheit, dîn ordenlîcher site, / dem vert und fuor ie triuwe mite" ("Womanhood, the nature of your order was ever and remains to *triuwe* bound") (116,13–14).⁴⁶ The entire audience, *man und wîp ... al ein*, is bound to prove itself worthy of this order. Benoît's trap, which inverts audience expectations to enlist their participation in a narrative enterprise of "being her," has been sprung and instead reformulated as a solemn contract, for the woman transformed is in this case already manifest as the origin of the tale. In a statement replete with multiple meanings, the distinction between true and false women from the opening lines (116,5–9) is said to "divide the tales": "sus teilent sich diu mære" (116,10).⁴⁷ Placed on this all-important narrative seam, the words refer to Gahmuret's story and that of Parzival—the two lives of Herzeloyde. They may equally be taken to announce the same distinction as "the touchstone of this tale"—or indeed of all tales.⁴⁸ For these lines complete Wolfram's initiation of audience and *âventiure* into the new female poetics of body and truth. The all-determining distinction between the false and the true body thus alludes to the transformation in the text, to that envisioned among its audience, and finally to a transformation of reading itself. This was the argument's conclusion; it remains for us to trace its beginnings.

The primary task of Wolfram's first prologue is to set the stage with a progression of narrator and audience identities whose relationship to meaning and the narrative is finally left unresolved.⁴⁹ The first half (1,1–2,22), often called the "men's prologue" because it focuses on *mannes muot* (the man's disposition, 1,5)—the same that has proven such a conundrum for modern scholarship—sets up an opposition between clerical instruction and the knight's narrative. With this gesture romance seeks its place

⁴⁶ The term *triuwe* (loyalty, love, devotion) somewhat defies translation; see p. 308, below.

⁴⁷ The first ten lines of the opening read: "Ez machet trûric mir den lip, / daz alsô mangiu heizet wîp / ir stimme sint gelîche hel: / geguoge sint gein valsche snel, / etslîche valsches laere: / sus teilent sich diu mære. / daz die gelîche sint genamt, / des hât mîn herze sich geschamt. / wîpheit, dîn ordenlîcher site, / dem vert und fuor ie triuwe mite" (116,1–10).

⁴⁸ *Mære* is here a collective plural (cf. modern English "news"), which leaves the referent (this tale or all tales) ambiguous.

⁴⁹ In what follows, I rely on the evidence and conclusions presented in Powell, "Parzival'-Prolog." See also Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 408–41.

by impinging directly upon the traditional delivery of religious truth to lay folk. In an abrupt shift, the argument then makes a preliminary exposition of *wîbes muot* (women's disposition) (2,23–3,34). An audience position between false and true female beauty is put forward as a counterweight or complement to the preceding discussion of *mannes muot* and its own struggle to grasp the truth. Thus, for the contemporary audience, the players—*pfaffen, rîter, frouwen* (clerics, knights, women)—had been identified and the stakes were clear, but the translation of the solution, Mary's reading, onto their stage had yet to be performed. The narrator then breaks off this venture into Thomasin's territory, his moral examination of man and woman (*wîp unde man ze rehte prûeven*, 3,25–26), as "it would make a weary tale," and turns instead to the story itself: "nu hoert dirre âventiure site" (3,27–28), that is, "now hear how this story goes," its "custom" or "character." With the resumption of the narrative in book 3, audience, narrative and narrator alike have all been enlisted in the enterprise of reading in the body; the movement from the Old to the New Eve transforms narrative as it transforms body. The repeatedly repackaged riddle on the identity of the poet's Lady is no less than the key to Wolfram's poetics of narrative and truth.

The stated ambitions of the prologue are far larger than what it delivers. It proposes, at least implicitly, to mediate between extremes of the human condition poised between good and evil, to distinguish (*prûeven*) the moral worth of men and women alike, to serve as a touchstone for the soul's progress to Heaven or its fall into Hell, and to tell a story of such imaginative dimensions as would exhaust the capacities of three such as the narrator himself. Notably, all these, except the fourth, are unusual claims for a secular narrative; in Thomasin's moral instruction, on the other hand, we too would find them quite within their place. The subject of the prologue's opening is in fact the mediation of instruction across the divide between *clericus* and *laicus*, and it begins in the voice of such a clerical instructor:

Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
gesmæhet unde gezieret
ist, swâ sich parrieret
unverzaget mannes muot,
als agelstern varwe tuot.
der mac dennoch wesen geil:
wand an im sint beidiu teil,
des himels und der helle.
der unstæte geselle
hât die swarzen varwe gar,
und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
sô habet sich an die blanken
der mit stæten gedanken.
diz vliegende bîspel
ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
sine mugens niht erdenken:

(1, 1–14)

(Where doubt lives close by the heart, the soul is surely imperilled. Wherever the steadfast, manly disposition makes room for company, it is both debased and glorified, as in the colouring of the magpie. Such a one can still meet with a happy end, for in him both Heaven and Hell have a part. The wholly inconstant fellow is black all over, and will come to a dark end, while he whose intentions do not waver, holds fast to the light. This fluttering fable flies too fast for simple folk, they can't think it through:)

The opening fourteen lines are designated as a *bîspel*, a rhetorical figure that corresponds largely to the Latin *exemplum*, for it denoted the demonstration of a moral message through application of the methods of *significatio* (what Thomasin refers to in German as *bezeichnenunge*) to an image isolated from the natural world or human behaviour—in this case the colouring of the magpie.⁵⁰ It was, then (this, too, is clear in Thomasin's presentation), a standard vehicle of clerical instruction.⁵¹ With lines 15–16, the prologue thus identifies a rhetorical mode in one breath with the audience to whom it is directed: “diz vliegende bîspel / ist tumben liuten gar ze snel” (this fluttering fable flies too fast for simple folk) (1,15–16). That is: no sooner is the communication staged than it is also proclaimed unsuccessful.⁵²

For nearly two centuries, interpretation of this passage was deflected into all manner of difficulties because this key identification of the audience was misunderstood.⁵³ *Tumbe liute* stands in Wolfram's usage for the *illitterati*, and it is especially notable that he takes this understanding from previous works in the German tradition that adapt religious learning for the lay public.⁵⁴ The same appeal to the *sermo humilis* tradition connoted a rejection of learning and eloquence as tainted by worldly vanity.⁵⁵ Read through this understanding, the opening confrontation between an audience of simple folk and the learned sophistry of the *bîspel* (critics' lack of success in resolving it stands witness) suggests for Wolfram's audience the presentation of an alternative.

Wolfram's *bîspel* is a travesty of a learned method of moral instruction.⁵⁶ As has been demonstrated often enough, the argument consistently assumes a continuity between

50 Powell, “‘Parzival’-Prolog,” 65–68; also Ohlenroth, “Wolframs Widerpart,” 34–36. On the art of the *bîspel*, see Yao, *Exempelgebrauch*; and De Boor, *Fabel und Bîspel*.

51 Thomasin places *bîspel* alongside the role of the exemplary stories found in “the old books” as complementary vehicles of moral instruction. The one offers models from the past, the other from the visible world of daily life (*Der welsche Gast*, lines 10675–80 and 10899–905).

52 Powell, “‘Parzival’-Prolog,” 62–64.

53 Ever since the text's first editor, Karl Lachmann, referred to the *tumbe liute* as “die Leichtsinigen,” the imprudent or foolish, it has been taken as all but given that “no audience member would want to find himself aligned with the *tumben*.” See, respectively, Lachmann, “Eingang des Parzivals,” p. 488; and Schirok, “Konzept,” 75.

54 Powell, “‘Parzival’-Prolog,” 62–64, 69–77. The term was a common audience designator in the *bîspel* tradition. Wolfram's understanding, however, appears closest to that of Armer Hartmann in his *Rede vom Glouben*, a vernacular adaptation of the creed.

55 Powell, “‘Parzival’-Prolog,” 71–73; more generally, Auerbach, *Literary Language*, pp. 25–66.

56 Likewise Brall, “Programmatik,” 17, 23.

colour and character that it inconsistently applies.⁵⁷ The result is a conundrum: either the possibility of salvation is framed as a dualistic struggle between black and white, in which any admixture of the two would imperil the soul, or such a mixture is a given of the human condition (*parrieret sein*), and the object is then not to struggle against this condition but to attain salvation within or through it. But Wolfram's point concerns not so much this content as it does its delivery: the initiated communication, this delivery of instruction, fails, and it does so because *the mediating form* is inappropriate to the capacities of its intended audience. As he then elaborates, it flitters or flutters about, leaps this way and that (like a startled hare); finally, it is no more reliable than fleeting reflections in a mirror (*zin anderthalb ame glase*), or the visions of one who himself cannot see (*des blinden troum*): "this dim and darkling light offers little comfort indeed" (cf. 1,18–25).⁵⁸ Beasts and birds and their allegorical meanings, the *speculum* as the symbol of such "reading," and the exegetical interpretation of dreams: none of this is of any true comfort to the simple soul poised between damnation and redemption. This "flight into images"⁵⁹ of the initial exposition is a critique of the schoolman's poetics of material apparitions and their meanings, of a mediation of moral knowledge that claims on the one hand that all physical form is but a mirror that reveals God's truth, and on the other disparages all such form as both ephemeral and deceiving—a paradox that made the cleric's intervention indispensable, for it was only his learning that could decode the bodily cover as a symbolic map of the latent truth.

The initial staging of the communication, then, calls the clerical instructor onto the stage to indict and dismiss him. With the subsequent shift to remarks on *disiu mære* (Wolfram's tale) just such a *wîser*, or learned man, one seen to insist on the delivery of "good teaching" and the appropriate *stiure* (guidance) to seek it out, is treated to his just desserts. For, as Wolfram says, here he can get his fill of ins and outs, ups and downs and zigzagging meanings; here meaning is made in the saddle of the jousting knight:

ouch erkante ich nie sô wîsen man,
 ern möhte gerne künde hân,
 welher stiure disiu mære gernt
 und waz si guoter lère wernt.
 dar an si nimmer des verzagent,
 beidiu si vliehent unde jagent,
 si entwichent unde kêrent,
 si lasternt unde erent.
 swer mit disen schanzen allen kan,
 an dem hât witze wol getân,
 der sich niht versizet noch vergêt
 und sich anders wol verstêt.

(2,5–16)

⁵⁷ Brall, "Programmatik," 9; Stein, *Studien*, p. 173; Groos, *Romancing the Grail*, p. 2; For the principle different interpretations, see Nellman, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 445–47.

⁵⁸ See the full text, with translation and explanatory remarks, in the appendix; also Martin, *Kommentar*, p. 6; and Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog," 64, 66–67, 82.

⁵⁹ Haug, "Konzept," 221 speaks of a "Bilderflucht."

(And I've yet to meet a man so very learned that he didn't himself need to ask how to approach *this* story and what good teaching it delivers. It's no slouch on that score! It'll show you its heels and then come charging, it will leave you the field and then take it back again, thus doling out both shame and honour. He who can hold the saddle through all these ups and downs, he has the gift of wit indeed: one who neither sits out the fight or takes to flight and other-wise knows where he stands.)

The "man's prologue" has been appropriately designated as such in that it confronts the cleric first with the layman's incapacity and then with his no less formidable expertise as knight or *miles*. Verses 2,9 to 2,12 serve to identify this latter expertise—the terminology describes tournament technique—with the necessary capacity to understand Wolfram's tale, *disiu mære*.⁶⁰ There is no place on Wolfram's wild ride for fellows (clerics) who would rather sit on their duffs (*versitzen*) or are likely to waver and wander from the field (*vergên*); here they would learn to "stand their man," which is to understand in a different way (*anders wol verstên*).⁶¹ And with this brilliantly multifaceted retort, the project is launched. The perils and vicissitudes of a chivalric existence, the world of the *miles*, are the medium of this opposite way of knowing. The cleric's disingenuous sophistry, meanwhile, has drawn the ethical charge of *untriuwe*; the *wenken*, or fickle mutability, of his representations of truth call their purveyor equally into question:

wil ich triwe vinden
aldâ si kan verswinden,
als viur in dem brunnen
unt daz tou von der sunnen?
(2,1–4)

(Shall I seek true fellowship [*triuwe*] where it's as like to vanish as fire in a fountain or dew under the sun?)

His *muot* is therefore identified as the bedfellow of falseness and consigned to the fire of Hell—precisely where, and with analogous justification, Thomasin places Arthur:

valsch geselleclîcher muot
ist zem hellefiure guot,
und ist hôher werdekeit ein hagel.
(2,17–19)

(the disposition of false friends deserves the fire of Hell and batters noble bearing like a hailstorm.)

This stage belongs to the narrating knight. "Disiu âventiure vert âne der buoche stiure!" (This knight's adventure rides without a bookish bridle!) (115,29–30).

With this much in place, the prologue as a whole not only offers a transparent confrontation between two different models of knowledge and its delivery, it also reads like

⁶⁰ Martin, *Kommentar*, p. 9; Brall, "Programmatik," 24.

⁶¹ I have intentionally offered different, complementary renderings of this passage in an attempt to capture the various layers of the puns.

a map of the logical argument for woman's reading. In the first, the "men's" section, we are confronted with a dipartite division of humanity into the learned and the unlearned, with no distinction of gender necessarily implied; that is, *mannes muot* might comprise all humanity before God. This dipartite division results in an impasse, the failure of the cleric to provide for the layman's redemption. In the second section, the discussion abruptly shifts to women's dispensation, *wibes muot*, and the distinction based on knowledge and learning capacities is apparently superseded by this introduction of a gender distinction. Man, then, is either humanity or only its male members or male principle, depending on the terms chosen for discussion, and intellectual capacity is the distinguishing factor only as long as man is all of humanity. This view of humanity as "man" results in exclusion and hierarchy based on access to learned methods. Insistence on the category "woman," on the other hand, makes an all-encompassing opposition between the ignorant and the learned into only one male half of a new gender equation, or an equation, perhaps, in which all humanity is one before God. If we can all be "man," so too we can all be "woman."

Despite what I have argued is the resultant transparency of this argument, its novelty in another regard should not be overlooked. Neither this adversarial valence of the *clericus-laicus* opposition nor even the tripartite audience typology of *pfaffen-leien-frouwen* had, before *Parzival*, been introduced onto the stage of *aventure*, much less that of its more "historical" and learned predecessors, the romances of antiquity. In the same way, the other texts considered here, with the partial exception of the *Eructavit*, have been more concerned with a project of *rapprochement*, a negotiation of the distance between "readers" and "non-readers," than inclined to polemic. This is no less true of the self-proclaimed literate knight, Hartmann von Aue,⁶² than it is of avowedly clerical authors like Benoît or Wolfram's other predecessors, Chrétien de Troyes and Heinrich von Veldeke. The shift in Wolfram's position is only comprehensible to his audience as a move to assimilate to the project of romance narrative a discourse thus far specific to religious reading, the mediation of the Word for lay audiences, and thus to present his narrative as a similarly alternative entry into knowledge. For this reason the layman discharges the clerical gatekeeper openly and as a prerequisite, no less, to the telling of his tale.⁶³

But where is the substance of his claim, what is the content of *anders wol verstên*—aside from the tournament pun? The knight and his jousting do not signify, in themselves, a different reading path to the truth, whether or not they have successfully lifted the cleric out of the saddle. Thomasin began by foregrounding woman's failing as proof positive that beauty and body are never free of deceit and from there proceeded to concede to *aventure* only so much truth as might be concealed beneath such deceiving

⁶² In his own prologues, Hartmann twice calls himself a "learned knight" who composed with the help of books; cf. *Der arme Heinrich*, lines 1–3; *Iwein*, lines 21–22.

⁶³ There is therefore neither room nor need here for an adversary from within the realm of vernacular narrative itself (such as the scholarship has almost invariably assumed); the idea is nearly a logical contradiction. Wolfram "leaps" from a vantage point he owes to his predecessors and still in their cause. See Powell, "'Parzival'-Prolog," 51, 60, 85–86.

exteriors. His real point only emerges once read within this presentation of “good and bad reading”—in fact the restoration of a traditional view of woman, body and truth. The missing dimension in Wolfram’s argument likewise first acquires real contours through his ensuing discussion of women’s *zîl*, their reading objective. It proceeds in the reverse direction, first indicting the learned manipulation of material forms to then advance woman and body as the abject vehicles of an accessible truth.

On its surface, we could easily mistake Wolfram’s “women’s prologue” for a page out of a standard book of instruction on morals and social mores, and, until recently, it was frequently dismissed as such.⁶⁴ It is instead where he shows his audience “how to read.” Women’s reading objective, as we saw above, is made one with the attempt to read woman, and the whole breaks off with an open parenthesis, an equation between the inner truth of *âventiure* and *rehter wîbes muot*, the disposition of the true woman. Here we discover in addition how this disposition is aligned with *triuwe*, long-suffering devotion. Together, *wîbes muot*, *âventiure* and *triuwe* form the substance of Wolfram’s claim to pre-eminence in the layman’s quest for truth.

The women’s prologue opens with the narrator—who thus slips from his stirrups into the shoes of women’s spiritual advisers—promising that his counsel (*râten*) will show them where best to bestow their *prîs* and *êre*, their reputation and their honour.⁶⁵

Dise manger slahte underbint
jedoch niht gar von manne sint.
für diu wîp stôze ich disiu zîl:⁶⁶
swelhiu mîn râten merken wil,
diu sol wîzen war si kêre
ir prîs und ir êre,
und wem si dâ nâch sî bereit
minne und ir werdekeit,
sô daz si niht geriuwe
ir kiusche und ir triuwe.

(2,23–3,2)

(But all these deliberations pertain by no means only to men. For the women I promise this reward: she who pays heed to my counsel will know well where to entrust her honour and her good name, likewise on whom she should thereafter bestow her love and her precious person, such that her chaste virtue and her true devotion not be abused.)

Mîn râten (line 2,26) does not refer to the lines that follow but rather to the entire process of the narrative; the speaker engages women as his audience by promising the

⁶⁴ For example, Schröder, “Prolog,” p. 187; and *LDMA*, p. 175. Among the few exceptions are: Schnyder, “Frauenpassage”; and Rausch, “Destruktion der Fiktion,” 55–58 (further literature cited there). My own reading remains largely as presented in Powell, “Instruction for Religious Women,” pp. 430–41.

⁶⁵ On the difficulty of translating *prîs*, see this passage in the appendix.

⁶⁶ See the note on this passage in the appendix.

means to their *zil*, their moral end, as well.⁶⁷ *Dâ nâch*, that is, after the performance, they will know where best to bestow their love such that their trust is not abused. Already in these lines, praise and judgment of women become synonymous with the impending narration and its reception, and *kiusche* and *triuwe* are as much aspects of this communication as of a potential love relationship.⁶⁸ The woman brings something to the performance, *triuwe*, an investment of loving constancy and faithful love, that the narrator promises will not be disappointed. By implication, and based as well on the preceding rejection of the cleric's *untriuwe*, the narrator promises equal returns, his own *triuwe* as their proper companion. Both the diction and the idea of reciprocity anticipate the later presentation of Herzeloyde and her place as the narrator's model of *kiusche* and *triuwe*. But here in the prologue we are speaking, ostensibly, of the audience's relationship to the narrator, while there it is the narrator's relationship to what he has narrated that is at stake. At opposite ends of the narrative arabesque we find the same woman, once as an audience, once as representational ideal. The task of reading woman is the same as that of the woman's reading; the identity between the woman inside and outside the narrative frames the entire exposition.

This contract between the narrator and his female audience is then solidified in an indirect prayer whose placement recalls that of a *Fürbitte*, a prayer in which the poet traditionally submits himself and his work to God's judgment:

vor gote ich guoten wîben bite,
daz in rehtiu mâze volge mite.
scham ist ein slôz ob allen siten:
ich endarf in niht mêr heiles biten.

(3,3–3,6)

(Before God I pray that all good women might keep proper discretion as their constant companion. Modesty holds the key to all other virtues; I can wish their souls no greater help.)

The difference is plain enough: Wolfram does not pray for his poem or for himself, but rather for his audience.⁶⁹ The same audience, the *sinnec wîp* whom he calls upon in the epilogue to book 6, is the receptive instance on which the truth of his endeavour depends.⁷⁰ Narration thus becomes a form of service to women, or *Frauendienst*, but if this is true, then it is because the woman-as-audience performs a receptive act as a form of worship, or *Gottesdienst*.⁷¹ We will discover the full meaning of this equation in the portrayal of Herzeloyde. The remainder of the remarks to women (as discussed above) then present the narrative, its proper reception, and the audience all at once within the

⁶⁷ Schnyder, "Frauenpassage," 11; Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," p. 431.

⁶⁸ Powell, "Instruction for Religious Women," pp. 431–32; similarly, Schnyder, "Frauenpassage," 11–13.

⁶⁹ Schnyder, "Frauenpassage," 11–12.

⁷⁰ See the passage and the discussion in chapter 1, pp. 20–21.

⁷¹ Similarly, Schnyder, "Frauenpassage," 15.

opposition between the false and the true woman, false and true praise. Masterfully, this activation of the woman's reading position takes the form of a contrafact of the earlier discussion. The images of paradox that there defined and disparaged material representations here characterize the false woman (3,8–9), that is, only the *false* exterior, the brilliance of form and *schæne*. "Diu valsche erwirbet valschen prîs" (The false woman reaps false praise) (3,7), the narrator begins, and then identifies *this* woman with an image of inconstancy that recalls the same used to indict the cleric's allegoresis: her repute fades like thin ice in the August sun.⁷² As an attribute of the body-to-be-read, then, an attribute of representational art, the true woman, or women's *triuwe*, is the antipode of the cleric's *untriuwe*. The false woman does not display bodily form as inherently deceptive, but rather stands in for the cleric's unreliable conceit, the (arbitrary) construction of continuity between representation and truth by means of rhetorical artifice. The proper orientation to *these* "pretty lies" is then made clear in an opposition between two women, the one defined by the "praise" her falseness deserves (*loben als ich solde/Isolde*), and the other, no less a poetic construction, identified with a craftsman's commitment to the inner truth; that is, the truth as conveyed in the base body of *âventiure*. The stage is now set to perform Benoît's exercise in leading the audience from Eve to Mary, a task accomplished in Wolfram's poem as a mere prelude to the "new tale."

Thus, in Wolfram's first prologue, the cleric's way to salvation through allegoresis is juxtaposed with a layman's (knight's) persevering struggle amid the vicissitudes of worldly experience; *clericus* and *miles* emerge between the lines of a reflection on signs (*bezeichnenunge*) and salvation only to give way to woman as herself sign and embodiment of truth—and to the voice of her instructor. The tension between the principles of exclusion and inclusion, between the dualistic opposition of black and white and *parrieret sein*, that shapes the *bîspel* in fact governs the remainder of the prologue and is implicitly resolved there though an articulation of competing modes of reading, each of which mirrors one of the opening ontological positions as a hermeneutic task. The woman's life in-corporates the task of distinguishing between *varwe* and *muot*, exterior and character, body and truth as the attempt to realize a self-effacing exterior that no longer conceals: once again, she reifies the reading task that polarized the terms of the *laicus-clericus* opposition. Through these positions and their several relationships to one and the same enterprise Wolfram constructs his prologue to describe generations in a poetological history of his genre.

For Wolfram's *âventiure* as for the texts of the new *romans* tradition examined earlier, woman thus embodies the new poetics: it is not an exegesis of the outer form that will reveal the truth but rather the ability—or, as Wolfram presents it—the *willingness* to perceive truth in and through a base exterior; not knowledge, not method, but an audience response, *rehter wîbes muot*. As a designator both of the knight's experience and of the literary event, the key term, *âventiure*, is introduced such that narrative art, chivalric experience, and the appraisal of women converge on the as yet still incomplete

72 Cf. lines 3,7–10 in the appendix and the corresponding note.

proposition of the knight's "reading." It is then also *âventiure*, the narrative process and its unexpected twists of fate, that finally gives the image of woman's perfection a name: *Herze-Leid*.

Lactans Dolorosa: Herzeloide and Mary's Reading

Herzeloide's transformation, as I have indicated, is a demonstration of how meaning is made in Wolfram's romance. The key moments in the demonstration are two, and each figures as a lactation, something medieval romance narrative had never witnessed before. These are made to emerge from the circumstances of Herzeloide's life such that the whole functions as the restaging of Mary's reading in the layman's narrative world: it is not Mary's person or Mary's place as mother of God or *theotokos* that is at stake but rather the truth that is communicated to humanity through her fulfilment of the images of the biblical text. Herzeloide's experience constitutes a re-embodiment, a vernacular renewal, of Mary's original experience as *sponsa et mater*, the experience that manifests woman as the body of the Word.

Herzeloide's first lactation, an auto-lactation, occurs where the audience expects the exhibition of a woman's grief.⁷³ That the one exhibition can replace or repress the other is, to some extent, the result of an illusion: the audience only learns that the queen is pregnant once she already lies unconscious on the ground, having fainted at the news of Gahmuret's death. The woman who regains consciousness is thus newly widowed as well as newly an expectant mother; the narration contrives to compress the two as if the result of one event. Herzeloide then affirms this impression as her own understanding of her new state, "ich ... bin sîn mouter und sîn wîp" (I ... am his mother and his wife) (109,25). These words stand on the one hand for her own confusion: all that remains of Gahmuret is the child she carries in her womb. On the other, they mirror Mary's experience as the words only Mary can truly speak: *sponsa et mater sum*.⁷⁴ The phrase itself contains the full meaning of Mary's reading: she is both identities at once, the letter and the gloss, the image and its living realization as *historia*. Herzeloide's condition is reported such that she can plausibly make the same statement, that is, such that her experience begins to reveal Mary's own. That she then addresses her own breasts and their milk as manifest proof of her new state, herself sucks of their milk, besprinkles her body with it, and declares this her rightful baptism: all these follow, as we shall see, from the same principle of representation, her place as the revelation of Mary's truth in the body of the layman's narrative.

The same is true of the second lactation, when she nurses her infant son. Again, the mother "awakens" into new consciousness. The text uses the same verb, *versinnen*, in

⁷³ Attempts to understand the passage as the expression of grief have not proved successful. See Greenfield, "Zweifache Witwe," pp. 135–39. Accordingly, Herzeloide does not figure in the survey of courtly mourning in Küsters, "Klagefiguren."

⁷⁴ The echo has been noted before, but with no satisfying explanation; see Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:336–37.

either case, in the second without apparent motivation.⁷⁵ And again it is the compression of her experience of a mother's joy and a widow's grief that contrives to fix a lasting image for the audience: "it seemed to her that her desire had conjured Gahmuret into her arms," we are told, as she now weeps, in fact, over the infant son who also sucks from her breast.⁷⁶ The second scene is as if the material fulfilment of the first. What Herzeloide foresees as her role in life in the first scene—"Often I shall sprinkle myself with you (her milk) and with my eyes, outwardly and inwardly, for I wish to mourn my Gahmuret"—that is, the promise contained in her swollen breasts and their milk is fulfilled in the second lactation.⁷⁷ This fulfilment applies as well to the baptism she evoked but in this case transferred to her son, who receives no other baptism.⁷⁸ In either case, the love for husband and son, the widow's grief and the mother's love, are experienced as one; her response to either and both is the same: grieving lactation. The *Lactans dolorosa*, as the text constructs the experience, is an image of the fusion of the Annunciation (*conceptio*) and the Passion (*compassio*) as the two moments in which woman as body was one with the Word.

As she thus carries his narrative from an old order to a new, Wolfram's Herzeloide becomes a re-embodiment of Mary's entry into knowledge as Rupert had staged the same in his *De incarnatione Domini*. The experience cannot, however, be communicated by allusion to the text of a monk's *lectio divina*; it must instead be delivered in a language and a use of images that become in themselves comprehensible to the audience's understanding. A mother's breasts and breastfeeding offered Wolfram the necessary associations for this purpose; they are used in this scene to articulate *triuwe* as the human capacity to reciprocate God's loving sacrifice for humanity; to reach that state of humility, then, in which body can reveal truth.

Taken as parallel to Rupert's understanding of Mary's knowing, Herzeloide's double lactation acquires a justification, if not an explanation: Mary first knew the Word in the kiss of Canticles 1:1, which Rupert saw as the Annunciation. This experience doubled with drinking from the breasts of the Spirit, which, as required by the oddity of the biblical text, the bride (and not the bridegroom) praises in the following image of the same verse. Thus, in Rupert's understanding, Mary, too, experienced two lactations, one in which she drinks and one in which she nurses, but the first did not involve her own milk.

75 Line 109,18: "Aldâ wart ir versinnen kunt" (In that moment she recognized her consciousness); and line 112,21: dô diu künigin sich versan" (When the queen gained consciousness). The translation of these passages is intentionally literal; see the discussion of *sin*, below, pp. 321–23.

76 "Si dûht, di hete Gahmureten / wieder an ir arm erbeten" (113,13–14).

77 "Ich sol mich begiezen vil / mit dir und mit den ougen, / offenliche und tougen: / wand ich wil Gahmureten clagen" (111,10–13).

78 Also noted by Wolf, "Meditationsgeflecht," 16n14, this point has received little attention elsewhere. The omission is no matter of narrative economy, as the parodic staging of the baptism of Parzival's heathen half-brother Feirefiz at the poem's conclusion—as a precondition of the ability to see the Grail—serves retrospectively to beg the question. Cf. Gnädinger, "Wasser—Taufe—Tränen," 67–69.

Even if Rupert's treatment inspired Wolfram's, however, it was certainly not an exclusive source. Rupert was not alone in understanding the kiss of Canticles 1:1 as a conception of the Word through the Spirit, and the words of a more celebrated commentator come surprisingly close to anticipating Herzeloide's initial thoughts and actions. In the following passage, Bernard of Clairvaux describes the experience of the soul seeking its beloved in prayer. The breasts of Canticles 1:1, first praised as the bridegroom's, as the breasts of grace, then become, secondarily, hers:

Kissing her, the bridegroom satisfies her desire and thus fulfills in her the Word that is written, "Thou hast given her her heart's desire, and what her lips longed for, you have not denied her" [Psalm 20:3]. And this is manifest in the milk that fills her breasts. For the holy kiss is of such powerful effect that no sooner has she received it than the bride becomes pregnant, her breasts begin to swell and seem to burst with milk as proof of her new state. Those who persist in frequent prayer have experienced that of which I speak. ... Thus the bridegroom can say, "Your wish has been fulfilled, my bride, and it is a sign of this that 'Your breasts are sweeter than wine' [Canticles 1:1]. You will know that you have received the kiss when you feel yourself to be pregnant. For this reason your breasts have begun to swell."⁷⁹

Herzeloide exhibits her breasts and their milk "as proof of her new state" and as proof of *gotes triuwe*. In her initial mourning recollection of Gahmuret, she recalls their conjugal embrace as the child's origin and pleads with God to show *getriuwe sinne* by bringing the seed to fruit (lines 109,26–110,1). In the next scene—Wolfram introduces it as "ein ander mære" (110,10)—she repeats this plea as "mînes herzen bete" (my heart's prayer) (110,16). She then tears open her bodice to expose her swollen breasts as proof of the child's coming, sent before him "since I first felt him living in my body" (cf. lines 110,30–111,2). Their milk would offer her a fitting baptism, for it is evidence of a covenant fulfilled between God and humankind, the answer to her prayer: "Diu frouwe ir willen dar an sach, / daz diu spîse was ir herzen dach" (The lady recognized her wish had been fulfilled, for the milk had become her heart's covering) (111,5–6). Thus, the milk is addressed with the words, "du bist von triuwen komen" (out of *triuwe* you have come to me) (111,7).

Bernard's text relies on knowledge of the relationship between pregnancy, swelling breasts and their milk, and impending birth to make the images of the Song intelligible as metaphors for spiritual experience. Wolfram's text uses the same knowledge to exhibit a woman's experience of these events as *proof of a spiritual experience*, a revelation of *triuwe* as reciprocal devotion between God and humankind. For this he relies, whether directly or indirectly, on Rupert's understanding of Mary's experience as the bodily realization of the scriptural images, as he likewise relies on other aspects of Rupert's

⁷⁹ "[Sponsus] annuit voto, dat osculum, impletque in ea sermonem qui scriptus est: Desiderium coridis eius tribuisti ei, et voluntate labiorum eius non fraudisti eum. Quod et probat ex eius uberum repletione. Tanta enim efficacia osculum sanctum est, ut ex ipso mox, cum acceperit illud, sponsa concipiat, tumescentibus nimirum uberibus, et lacte quasi pinguescentibus in testimonium. Quibus studium est orare frequenter; experti sunt quod dico. ... Dicat ergo, 'Habes, sponsa, quod petisti, et hoc tibi signum, quia meliora facta sunt ubera tua vino: hinc te scilicet noveris osculum accepisse, quod te concepisse sentis. Unde et ubera tibi intumuerunt.'" *Sermones super Cantica*, 9.7, p. 46.

portrayal. To these we must return shortly. First it is instructive to follow Herzeloide's presentation of the epiphany of *triuwe*.

Triuwe is in fact ascribed to all manner of characters and actions in Wolfram's text; it is one of the most commonly evoked positive attributes.⁸⁰ Most readily identified with *fidelitas* and *pietas*—and thus with the loyalty, or *Treue*, associated with feudal and filial bonds—in Wolfram's world *triuwe*, like God's truth, is potentially manifest everywhere.⁸¹ It is nevertheless—or for this very reason—expressly identified with no less than God and God-as-love. As Trevrizent instructs Parzival, “got selbe ein triuwe ist” (*triuwe* is the essence of God himself) (462,19); furthermore, God, most especially as the Son, is likewise the *wäre minnaere* (466,1), the true lover. And in an excursus on “good” and “bad” love (lines 532,1–19), the narrator distinguishes erotic attraction from love as experienced by those who know *herzenlîchiu triwe* (heartfelt love). The latter is no temporary affliction but rather the constant accompaniment of their existence and incorporates joy and sorrow equally. He then states apodictically, “reht minne ist wâriu triuwe” (love properly conceived is true *triuwe*) (532,10). His authority to distinguish in this question can itself stem only from *triuwe*: “sol ich der wâren minne jehn, / diu muoz durch triwe mir geschehn” (If I am to speak of true love, then it must come to me through *triuwe*) (532,17–18). In Herzeloide's case, as Sigune informs Parzival, “grôz liebe ier solch herzen furch / mit dîner muoter triuwe” (True love ploughed such a furrow in your mother's heart with her *triuwe*) (140,18–19). As Herzeloide and later Sigune exhibit it, *triuwe* is best understood as the capacity to suffer for another in love, to embrace the other no less in pain than in love, that we have found at the centre of *romans* translation of Mary's reading and at the centre of “the problem of the woman reader.”⁸² As Wolfram develops the concept above all through these two figures, its function and significance make it closely comparable, in fact, to Landri's *devociions de cuers*. Both terms denote the potential of *fidelitas*, *caritas*, and *compassio* alike to move the soul towards God, to bring forth in humanity its innate resemblance to the divine, the *imago dei*.⁸³

⁸⁰ For a comprehensive review of the place of *triuwe* in *Parzival*, see Schmid, *Studien*, pp. 111–86, esp. pp. 155, 168, 173–74, 179–84, and 186.

⁸¹ To insist on the term's relationship to the feudal bond is only to state the etymologically obvious. The extent to which Wolfram enlarges this concept to comprise a religious experience of *compassio* has been established at least since the work of Schwietering (see the following note and above, p. 203 note 20). See also Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 275, 279–84.

⁸² Julius Schwietering argued that Wolfram's *triuwe* reflects a new religious feeling of the twelfth century that focused on the sufferings of Christ and compassion from man to man: “Leiden ist *triuwe* und trifft ins Herz” (Schwietering, “Parzivals Schuld,” p. 378).

⁸³ As I have argued before, *triuwe* is remarkably similar both in etymological development and range of meaning to the twelfth century understanding of the term *devotio* and may be Wolfram's translation of that term, see Powell, “Instruction for Religious Women,” pp. 463–64; and Chatillon, “Devotio,” 702–16 at 702–5 and 708. *Devotio* has likewise been identified with the experience of loving suffering that is the object of the text-image tradition that (later) precipitates in visual art as the *pietà*; see Schawe, “Pietà und Hoheslied.”

Triuwe accompanies the events surrounding Parzival's birth like a leitmotif, evoked all but exclusively by Herzeloide herself.⁸⁴ Her testimony is affirmed and continued in the voice of the narrator in the transition to the new narrative.⁸⁵ This narrator's affirmation begins in the concluding lines of book 2, in the form of an echo of Herzeloide's words: as she mourns Gahmuret, Herzeloide rhymes *wîbes riuwe* (women's sorrow) with *manlîch triuwe* (manly *triuwe*) (lines 110,7–8); the same rhyme receives a chiasmic echo within the narrator's concluding description of her: "si kunde *wîbes triuwe* haben ... ir schimpf ertranc in *riuwen vurt*" (She knew the way of woman's *triuwe* ... her joy was drowned at sorrow's ford) (113,30; 114,3). In the first instance woman's suffering, *wîbes riuwe*, evokes *triuwe* as the man's devotion to the woman, in the second this devotion is mirrored in the woman's devotion, *wîbes triuwe*, to her son.⁸⁶ Once again, before the birth, Herzeloide evokes *mannes triuwe* as an expression of the conjugal act of love. With these lines—as she reasons out loud over the need to moderate her grief ("got wende mich sô tumber nôt" 110,17 [God keep me from foolish desperation])⁸⁷—she speaks of the child she bears as the charge of her own responsibility to her husband:

die wîle ich bî mir trüege
daz ich von sîner minne *enphienc*,
der mannes triwe an mir *begienc*.
(110,20–22, emphasis added)

(while I carry within me what I conceived through his loving embrace who fulfilled a man's *triuwe* unto me.)

And as she fulfils this responsibility and manifests her own *triuwe* by nursing her son, identifying herself in this act with Mary, the same rhyme and parallel phrasing effectively identify the devotion (and act) of conjugal love with Christ's supreme act of devotion to humanity:

[frou] Herzeloide sprach mit sinne
"diu hœhste kûeginne
Jêsus ir brüste bôt,
der sît durch uns vil scharpfen tût
ame kriuze menschliche *enphienc*
und sîne triwe an uns *begienc*."
(113,17–22)

⁸⁴ Lines 109,30, 110,7–8, 110,22, 111,7, 113,22.

⁸⁵ Lines 113,30, 114,9–10, 116,14, 116,19–20.

⁸⁶ The rhyme on *riuwe/triuwe* occurs elsewhere in contexts similarly marked in their significance, among them the first prologue (lines 3,1–2) and the passage just quoted in which Sigune reveals Parzival's name and its meaning (lines 140,16–20). See also lines 140,1–2 and 451,3–8; and Schmid, *Studien*, pp. 179–82.

⁸⁷ Trans. Hatto.

(Lady Herzeloyde spoke from true knowledge: “The queen of queens offered her breasts to Jesus, who later died our human death most cruelly on the cross, thus fulfilling his *triuwe* unto us.”)

Triuwe is thus at the centre of the ideas behind Wolfram’s creation of the *lactans dol-rosa*; its meaning is articulated through the scene itself to reveal in turn the meaning of the image—in fact, both images and verbal concept are engaged in the same attempt to articulate the experience of truth through the layman’s narrative. We previously saw that the one image, that is, Herzeloyde’s first lactation, displays milk as the manifestation of God’s *triuwe*. But Herzeloyde’s statement, “out of *triuwe* you have come to me,” has a double referent, or double origin: the milk comes both from God and from Gahmuret. As she says, “sînes verhes sâmen, den gâben unde nâmen unser zweier minne” (the seed of his flesh was given and received in our loving embrace) (109,27–29), and “I conceived through his loving embrace who fulfilled manly *triuwe* unto me.” The exchange of semen in conjugal love thus manifests the same reciprocity expressed between Mary’s nursing of her son and his dying on the cross; at the same time, Christ’s death on the cross is analogous to Gahmuret’s *mannes triuwe*.

This somewhat mysterious chain of association, the progression of *triuwe* from pregnancy as the bodily fulfilment of conjugal love through lactation to the crucified Christ, contains a still more startling equation: Gahmuret’s *mannes triuwe* is to Herzeloyde’s lactation as Mary’s lactation is to her son’s crucifixion—where *mannes triuwe* occurs in the release of semen, in the conception. Each act “nourishes” the other in love, but no less contains the seeds of a life of suffering. This is the underlying equation that Wolfram’s text shares with Rupert’s double lactation; that is, his development of the idea of *triuwe* works to transport the same equation. It is likewise accessible to the audience through the ideas associated in Wolfram’s time with breast-baring and lactation.

The baring of a woman’s breasts had been, from antiquity, a privileged gesture of supplication and the appeal for mercy; her breasts were a symbol of the universal bond between mother and child and thus of the love and compassion owed to one’s fellow human.⁸⁸ Medieval ideas of human physiology, likewise inherited from antiquity, offer the underlying explanation, which is more visceral than we might expect. Stated simply, “breastmilk was transmuted blood, and a human mother—like the pelican that also symbolized Christ—fed her children from the fluid of life that coursed through her veins.”⁸⁹ The breast-baring woman thus appealed for recognition of her physical sacrifice in the generation of human life. The analogy with Christ’s sacrificial suffering is found as early as the second century, when Clement of Alexandria compared the blood of the Eucharist with “a human mother whose blood becomes food for her child.”⁹⁰ In visual art

88 Schreiner, “Deine Brüste,” pp. 103–4; also Panofsky, “‘Imago Pietatis,’” p. 302n75; and Seidel, “Ubera Matris,” 41–98.

89 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 270. Beginning in the thirteenth century, lactation and bleeding—not only Mary’s and Christ’s, but also that of their devotees—could be seen as analogous acts of compassion and nourishment, Christ’s wounds could be seen as nourishing “breasts” and a woman’s breasts as bleeding wounds (*Holy Feast*, pp. 270–75).

90 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 270–71.

somewhat later than Wolfram's time, this parallel appeared in images of Mary and Christ as twin supplicants for sinful souls to either side of God the Father: Mary appealed by baring her breast, cradled in one hand as if to nurse, while Christ did the same by indicating his own bleeding for the life of man, the wound in his side.⁹¹

Thus we arrive at an answer to why Herzeloide so immediately refers Mary's nursing of Christ and hers of Parzival to Christ's bleeding on the cross: Either act was a sacrificial bleeding, one that was also "sacred" in a universal sense. In reference to Mary it was sacred in a quite specific sense. The "solidarity of the flesh" that joined all men as nourished in and on a woman's body was the same bond that joined Christ to mankind.⁹² As Herzeloide reminds her audience: Mary gave Christ his flesh and Christ suffered on the cross *mennischliche*, in his—and our—human flesh (lines 113,18–22).

A similar solidarity pertains in the exchange of semen, for it too was understood as a kind of boiling-over of the blood.⁹³ Thus the connection, for Wolfram sublimated as *triuwe*, between coition, lactation, and bleeding resided in the fact that each required an equivalent bodily sacrifice. For Wolfram *triuwe* itself might be an abstraction but the experiences it calls forth and instills have undeniably visceral reality. Still, we might well note, Herzeloide does not supplicate with her bared breasts; she rather proclaims. Moreover, none of this offers an explanation for her auto-lactation.

These remaining ideas have two explanations. The first lies, once again, in Herzeloide's own testimony; the second lies in Mary's reading as the explanation for *how she knows these things*. For whether or not we can find symbolic ideas that render Herzeloide's actions coherent to a medieval audience, it still remains to explain how the same are suddenly the manifest *wisheit* of a woman who formerly showed no particular possession of wisdom.

In her testimony, Herzeloide's pressing of her milk is a physical demonstration of her transformation from the old woman into the new, that is, from the old body to the new. When she addresses her milk with the words, "Out of *triuwe* you have come to me," she acknowledges it as the physical manifestation of the inner bond between wife and husband, woman and God; that is, as the inner truth of this entire presentation. The key statement is the narrator's, because it reveals this startling exhibition, a public display of bodily humility, as the female ideal left unnamed in the first prologue: "Diu frouwe ir willen dar an sach, / daz diu spise was ir herzen dach" (The lady recognized her wish had been fulfilled, for the milk had become *her heart's covering*) (111,5–6, emphasis added). The odd phrase first occurred in the prologue, where it signalled the mere beauty of the exterior, *daz man siht*, by which the narrator would not judge a good woman, she who is instead "inrehalp der brust bewart" (steadfast *within* her breast) (3,22–23). In Herzeloide, "the heart's covering" has become an inner fluid and the essence of human

⁹¹ The earliest visual examples occur in manuscript illumination in the second half of the thirteenth century, while the textual tradition is generally traced to Arnold of Chartres in the mid-twelfth. See Marti and Mondini, "Marienbrüste," pp. 79–85 and plates 48, 50, 51; and Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 272 and plates 28–30.

⁹² Brown, "Notion of Virginity," p. 439, see also pp. 437–38.

⁹³ Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 17; also Bynum, "Female Body," p. 220.

triuwe, which she then herself brings to view—in explicit defiance of decorum and other’s opinions: “Diu vrouwe enrouchte wer daz sach / daz hemde von der brust si brach” (the lady cared not who might see her / she tore her bodice from her breast) (110,23–24). Just as her actions are a contrafact, to some extent, of the conventions of a widow’s grieving, so too her breast-baring has finally no basis in public appeal: it is, in effect, an affair between her and God alone. The same self-effacing gesture accompanies her nursing of her own son; the reference to Mary, as has been pointed out often enough, in part serves to justify the flouting of social convention. Social standing, that is, *êre* and *prîs*, honour and reputation, dictated that a queen did not nurse her offspring. What the queen of Heaven deigned to do, however, this earthly queen will not refuse; “diemuot was ir bereit” (humility was her part) (113,16). In her two demonstrations of the solidarity of the flesh between humankind and God, then, Herzeloide becomes the diaphanous body, the truth as revealed in “base brass.”

Wolfram, however, goes still further. His queen does not merely press, but also sucks the milk from her breasts. It is here that we must return to Rupert’s Mary.

As seen in the earlier discussion of Rupert’s text, when Mary refers to “the moment that made me a mother” and her entry into knowledge (*prophetissa eram*) as one event, she is recalling the opening of the text, in which the enquiring exegete explored her conception as the realization of the bridegroom’s kiss (Canticles 1:1). In Rupert’s description—for Mary herself does not yet speak—Mary’s conception of the Word comprised the transfer of two substances: God’s *voluptas* (desire, delight, or semen), which entered her womb, and the milk she drank from the breasts of the Spirit, from which she acquired knowledge of all scripture.⁹⁴ Thus Rupert could perfectly preserve the juxtaposition of longing for “his kiss” with praise of “your breasts” in the opening verse of the biblical text: *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are sweeter than wine* (Canticles 1:1). Not only does Rupert’s diction play insistently on either as a “drink” imbibed by Mary, but also the two are offered as alternative understandings of the one ineffable, unknowable moment:

uberum laetificata dulcedine ineffabili, dum concipis, o virgo beata, dum tibi fit secundum hoc verbum angeli: “Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi.” ... Quid aliud diceret nisi quia “meliora sunt ubera tua vino”?⁹⁵

(When you were sucked with the ineffable sweetness of those breasts, even as you conceived, o blessed virgin, even as it happened to you according to the words of the angel: “And the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you” [Luke 1:35]. ... What else could you say but “Your breasts are sweeter than wine?” [Canticles 1:1].)

For Mary as for Herzeloide, then, the reception of *voluptas* and the drinking of breastmilk are twin predecessors to the *lactans dolorosa*, the embrace in which *sponsa* and *mater* are one and the Word is incarnate as human experience. The very oddity of

⁹⁴ As noted earlier (p. 72, above), *voluptas* could also mean “semen,” a pun of which Rupert appears well aware.

⁹⁵ CCC, 1, pp. 11–12.

the biblical text, its conflation of the bride's "prayer" for the kiss and the praise she, not the bridegroom, speaks of the breasts and their milk; this oddity calls forth the chronological compression and attempted coalescence—for Rupert a simultaneity—of conception and auto-lactation in Wolfram's text; it likewise calls forth Herzeloide's praise of breast milk addressed in the second person (111,7 ff.). More important still is the bodily wisdom with which she is filled—no less, as she says, than she is with the child and the milk it has sent before, "since I felt him living in my body." The merging of the two experiences, on which both the narrative and Herzeloide insist, the continuity she expresses between before and after, reproduces the inimitable simultaneity of Mary's *historia* in our history, as we can know it. Everything in Wolfram's presentation operates to reinforce this one idea: Herzeloide knows as Mary knew in this "same" moment, and we, in turn, are to know as Herzeloide knows.

The *lactans dolorosa*, as spoken by either woman, is then the fulfilment of this knowing in loving and suffering, knowing as *sponsa et mater*:

For I was a prophetess, and from the moment that I was made his mother, I knew he was going to suffer these things. When, therefore, I fondled such a Son, born of my flesh, at my bosom, carried him in my arms, nursed him at my breasts, and had always before my eyes such a death as was destined for him, and foresaw everything with a prophetic, nay rather, a more than prophetic mind; what kind, how much, and how extensive a passion of maternal grief, do you imagine me to have endured?: This is why I say, "My beloved is for me a bundle of myrrh; he will dwell between my breasts" [Canticles 1:12]. O sojourn sweet indeed, but filled with unutterable groanings!

This is the moment, in all its insistent physicality and tenderly human devotion, that Wolfram could re-embed in a narrative context in which the mother relives the embrace of her dead husband as she nurses the infant son and identifies this *memoria* with the *memoria* of Christ's suffering. Rupert's text prefigures not only the fusion of "widow" and mother, bereavement and nourishment, not only the viewer's/listener's introduction into a woman's intimate emotional and physical experience, but also the idea of reciprocity between Mary's lactation and Christ's Passion, between the mother's "bleeding" body and the bloodied body of the Word. That is, what Rupert's text introduces, above all, is the idea of this moment in Mary's life as the image that embodies the mystery of the bodily bride and makes it available to human apprehension, precisely what Wolfram's exposition requires.

Mary's experience, too, is designed to communicate a before and after, the progression from promise to fulfilment, conception to Incarnation. As Rupert witnessed it, she does not introduce the image of her grieving lactation as an "explanation" of Canticles 1:12. She rather offers Canticles 1:12 to her *amici* as their way of grasping the ineffable, how she was one with the Word (*dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*), how the fragrance of her humility "could rise so high as to reach him. O friends, this I have experienced!"⁹⁶ Thus Mary revisits her experience of the conception (here seen through Canticles 1:11) as the unspeakable grace that allowed her to reverse the failing of her sex in Eve: "Non possum

⁹⁶ "... qualis ... usque ad ipsum spiravit vel spirare potuit. ... O amici, hoc ego experta sum" (CCC, 1, pp. 30–31).

eloqui, non possum verbis consequi: res ista non est effabilis" (It cannot be uttered, words cannot describe it, this thing is ineffable).⁹⁷ The transition to Canticles 1:12 then introduces the "bundle of myrrh" as at once the movement from conception to birth and her attempt to give this mystery communicable form:

descenditque de illo accubitu suo, et requievit in tabernaculo meo. Hic requievit, hic habitavit totis novem mensibus, et cuius erat Dominus, eiusdem ancillae suae factus est filius. Vultis audire, amici, qualis exinde fuerit iste dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi? Ecce dico vobis: "Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur."

(CCC, p. 31)

(and so he came down from his couch [cf. Canticles 1:11] to rest in the shelter of my womb. There he rested, there he lived for nine months and she of whom he was lord, of that same handmaid he became the son. Do you want to hear, my friends, how it could then be that "my beloved was to me as I was to him"? Here I tell you: "My love is to me as a bundle of myrrh, between my breasts he shall rest" [Canticles 1:12].)

The image of the *lactans dolorosa* is thus to be understood (by the audience) as the same mystery differently "spoken," as its manifestation in apprehensible reality. Conception and lactation, respectively, signify the experience of the Word as apprehended before and after the Incarnation. The ineffable union of the one experience is made knowable to humanity as the reciprocity in love and suffering, *passio* and *compassio*, that allows us to know God's pain as our own. "If you ponder this rightly," Mary says before she speaks Canticles 1:12 as the image of the *lactans dolorosa*, "truly, you will discover it in me, whence with me you will be pierced with pain and with me you will be sweetly consoled."⁹⁸ This knowledge lies in a communion of the flesh whose perfect realization pertained in Mary and Christ; the milk with which Mary nourishes her son is a sign for all to see of the invisible union that took place in her womb.⁹⁹ With it she completes the new covenant between God and woman, "that same sex from which the root of *superbia* came forth and corrupted the entirety of the human race."¹⁰⁰ The Old Eve has become the New.

Mary's knowing thus derives from the same equation—conception is to lactation as lactation is to crucifixion—that Wolfram manifests in the way Herzeloyde attests to her experience of *triuwe*. *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*: the experience of the New Eve is that of a reciprocity between woman and God and of a continuity between love human and divine, and no less between physical and spiritual experience. Herzeloyde understands her experience through this continuity and refers it to the same fact of Mary's experience: the mother's bodily nourishing of her child and the suffering each will endure for love of her son-spouse constitute (and this is one-half of the mystery)

⁹⁷ CCC, 1, p. 31, see also pp. 10–11; and above, pp. 74–75.

⁹⁸ "Si haec scitis, si ista rite perpenditis, profecto in me invenietis, et unde mecum compungamini, et unde mecum dulciter consolemini" (CCC, 1, p. 31).

⁹⁹ Rupert returns to this idea with still greater emphasis in the passage on Canticles 4:10, *Quam pulchrae sunt mammae tuae*, CCC, 3, p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ "In isto ... sexu, a quo initium superbiae generi humano superveniens totam massam corruptit" (CCC, 1, p. 30).

the equal exchange between the mother's bleeding breasts and the son's bleeding body; they express and instil the same union in love. The other half of the mystery Herzeloide expresses with her auto-lactation: the fulfilment of conjugal love as manifest truth in her pregnant body is a renewed experience of the covenant between God and humanity. The equation between semen and milk, coition and lactation, that is so remarkable in Herzeloide's transformation is to be understood as the consequence and even the physical proof of her re-embodied reading. These fluids form the substance of her continuity with Mary's experience and the substance of a sacramental power in human experience.

When she announces her initial lactation as an experience of the original Christian sacrament, Herzeloide testifies to this generative moment in her narrative as a "translation" of the fundamental moment of Christian *renovatio*. It is no less her Annunciation, the moment when the bride becomes aware of her impregnation through the Spirit—not such that she will bear another Christ, not such that Parzival becomes the second person of the Trinity, not such that she is Mary, but rather just as Rupert defined it: such that body becomes the diaphanous vessel of truth. The final image of the *lactans dolorosa* is the receptacle into which all of this pours. Herzeloide's *Klage*, as it is known to the scholarship, is thus only a scene of grieving insofar as a woman's love and her suffering, one woman's grief and her audience's compassion, had come to represent the most humanly accessible way to know God's humanity.

Romans, or Wolfram's *âventiure*, was the vehicle through which such ideas were being translated to lay audiences. When the as-yet-anonymous narrator of *Parzival* finally steps forward to claim his poem by name and in the same gesture acknowledges this woman as his new female ideal, when he grounds his narrative art in his heartfelt identification with her pain, he, unlike Rupert, does not claim to be illuminated, touched by the Spirit. He instead holds up his heart as the mirror of her pain; he claims the truth of knowing this pain, of being her, as the truth of being there—that is, in the humble aspiration of feeling as she felt he has experienced what she did. Here the knight-narrator and man of action has learned a different way to truth, one that resides in entering the experience of the gendered other, in compassionating the woman.

This woman has known the truth as manifest and experienced in the body. This is the meaning of the intricate parallels between the two texts. The same idea is undoubtedly the key to what have proven her most inscrutable words. Here Herzeloide explains, or at least elaborates on the identification between her experience and Mary's:

[frou] Herzeloide sprach mit sinne
 "diu hœhste kûneginne
 Jesus ir brüste bôt,
 der sît durch uns vil scharpfen tût
 ame kriuze mennischlîche enphienc
 und sîne triwe an uns begienc.
 swes lîp sîn zûrnen ringet,
 des sele unsamfte dinget,
 swie kiusche er sî und waere.
 des weiz ich wâriu mære."

(113,17–26)

(Lady Herzeloide spoke from true knowledge: "The queen of queens offered her breasts to Jesus, who later died our human death most cruelly on the cross, thus fulfilling his *triuwe* unto us. He who denies his own flesh shall fare ill on Judgment Day, however virtuous he might be or have been: of this I have true knowledge.")

The interpretation of the final four verses of this passage has remained poised between readings that, oddly enough, fall as if on either end of the devotional shift that is at the centre of Wolfram's interest: the shift from the fear of Christ as judge to loving compassion for the suffering Man-God. What are the *wâriu mære* that Herzeloide has learned? Not, surely, that Christ's wrath will land a soul in Hell. Quite aside from seeming as obvious as it would be unmotivated, such a final proclamation would deny the very import of the preceding testimony, a paean to God's mercy and compassion, his capacity to feel our pain.¹⁰¹ Herzeloide's statement must be taken in its entirety: the truth to which she attests is that expressed in the *lactans dolorosa*, in the reciprocity between Mary's lactation and Christ's Passion, their *triuwe*. This reciprocity is testimony, in turn, to the reality of the Incarnation and its import for our lives, what it enables us to know in and through the body, through, as Herzeloide says, Christ's *triuwe* unto us. The fourth element in the analogy, the *triuwe* humanity owes Christ, is what she alludes to in lines 113,23–24; should it fail, this gift is lost, and the soul with it.¹⁰² The translation above reflects this understanding of the passage as a whole. The words recommend Herzeloide's response to her own bereavement, one that honours rather than flagellates the body, to her audience.¹⁰³ The truly significant statement then, is her last: "*des weiz ich wâriu mære*" (of this I have true knowledge). Just as Mary proclaimed before her with the words, "*O amici, hoc ego experta sum*," Herzeloide proclaims the covenant of the Incarnation anew, a covenant between God and the vessel of his Word, woman.

The image of Herzeloide as *regina lactans* is reiterated three times in this scene before it is finally replaced by that of Mary as her forebear. Wolfram uses the repetition not only to underline its importance but also to allow the one woman's experience to seep into the other's, to allow the earthly vernacularity of his Herzeloide to coalesce with a sacred image. Initially we are shown a mother who "grasped those dun-red buds: I mean the little tips of her teats, and thrust them into [her baby's] tiny beak" (cf. 113,5–8). Then the statement: "she who bore him in her womb was herself his nursemaid" (where *wamme*, womb or belly, sustains the attention to a woman's sexual physiology) gives

101 On the varying interpretation of these lines, also in relation to lines 110,17–21, see Elisabeth Schmid, "Swes lîb," 377–90; and Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:361–62.

102 As printed here, line 113,23 is Lachmann's conjecture, based on MS D, which reads, "*swes sîn lîp zürnen ringet*." Lachmann rejected the alternative found in MS G, *swes lîp sînen zorn erringet*; while Nellmann has argued for restoring the latter in "Zum zweiten Buch," 191–202. In the controversy over these two verses, the words *sîn zürnen* have invariably been seen to refer to Christ; I take then to refer to the subject evoked with *swes lîp*. This yields the meaning, "He who rages against his own flesh," or, to paraphrase what would then be Herzeloide's meaning: "he who denies the flesh denies Him who suffered on the cross." *Ringet* I read as a transitive verb with the meaning, "sich umarmt halten ... abmühen, quälen," following Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, 449.

103 In lines 110,17–22, Herzeloide explicitly forgoes the self-flagellation that customarily accompanied a woman's mourning. See above, pp. 55–56.

way to what seems a third repetition, "she nourished him at her breast," but instead introduces an incongruous epithet: *die wîbes missewende vlôch* (she who shunned woman's failing) (113,11–12). Finally, this image is transformed in Herzeloide's imagination into that of her holding her dead husband in her arms, followed again by a generalizing comment: "she was not given to flattering foolery, humility was her sole intent" (cf. 113,15–16).

On the one hand, this progressive coalescence of bodily particularity and generalized exemplarity might be explained, and too often has been explained, as the narrator's attempt to forestall objections to unseemly behaviour.¹⁰⁴ To thus trivialize its import nevertheless flies in the face of the concluding statement to which it clearly builds. Why or how Herzeloide remedies a failing inherent in her sex is unclear at best; the woman who indisputably "fled"—or reversed—such a failing is Mary, the New Eve. The idea that Herzeloide might be charged with moral laxity or frivolity (*lôsheit*, line 113,15) is jarring at this juncture of the text, whatever judgment we may apply to her earlier life. The contrast *lôsheit*–*diemout*, however, completes one more circle in a narrowing spiral: Herzeloide's bodily experience becomes, in the process of the narrative, a translucent vessel of Mary's; at the same time, Wolfram's vernacular diction becomes as if a blurred or reshaped imprint of biblical and liturgical imagery; his text as if a palimpsest of one written before, once and for all time. In her transformation from the manipulative and self-centred queen of the Kanvoleis tournament to widowed bride and self-immolating mother, Herzeloide has relived Mary's redemption of Eve. The real meaning of both her words and Mary's is: "Behold the image of this truth, manifest in my experience."

The Layman's Key to Peter's Gate

Swer nu wîben sprichet baz,
deiswâr daz lâz ich âne haz:
ich vriesche gerne ir freude breit.
wan einer bin ich unbereit
dienstlicher triuwe:
mîn zorn ist immer niuwe
gein îr, sît ich se an wanke sach.
ich bin Wolfram von Eschenbach,
unt kan ein teil mit sange,
unt bin ein habendiu zange
mînen zorn gein einem wîbe:
diu hât mîme lîbe
erboten solhe missetât,
ine hân si hazzens keinen rât.

¹⁰⁴ Thus, still, Hartmann, *Gahmuret und Herzeloide*, 2:354–61, where earlier interpretations are reviewed.

dar umb hân ich der andern haz.
 ôwê war umbe tuont si daz?
 (114,5–20)

Should anyone now give a better account of women, truly, I'd be the last to object: I'd happily hear them held in high esteem. Only to one among them do I deny my devoted service: I hold a grudge ever-new against her, since I found her untrue. I am Wolfram von Eschenbach, and have sung my share of love songs, but I'm like a pair of pincers where my grudge against one woman is concerned. She caused me, life and limb, such grievous injury that I can't help but despise her. And this all the others hold against me. Alas, why do they do so?

When the narrator steps between the concluding image of Herzeloide as *lactans dolorosa* and his audience to speak these words, he does so as a poet-champion throwing down the gauntlet to any and all contenders: whoever might “now,” that is, in the presence of *this* female ideal, best him in women's praise has his unbegrudged blessing.¹⁰⁵ This woman is the essence of his new narrative art. She is the manifest reversal of the old body poetics and “living” proof of the promise contained in the new.

The conclusion of Wolfram's poetic exposition in the second prologue stages the transformation from the old to the new narrative as that from the Old to the New Eve on several levels at once. The transformation of Herzeloide is the primary and moving force that carries the rest. But next there is the narrator's own, ostensibly “biographical” conversion from a false to a true woman, from the woman *an wanke* to she who inspires his *herzeleit*, his loving compassion. This, in turn, is portrayed as a conversion from singing the praise of the One Lady of the Minnesang (lines 115,5–7) to a narrative art in which all women are equally entitled to his attention in as much as they manifest and inspire the same *triuwe*. And finally there is the audience's transformation, evoked in the narrator's admonishments on the resumption of the narrative in book 3. The transformation comprises protagonist and narrator, audience and medium, in a symmetry of *triuwe* on both sides of the narrative mirror.

As pointed out above, this juncture of the text exhibits parallels both to Benoît's introduction of Briseida's dilemma (likewise transferred to the audience) and to Landri of Waben's union of the heart with the reading bride and his “awakening” from her contemplative sleep. Wolfram's exposition incorporates both gestures, the one from history and the other from exegesis, and surpasses both: Like Benoît's, his text serves the articulation of a new experience of truth in narrative, like Landri's, it articulates this experience as a “translation” of the reading experience of the Song of Songs. The shifting voices of the speaker and changing identities of his prospective audience reflect the masterful manipulation of a discourse on media and truth previously proper to religious literature—and its appropriation for a new translation onto the stage of the layman's narrative.

The layman's advocate of the first prologue promised reliable counsel on woman's redemption somehow derived from chivalric experience, a model of reading in

¹⁰⁵ Kuhn, “Wolframs Frauenlob,” 200 and passim.

experience to supplant the cleric's mediation of truth. Having now provided the proof before her eyes and ears, the narrator proudly steps forward to claim his literary spurs, the knight-narrator's right to the stage. The challenge from the end of book 6 ("swelhiu diz mære geschriben siht ..."), with which the narrator calls women to witness the truth of his portrayal, is formulated here as an insistence on aural and visual evidence that corresponds to the proof of action as opposed to mere words or intellectual sophistry. *Reht* and *art* of this poetic project are established in personal risk of life and limb:

swelhiu mîn reht wil schouwen,
 beidiu sehen unde hœren,
 dien sol ih niht betœren.
 schildes ambet ist mîn art:
 swâ mîn ellen sî gespart,
 swelhiu mich minnet umbe sanc,
 sô dunket mich ir witze kranc.
 ob ich guotes wîbes minne ger,
 mag ich mit schilde und ouch mit sper
 verdienen niht ir minnen solt,
 al dar nâch sî sie mir holt.
 vil hôhes topels er doch spilt,
 der an ritterschaft nâch minnen zilt.

(115,8–20)

(Whatever woman now wishes to inspect my credentials, both to see and to hear them, she I shall not lead astray. My craft is that of the shield: Where my courage isn't put to the test, where a woman will love me merely for singing, I'd say she's weak in the head. If I seek a good woman's love yet fail to earn it with shield and lance—then let her favour me accordingly. He who woos for love with the knight's craft shows that he's playing for keeps.)

Narratorial legitimacy is here—as in the first prologue—grounded in steadfast service through thick and thin, guaranteed above all through a palpable experience of presence. Where there the clerical instructor was discharged for *valsch geselliclicher muot*, manifest as the inconstant and insubstantial surface apparitions of *significatio*, here the polemic against the deceptive exterior discharges the rhetoric of the Minnesinger as *falscher prîs*, mere flattery that peddles a no less elusive and deceptive image-ideal. Either purveys a false reading of the body, the one its rejection as merely arbitrary form, the other its elevation to ornamental conceit. The summary preconditions for a continuation of what he has just begun are therefore two:

hetens wîp niht für ein smeichen,
 ich solt iu fürbaz reichen
 an disem mære unkundiu wort,
 ich sprache iu d'âventiure vort.
 swer des von mir geruoche,
 dern zels ze keinem buoche.
 ine kan decheinen buochstap.

dâ nement genuoge ir urhap:
disiu âventiure
vert âne der buoche stiure.

(115,21–30)

(If the women will do without the usual flattery, I'll gladly go on to tell you in this tale things unheard of, I'll continue the story for you. But whoever desires this of me had better not think it a book. I am no man of letters. There are plenty of that sort around: this knight's adventure rides without a bookish bridle!¹⁰⁶)

Somewhere equally removed from the poles of merely flattering *vernacular* love poetry and instruction derived through *Latin* learning (*litterae*) and books lies the true vocation of *den wîben sprechen*, speaking for or to women—and with it this poet's audio-visual claim to truth. But praise and appraisal of woman had been at the centre of a debate over body and truth from the early centuries of Christianity; when *Parzival* was completed, “she” had been the pivotal point in a renewal of bodily media for nearly a century. Wolfram's exposition exploits the full consequences of this idea for a poetics of narrative experience. The proud defiance and exuberant confidence of his misnomered “Apology” stem from the knowledge that his audience will not only agree but also knows full well what is at stake. To read woman is to read the world—as a woman. To read as a woman is to endure the trials and limitations of bodily experience as the authentic medium of truth.

Reading Wolfram's poetic exposition from the perspective of a debate over the new body poetics repeatedly introduces a fundamental departure from previous interpretations that is also the fundamental departure of this book from previous ideas of what new vernacular narrative was: Wolfram is not primarily concerned with positioning himself against other vernacular poets nor even to position narrative against the lyric of the *Minnesang*. His real thrust is to champion a layman's *litteratura*, and this means a layman's entry into knowledge, a legitimate means to the constitution and apprehension of moral truth that operates outside the bounds of clerical authority and its monopoly over writing and hence over scripted and scriptural truth. The necessary antecedent is then clear: an alternative reading for non-readers, a layman's, or rather a woman's, *lectio*.

Thus, if Wolfram's narrator begins his second prologue from a position squarely within the culture of courtly poetry, if the motivation for his intervention is initially most reminiscent of Benoît's, the remainder of the second prologue is more readily recognized through its predecessors in women's monastic instruction and vernacular exegesis. The *Speculum virginum* modelled a woman's (that is, a non-reader's) *lectio* that derived its legitimacy from Mary's conception of the Word as the renewal of the body and bodily media—the promise of an audio-visual apprehension of truth through performance and physical presence. Landri's “teaching of the bride” was directed at *puceles*, those

106 More literally: “This *âventiure* needs no help from books!” Wolfram's second prologue has in fact proven no less resistant to scholarly interpretation than his first, precisely because the connection between reading and the appraisal of women has continuously eluded our grasp. For a detailed account of the points of controversy and the various interpretations, especially of Wolfram's denial of books and learning, see Kästner and Schirok, “Bücher.”

as yet unschooled in love who were privileged to a different path, the unlearned who received the milk of instruction as *estoire* from the mouths of their *maistres*—whose intervening role, however, the reading exercise at hand was designed to bypass. But it is the *Eructavit*, as the adaptation of women's audio-visual *lectio* to the courtly stage, and most particularly its performer-protagonist, David, that most clearly prefigure Wolfram's poetic positioning.

In the *Eructavit* we find all the same elements that seem so incongruously bundled together in the introduction of the German courtly narrative: The proud insistence on the vocation of the singer and entertainer paired with humble devotion to (a) woman as audience and inspiration, the idea of women's instruction conducted as if a moral step beyond the courtly *chanson*, the defiant confrontation between an entertainer's song and a cleric's catechism, between "the voice of the heart" and the dry learning of the written page; and all this in service of one objective: to lend Mary's reading a voice on the stage of courtly vernacular literature. David's defiant humility before the gates of Heaven (no less and no more a paradox than Wolfram's) claimed a privileged entry into knowledge for himself as for the poem's *dame*, Marie de Champagne, that was to take place through his audio-visual delivery of the call to the bride—vernacular *lectio* as no less than a reactivation of the *voiz* that performed the Annunciation to Mary. Such was the reading aspiration that could be ascribed to the "queen" of scripture *en romans*. We have seen that Wolfram fully espoused the same aspiration for his poem and the woman at its poetological centre. But here, there is no David and no elevation to heavenly vision; the vernacular bride is herself witness to the transformative power of the Spirit and the poetic voice; its medium is her own—and our own—bodily experience.

When Herzeloyde speaks the concluding lines of her testimony to this experience, so we are told, she speaks *mit sinne* (line 113,17). At the end of book 6, when the narrator challenges his female audience to authenticate his "true" portrayal of women, he qualifies their competence with the same term: not to just any woman, but to *swelch sinnec wîp* he submits his work for judgment (cf. line 337,1). The epilogue insists on the same qualification: "goutiu wîp, hant di sin ..." (Good women, so far as they have *sin* ...) (827,25). The woman with *sin* authorizes and presides over the performance of this narrative. Yet a connection between these three instances of the term has so far escaped recognition. None of the standard translations render all with the same idea; no more is there agreement among the translators on the meaning in any one of the three passages. As Wolfram applies the term to women, *sin* does not mean simply or alternately "understanding" or "discernment," still less "learning" or "cleverness."¹⁰⁷

107 These observations are based on the translations of Hatto, Knecht, Kuhn, and Spiewok. *Sin* is generally taken in these passages as a reference to reasoning ability or education. Herzeloyde's words are qualified as spoken "pensively" or with reflection; *sinnec wîp* are taken as "educated," "sensible," or "intelligent" women—with a strong tendency to read the statement as a reference to women's literacy (for example, despite his earlier reservations, Nellmann, commentary to *Parzival*, p. 625); and the qualification evoked in the epilogue is rendered somewhere between "prudent" and "clever" (*klug*), or as "discerning."

Much more has been made of Wolfram's use of *sin* in another highly conspicuous context, the prologue to his second epic poem, *Willehalm*. There it occurs in direct opposition to bookish knowledge as the source of his own poetic inspiration:

der rehten schrift dôn und wort
 dîn geist hât gesterket.
 mîn sin dich kreftec merket.
 swaz an den buochen stât geschriben,
 des bin ich künstelos beliben.
 niht anders ich gelêret bin
 wan hân ich kunst, die gît mir sin.¹⁰⁸

(What is spoken of holy scripture derives truth from your spirit. My own inner ear [*sin*] is turned to you alone; what is written in books has been no help to me. I've had no other education than what I find in my craft, and that comes to me from within [*sin*].¹⁰⁹

Willehalm derives from the *legenda* tradition, in which the poet serves as mouthpiece of the Spirit whose works he recounts as the life of a saint. *Sin/sensus* thus signifies the human faculty to apprehend the Spirit directly, access to a higher *wisheit* (wisdom) that is granted by grace alone; similarly then, it stands for *sensus* in opposition to *litteratura*, the living wisdom of Christ as opposed "to the dead letter."¹¹⁰ The same idea stands midwife to David's insistence on performance in the *Eructavit*, with additional scriptural authority lent through the psalm verse, *non cognovi litteraturam et introibo in potentiam domini*.

The parallels with the literary positioning in *Parzival* as we have pursued them are clear. The same have been repeatedly discussed in the scholarship to return always to the same conclusion: the poet of *âventiure* cannot pose *a priori* as the inspired vessel of the Spirit proper to the *legenda* tradition, and if he nonetheless invokes the illiterate's privilege through the authority of the psalm verse, it remains unclear at best where we are to locate his alternative guarantor of spiritual truth.¹¹¹

Wolfram's claim, however, is not at all made *a priori* but rather in the presence of the manifest truth of Mary's reading. The truth of this narrative mode is not invested in the poet's inspiration, but rather in the woman's reception, her *sin*, through and of which Herzeloide speaks with her *wâriu mære*. The key to this understanding of the term

108 *Willehalm*, lines 2,16–22.

109 This translation, too, is inevitably an interpretation, which in this case must speak for itself. I have largely followed *LDMA*, p. 189. For detailed discussion and the various readings, see (most recently) Fasbender "Dôn und wort," 21–33; and Ochs, "Willehalm'-Eingang"; also Ohly as in the note following.

110 "Der *sin* 2,18 ist der *sensus* als das Organ der Wahrnehmung des heiligen Geistes" (Ohly, "Wolframs Gebet," 19, and *passim*). Ohly continues: "Der schöpferische *sin* des heiligen Geistes macht im Empfangen auch den Menschen schöpferisch, so wie die ehrfahrene *triuwe* Gottes für Wolfram auch den Menschen *triuwe* lehrt" ("Wolframs Gebet," 19). This statement might serve to describe Herzeloide's function for the genesis of the narrative in *Parzival*.

111 See Haug's discussion in *LDMA*, pp. 177–78 and 189–90. Bumke, *Blutstropfen*, pp. 134–35, argues anew that Ohly's conclusions are pertinent to *Parzival* as well.

is contained in the moment when Herzeloide experiences the transforming power of epiphany in the body that brings a transition from figurally concealed to bodily immanent truth. Just as the milk she drinks affords her a different *wisheit* ("alsus sprach diu wise," 110,28), so the narrator qualifies her recognition of affinity with Mary (lines 113,17–26) with the words: "[frou] Herzeloide sprach *mit sinne*" (113,16). That is, either lactation and either awakening—each is announced with the verb *sich versinnen*—attests to her entry into Mary's gnosis.

It is thus neither the author of the Psalms nor another poet similarly inspired but instead Wolfram's lowly knight-narrator in the here and now who justifies, as David did, his "right" to perform for *diu wîp* as one that must be "seen and heard," with the same proud insistence on the insignia of his otherwise disqualifying social class. In effect, the position of the poet-exegete is now occupied by the *illitteratus*, the same who previously sat in the audience alongside Landri's *seignors* or Baldwin of Guines, while the positions of the heavenly and the courtly bride, of *sponsa et mater* and *adulescentula*, are collapsed into an experience witnessed by his indispensable counterpart, the woman as human mirror of divine truth. And if this narrator now insists both on his own status as *illitteratus* and on independence from bookish guidance, it is because he claims the privilege of a layman's entry into knowing—*non cognovi litteraturam et introibo in potentiam domini*—and then also proclaims the consequences. David's insistence on the privilege of his art as jongleur is literally a rejection of writing as mediation and implicitly a rejection of the written authority that the gatekeeper evokes and represents: "Don't tell me to write it down; / The tongue, which the heart quickens / Will write it without fingers or hands / Much better than any scribe."¹¹² Wolfram's is an explicit rejection of the authority that *litteras* represent and thus a claim to a layman's reading autonomy.

The illiterate knight-narrator who assumes his identity only once he has also "read" the tale of the transformation of Eve as *âventiure* has taken the implications of Rupert's reading to their extreme. Like Rupert's and Landri's exegetes, this new lady's champion poses as the voice of a new experience of the truth—but can only do so as an accessory to the *adulescentula*. The layman has assumed his position as a special category of woman, of humanity's weakness before God. The woman he follows is no longer Mary herself but a representative of that same weakness and its gnostic privilege in the here and now. The reception of truth through audio-visual experience now resides in a symmetry of position and disposition on both sides of the communicative act, a mutual manifestation and mutual recognition of *triuwe*, or that which is of God in our fellow (wo-)man. Meaning is made only as a result of the joint participation of audience, performer/narrator, and text in the making of *âventiure*. This "renewal" of tale-telling would transform the most secular of narrative experiences into the vessel of a privileged gnosis, an entry into the presence of the Word reserved for the weak, the young women, and the illiterate. *Devocions de cuer*—that is, *triuwe* such as Herzeloide represents—is the layman's key to Peter's gate.

112 Cf. lines 239–42, quoted above, pp. 219–20.

This was Wolfram's answer to "the truth question" in vernacular narrative. Notably, it has little to do with our idea of fiction but much to do with a discovery of empathy as a locus of Christian meaning and truth. It accomplishes the same substitution, in far more ambitious form, that we observed in Benoît's narrative: the truth of "being there" is superseded by the truth of "being her." In effect, Herzeloyde's words stand as an *attestatio res visae* in which the truth born of personal witness in physical presence is instead known through identification in affective experience: loving, suffering, and thereof knowing, as another did before. Gottfried von Strassburg subsequently introduced a similar substitution in more playful form in his *Tristan*.¹¹³ After the extended and indulgently allegorical description of his celebrated love grotto, the narrator attests to the truth of the portrayal with the words, "Diz weiz ich wol, wân ich was dâ" (This I know well, for I was there) (17104). But after another thirty-five lines in which he describes his trip to the location in question it is abundantly clear that what he intends is instead a witness of the heart: "ich hân die fossiure erkant / sit minen elif jâren ie / und enkom ze Kurnewâle nie" (I've known the grotto since I was eleven years old and without ever setting foot in Cornwall) (17140–42).

What Gottfried intended this statement to mean for the construction of truth in *Tristan* cannot be pursued further here. I will explore in the last chapter how Wolfram developed the idea of witness through the heart in *Parzival*. But the contours of the experience are already delivered through Herzeloyde: the truth of narrative is found in a response in which we know one another through identification in experience, in the humanity that we share with Christ. The enabling model and mirror of this truth is Mary's experience of conception, birth, and motherhood, the joy and suffering of humanity over its part in the life of the divine on earth. With the exposition of his "new narrative" Wolfram reinscribed the original act of Christian reading, the act in which the body became the vessel of divine truth, as the model of how meaning is made in his performance space; he claimed the truth manifest in the reading of the bride as the truth of the layman's romance.

113 Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 186–87.

Chapter 8

THE HEART, THE WOUND, AND THE WORD— SACRED AND PROFANE

The Advent of *Âventiure* and the Reconception of the Word

In one of his last essays on the formation of a poetics of fiction in early romance narrative, Walter Haug described this “liberation” from “the horizons of religious meaning” as a continuation of the revolutionary renewal of biblical exegesis that began with Rupert of Deutz.¹ It was Rupert, Haug wrote, who had established “the right” of every new exegete (and thus also every new poet) “to ask after the meaning [of scripture] independently of all previous authority.”² In the new fictional narrative, the poet’s

work is, for him, a search for meaning, and this as an existential problem, for at stake is the claim that a poetic fiction can constitute the path to meaning and its delivery even within a world for which interpretation as God’s creation according to Christian teaching no longer provides the operative authority.³

How this existential search for meaning could have grown out of Rupert’s testimony that personal reading experience could reveal not “meaning,” but *truth*; that all reading experience, approached through the authentic “foundation” of sacred *historia*, led to the truth—that is, to God—is a problem that Haug did not directly address.

The idea of a connection between the experience of narrative fiction and Rupert’s reading experience served Haug as a way of accounting for Wolfram’s persistent appeal to the figures and metaphors of religious inspiration to authorize his work. In particular, he was building on an essay by Friedrich Ohly of thirty years previous, which elucidated the same for the central image of Wolfram’s *third* Parzival prologue, the advent of *Frou Âventiure*, “Lady Taleteller,” at the opening of book 9:⁴

“Tuot ûf.” wem? wer sît ir?
“ich wil inz herze dîn zuo dir.”
sô gert ir zengem rûme.

1 “... die neue, vom religiösen Sinnhorizont abgelöste Literatur,” Haug, “Autorität,” pp. 115–27 at p. 124.

2 “... das Recht, in Freiheit von jeder Autorität die Sinnfrage zu stellen” (Haug, “Autorität,” p. 126 and *passim*).

3 “Sein Werk ist für ihn Sinnsuche, und zwar Sinnsuche als Problem, denn es geht um die prekäre Frage, ob eine poetische Fiktion ein Weg der Sinnfindung, einschließlich ihrer Vermittlung, im Rahmen einer Welt sein kann, der gegenüber man sich nicht mehr damit begnügt, sie als Schöpfung Gottes heilsgeschichtlich zu deuten” (Haug, “Autorität,” p. 124).

4 “Cor amantis,” pp. 128–55.

“waz denne, belibe ich kûme?
 mîn dringen soltu selten klagn:
 ich wil dir nu von wunder sagn.”
 (433,1–5)

(“Open up.” To whom? Who are you? “I seek the way to you inside your heart.” Then you’re after cramped quarters! “What, you don’t think I’d fit? My prodding shall give you little to complain of: I want to tell you wondrous tales.”)

For both Ohly and Haug, this encounter between the narrator and his story-as-muse recast the idea of divine inspiration as invention occurring in the author’s heart. Both singled out the unusual use (unique in Wolframs oeuvre) of the verb *erliuhten* in the narrator’s plea for news of Parzival in reply: “nu erliuhtet mir die foure sîn” (Now illuminate his path for me) (434,2). The term referred to a spiritual *illuminatio*, but in this case it occurred through “the spirit of the story” itself.⁵ For Ohly this was a gesture to God’s intervention in the story as manifest in book 9 (“the story of an act of grace”), but he did not extend a claim to such truth to the act of narration itself.⁶ For Haug, the allusion to spiritual inspiration claimed similar authority for narrative invention alone.

Either conclusion offers a striking display of how reluctant scholars have been to admit of a true interpenetration of the sacred and the profane in the “classics” of medieval romance, for there have been few better informed on such questions.⁷ As Ohly laid out, the image of a beloved who seeks entry into (or once admitted, is locked inside) a *Herzkluse*, the “chamber” or “cell” of the heart, was by 1100 a common, even somewhat hackneyed one, whether in spiritual use as God’s place in the hearts of the faithful or in secular love poetry. His interest in Wolfram’s verses lay in the way they crowned a renewal that was characteristic of the twelfth century: “a fresh approach that takes the image literally and this literal understanding seriously, that restores its appeal to the imagination even as it seems to eliminate the imaginary.”⁸ That is, this treatment of scriptural imagery witnesses the transition from the imaginary to the experiential, the figural to the “historical.” Moreover, it does so as a consequence of reinvigoration through the miracle of the Incarnation: the literalization of the metaphor in question takes place in the first half of the twelfth century just as Wolfram has recorded it, as speculation over how such a small space can possibly accommodate such an imposing guest, that is, how Mary’s heart, or womb (the two were often interchanged, in Latin and in German), could have accommodated *Christus Gigas*, he who was more immense than the world itself.⁹ Ohly, however, did not make the causal connection that has proven

5 Both authors take the phrase “der Geist der Erzählung” from Thomas Mann’s *Der Erwählte*; Haug, “Autorität,” p. 123; Ohly, “Cor amantis,” p. 155.

6 In “dem geistigen Herzen der Dichtung, ... der Geschichte eines Gnadengeschehens,” “Cor amantis,” pp. 148, 154.

7 Similarly: Palmer, “Herzeliebe,” pp. 203–4.

8 “Cor amantis,” p. 129, “Seit dem 12. Jahrhundert gibt es einen frischen Zugriff, der das Bild beim Wort nimmt, mit ihm ernst macht, ihm den Reiz des Phantasievollen zurückgibt, indem es ihn zu nehmen scheint.”

9 Ohly, “Cor amantis,” pp. 143–44; see also Palmer, “Herzeliebe.”

central to developments considered in these chapters: Mary was the wellspring of the twelfth century's literalization of scriptural imagery; it sprang from her generative and gnostic act. Thus, the images of her conception and bearing of Christ did not merely "influence, or incite" the complementary images in love poetry¹⁰ but rather mediated the experience of reification itself. The mediation of this act as reading experience to twelfth-century audiences is where Rupert's contribution is properly situated. With the reopening of Parzival's story in book 9, Wolfram not only illustrates the literalization of a metaphor. He also appropriates the original authority for the realization of scriptural imagery as experience and identifies it with the heartfelt reception of narrative. What this meant for the construction of meaning and truth in courtly romance is to be further explored in this chapter.

The juncture at which Wolfram avails himself of these ideas has much in common with that between books 2 and 3: here as there, the story must introduce its absent hero, as Parzival has not appeared for the length of two intervening books on the adventures of Gawan. Where we witnessed there his original entry as born from his mother's bodily conception of a new narrative, his return in book 9 must emerge from the entry of *frou âventiure* into the respondent's heart; the "conception" of narrative depends on "his" opening to "her" loving knocking.

But Wolfram's image is not therefore one of the poet's *illuminatio*. The singular use of the verb *erliuhten*—familiar from religious literature in connection with the divine illumination of the heart¹¹—is a telling point, but it occurs far on into the passage, embedded in a cascade of anxious queries like those of some amorous *adulescentula* eagerly awaiting news of her beloved, a litany of desire itself (433,8–434,10). Moreover, it is not the poet's wish to narrate that initiates this exchange but rather "Lady Taleteller," who, in the manner of a wooing lover, herself seeks entry "to *you* into *your* heart." That the person addressed is the composing poet or even the narrator is open to question. Whatever his or her identity, and despite initial scepticism over the available space (Mary, too, balked at Gabriel's announcement), the addressee's reaction evinces exactly what the exegetical elaboration of this figure assured: once the "lady" is recognized, the heart expands sufficiently to accommodate all manner of possible tales (or guests).¹² Entry here requires no great persuasion, for this heart's enclosure has already been punctured by love's dart.

This "narrator" is singularly ignorant of his own tale, and what he seeks is not so much illumination as simply presence. His heart opens as the poet intends ours to do—this is the real objective—in anticipation of encountering the hero. For when we receive *frou âventiure* we receive her hero no less; or rather, to receive this lady in love is

¹⁰ Ohly, "Cor amantis," p. 144.

¹¹ In the *Sankt Trudperter Hohelied*, lines 128,2–7, for example, God, seen as the sun, is said to enter and *entliuhten* the hearts (souls) of the faithful. Further examples of the illuminated heart in Middle High German literature are cited in Ertzdorff, "Herz," 290–91.

¹² God (or love) makes the heart into an infinitely expanding enclosure, capable (as Mary's was) even of receiving him "whom no vessel can contain" (Landri of Waben, *Song of Songs*, line 2242). See Ohly, "Cor amantis," pp 135–39; esp. p. 139n22.

to follow her hero's path, *die fuore sîn*, with all the loving anxiety modelled in the receiving heart's response. This is, then, no more a model of poetic inspiration (divine or otherwise) than the denial of letters in the second prologue can be directly equated with the *legenda*-poet's invocation of the Spirit. In the poetic construction of the *niuwe mære*, authority is invested in the "female" receptive act. The obverse is also true: this generative rebirth of narrative partakes of the same power and truth as Herzeloide's did. Consequently, the continuing story is now born of *our* hearts, of our own burning desire to follow the path of "the beloved"—we need only hear the first person singular pronouns as plurals:

Beidiu iur hêrre und ouch der mîn[,]
 nu erliuhtet mir die foure sîn:
 der süezen Herzeloide barn,
 wie hât Gahmurets sun gevarn,
 sît er von Artûse reit?
 ober liep od herzeleit
 sît habe bezalt an strîte.
 habt er sich an die wîte,
 oder hât er sider sich verlegn?
 sagt mir sîn site und al sîn pflegn.
 (434,1–10)

(Both your lord and also my own, now illuminate his path for me: how has the sweet child of Herzeloide, how has Gahmuret's son fared since he rode from Arthur's court? Tell me whether he has since won happiness or heartfelt sorrow in his battling. Does he persist in his wide wanderings, or has he rather turned to his bed? Tell me how it is with him and what he's been about.)

The generative transformation that took place once before as the experience of Herzeloide, that is, in the body of narrative, must take place here in the hearts of the "believing" audience. The resumption of the narrative thus begins with the celebrated, seemingly blasphemous pronouncement, never sufficiently explained: "Swertz niht geloubt, der sündet. / diu âventiure uns kûndet" (He sins who does not believe this. Lady Âventiure tells us) (435,1–2). This would be heavy artillery, indeed, to employ in an advance charge so far afield as an annunciation of narrative fiction. But it is none such. Wolfram is merely taking the metaphors to their experiential extreme. Should the manifestation of truth in experience itself depend on the believing participation of the *experti*, then to fail in that faith, that is, to fail in *triuwe* to the telling of the tale, would offend against the new covenant between humankind and God.

Wolfram's renewed generation of Parzival's story is thus here as before fused with the constitution of sacred truth. In exegetical tradition the idea of God's knocking on the door of the heart to gain entry, either for instruction or loving reception, was centuries old when Wolfram composed his *Parzival*.¹³ Its scriptural antecedents were two: Canticles 5:2, in which the bride awakens to "the voice of [her] beloved, knocking,"

¹³ Ohly, "Cor amantis," pp. 150–51; on development from the thirteenth century onward, see "Knocking at Heaven's Gate," in Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 158–68.

and Revelations 3:20, “I stand at the door and knock.” Middle High German sermons and religious poetry of the thirteenth century play on the same themes in a way that suggests Wolfram captures ca. 1210 a vernacular understanding that is on the threshold of written tradition. A dialogue between God and the soul from the late thirteenth century, for example, has Christ paraphrase Canticles 5:2 with these words: “ich klopfe an daz herze dîn, / dîn friuntschaft mir daz niht verbunne, / tuo ûf, mîn hort und lâ mich in” (I knock on the door of your heart, your friendship will not begrudge me entry, open up, my darling, and let me in!).¹⁴

The voice that announces itself as if knocking at the door of the heart is borrowing the voice of the beloved, knocking, to which we have seen the bride rise and open over and again (cf. Canticles 5:2, 5:5). This voice speaks here through a lady who is the incarnation of narrative itself. What more clever construction could one imagine to conflate Mary’s conception of the Word, the audience’s reception of narrative, and the resumption of the tale at hand all in one “opening” gesture? The opening to book 9 is a call to make room in one’s heart for a heartfelt participation in the continuation of the story and thus in its manifestation of *triuwe* as truth. The awaited *illuminatio*, the heart’s induction into knowledge, is found in compassion with the story’s protagonist; here as elsewhere this loving entry is also a wound.¹⁵ With the penetrated heart thus evoked, the audience’s experience joins with the narrator’s words of conversion to the new woman: *Mir ist von herzen leit ir pîn*. To open one’s heart to Lady Âventiure’s urgent knocking is to participate in—or rather to renew—a fellowship of suffering hearts that was first conjured in the second prologue.

What eluded both Ohly and Haug in reading this passage was the transfer of the stage of communication to the hearts of the recipients and the consequent modelling of empathetic response as the heart of truth. Such would have accorded well with Haug’s model of meaning formed in the act of narrative received, “in a shared path of loving and suffering.”¹⁶ It was not, however, a new way of making meaning peculiar to the composition of secular or romance narrative. In fact, as has become increasingly apparent in the preceding chapters, it was a new truth that comprised both our history and Christ’s, that made our pain into a mirror of Christ’s and held the two together in one suffering heart, Mary’s. To open one’s heart to this truth was to know as Mary knew, to experience as she did the descent of the Word into the all-too-cramped space of a human heart, to speak with her the words, *Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea*

¹⁴ As cited in Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 165–66. As Hamburger notes, the poem elaborates “the imagery of the Song of Songs in combination with that from Revelation 3:20 to give nuns models for an amorous colloquy with Christ.” Similar passages are found earlier in the thirteenth century; see Messelken, “Rabe und Taube,” pp. 112–13 and 164.

¹⁵ The ideas of the knocking on and opening the door to the heart and that of penetrating and wounding it are interchangeable; both equally identified with Christ’s side wound as the door to his heart. By the first half of the thirteenth century this image complex becomes conventional: see Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 158–68, esp. 164–66.

¹⁶ “... im liebenden und leidenden Mitgehen mit dem ... literarisch gestalteten Schicksal,” *LDMA*, p. 178.

commorabitur (Canticles 1:12), and enter into her mystery, one that united conception and compassion, an embrace of both loving and suffering. In such compassionating participation empathy is sanctified, for it constitutes a condition in which the heart opens, that is, bleeds, for fellow men as Christ bled when he, as Herzeloide informs her son, “died the death of our flesh most cruelly on the cross.”¹⁷ The heartblood of compassion is our equivalent of Herzeloide’s flowing milk, our *triuwe* in return for Christ’s. *Swerz niht geloubet, der sündet*.

Both the second and third prologues thus serve one message: *compassio*, this reciprocal entry into a heart-wound, could reveal history, it could generate narrative as an experience of the truth. There were conditions on this possibility, which Wolfram lays out in his prologues. Their essence is the acknowledgement of an abject, body-bound humility that enables reciprocal recognition of inner truth—the same that we saw initially articulated through the expanded role of Alexis’s *spuse*, or through the interpolation of Briseida’s story as a contrafact to the audience’s expectations of Helen. With Herzeloide, three different personifications of female suffering for love, the *sponsa derelicta*, Mary’s *compassio*, and the worldly widow, meet and their convergence is complete; the three have become one in her testimony to a woman’s renewed experience of Mary’s knowing. The reiteration of the moment of heartfelt identification staged as the regeneration of Parzival’s story in the opening to book 9 is a signal to the audience that an arc of meaning is on the verge of completion, the aimless drifting of *âventiure* is about to touch land again, which will occur in a renewed and decisive encounter with a woman’s widowed grief, the third meeting between Parzival and Sigune. The relationship between witnessing audience, a woman’s suffering, and the constitution of truth through shared tears, first demonstrated in Herzeloide’s transformation, is remixed and restaged at the opening of book 9 through a reverse arrangement: here the poetic exposition, or communication about the making of the story in the penetrated heart, precedes. The crucial moment of identification with women’s suffering follows in Parzival’s own encounter with the widowed bride, his entry into the compassionating heart.

In this final chapter we return to the two images of the psalter-reading woman with which we began, Sigune and Laudine, to rediscover them as widows. What the two finally have in common is that each represents the widowed bride within a carefully constructed presentation of narrative poetics as Mary’s reading *en romans*—Wolfram, in fact, tells us as much by twice evoking Laudine’s dilemma as the point of reference for his portrayal of Sigune, measuring either woman against an ideal of widowed fidelity. What Chrétien had communicated to his audience through Yvain’s path from Laudine to the *pucele*, Wolfram incorporated into a parallel construction in *Parzival* that leads from Herzeloide’s grieving lactation to the apotheosis of grief in Sigune. In both *Parzival* and *Yvain*, proper orientation to the suffering of the widowed bride, to a woman’s tears, is where audience and protagonists alike learn proper response to a story told. This process, in which the protagonist learns to read the widow, forms the narrative arc or

¹⁷ Herzeloide’s statement is echoed early in book nine by Kahenis, lines 448,10–12 (see below, pp. 335–36).

horizontal axis between two encounters that each double an identification in suffering within the narrative with an appeal to the audience to accomplish the same; indeed, in which continuation of the tale is made contingent on such continuity of heartfelt participation (see [figs. 8.1](#) and [8.2](#)). The resulting four-cornered construction accomplishes a presentation of narrative poetics such as, when Chrétien first laid it out in *Yvain*, had never been attempted before. The scenes together, in either text, build up a complex of images and associations between love, suffering, and knowing; where knowing resides in the initiation into another's pain, an act of reading that penetrates the heart of the beheld and thereby wounds the heart of the beholder. The heart, the wound and the Word; *compassio* as union in the wounded heart mediated by a woman's grieving and reading or reading grief: this was the point in which the popularizing potential of the monastic transformation of reading culminated.

This increasing focus on the widow's grief as the centrepiece of the new poetics of body and truth I outlined previously, in [chapter 4](#).¹⁸ By the end of the twelfth century, the literature of Mary's *compassio* had developed such that the relationship that Wolfram repeatedly exploits between witnessing audience, a woman's suffering, and the constitution of truth through shared tears is readily recognized as its derivative. The influential Passion tract known as the "Quis dabit," written before 1205 and probably of Cistercian origin, begins with the words, "Who will lend my head and eyes a stream of tears so that I might weep night and day until the Lord appears to his servant in a vision or a dream to console my soul?"¹⁹ The tears the author seeks are Mary's. To share in Mary's tears is to know her experience, which reveals sacred history: "I beseech you," he addresses her, "pour out for me those tears which you had at his Passion, and, so that they might flow more copiously, let us exchange words with each other concerning the Passion of your son, my lord and God. Tell me, I beg, *the true sequence of events*."²⁰ In order to know, then, the interrogating devotee must first learn from Mary how to weep, for, as he protests, "I am a wretch with a stony heart, and I cannot weep." Mary in turn requires the devotee's tears as the condition for her speech, for him to know and to write of her experience: "Tu tamen, cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magnis doloribus ipsa perpensi" (You, however, write with tears those things which I have pondered with great pain).²¹ Thus, this text, too, is generated and can only be generated out of a moment of heartfelt identification with a woman's suffering.

This is a most revealing beginning; it also demonstrates what had occurred over the previous century with regard to tears and stories told. Before the twelfth century, long-standing

¹⁸ See pp. 177–87, above.

¹⁹ Translation modified from Bestul, ed. and trans., p. 167. Medieval tradition attributed the text to Bernard of Clairvaux; the modern attribution to Oglerius of Lociedo is questionable, as noted in Büttner, *Überlieferung*, p. 31; all that is certain is that Oglerius used and expanded on the text of "Quis dabit" in his *De laudibus sanctae dei genitricis*, thus giving a *terminus ante quem* of 1205. An informative discussion is Marx, "Lamentation of Mary," pp. 137–57.

²⁰ "Quis dabit," ed. and trans. Bestul, p. 169, emphasis added.

²¹ "Quis dabit," ed. and trans. Bestul, p. 168/69.

Reading the Widow in *Yvain*

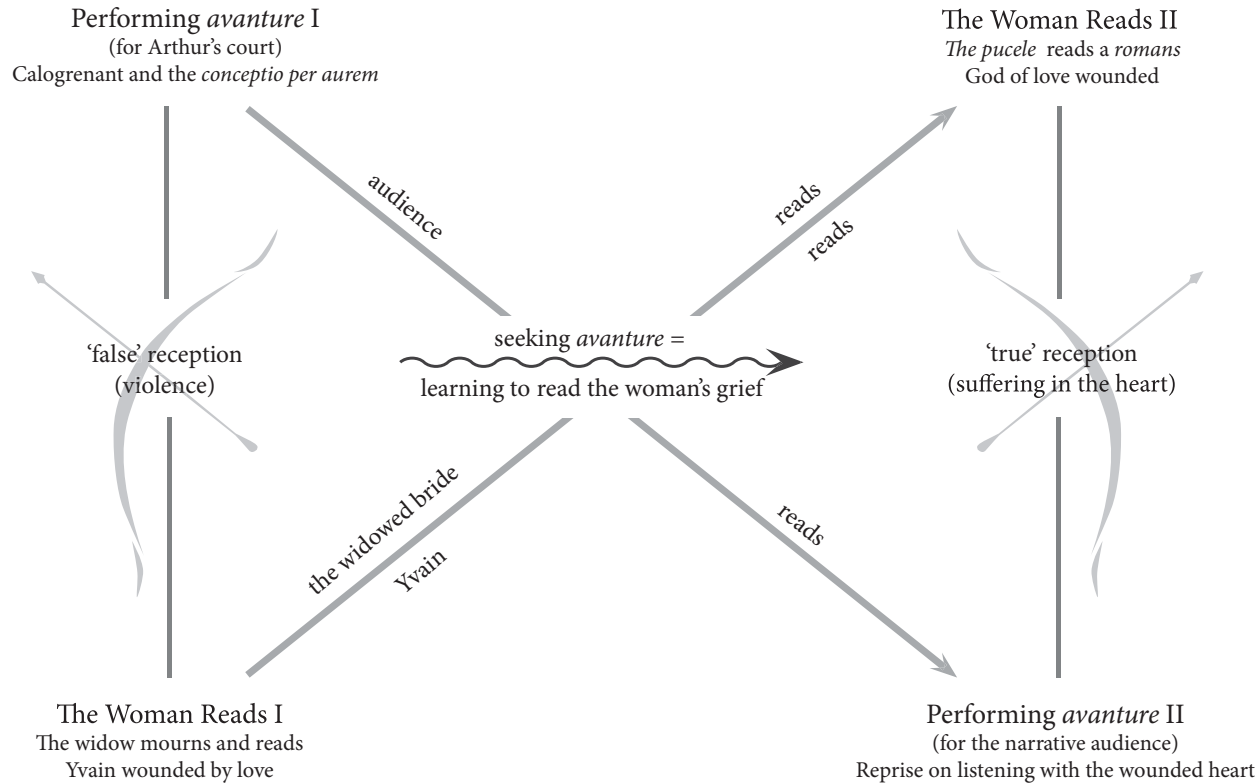


Figure 8.1. Diagram design by Barbora Hanova. © Morgan Powell.

Reading the Widow in *Parzival*

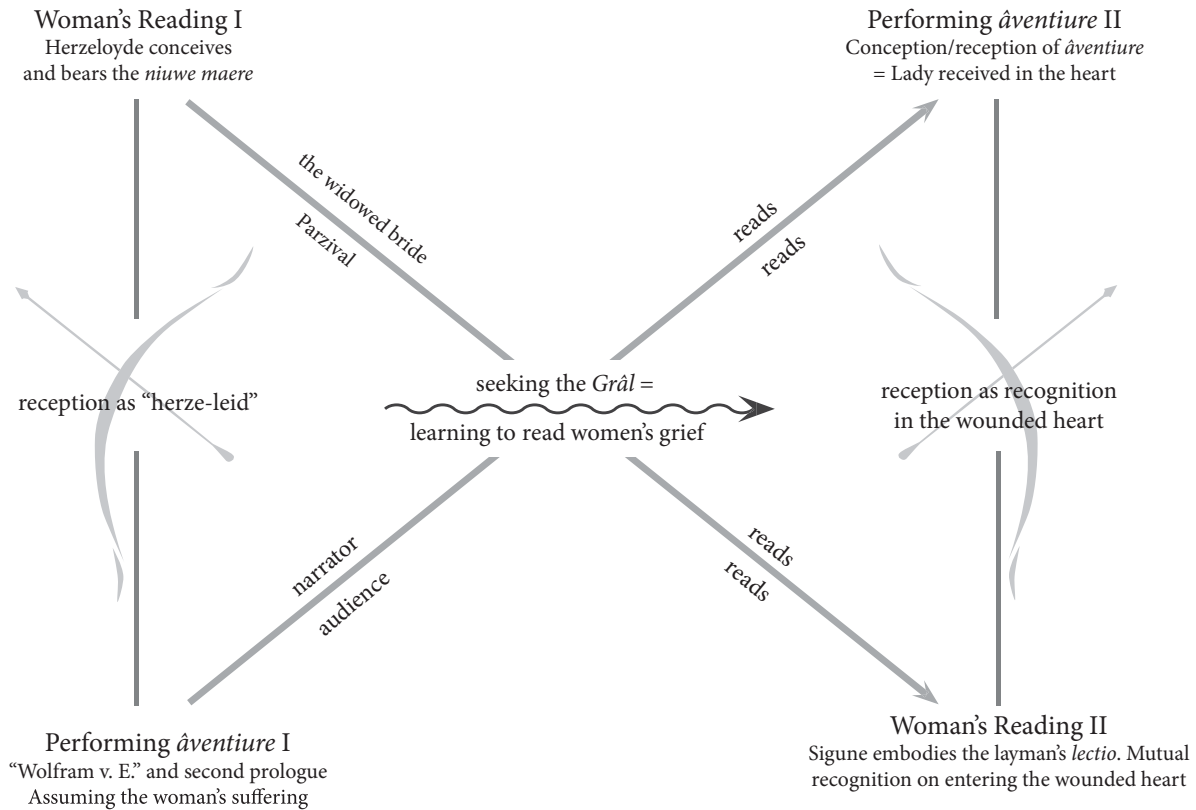


Figure 8.2. Diagram design by Barbora Hanova. © Morgan Powell.

monastic tradition had condoned tears only out of compunction for sins, secondarily out of desire for Heaven, and the tears Mary requires are neither.²² Mary herself had not been seen to weep, but rather to stand, stoically, at the cross.²³ In the “*Quis dabit*” and other texts of Marian *compassio*, participation itself requires the tears of a woman’s loving grief. Tears are the visible manifestation of shared inner suffering without which no telling is granted; the story is received with the wounded heart or not at all. But more than this: tears generate narrative, for what Mary revealed was neither exegesis nor interpretation but *sacra historia* itself, the story that scripture did not tell and thus was discovered by being her. It was revelation, or *erliuhten*, that occurred in the communion of wounded hearts.

To know this story, then, required the reader to become the mirror of Mary’s pain, and the content of the “*Quis dabit*” is dedicated entirely to this purpose. To the same purpose, Mary had begun to weep, to sigh and groan and even to swoon and fall to the ground; that is, she became more and more the mirror of a secular widow’s grief.²⁴ Even as she had begun to speak, her pain found expression in a familiar language of gesture so that it could be known, and through it, Christ’s: Mary makes the Word knowable as flesh at the Passion even as she did in the Incarnation. The devotee seeks not only to know what she knew but also to learn *how* to know as she did; her tears are the metonymic signifier for this process. To the extent that the reader-devotee is able to assimilate Mary’s pain to the self, Mary’s story is revealed—in terms of the same pain. A symmetry of inner disposition allows the blackened body, the body in grief, to reveal sacred truth. As Mary herself says, she, now glorified and in Heaven, can no longer weep; her human interlocutor must therefore reconstitute the humanity she expressed at the cross,²⁵ and this, the human complement to the divine, will reveal “the true sequence of events,” as it enables Mary to tell, and her audience to feel, what she felt.

The ultimate objective of this knowing was the renewed embrace of the Word, the mystery that saw Mary’s experience of conception and *compassio* as one, an experience offered the audience (like the author) of the “*Quis dabit*” by learning to be her.²⁶ The promise of the same experience is what inspires Wolfram to the extraordinary

22 McGuire, “Monks and Tears,” pp. 133–51; also Weinand, *Tränen*, pp. 172–82; Adnès, “Larmes,” 9:295–97.

23 See above, p. 186.

24 All these gestures occur in the “*Quis dabit*”; in one redaction, Mary also shakes her head and beats at her neck. See Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 99–101.

25 “*Illa respondet: ‘Illud quod queris coniungituum est et magni doloris; sed quia iam glorificata sum, flere non possum. Tu tamen cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magnis doloribus ipsa perpensi’* (“*Quis dabit*,” ed. Bestul, p. 168).

26 Both the “*Quis dabit*” and Odo of Morimund’s sermon (discussed in chapter 4), point to this connection by attributing the strength Mary needs to sustain her suffering to an infusion from the “Most High,” an overshadowing of the Spirit just as it occurred at the conception; “*Quis dabit*,” ed. Bestul, p. 180; Odo of Morimund, “Homilia,” p. 420. In keeping with the same idea, a tradition developed beginning in the twelfth century that saw Mary giving birth a second time at the cross, this time to holy church; see Neff, “Mary’s Labor,” 254–73. The “*Quis dabit*” identifies Mary’s pain at the cross with the pain of childbirth that she was spared at the birth of Christ (ed. Bestul, p. 177).

representation of Herzeloide's transformation as a bodily coalescence of conception, grieving and birth. The heart of knowing lay in the woman's suffering heart, and through this, her human suffering in dialogue with Christ's on the cross, Mary with Christ sanctified all human suffering, initiated a reciprocal gaze and a reciprocal wound that could be reconstituted in *compassio*, a loving suffering with and for one's fellows; that is, to reconstitute this reciprocity of "hearts ... stirred with compassion and pierced to the point of tears"—as Peter of Blois evoked it in passing—was itself to fulfil (though he does not say so) Peter's condition for the salutary value of tears: that they proceed from the love of Christ.²⁷ Decisive was not the object of attention, whether Christ's suffering as human flesh or the flesh of suffering humanity, whether tears for Arthur or tears for Christ, but rather the constitution of a true knowing from heart to heart, a negation of bodily difference through the reciprocal manifestation of inner truth. This possibility was delivered to humanity through the woman who conceived the Word as flesh and redelivered through her when she became the human mirror of Christ's Passion. Lady Âventiure's Annunciation prepares the audience for a redelivery of the same possibility through the woman who is Herzeloide's extension into the body of narrative, Sigune.

Ist iemen dinne? (Is Anybody There?)

With her foster-mother, Herzeloide, Sigune shares the dual distinctions of generating some of the most unforgettable images of German romance narrative and being the object of widely divergent interpretations. For the moment I will leave these latter aside in favour of offering a new interpretation of her third and final living appearance, reading it as the narrative embodiment of entry into the heart of compassion.²⁸

This third scene is entirely Wolfram's invention and by far the most extensive of Sigune's four appearances. These occur (1) just before Parzival enters the knighthood, (2) after he leaves the Grail Castle, having failed in the destiny appointed him, (3) here, before he meets Trevrizent and recognizes God's grace, and finally, (4) when, after ascending to the Grail kingship, he finds Sigune dead in her cell. In Chrétien's unfinished *Conte du Graal*, Perceval makes a single encounter with a young woman, said to be his *germaine cosine* but otherwise anonymous, holding her slain beloved in her lap.²⁹ Wolfram distributed the content of this scene over Parzival's first two encounters with Sigune (Cu-si-ne), and then added two more.³⁰ The resulting sequence suggests a progression parallel to Parzival's narrative path, his unceasing action and displacement contrasted with her passivity and stasis—a stasis so complete as to seem to exist outside the passage of narrative time.³¹ This is a narrative doubling we have seen before, in the expanded

²⁷ See above, pp. 200–202.

²⁸ Similarly, Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 196.

²⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal*, lines 3368–628, see esp. 3538–39.

³⁰ For extensive comparison see Mertens Fleury, *Leiden*, pp. 150–63.

³¹ Bumke has repeatedly drawn attention to Sigune's development as "einen Heilsweg ..., der offenbar kontrapunktisch zu Parzivals Weg zum Gral konzipiert ist"; here Bumke, *Wolfram von*

role of the abandoned bride in the *Chanson de Saint Alexis*, and it serves very much the same purpose. The layman's struggle and the woman's grieving become contrasting and complementary trajectories, hermeneutic cousins, in a seemingly endless and—if Trevrizent's wisdom is to be believed—pointless narrative quest.³² Ultimately, the quest reveals the reversal of that wisdom. But why? Neither Parzival's adventures nor those of Gawan offer any more than a tangle of possible and often contradictory answers to this question. Wolfram's first prologue would indicate that the answer is in some sense Sigune's to give; the revelation of meaning in the knight's narrative was referred there to a reading objective identical with the woman's *zil*, in which she constitutes the diaphanous body of truth.

Lady Âventiure's "wondrous tidings" concerning Parzival reveal him merely wandering as before, somewhat aimlessly through a forest.³³ The remarkable wind-up of the story's reopening is staged, it seems, merely to bring Parzival to Sigune's doorstep, that is, to the window of her cell:

Swertz niht geloubt, der sündet.
diu âventiure uns kündet
daz Parzivâl der degen balt
kom geriten ûf einen walt,
ine weiz ze welhen stunden;
aldâ sîn ougen funden
ein klôsen niwes bûwes stên.

(435,1–7)

(He sins who does not believe this. Lady Âventiure bears us tidings that Parzival, the bold warrior, came in his riding upon a wood—I've no idea at what hour—and there his eyes fell on a cell, newly built.)

The content of Parzival's third meeting with Sigune is of no consequence for the progression of the narrative—as if to underline this point, its sole result is that Sigune puts Parzival on Cundrie's path, which he no sooner takes up than he loses it again (442,25–30). Neither does it provide any new information on the hero's progress. No use is made of the opportunity to recount his adventures since the two last met; Parzival's reply to Sigune's questions reveals nothing beyond his double longing for his wife and the Grail (441,4–14). The scene's importance lies in the encounter itself, in the progressive and reciprocal process of recognition that it brings about between the bereaved woman and the errant knight, cousins in suffering. For the first time, each opens to the other's

Eschenbach, pp. 87–88. Similar conclusions in Mertens Fleury, *Leiden lesen*, p. 163, and Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 265–84.

32 As Parzival learns from Trevrizent, the Grail can be neither sought nor won, cf. lines 468,10–14.

33 The brief summary of Parzival's adventures in the interim (lines 434,11–30) is notable only for the lack of information of any consequence. The one specific event named, the restoration of Anfortas's sword in the fountain of Lac, serves to illustrate the point: the sword is never mentioned again; moreover, at the tale's conclusion, when Parzival battles Feirefiz, his sword is not the one he received from Anfortas, but the one he stole from Ither (cf. lines 744,17–18).

heart and the nature of its grief. Wolfram manages to postpone this moment nearly to the scene's end, when, echoing the "heart's" words from the book's opening, "sît irz, frou âventiure?" (Is it you, Lady Taleteller?) (433,7), Sigune exclaims, "ir sîtz hêr Parzivâl?" (It's you, Lord Parzival?) (440,28), and then contributes her own series of questions out of heartfelt concern: "sagt an, wie stêtz iu umben grâl? / Habt ir geprüevet noch sîn art? / oder wiest bewendet iwer vart?" (Tell me, have you news of the Grail? Have you indeed learned its nature? Or what then is the reason for your wandering?) (440,29–441,2). Their interaction reiterates the encounter between Lady Âventiure and the locked heart from beginning to end. It is initiated when Parzival approaches the window, the sole opening in Sigune's sealed enclosure, and calls, "ist iemen dinne?" (Is anybody there?) The woman's voice within returns, "jâ" (437,2). The question that should follow and could from either side, *Who is it?* (*wer sît ir?* as in line 433,1), is spoken by neither, because its answer is a matter of deeper recognition, which is the objective of the entire scene.

Sigune's simple, opening *ja* announces the first meeting between the two that begins with speech rather than with her *wuofen*, or mourning wail. Her existence, as the scene reveals, has taken a decisive turn. For Parzival, too, a decisive turn is at hand. As he "knocks" here we are reminded that he seeks the Lady herself—"der junge degen unervorht / reit durch âventiur suochen" (the fearless young warrior rode in search of *âventiure*). But God has something else in mind: "sîn wolte got dô ruochen: er vant ein klosnærinne" (God then took his part: he found a holy recluse) (435,10–13). God, then, personally provides for a knocking at a different door. To communicate the result of this encounter, Wolfram awaits the conclusion of the next one, on Good Friday, with the penitent pilgrims:

hin rîtet Herzeloide fruht.
dem riet sîn manlîchiu zuht
kusch unt erbarmunge:
sît Herzeloide diu junge
in het ûf gerbet triuwe,
sich huop sîns herzen riuwe.
alrêste er dô gedâhte,
wer al die werlt volbrâhte,
an sînen schepfære,
wie gewaltet der wære.

(451,3–12)

(On rides Herzeloide's child; so advised by his manly upbringing, his candour and his feeling heart: because the young Herzeloide had passed her *triuwe* on to him, he came to know heartfelt suffering. Only now did his thoughts turn to Him who had brought the world into being, to his Creator, and how almighty he must be.)

We open our hearts to Lady Taleteller; Parzival opens his to the sufferings of Sigune, of his fellow men, and of Christ on Good Friday—this latter being recalled by the pilgrim Kahenis in an echo of Herzeloide's words: "wâ wart ie hôher triwe schîn, / dan die got durch uns begienc, / den man durch uns anz kriuze hienc?" (Where was greater *triuwe* ever revealed than in that which God endured for us when he was nailed to the cross

for our sakes?) (448,10–12). The wheel has come full circle: Parzival's "baptism" in the *triuwe* of milk and tears, the narrator's wounded heart, and the audience's participation in the tale are all joined in the heart of the suffering woman—and thereby also to Christ.

Sigune's enclosure is the final station of her existence and the one in which it will reach fulfilment. How we are to see it makes up in large part the content of the scene, including a lengthy preamble of some three strophes before the conversation can be fully engaged. This is devoted to *telling us* what Parzival finds as opposed to what he thinks he sees: *aldâ sîn ougen funden ein klôsen* (And there his eyes fell on a cell) (435,6–7). What "his eyes find" is not what they see:

er vant ein klôsnærinne,
diu durch die gotes minne
ir magetuom unt ir freude gap.
wîpflicher sorgen urhap
ûz ir herzen blüete alniuwe.
unt doch durch alte triuwe.
Schîânatulander
und Sigûnen vand er.

(435,13–20)

(He found a holy recluse who for the love of God had offered up her virginity and her happiness. That fountain of all women's sorrow bled ever fresh from her heart and yet by reason of an old wound. Schianatulander and Sigune were those he found.)

These verses form a carefully constructed chiasm that describes the central paradox of Sigune's existence. In all outward appearance, this woman is a virgin recluse who has devoted her body and her life exclusively to Christ. Neither we nor Parzival initially know any more of the occupant's identity than this. But the apparently factual statement, *er vant ein klôsnærinne*, undergoes a reversal when we learn that this virgin is not enclosed with her heavenly bridegroom, or not with him alone: *Schîânatulander und Sigûnen vand er*. This incongruity is underlined by the occupant's isolation from human settlement and ecclesial support, brought to a point when the narrator insists: "Sigûne doschesse / horte selten messe: / ir leben was doch ein venje gar" (Duchess Sigune all but never heard mass; still, her life was one long prayer on bended knee) (425,23–25). And the continuing description, which lingers over the pallor of Sigune's faded beauty, her renunciation of "all worldly joy," her hairshirt and grey habit and the psalter in her hands, leaves no doubt as to her station in life. Regardless of the paradox then, this is in truth a holy life, but its very holiness is inseparable from the central statement that bridges the gap between Parzival's visual impressions and what is inside the cell, between outward appearance and inner truth: "That fountain of all women's sorrow bled ever fresh from her heart, and yet by reason of an old wound."³⁴ These words contain the entire meaning

³⁴ My translation restores what I take as the more immediate sense of the image. Line 435,17 contains a pun, as both *blüete* and *bluote* (the reading offered in MSS D and G) can mean either 'bled' or 'blossomed' (Lexer, *Handwörterbuch*, 315, 317; and Beneke, Müller, Zarncke, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 1: 215, 219). But while the idea of sorrow "blossoming" ever new, which is that adopted

of the encounter, the enclosed truth that it opens to Parzival's knocking. The process of recognition the scene describes is Parzival's entry, and ours with him, into communion with this wound. The same process replays the familiar question, the *Quae est ista?*, as a knock-knock riddle, an entry from exterior to interior, such that it becomes a narrative iteration of the locus of truth as it was announced in the first prologue: woman as the blackened body that reveals inner truth.

But what is the *alte triuwe* that I have translated as the "old wound"? The opposition between old and new is one—like that between the two different identities of the woman Parzival "finds," the *klosnærinne* and his cousin Sigune—between women's suffering in worldly love and another "wound" that is not contingent, not temporally limited, continuous with Sigune's suffering as it is continuous through time. It is the opposition between *sacra historia* and the *mære*, between *gotes minne* and Sigune's *minne*. *Alte triuwe* evokes Christ's *triuwe* on the cross but even more Mary's *triuwe* as the woman who suffered the same heart-wound for and with him. Sigune's love reveals that love, the new reveals the old; love of others renews our love of Christ. This is essentially the same message as that communicated through Alexis's bride, whose unflinching fidelity finally merits a heavenly embrace in which she is (re-)united with her husband and with Christ at the same time. It is above all Herzeloide's message, the import of the *lactans dolorosa* for the *niuwe mære*.

Still, while the audience is now informed of the identity of the occupants of the cell, Parzival is not: "dennoch was im hart unkuont / wer si wære od möhte sîn" (Still he had no idea who she was or even might be) (437,22–23). For him recognition will come only after the conversation is well under way, at the end of the sixth of eight strophes (240 verses) that comprise the full encounter; that is, only after the *klosnærinne* has initiated him into the mystery of her existence as she understands it. The point of departure is her ring, which thus becomes the quintessence of all that she represents. Enquiring after its justification, Parzival goes so far as to suggest she is a fraud: "For whose sake, then, do you wear that ring," he scoffs (*in schimpfe*), "ich hôrt ie sagen mære, / klōsnærinne und klōsnære / die solten mīden âmûrschaft" (If I've heard right, holy men and women aren't supposed to be lovey-dovey) (439,13–15).³⁵ The audience feels this reproach as

as a rule in modern translations, is not at all foreign to the imagery of the heart's wounding in love and mystical imagery of Christ's wounds, this only underlines its essential character as bleeding. The related rendering of *alte triuwe* as "old wound" I will discuss shortly.

35 Parzival's confusion is shared—but in reverse—by modern critics. Nellmann remarks in his commentary on these lines that, as a recluse, Sigune should have been formally inducted into this life with a church ceremony; Green, *Women Readers*, p. 148, feels Parzival must be ignorant of the role played by a nuptial ring in the same ceremony, which the bride of Christ (nun or recluse) then wore as a sign of her profession. Neither custom had, however, been widely established by 1200; they appear instead to have formed part of the church's attempt to reign in and regulate the female eremitic and monastic life in the course of the thirteenth century; see *VCM*, 2:89 and 224–25, esp. n377. Aelred of Rievaulx makes no mention of either custom in his rule for recluses of ca. 1160, and Hildegard's nuns created a scandal in the eyes of another abbess, Texwindis, in part because of their habit of dressing as brides and wearing rings. Sigune's understanding of her ring, on the other hand, perfectly anticipates the sentiments that were to find representation in the ring of profession.

Sigune must: like acid on a wound. Sigune responds, however, with the solemnity of a sworn witness in her own defence, “swenne ich nu valsche gelerne, / sô hebt mirn ûf, sît ir dâ bî. / ruochts got, ich pin vor valsche vrî” (Should I ever learn false ways you may well denounce it, should you be present. As God is my witness, of falsehood I am free) (439,18–20). Her ensuing account of herself forms the “heart” of the encounter.³⁶ “This betrothal band” she says, she wears “for a man whose love I have never known in the human act, but whom the counsel of my virginal heart teaches me to love.”³⁷ For this man (still a riddle to Parzival) her love is unending, for he fought and died for her sake; she retains her virginity, but before God he is no less her husband. “Of true marriage this ring shall be my witness before God; this, the lock of my true devotion, and the heart’s stream that flows from my eyes.”³⁸

I have selected and paraphrased Sigune’s words so as to underline the echoes they contain of the life of a bride of Christ. Wolfram has ingeniously reconstructed the riddle between narrator and audience, the *Quae est ista*, such that the protagonist is in the dark about an identity in this case known to the audience. Parzival’s confusion serves to allow the audience to approach the same question on a different level. The crucial identity question concerns not the woman’s name but the truth of her existence, the central and obstinate insistence on continuity between human and divine love, between the grief of the bereaved *Minnedame* and the devotion of the bride of Christ—the meaning of her ring. For Parzival, “finding” the identities that lie within the enclosure will bring this revelation: the bride of Christ is *also* his cousin, Sigune. For the audience, the grieving existence of the woman it knows as Sigune becomes continuous with devotion to Christ, this devotion is revealed in and through that “historical” body, tears shed for Schianatulander are tears of *triuwe* to God.

That Sigune’s ring so immediately attracts Parzival’s attention is due to its luminosity. As we are told, this seal of “rehter minne rât” (the counsel of true love) “darts its rays like fiery sparks” from the darkness of her cell. “The noble ruby set in base brass with *al die âventiure sîn*,” the ring that, in the first prologue, identifies *rehten wîbes muot* with the corrected ideal of poetic representation, has found an equivalent here in *historia*, as a product of narrated experience that we can know and feel. That the ruby is replaced by a garnet in Sigune’s ring is only in keeping with Wolfram’s insistent displacement of symbolic identification: we are not to seek factual equivalence, but rather inward identity in ever-changing external manifestations. As the centre of luminous beauty in an otherwise utterly disconsolate existence, Sigune’s ring completes a statement of paradox that inwardly identifies her *triuwe* with the commitment the ring would appear to belie, the integrity, or *triuwe* of the bride of Christ. Sigune embodies this integrity in a literal sense; she lives it as apprehensible reality. The identity discovered by the audience is

36 Likewise Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, pp. 87–88.

37 “... disen mähelschaz / trag ich durch einen lieben man, / des minne ich nie an mich gewan / mit menseschlicher tæte: / magtuomflichs herzen ræte / mir gein im rätent minne” (439,22–27).

38 “der rehten ê diz vingerlîn / für got sol mîn geleite sîn. / daz ist ob mîner triwe ein slôz, / vonme herzen mîner ougen vlôz” (440,13–16).

one that identifies Sigune's grief, a woman's grief over her earthly beloved, with the grief of every Christian *sponsa* over Christ's death on the cross. She is his widow no less than Mary was, because she effects the incarnation of the same truth.

The clearest parallels are thus the apparently most unseemly, because they embody spiritual experience: the *inclusa* was seen as truly "interred," *consepulta* with Christ, dead to the world and thus enclosed in a living tomb. As the narrator says, "der helt lac dinne begraben tût: / ir leben leit ûf dem sarke nôt" (the warrior lay within dead and buried; her life was but suffering over his tomb) (435,21–22), and, "si minnete sînen tûten lîp" (she served in love his dead body) (436,3). The inward truth of this morbid obsession is once again other than it seems. Sigune experiences her existence not, or not only, as one of eternal grief, still less of penance, but rather as one of union with her beloved. With the following words she allows Parzival the long-delayed moment of recognition, and identity is revealed simultaneously with the idea that is the centre of her existence: "Ich pin hinne selbe ander" (Here within I am two together), she concludes her defence of the ring, "Schîanatulander / ist daz eine, dez ander ich" (Schianatulander is the one and I the other) (440,17–19). The two verses together suggest one place that comprises two beings, an identification of two in one, or two persons in one heart: "*Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*" (My beloved is mine and I am his) (Canticles 2:16). Here, too, tears lead to *unio*.

Sigune's factual enclosure recalls the celebrated verses on the beloved enclosed in the heart, long mistaken as the epitome of *Minnesang*, that have come to us within a collection of love letters from the monastic literary centre of Tegernsee:

Dû bist mîn, ich bin dîn
des solt dû gewis sîn
dû bist beslozen
in mînem herzen:
verloren ist daz slûzzelîn:
dû moust ouch immêr darinne sîn.³⁹

(You are mine, I am yours, of this you should be sure. You are locked within my heart; lost thereto the key: there within you ever must remain.)

The female voice of these verses emerged from the monastic experience of the Song of Songs; they, too, are a translation of the reading life of the bride.⁴⁰ The words *du bist mîn unt ich bin dîn* occurred no less readily in sermons on the beloved's knocking and entry from Canticles 5:2.⁴¹ Sigune's "necrophilia," as some have called it, reifies this

³⁹ *Minnesangs Frühling*, 1.1.8, p. 21. For an inquiry into the entire "love-letter" collection with an edition and translation of the texts, see Kühnel, *Dû bist mîn*; the famous verses are discussed there on pp. 27–34.

⁴⁰ As argued in detail by Ohly (and others previously), "Du bist mein," see esp. pp. 375–78, 391.

⁴¹ Ohly, "Du bist mein," p. 383, cites two sermons on Canticles 5:2 (one of them on Mary) that each contain a passage in which the bride's "cohabitation" in the heart is described as follows: "[er] ruowet da mit ir unt si mit ime. ... So sprichet denne diu sele o lieber herre du bist min und ich bin din" (He lies therein with her and she with him. ... Thus the soul proclaims, 'O dear Lord, you are mine and I am yours.) See also Edwards, "Winileodos," pp. 195–96.

metaphoric complex, both the enclosure of the heart and knocking for entry, but such that its promise of blissful union is accomplished only through suffering and grief. Her cell is to be understood as a *Herzkluse*, but to enter here is to enter a wound and to be likewise wounded, to be enclosed with another in a communion of suffering, a *compassio* of a most body-bound sort.⁴² Through obstinate insistence on the destiny that is singularly her own, Sigune reveals the meaning of the universal, the truth contained in suffering with the suffering Christ. But such meaning is revealed only to those who “knock on her heart,” a gesture that in fact corresponds to the opening of their own to empathy. This is the truth contained in the ring, in Sigune’s wounded heart, and in her *Herzkluse*, the truth of the true woman.

The reciprocity that is then established between the heart of the suffering bride, Sigune, and her audience, Parzival, is one that restores a bridge between earthly and divine love as it does between the life of the body and divine truth; it recapitulates, then, Mary’s gnostic act through the process of narrative, which is also a process of suffering. Sigune re-embodies Herzeloide’s *wāriu mære*, but where Herzeloide’s experience mirrors the simultaneity of birth and death, joy and suffering, contained in Mary’s uniquely prophetic apprehension of the Word, Sigune’s exhibits the apotheosis of purely human grief into a oneness with devotion to God even as it empties the imagery of love lyric into a union in suffering with the suffering Christ. And all of this is obliquely evoked as the obligation of the “believing” audience when Lady Âventiure seeks to penetrate their hearts.

Reading the Widow

It is Sigune’s function in the narrative to manifest a mystery, that is, how our history, in and of itself, can remanifest the truth of *sacra historia*. Accordingly, Wolfram does not refer Sigune’s mourning explicitly to devotion to the dead Christ. No words escape her lips equivalent to Herzeloide’s when she cites Mary’s breastfeeding as the *triuwe* or the heart’s bleeding that reciprocates Christ’s on the cross. Where he does refer Sigune’s suffering devotion to a model or exemplar beyond his own text it is instead one from the world of *âventiure*, and the model appears to be the negative counter-example of her literary forebear, Laudine, the widow who marries the man who slew her husband in the romance of *Yvain/Iwein*. Precise understanding of this gesture is the key to the relationship between Wolfram’s poetic superstructure and its foundations in Chrétien’s *Yvain*.⁴³

⁴² Similar conflation of sacred and profane, of *Minnesang* and religious imagery, characterized the further development of this image complex in the female monastic tradition; see Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 151–58.

⁴³ A comparison with Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein* (concluded by ca. 1200), while rewarding, cannot be attempted here. There are parallels between Chrétien’s text and Wolfram’s that directly concern my argument but are not found in Hartmann’s. These reinforce the conclusion, already acknowledged in the scholarship, that Wolfram knew and used both texts. Where the parallels directly concern the communication with the German audience over the nature of the narrative project in relation to its forebears, this admittedly raises questions that require further attention.

Its significance reaches beyond even the realm of romance poetics to the fundamental questions of reading and knowing that have shaped this book, to the function and identity of the woman as mirror in the long twelfth century. Wolfram's audience was well aware that the question, "who is the truest widow," was no simple matter of poetic rivalry, that it evoked a figure that held a central position in the very production of meaning within the western Christian church.⁴⁴ The question Sigune raises (and the audience is to answer) is once again that of the relationship between "woman ... and reading in the literary history of the West."⁴⁵

As I laid out earlier, Mary's grieving allowed a response to and recognition of Christ's suffering that acknowledged the weakness of the body; the widowed bride responded not by reaching beyond herself, but by discovering the truth of her oneness with the bodily Christ. Standing with Mary at the cross and weeping her tears, the new widow did not so much plead for forgiveness as she simply sank into the heart of her grief; her suffering could bypass penance to emerge from her own compassion and loss.⁴⁶ Her response was one of steadfast fidelity and selfless love (Wolfram's *triuwe*) that enabled her to know and to bear Christ's pain. In this embrace, the twelfth century discovered a new understanding of the widow. Not in an approximate or merely metaphorical sense but in the reality of human experience, Mary's experience at the cross expressed that of grieving widows in the world, and vice versa. This conjunction between love sacred and secular thus became both the accessible point of entry into and a generative pole of the continuity Mary creates between *sacra historia* and our experience. This is the conjunction that we find so puzzlingly distilled into the existence of Herzeloide, Sigune and Laudine, and what is at stake in Wolfram's claim to the truest portrayal of a widow's grief.

It is only one of the oddities of this apparently polemical gesture, which occurs not only in the third scene but also in the preceding (in which Parzival finds Sigune perched with her baleful burden in a linden tree), that it is aimed not at the remarrying widow directly (who receives no explicit mention) but instead at her confidant and lady-in-waiting, Lunete. Likewise unclear is precisely what motivates the narrator's indignation. In the first instance, we are told that "Sigune had heard no such advice as Lunete gave" (cf. 253,10–11). The narrator then castigates Lunete's *dame* indirectly by stating that Sigune desired no other man as replacement (*ergetzen*) of her loss, "als wîp die man bî wanke siht" (as with women of fickle will) (253,16). Again we hear an echo of the presentation of women's *triuwe* and inner truth, this time from the second prologue.⁴⁷ The contrast with Chrétien's widow, whom Chrétien names only once (if at all) as Laudine, would seem clear in that she gives up her mourning to remarry, while Sigune perseveres

⁴⁴ See Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 224 and passim, who describes his project as tracing "wie die Figur der Witwe ins Zentrum der christlich-occidentalen Sinnproduktion geraten ist."

⁴⁵ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 47–48.

⁴⁶ See above, pp. 179–80.

⁴⁷ Draesner, *Wege*, pp. 265–84, overlooks this point, despite making an argument constructed entirely around inter- and intratextual references. See also note 56, below.

in her *triuwe in extremis*.⁴⁸ The *Quae est ista*, the audience's search for meaning in a female identity, has been expanded to an intertextual frame of reference, with Sigune—the widow unto death—as the new female ideal.

Doubt arises, however, if we recall that the *wîp* whom Wolfram found untrue (*an wanke sach*, 114,11) stands in contrast to Herzeloide, herself a remarried widow—circumstances of which Parzival will shortly be informed by Trevrizent (494,15–30). On being widowed a second time (from Gahmuret), Herzeloide chooses Sigune's path, with consequences that can only cast a favourable light on the reasoning that motivates Laudine's decision.⁴⁹ Within the narrative, moreover, the idea that Wolfram might seriously advocate that widows continue in fidelity unto death is resoundingly countered by Orgeluse's story, the entire object of which appears to be that she overcome her embittered grief not as Sigune does but through remarriage to Gawan.

A third oddity is that, while Herzeloide and Laudine are truly secular widows—the latter can be taken as the near epitome of the expression of a woman's grief in this period; in three successive descriptions of her, Chrétien delivers the entire catalogue of gestures this entailed⁵⁰—Sigune is in reality no widow, but rather a grieving, virgin beloved. Mary herself, however, was not a widow in factual understanding; she became one, no less, through her own realization of scriptural imagery as history, *sponsa* was *mater* not in the succession of personal biography but as roles filled in relation to one male entity. Sigune's existence manifests Mary's realization of scriptural imagery as a process that defines her own narrative trajectory, a process to which we will later return in more detail. As one aspect of this existence, Sigune insists simultaneously on the roles of the virgin, the abandoned bride, and the widow—and appears to fulfil them all. In this, once again, she is very like Alexis's bride, whose persevering fidelity alone constitutes a holy trajectory that culminates in virginal widowhood as a position from which she surprisingly ascends to the heavenly embrace of the saint and the *sponsus*. Sigune remanifests this destiny in and as *âventiure*. True to the ironic cast of his gestures to Chrétien's romance, Wolfram claims that Sigune is the better widow because she is not one in the factual sense but rather only through inner truth.

48 Wolfram's gesture, naming only Lunete, is in fact consistent with the texts of both Chrétien and Hartmann, which name Laudine either not at all (seven of ten manuscripts of *Yvain*) or extremely seldom (the other three manuscripts use the name once, at line 2153, while in Hartmann's text she is named only twice, at lines 2421 and 2758). As a rule Chrétien refers to Yvain's bride only as *la dame*, in marked contrast to the frequent use of Lunete's name and in keeping with the anonymity of the bridal reader we have repeatedly observed. I use the name Laudine solely for clarity's sake. See the note in *Yvain*, ed. Hult, at line 2153.

49 Herzeloide's initial widowing is perhaps as close to Sigune's as a married woman's can be, while nonetheless recalling Laudine's responsibility in magnified form: Castis, her first husband, dies before the marriage is consummated but nevertheless leaves his two kingdoms in her care. Both are then lost after she flees to Soltâne (lines 494,15–30).

50 Laudine wails, swoons and falls to the ground, tears at her hair and clothes, wrings her hands, weeps, scratches or beats her face and breast, clutches at her throat, and is described as delirious. See *Yvain*, lines 1152–59, 1204–5, 1300–1301, 1415–17, 1471–91.

Accordingly, the argument is made *ex negativo*, by discrediting the alternative, outward qualification of inward excellence. The renewed allusion to Laudine in the third encounter all but entirely retracts the idea that the “best” widow should never remarry. We are first informed once again that “Today’s Lady Lunetes likewise arrive all too hastily on the scene wherever a woman’s fidelity is at stake” (cf. 436,8–10); and then, here, of all places, we are reminded that Sigune is not a widow: *If Sigune had become his wife, Lunete would not have dared ...* (cf. lines 436,4–5). But what reason would we then have to reprehend a hypothetically hasty Lunete for her advice in Sigune’s factual case? Rather than clarify, the narrator only multiplies the confusion. His deliberations conclude with the statement that a man whose wife maintains her fidelity *while he lives* has been granted the greatest gift; should he die, *she is free to do as she pleases*—although her reward for faithful widowhood will be greater (her crowning “wreath”) “than if she joins the pleasure of the dance” (cf. lines 436,11–22).

These concluding remarks are not, or not only, the narrator’s own but rather a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 7:39–40.⁵¹ This passage and the preceding verses (1 Corinthians 7:32–38, in particular verse 34) formed, together with the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23; Luke 8:5–15), the scriptural authority for the several heavenly rewards of the married, the widowed and the virgins.⁵² As seen above, the transformation of the role of the widow in the twelfth century went hand in hand with a shift in the understanding of this hierarchy of bodily roles, such that inner *intentio*, rather than socio-sexual station, became the decisive determiner of merit.⁵³ Wolfram is playing a shell game, and the shells involved are the three sexual lives of women, which should contain their respective thirty-, sixty- and hundred-fold rewards in Heaven. The models for each state are provided, in this case, not by saints’ lives or from scripture, but rather from the pantheon of *aventure*. The final remark on the crowning wreath appears to defer to the conventional system of model behaviour and its reward.

Sigune, however, would qualify for none of the conventional roles: for all her carnal devotion *uni viro* to a deceased knight servitor, she is factually a virgin and was not so much as betrothed to Schianatulander, so that she is neither widow nor wife. Conversely, while she insists on nothing if not her fidelity to her beloved and “spouse,” her intact virginity does not constitute that fidelity, but rather her deepest regret.⁵⁴ On the other hand, her place as the earthly embodiment of *triuwe* is never in doubt, as we were reminded at the opening of the second encounter: “al irdisch triuwe was ein wint, wan die man an

51 “A woman is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth: but if her husband die, she is at liberty. Let her marry to whom she will: only in the Lord. But more blessed shall she be, if she so remain, according to my counsel. And I think that I also have the spirit of God.” Groos, “Sigune,” 641–42, also commented on this connection.

52 Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 46–147; the resulting image idea can be seen in the picture of the “tree” of the three orders that is the object of discussion in part 8 of the *Speculum virginum* (cf. Jussen, *Witwe*, figs. 3–6).

53 See pp. 178–79, above.

54 As Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 109, observed, “Die Klausnerin ist nun Witwe (438,9), Jungfrau und Vermählte zugleich (435,13–15; 440,7ff).”

ir libe sach" (all earthly *triuwe* was as nothing next to the affliction visible in her person) (249,24–25). What this shell contains is clear, regardless of its outward appearance, and therein lies the point: such model categories and the corresponding social mores, "the condition and behaviour of the body," have no real bearing here.⁵⁵ Hence the narrator's corrective epilogue to his digression, as if calling himself to order: "wes mizze ich freude gein der nôt / als Sigûn ir *triuwe* gebôt? / daz möhte ich gerne lâzen" (But who am I to count out rewards in the face of the affliction Sigune endured for her devotion? That's better left alone!) (436,23–25).

The consequences of this multiple refraction are several. First, there is no criticism properly to be levelled at Laudine, for it is the inner truth (on which in her case we are left in the dark) that is decisive, the essence of Sigune's ring. Only Lunete is clearly in the wrong, but her position is nowhere in evidence—unless it is to be inferred among the audience.⁵⁶ Once again, the argument on women's fidelity points finally, inevitably, to the eyes of her beholders—reception of the *mære*. The indictment of Lunete serves to direct the audience to beware a misjudgement not infrequently encountered among modern critics: that Sigune's fidelity should be called into question as overly extravagant, self-indulgent or better overcome (such were among Lunete's arguments to Laudine); indeed, that it should require any justification other than the one she claims herself: inner truth. Beyond this, it is in her virtual widowhood, especially, that Sigune stands in opposition to the *wîp an wanke* and the woman whose exterior beauty (or virtue) hides a counterfeited heart, who are both evoked, in the second and first prologue, respectively, in opposition to an ideal of truth in narrative art. The narrator's endorsements thus serve to recall and renew Herzeloide's position in the romance's exposition. If Sigune surpasses "all earthly *triuwe*," then it is—as the preceding line states—because she is the child of Herzeloide's sister: "si was doch sîner muomen kint" (249,2). In Wolfram's ongoing exposition of romance poetics she assumes Herzeloide place.

Finally, then, exemplary exteriors and their presumed rewards are disenfranchised in favour of something that defies external imitation. *Sigûnen triuwe* is the extreme protraction of grief over the dead beloved into a state of permanent loving contemplation and unending embrace, that is, into a Marian devotion to the crucified Christ. The narrator's first indignant swipe at Lunete responds to Parzival's suggestion that the body be buried; the second follows the words, "si minnete sînen tôten lîp" (446,3). These remarks defend an all but monumental expression of a woman's grief at the same time as they suggest the same bears directly on the relationship of this tale to one told before. With the feigned sideswipes at Laudine that set up his "widow," appearances notwithstanding, as the epitome of *wîbes triuwe*, Wolfram indicates that "she"—his narrative as her body—at the same time surpasses previous embodiment of truth in romance narrative. But what claim had Chrétien made before him?

55 "Der Zustand und Haltung des Körpers," Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 147.

56 Draesner's idea (*Wege*, pp. 271–73) that Parzival, by advising in the second encounter that Sigune (in effect) bury her sorrow, is placed in the position of Lunete, is ingenious, but Wolfram undercuts it immediately when he makes the point of comparison reside not in such a release from grief but rather in *ergetzen*, or compensation for the loss. For the third encounter as well, Draesner argues that Lunete's position is implicitly placed among the audience.

Yvain and the “tres bele crestienne”

We last revisited Chrétien's *Yvain* by reason of parallels exhibited between the description of the *pucele* reading in the garden and the descent of the Word to claim its bride. Landri of Waben's understanding of Canticles 4:9, *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea sponsa, vulnerasti cor meum uno oculorum tuorum et in uno crine colli tui* (You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck), is remarkable for its recording *en romans* of an understanding of this passage such that the bride inspires and even prompts the descent of the loving god through her “reading” act—to paraphrase the terms in which Chrétien hypothetically extolled the sheer irresistibility of his young lady's reading. Compassion, as Landri (among others) saw it, the desire better to know our pain, moved God to reciprocate the bride's reading gaze, her attempt “to comprehend what no place can hold,” and nonetheless take human form in the tiny space of her womb. That is, as Chrétien put it, “to serve her he [became] a man, issuing from his divinity and striking the love-wound in his own body.”

Pucele aventure, as we might call her, in this scene effects the descent of the Word *en romans* by wounding the heart of her audience with her reading. The scriptural image at stake was presumably unmistakable to a twelfth-century audience, and it implied a reverse wounding that enabled *compassio*, the reciprocal recognition of suffering that was constituted in the reciprocal gaze, the moment that Odo of Morimund paused over as the “stupendous axis of vision” that changed the world forever.⁵⁷ A doubling in the wound of love is likewise built into Chrétien's four-cornered construction: the wounding of the god of love at the sight of a woman's reading is the reprise of Yvain's wounding over the sight of Laudine's reading grief; the wounding of incarnation should find here its parallel in a wounding of compassion—once again as received by the audience of the suffering woman (fig. 8.1). But the parallel between the two scenes only serves to underline their incommensurability. Chrétien's romance of love conceived for the woman widowed by the lover's violence is constructed as the result of an illicit, indeed, an invisible gaze; reciprocal vision is precluded, even as loving compassion is displaced by predatory lust. The task of the romance, then, is somehow to correct the distortion, to teach its audience and Yvain alike—both loving voyeurs—how to read the woman suffering for love. This, it turns out, is none other than instruction in how properly to read tales told, tales such as the *pucele* or the narrator relate, tales, most crucially, such as the one Yvain was told at Arthur's court: *avantures*.

The four-cornered configuration we found in *Parzival* requires two generative moments, one narrated and the other staged as narration, to allow the romance to unfold (fig. 8.2). In *Yvain* these first two corners are Yvain's wounding for love of Laudine and, preceding this, a narrator's exposition presented though the disjoint staging of *aventure* as eyewitness report (*ce que je vi*, 174) at Arthur's court (fig. 8.1). The latter event, Calogrenant's tale, has been perhaps more often discussed as a portrayal of the generation and staging of romance narrative than any other scene in the canon. Arthur is absent, lingering too long in bed with his queen (who is not named). Her later

⁵⁷ See above, pp. 180–81, 183–84. On the relative obscurity to a medieval audience of the possible reference to Cupid and Psyche, see above p. 256 note 67.

and somewhat surreptitious entry interrupts Calogrenant's tale, which, upon altercation with Key, he threatens not to continue—unless his lady, the queen, should insist. Wolfram's narrator twice renewed this gesture, directed to the women in his audience. For our purposes, two observations are key: first, the narrative is resumed only under the auspices of the listening lady, and Calogrenant now (why not before?) requires of his audience that they listen with their hearts.⁵⁸ As Chrétien's narrator has already reminded us, to belong to Arthur's court was—or should have been (should be?)—to belong to an order of the heart in which stories (*nouveles*) are told, most especially of love,

of its torments and of the suffering and the great good that are the part of disciples of its order, who, in those days, were great both in number and quality. But today few remain true to love. ... Today, indeed, love is little more than a fiction [*tournee a fable*], because those who have in fact felt nothing of it say they love, but they lie. They make of love a pack of fables and fairly tales [*fable et menchonge*] who expound on it with no right to do so.⁵⁹

Calogrenant's exordium thus joins the narrator's own; he sets about (re-)establishing this truth, one contingent upon lived experience received in the loving heart.⁶⁰ As he elaborates before his newly constituted audience (with the lady in its midst), truth is made not in the ears, but in the heart, "Car parole oïe est perdue / S'ele n'est de cuer entendue" (For that word is lost that is not heard with the heart) (151–52). This brings up the second key point. There follows what may be regarded as the actual prologue to Chrétien's romance, delivered instead by the knight telling his tale of personal shame. What it describes we have seen several times before, a *conceptio per aurem*, here *en romans*:

As oreilles vient le parole,
Aussi comme li vens qui vole,
Mais n'i arreste ne demore,
Ains s'en part en mout petit d'ore,
Se li cuers n'est si estilliés
C'a prendre soit appareilliés;
Que chil le puet en son venir
Prendre et enclorre et retenir.
Les oreilles sont voie et dois
Ou par ent y entre la vois;
Et li cuers prent dedans le ventre
Le vois que par l'oreille y entre.
(157–68)

⁵⁸ "Such a demand from him was [at this point] quite unnecessary," Hunt, "Rhetorical Background," 14.

⁵⁹ "Des angousses et des dolours / Et des grant biens qu'ont souvant / Li desiple de son couvant, / Qui lors estoit riches et boens; / Mais or y a molt poi des siens, / ... / Or est Amours tournee a fable / Pour chou que chil qui riens n'en sentent / Dient qu'il aiment, mes il mentent; / Et chil fable et menchongne en font / Qui s'en vantent et droit n'i ont" (12–27).

⁶⁰ Alois Wolf points out the connection between the two passages, but relates them to the idea of truth in narration rather than to a true heartfelt reception—a misinterpretation that, not surprisingly, all but ignores Calogrenant's extensive appeal (lines 150–70) for this latter: Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter," pp. 191–209 at 200–201.

(The word comes to the ears like the whirling wind but does not linger there or remain, but is gone in a whiff if the heart is not properly disposed and prepared to grasp it, so that it seizes the word as it arrives, locks it in and retains it there. The ears are the pathway and the conduit through which the voice enters; and the heart encloses the voice in the belly, which enters through the ears.)

Such a wind whistled in the ears of Rupert of Deutz to tell him that “a woman conceived God in her soul, Christ in her body.” It blew again through the garden enclosed in which Landri’s reading bride awaited the Spirit. In the *Eructavit*, the *voiz cui li cuers toche* was identified explicitly as God’s word that was to enter Marie’s heart even as it “entered [Mary’s] precious body through the voice of the angel.”⁶¹

To date, comment on Calogrenant’s invocation of the *conceptio per aurem* has largely contented itself with the observation that it constitutes a “typical prologue topos” in allusion to Matthew 13:14–15.⁶² This is misleading: the passage relates to a tradition, certainly, that arises from these biblical verses, but the tradition is enormous and properly implies the entire parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23 and Luke 8:5–15). This is the biblical *locus classicus* for a fertile reception, by way of eyes and ears (“*beati oculi quia vident et aures vestrae quia audiunt*” [Matthew 13:16]), of the Word of God.⁶³ A topos, indeed: we have encountered it repeatedly in connection with the eleventh verse of Psalm 44 and Mary’s conception of Christ. The biblical passage is part of a complex of imagery used to evoke Mary’s reading as a model for the audio-visual reception of performance. And this is clearly where Calogrenant/Chrétien intends our own ears to turn: his is no mere evocation of the need to listen carefully or even empathetically but instead also a description in anatomical terms of the way the Word is conceived in the heart and the pathway it takes to get there. As Bernard was led to insist, it was not enough that Mary merely hear Gabriel’s greeting, that she be filled with grace *in mentem*; there was a further penetration necessary that took place with the words, “the Most High will overshadow you,” and so on, in which “*etiam ventrem perfundere debet*” (her very womb was to be flooded), where *venter* takes on the meaning that is in play wherever the *conceptio per aurem* is evoked.⁶⁴ We have seen that this entry was also a wound, which Bernard and others saw as one with the heart-wound both Christ and Mary experienced at the cross. The author of the *Eructavit* completes the triangle by referring to the voice and the Word of God as the point and shaft, respectively, of an arrow shot to convert “the king’s enemies,” but also as the arrow of love that Bernard had written of, striking a wound both “suave and sweet” that pierces (as Calogrenant also specifies) “*li cuer del ventre / Que nus ne set quant il i antre*” (the heart of the belly / such that no one knows when it enters there) (*Eructavit*, lines 727–28). This is “the wound of which no one complains,”

⁶¹ Cf. lines 119–21, cited above, p. 213.

⁶² Cf. Wolf, “Roman vom Löwenritter,” p. 200 (who does not identify the biblical passage); similarly: Hult, ed., *Yvain*, n.3; Hunt, “Rhetorical Background,” 13n76; and Woledge, *Commentaire*, 1:64. More incisive is Ribard, “Calogrenant,” p. 425 and *passim*.

⁶³ See also Luke 8:15, where those who receive the word “on the good ground are they who, in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it and bring forth fruit in patience.”

⁶⁴ *LVM*, 4.3, p. 50.

consisting of love and faith, and which anyone should count himself lucky (as Bernard would) to have felt.⁶⁵ This jump from receiving and seizing in the heart to the idea of suffering a wounded heart is not completed in Calogrenant's prologue. If reception of his tale were properly accomplished, the hearts of his listeners would be pierced just as Mary's womb was, and Chrétien's audience is advised to experience the text from within the wounded heart that is thereby evoked. Calogrenant's audience, however, receives this wound quite differently, which is both why the discourse on the wound is postponed and part of the explanation for why this prologue is projected into the narrative rather than delivered by the narrator. Further reflection on the point awaits development through the narrative and finally restatement by the narrating poet at the completion of the four-cornered exposition, once we have learned, with Yvain, to read the widow.

Because this prologue is embedded in the narrative, two observations apply: the constitution of audience for Chrétien's text does not occur, unless it is taken as figured in Calogrenant's. Second, the scene offers Chrétien the opportunity to stage the proper constitution of audience as well as the model of reception of *aventure*. These normative gestures then go awry: as we are twice reminded in the course of *Yvain*, the queen has eloped into an *aventure* of illicit love of her own; one, moreover, required to satisfy a historical woman-as-audience, "ma dame de Champagne": Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*.⁶⁶ This absence intrudes on the narrative we are about to hear in that it disrupts the proper functioning of Arthur's court. In effect, the action of the one tale is collapsed into the other, such that both tales—this one of the fountain of Broceliande and the other involving its absent audience—are observed by the sole audience evoked beyond the texts, Marie de Champagne. The result is a highly suggestive triangle: the princess of poetry *en romans*, Marie, witnesses the staging of a tale (*Yvain*) in which the queen, as audience, wanders into her own tale (*Charrette*); or Marie requires a tale (as the queen does of Calogrenant) of illicit love that, in effect, results in the absence of the woman-as-audience (the queen) from *Yvain*. The main narrative of *Yvain* is the result of another audience member's, Yvain's, attempt to step into and thus re-enact a tale he has heard. At the same time, ca. 1180, once again, another text, the *Eructavit*, was written claiming the same historical audience, in this case by way of staging the arch-communication, David's or the Spirit's to the heavenly bride, to which Calogrenant's model of reception—Chrétien's staged communication of *aventure*—ultimately refers. In either case, whether scriptural model or *aventure*, the woman's ear is required inside and outside the text in order for the *parole* to be properly received. This condition is secure only in the *romans* of Psalm 44, the model on which Chrétien's puzzle-piece variations are based.⁶⁷ In these

⁶⁵ Cf. *Eructavit*, lines 723–36.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Yvain*, 3702–7 and 3914–23. In a third reference, lines 4734–39, the queen is reported to have been restored to the court only three days before. See also above, pp. 215 and 257n68.

⁶⁷ These observations need not depend on historical circumstances and are not intended to claim, for example, historical patronage of *Yvain* by Marie de Champagne. Most significant is the way Chrétien has woven the two texts together so as to encourage reflection between them on the construction of audience and of *aventure* and its reception.

latter, we in one case observe an audience who submits to Ooliba's failing and in the other an audience—Yvain—who learns to read the New Eve.

To return to Calogrenant's normative staging of an *aventure*: this is renewed at the express request of a queen of *romans*, whose request is accepted on the condition that the speaker's *parole* be received as Mary received the Word, through her ear to be enclosed in the heart-womb, the generative centre of truth in the body. Conditional upon the fulfilment of these requirements, and echoing the narrator's words on tales of true love, Calogrenant makes his own claim to truth in storytelling depend on his story's "true" reception:

Et qui or me vaurra entendre,
Cuer et oreilles me doit rendre,
Car ne veul pas servir de songe,
Ne de fable, ne de menchange,
Dont maint autre vous ont servi,
Ains conterai che que je vi.

(171–74)⁶⁸

(Anyone, then, who would understand me must lend me both ears and heart, for I do not wish to serve you dreams, or fairy tales, or lies such as so many others have done. I will tell you instead what I saw myself.)

Calogrenant in effect claims his story is commensurate with "true" stories told by those who have experienced true love, for either derives from experience in opposition to vain fantasies; such tales require reception by "true" hearts capable of receiving the same experience. The combined message of the two passages (the narrator's and Calogrenant's) results in the position taken by the narrator in his later excursus on the wound of love, where he disparages of his audience's capacity for heartfelt, "wounded" reception of the story because they themselves "no longer truly love."⁶⁹ That is, "today's" lovers have become today's listeners, and true love is true listening, or the ability to receive the word with the heart (see fig. 8.1). Truth, then, is constituted in response, in the act of listening with the loving (= wounded) heart. At this later juncture, however, Chrétien has only just evoked the same act of reception by restaging Calogrenant's delivery of *aventure* as the prelecting of a *romans* in an enclosed garden, where some knight's tale (*ne sai de qui*) has become a text delivered by an exquisitely desirable maiden, and this act provokes the godhead to descend into human form to embrace his

⁶⁸ The last two verses are missing in two major manuscripts, including the copy by Guiot, on which the CFMA text is based (see the note following). The lines are, however, perfectly in tune with the overall argument.

⁶⁹ Here the copy of Guiot (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 794), used in the CFMA edition (ed. Mario Roques), may preserve the text closest to Chrétien's: "mes tost deïst, tel i eüst, / que je parlasse de songe, / que la genz n'est mes amoronge / ne n'ainment mes, si con il suellent" (5386–89). As Wolegde, *Commentaire*, 2:98, notes, *amoronge* is a *hapax legomenon*, and thus clearly the *lectio difficilior*. But the more compelling argument in its favour is that it is used to echo Calogrenant's rhyme on *songe/mançonge* (Roques, ed., lines 171–72), which in turn echoes the narrator's remarks in the prologue (lines 26–27). With the rhyme *songe/amoronge* the place of the passage in the exposition of truth and narrative is lexically fulfilled.

bride—or *would, if he had seen her* (cf. line 5373). We do see her, as Yvain does and her mother and father do, who “greatly rejoice to behold and listen to her,” *de li veoir et oïr* (lines 5367–68). That is, the response of the god of love re-enacts the moment that is the origin of the reception of tales evoked in Calogrenant’s prologue on receiving the word with the heart. We, however, are not the god of love, whether from the literature of antiquity or Christian scripture; our place is with the maiden and her reading. Love properly conceived is a wound reciprocal to that (once) sustained by the god of love over the reading of a maiden, and the proof of worthiness required of the audience is to *aimer loiaument*; that is, to bear this secondary wound, a wound of *compassio*, to the end of the tale (cf. 5381–87).⁷⁰ The hypothetical conception effected through the god of love is to be truly completed in our listening hearts. *Vulnerasti cor meum soror mea, sponsa*, with one word of your mouth, with one verse of your *romans*. Yvain’s own *aventure*, a reiteration of the one told by his cousin—the “microcosm of a romance,”⁷¹ related “non de s’onnor, mais de sa honte” (not for his honour, but for his own shame) (60)—is a story that teaches how to receive the story of another’s suffering.

When we reach the second generative moment of Chrétien’s romance, Yvain’s wounding in love for the grieving widow, things are even more amiss than at Arthur’s court, and the reason derives from misguided reception of the tale recounted there: Yvain does not take Calogrenant’s words “to heart.” His cousin’s intention was clearly not that his shame should be avenged (he has waited six years to tell of it—175), nor that any should undertake the “fool’s adventure” that he recounts, nor that it ever be told again (cf. 575–78). Yvain’s response, which instead insists his cousin is a fool for having sought no restoration of (family) honour (580–83), continues a never-ending cycle of violence and vengeance—“G’irai vostre honte vengier” (I will go and avenge your shame) (587)—which is the nature of the fountain of Broceliande (in German “Briziljan,” where Sigune will endlessly deplore the violence of Orilus). The initial cycle of the romance up to Yvain’s wedding of the widow represents false, or not “heartfelt” reception of a tale and a wound—one that cannot sustain compassionating participation without rising in the wish to correct or avenge the wrongs displayed, that is, to perpetrate further violence. The Passion narrative, one might recall, begins with Christ’s admonition to Peter to put away his sword.

⁷⁰ Our text, and Foerster’s critical edition (with standardized spelling), read: “De cheste plaie vous deïsse / Tant qu’è huimés fin ne preïsse, / Se li escouter vous plëüst” (I would tell you more of this wound, such that I would never reach the end, if it pleased you to listen to it) (5385–87). The CFMA edition, following Guiot, reads: *de ces plaies molt vos deïsse / tant qu’a une fin en venisse / se l’estoire bien vos pleüst* (I would tell you much of this wound, until I reached the end of it, if the story were to your liking) (Roques, ed., lines 5383–85). Woledge, 2:96–98, examines the differences between Guiot’s text and Foerster’s in some detail to conclude that the two texts, despite the differences, yield the same meaning. In either case, it is clear that the audience lacks willingness to suffer the wound, and this suffering is prolonged through narration. As indicated in the preceding note, however, Guiot’s text displays the greater sensitivity to the overall argument in relation to the earlier exposition.

⁷¹ Ribard, “Calogrenant,” p. 428.

With some panache, Chrétien/Calogrenant turns this idea of reception as intervention-in-a-story against those who insisted on truth as tangible fact. The most pointed reference to the relationship between fiction and truth is intertextual, and comes with Calogrenant's concluding words:

Ainsi alay, ainsi reving,
 Au revenir pour fol me ting.
 Si vous ai conté comme fox
 Çou c'onques mais conter ne vox.

(575–78)

(Thus I went forth, and thus I returned, and returning held myself a fool. And as a fool I have told you what I wish never to tell again.)

As is well known, these lines take up a derisory rejection of the fabulous quality of romance and place it in the mouth of one who himself protests to be eyewitness to the truth of what he tells—within a patently fantastical narrative. In his *Roman de Rou*, Wace, a contemporary writing as a vernacular historian for Henry II, had taken his distance from the marvellous dimensions of Arthurian tales by claiming to have gone to see the fountain of Berenton in the forest of Broceliande for himself (here we should recall Gottfried's words on his visit to Cornwall):

La alai jo merveilles querre,
 vi la forest e vi la terre,
 merveilles quis, mais nes trovai,
 Fol m'en revinc, fol i alai;
 fol i alai, fol m'en revinc,
 folie quis, por fol me tinc.⁷²

(I went there seeking marvels, I saw the forest and the country, marvels I sought but none did I find, a fool I returned, as a fool I set forth; a fool I set forth, and a fool I returned, foolishness I sought and held myself a fool.)

It is highly likely that Chrétien's narrative turns so entirely around the adventure of the fountain because it is conceived as a direct response to the question of how the encounter with the marvellous—not in life, but through stories told—can deliver experience that contains the truth that Wace so foolishly sought with his foolish "eyewitness" expedition.⁷³ The retort to such pedantry is delivered by Calogrenant in the brilliant exchange

72 Wace, *Roman de Rou*, lines 6393–98; see also Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter"; and Green, *Beginnings*, pp. 179–80. The dates generally accepted for the section of the *Roman de Rou* in question are 1170 to 1183, thus only shortly before the *Chevalier au Lion*; on this question see Woledge, *Commentaire*, 1:85–86.

73 Wolf, who points out the neglected significance of the allusion to Wace, nevertheless misinterprets it. Calogrenant's self-avowed foolishness attests to the grievous *reality* of the peril and shame that befell him; I cannot see how it can be taken as undercutting the "truth" that he earlier claimed for his tale; cf. Wolf, "Roman vom Löwenritter," pp. 200–201 and *passim*. This truth, that of eyewitness experience, is affirmed step for step (within the overall fictional frame) through Yvain's adventures.

with the wild man, when he defines the knight errant—that is, his own existence—as the narrated object of an *aventure* with the words, “I am—as you can see—a knight, one who seeks what I cannot find.”⁷⁴ Or is it “what cannot be found”?⁷⁵ Truth can be seen, heard, and felt in *aventure*, but not such that one can reach out and grab it nor even such that it is “found” in the tale itself.

No less foolish than Wace’s response, we can surmise in retrospect, having heard the story, was Yvain’s own expedition in search of Calogrenant’s adventure. Such wisdom is not the privilege of the audience at the outset, however; on the contrary, we are taken in the same trap and assume that Yvain’s exploits are those he is rightfully to fulfil in conception of his own heroic tale of *aventure*. Thus Yvain’s narrative proceeds from a point that finds its inverted complement in the later staging of the maiden’s romance performance and the narrator’s address to the audience. Reception in the wounded heart is the objective in either case; in Yvain’s case we see what occurs when this reception is not fulfilled. His arrival in the secluded garden in which the *pucele*’s reading seduces the god of love signals completion of an arc of meaning in the same way (and with very similar meaning) as does the arrival of *Frou Âventiure* at the beginning of book 9 in *Parzival*.

The misguided reception of what he sees and hears (and invariably wishes to reach out and grab) becomes the explosive seed and motor of Yvain’s narrative when, in voyeuristic fascination with the grievous consequences of his intervening violence, the husband’s slayer falls in lust with the bride and actually succeeds in replacing him in the conjugal bed. Yvain is a far cry here from the response contained in Wolfram’s credo, proclaimed in heartfelt suffering for the suffering widow, Herzeloyde. But we, as audience, are on the same path as is initiated there—to a reception of the Word in the heart—and find ourselves at very much the same juncture of narrative (see [figs. 8.1 and 8.2](#)).

Not surprisingly, it is this introduction of the widow—the second corner in *Yvain* and the first in *Parzival*—that displays most emphatically what the latter romance owes to the former. Either narrative is exceptional for two things (at least): the story to be told begins only after a lengthy proemium, really an independent narrative complete in itself, which serves to deliver its heroine into widowhood, such that the emerging tale is born—in *Parzival* literally—from this portrayal of female suffering. That is, narrative experience takes place first as the introduction to and performance of a woman’s grief and then as a renewed trajectory entirely determined by (one might say, under the sign of) the same, as the search for an adequate and reciprocal *response*. In *Yvain* this search overtly drives the protagonist’s narrative path as the reformation of male desire; in *Parzival* it is instead a kind of genetic inheritance unknown to the hero but no less essential and all the more inevitable. Wolfram removed the personally contingent dimension of this search to make it instead a human destiny, or humanity’s destiny.

What is most extraordinary about the introduction of the heroine in Chrétien’s *Yvain* is also what is most obvious: her incomparable beauty is perceived and described only through the extremity of her grief and as disfigured by her grief; for Yvain, the two are

⁷⁴ “Je sui, çou vois, uns chevaliers / Qui quier che que trouver ne puis” (356–57).

⁷⁵ Ribard, “Calogrenant,” p. 432, likewise suggests the line is better understood in the latter sense.

inseparable, even as his love is inseparable from her distress. This beauty receives qualification worthy of Benoît's *riche dame de riche rei*; given the circumstances, however, it is more reminiscent of the heavenly queen in her earthly pain. As the invisible Yvain watches the frantic search for her husband's assassin,

Vint une des plus bele dames
C'onques veïst riens terrestre.
De si tres bele crestienne
Ne fu onques plait ne parole;
Mais de duel faire estoit si fole
C'a poi qu'ele ne s'ochioit.

(1146–51)

(There arrived one of the most beautiful ladies who have ever walked this earth. Of a more beautiful Christian woman word has never been heard, but she was so consumed with her grieving that she might well have taken her own life.)

The opposition between "Christian beauty" and the excess of grief is apparent—but not reported as irresolvable (in Herzeloide's display of her grief it is, in effect, spontaneously resolved). While Yvain suffers for seeing where he dares not be recognized, for Laudine it is the inability to see the author of her wound that is most unbearable—for the sake of vengeance, not for recognition. God himself takes a scolding from her for this injustice; a fact which initially underlines the extremity of her own position and its need of correction (lines 1212–16). The fascination exerted upon Yvain is nevertheless immediate—but there is as yet no talk of love. As the text says later, "Love took him at the window"⁷⁶—that is, in the position that renders unmistakable both his seeing unseen and the intensity of his desire to step into a scene from which he is irrevocably excluded: "Then she swooned and tore at all that was on her person and came within her grasp. My Lord Yvain, regardless of the consequences, could only barely restrain himself from rushing out to hold her hands."⁷⁷ What Chrétien so carefully constructs as the catalyst from which this narrative is launched is an almost intolerable suspension between the desire for inclusion in, and factual exclusion from, a woman's suffering; experienced, so the fabulously constructed narrative would have it, on one side as a negated body (Yvain's invisibility, or inability to show himself), and on the other as negated vision (Laudine's inability to see him). The rest of the romance takes place as the struggle to establish a reciprocal gaze in which each recognizes the other's wound. This, as we have seen, can also be stated differently, as the desire for inclusion in woman's truth. It was no less the realization of the diaphanous body, the body whose blackness—unlike Laudine's in this scene—could serve to reveal rather than to obscure the beauty of the bride.

The same construction thus witnesses a collision of the sacred and the profane in which Yvain figures as the cause of their incompatibility and Laudine as the site of their *potential* convergence. Despite the crass profanity of Yvain's position, however, all sense of

⁷⁶ "En chest voloir l'a Amour mis, / qui a la fenestre l'a pris" (1427–28).

⁷⁷ "Lors se pasmé et se dessire / Trestout quanques a mains li vient. / A mout grant paine se detient / Mesire Yvains, a quoi que tort, / Que les mains tenir ne li cort" (1300–1304).

contingent impropriety is passed over in silence, for the audience alone to ponder. Lunete expresses neither indignation nor even surprise at her captive's vampiric voyeurism; on the contrary, his suggestion that he "would gladly see the procession and the body" is met with her immediate indication of the fateful window.⁷⁸ The funerary procession, by contrast—which Chrétien describes previously and which proceeds as if continuously in the background of these transactions—is lent all possible marks of Christian solemnity: a company of nuns precede, bearing the consecrated water, the cross, and candles; behind them come "li texte"—doubtless the Gospel books—and the censers born by priests "who dispense the holy absolution that is the concern of every frail soul (*chetive âme*)" (cf. lines 1166–72). The manuscript on which our text is based provides its own window onto this scene, a large single miniature inserted not where the procession is first described but instead above and directly opposite Lunete's instructions to Yvain on how he is to behave as its viewer (lines 1314–37, [fig. 8.3](#)).⁷⁹ These instructions are remarkable in themselves. Once again, they contain no reference to Yvain's position as a *chetive âme* in need of his own absolution; they read instead as if advice to a bumpkin about to attend his first performance of tragic theatre. Her remarks are in part a response, it is true, to Yvain's demonstrated difficulty to control his impulses (lines 1303–4), but what can Lunete mean, at this point, when she evokes the "grant biens" (great good) that can result from his visual participation in the funerary procession if only he will stay seated; and the "enormous profit" that will be his if he refrains from "scandalous outbursts" (*dire outrage*)?⁸⁰ "For he who lets himself get carried away," she explains, "or even sets about some bold action when it is neither the time nor the place, he I would rather term vulgar than honourable."⁸¹ The specific, perilous, and painful peculiarity of Yvain's position vis-à-vis Laudine is here whitewashed in favour of general instruction in how properly to conduct oneself as the compassionating audience of a performance, of events that no measure of chivalric bravado can set aright. In this much Yvain succeeds, although not without great difficulty. It is his first attempt to "read" as a woman.⁸²

78 "Verroie volontiers la hors / La prochein et le cors" (1273–74).

79 As seen opposite, the miniature is itself a sophisticated "window" view: the procession is portrayed as inside the church while framed by an exterior view of the same. Yvain is nowhere visible; we see what he sees. The text's description of the procession occurs on fol. 71'.

80 Cf. lines 1314–22.

81 "Car qui se derroie et sourmaine, / Et d'outrage faire se paine, / Quant il n'en a ne tans ne lieu, / Je l'appel plus mauvais que preu" (1323–26). The lines occur only in Guiot's copy (MS H) and Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1433 (MS P), the two manuscripts also generally held to be the most reliable. Other redactors possibly found them awkwardly inappropriate. Foerster originally excluded them in his "Große Ausgabe," only to restore them later in the "Petite Edition." See also Woledge, 1:107.

82 A somewhat comical effect is achieved when Yvain, immediately before being wounded by love, is suddenly preoccupied once again with Keu's renewed mockery, should he not "grab" some proof (*tesmoing et garant*) of the truth of his exploits, a trophy to bring home (cf. lines 1345–57). This relapse into male reading anticipates Yvain's later absorption in tournament games, over which he will simply forget his all-important promise to Laudine.

His position at the window, on which the text repeatedly insists, is in fact superfluous—being invisible, he has no need to conceal himself behind a wall—and serves properly as a “visual” analogy to the position of the audience before a performance. Like them, Yvain must learn to sustain suffering felt in the heart—suffering for love of another who takes the real blows—as the only way to enjoy even an illicit proximity to the object of his desire. All this in preparation for the decisive, third “scene,” in which he finally observes Laudine alone. As further necessary introduction to this scene, we first learn the result of Yvain’s lesson in compassionating participation: an incomparably wounded heart that will, finally, subsume his entire identity and reduce him to only the barest semblance of a man—for failure to *aimer loiaument*, a failure of reciprocal recognition in suffering.

This wound, significantly, is not struck by the male god of love who will be evoked in the garden at *Pesme Avanture* but rather by a consistently female personification who works, ostensibly, in service of Laudine’s revenge, “which she exacts more severely than ever [Laudine] could have done.”⁸³ Yvain is wounded not as the *sponsa* is but rather indirectly, through the wound to the suffering woman. Like Mary’s (as Odo tells it), his wound is struck “through the eyes to the heart” and lasts far longer than any administered by lance or sword (1372–74). There follows the complement to the later remarks on its “cure,”

Cols d’espee garist e saine
Mout tost, des que mires y paine;
Et la plaie d’Amours empire
Quant ele est plus pres de son mire.”
(1375–78)

(Sword wounds can be cured and heal quite quickly, once a surgeon attends to them, but the wound of love only worsens when its surgeon is near.)

Afflicted with a wound for which the only “healing” is its protraction, the victim has no choice but to learn to sustain its pain—which becomes the object of Yvain’s next lesson, and which the narrator later announces as the burden of his own audience.

It is this next scene, in which Yvain no longer observes the public grief of the ruling lady but rather her private devotion, “reading her psalms in a psalter illuminated in letters of gold” (cf. lines 1418–19), that clarifies exactly how he is wounded: on the one hand by her grieving reading, on the other by—among other points—her eyes, her hair, and her neck, *in uno oculorum tuorum et in uno crine colli tui* (Canticles 4:9). This is likewise the scene that makes Laudine’s significance clear, in which she briefly becomes the diaphanous body and the lightening rod for the descent of the Word into our experience, into *avanture*. First the grieving reading:

83 “Venjanche en a prise gregnor / Qu’ele en prendre ne l’en peüst” (1368–69). Hult’s translation does not preserve the female gendering of love, apparently assuming it is merely grammatical. That did not prevent the poet from speaking of a male god in the later scene.

Et Mesire Yvains est encor
 A le fenestre ou il l'esgarde;
 Et quant il plus s'en donne garde,
 Plus l'aime et plus li abelist.
 Che qu'ele pleure et qu'ele list
 Vausist qu'ele laissié eüst,
 Et qu'a le parler li pleüst.
 En chrest voloir l'a Amour mis,
 Qui a la fenestre l'a pris.

(1420–28)

(And my Lord Yvain is once again at the window where he beholds her, and the more he beholds her, the more he loves her and the more he is delighted, that she weeps and that she reads, these he wishes she would leave off and that it would please her to speak to him. Love put him in this state, who fell upon him at the window.)

The five verses (1422–26) that are framed here by a pair each before and after, stating and restating the position at the window, defy linear interpretation. The reason is an *apokoinu*, a construction in which one syntactical element serves to form two consecutive statements. That element is the central verse, *Che qu'ele pleure et qu'ele list*.

This is the heart of the matter, for us as well as for Yvain. Laudine is an all but mandatory inclusion in any discussion of women's grieving in romance narrative; as we saw in [chapter 1](#), she has become no less obligatory to the discussion of women's literacy. But the two are never discussed as Chrétien emphatically represented them: together, as inseparable and complementary. The reason for this is simple: Laudine is the sole example to be found of a courtly lady who chants her psalms while also fulfilling the prescriptive gestures of a widow's grief.⁸⁴ Was it this sense of incongruity that led Chrétien's German adaptor, Hartmann von Aue, to omit all reference to Laudine's psalter prayer? Wolfram, for his part, would appear to have understood perfectly and conceived his portrayal of Herzeloide's grief analogously: each woman's grieving is defamiliarized through an element that suggests an interpenetration of sacred and profane and is to be read as a reference to the woman who sacralized human grief, Mary.

To read the crucial and central verse such that the syntax is entirely successful it is necessary to substitute a comma for the full stop after *abelist*. Laudine's tears and her prayer can or indeed must be taken as both what increasingly pleases Yvain and what he wishes would stop.⁸⁵ The resultant state, "which love put him in at the window," is

⁸⁴ Characteristically, a recent contribution judges Laudine's portrayal to be composed "all but exclusively of conventional literary topoi from the widow's *planctus*," but makes no mention whatever of her psalter-reading: Breulmann, *Weibliches Agieren*, pp. 194–95. Comparative studies of the grieving women of courtly narrative are found in Küsters, "Klagefiguren," and Peil, *Gebärde*; neither, however, comments on Laudine's psalter prayer. Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, pp. 113–15, is one of the few to have so much as paused over the striking incongruity of the scene.

⁸⁵ In the first case the sense would be, "The more he beholds her, the more he loves her and the more it pleases him to see her weep and read; *nevertheless*, he wishes she would leave these and that it would please her to speak to him." In the second: "The more he beholds her, the more he loves

admittedly peculiar: he is most possessed by that which also precludes all contact with his beloved; similarly, love's wound most craves that which makes it suffer: in either case, reading and weeping, prayer and tears.

The more she does this, "the more he loves her and the more he is delighted": the collision of profane desire and a sacred attention to the dead continues; Laudine's psalter appears in part as if a sacral remnant of the funerary procession that accompanied her previous lament, accentuating the continuing incongruity of Yvain's desire. To these incongruities I will return shortly. But the grieving widow's psalter is no less the counterpart of the *pucele's* romance, its reading responsible for an equivalent wound of love: Yvain's ill-conceived participation in the suffering of the widow reaches its own resolution (which offers no resolution in his relationship to Laudine!) at the castle of *Pesme avanture*, where he again witnesses a woman's reading performance, this time purely profane, but with a power to wound that is capable of re-enacting Mary's original reading act—or at least affecting another god in the same way. It is in fact Laudine's tearful reading that bears the appropriate resemblance to the dart cast by the Christian bride, while Yvain's response to the wound he receives beholding Laudine is what romance convention would dictate for the later scene. His response to *pucele avanture*, on the other hand, constitutes redress of his earlier transgression: rather than seeking possession of the reading woman, he ends up freeing the 300 weeping ladies held in slave labour (see lines 5769–79). The prelude to this latter act is a scene in which hearts meet in mutual recognition and explicitly reciprocal vision—"Il les voit et eles le voient / Si s'enbrunchent toutes et pleurent" (He sees them and they see him, and they all bow their heads and weep) (5202–3)—and in God's name: "Dix, s'il plaist," Yvain hails the ladies, "Chel doel, qui ne sait dont vous naist, / Vous ost des cuers et tourt a joie!" (May God, if he please, lift from your hearts this sorrow, of which I know not how it befell you, and turn it to joy!) (5243–45). The echo returns from within the enclosure (*un prael clos*—line 5187), "Dix vous en oye, / Que vous en avés apelé!" (May God hear you, as you have called upon him!) (5246–47). Once Yvain has encountered the *pucele* and accomplished the *Pesme Avanture* and they are thus rescued, the ladies manifest a joy such as "I doubt they would have shown over him who created all the world, had he descended from Heaven to earth."⁸⁶ The hypothetical descent of God-as-love marks not only the maiden's reading but also Yvain's arrival as a reader of Mary's reading, one able to know and embrace her tears. This is the same point, at the same corner of the poetic exposition, at which Parzival has arrived when he knocks on the door to Sigune's wounded heart and "finds" her true identity.

her and the more *she* pleases him. Her reading and her weeping he wishes she would leave, and that it would please her to speak to him." Separated into two distinct statements, neither is entirely satisfactory without an interpolated element (given above in italics). Neither Woledge, *Commentaire*, nor the editors (Roques, Hult) offer any comment on these lines.

86 "Ne je ne cuit qu'eles feissent / Tel joie com eles le font / De celui qui fist tout le mont, / S'il fust du chiel venus en terre" (5776–79).

In response to the spectacle of “the Lady’s” grieving reading,⁸⁷ Yvain delivers a monologue in fascinated admiration that continues Chrétien’s study in *compassio* ill-conceived even as it ostensibly enumerates the hallmarks of her beauty. These are (as alluded to above) her hair, “surpassing fine gold, such is its luster,” which, Yvain says, “m’esprennent et auguisent” (inflamm[e] and prick[s] me like needles) (1468) as she tears at it; her eyes, the most beautiful he has ever seen, despite their ever-flowing tears, which “me dessient” (rob me of my senses) (1472); her face, the beauty of which is disfigured by her scratching, thus causing him “grant destreche” (great constriction) (1477); and, finally, her neck (or bosom, the word is *gorge*), which, as she clutches at it, “me par a acouré” (nearly tears out my heart) (1482). On this last he elaborates: “Ne nus cristaus, ne nule glache / N’est si bele ne si polie / Que se gorge est, ne si onnie” (No crystal nor any mirror is so beautiful or so bright as is her bosom, nor so defiled) (1486–88).⁸⁸

Chrétien delights in this climax of discord between the lustful gaze and the suffering widow, which is the echo of his original description of this “most beautiful Christian woman who ever walked the earth” (cf. Yvain’s reprise of this superlative description, lines 1496–510) and, in some sense, its resolution. The woman’s wound is open in this scene, her suffering unobscured by desire for vengeance or defiance of God. The image of her bosom as a sullied mirror is the telltale signal of the body diaphanous; through the disfigurement of her grief, or rather because of it, the key scriptural image shimmers as if below the surface. With her psalter prayer Laudine represents the widow’s grief as the potential convergence of human and divine, suffering and the kiss of heartfelt recognition. What Yvain experiences is beauty inverted, the joy of the flesh transmuted into the image of suffering for its loss, the body as mirror of its own infirmity: the nature of the widowed, or black bride. In one possible interpretation his suffering is that of the *sponsus* who suffers in reciprocation of her suffering, wounded at the sight of her eye, her hair and her neck. At the same time, it remains that of the erotic voyeur, marvelling over purely exterior beauty. The correspondence between the image of Canticles 4:9 and the body parts that so physically afflict Yvain is only partial and in itself not compelling. It becomes so, once again, through the jarring peculiarity of the situation: erotic love conceived as physical pain over a woman’s grieving pain. We had reason to pause over such wilfully obscured allusion to sacred models with reference to Herzeloide and Wolfram’s text generally. Despite all incongruity, Yvain suffers with the widowed bride as Landri’s bride suffered with Christ, she who “endures by *co-passion* whatever [Christ] suffered in the flesh. She is one spirit with him, all the injuries are common to each.” But neither sees the other’s wound. Love here does indeed proceed from pain that is reciprocal and interdependent, but it is neither shared nor mutually acknowledged; the gaze cannot be returned.

⁸⁷ See note 48, above.

⁸⁸ Guiot’s copy omits all reference to Laudine’s neck or bosom (*gorge*), which results in a less satisfactory text and suggests that the special and extended emphasis the *gorge* receives was felt as incongruous—possibly exactly what Chrétien intended.

The woman's psalter-reading was our point of departure, we saw that it could stand for an incapacity for letters and the learned path to God as well as for an ideal of lay devotion and a layman's gnosis. In Laudine's hands, the psalter mitigates the portrayal of grief, for it joins her with the image of the woman as expectant, potential vessel of the Word and "our" access to God. Such reading frequently involved tears, as illustrated when Malcolm of Scotland, Margaret's husband, leafed through the lavishly ornamented book he had given her and, in admiration of her devout reading, kept "even the nocturnal hours ... with a sighing heart and abundant tears."⁸⁹ But these were tears of contrition, not tears of grief, tears of desire for Heaven, not for a lost beloved. The moment of incongruity insisted upon here is entirely characteristic of Chrétien's art; such moments serve to provoke the audience to seek further meaning. In this case, the *sponsa derelicta* has joined the grieving widow-in-the-world, tears of prayer have joined those of suffering for love—precisely the shift that received its sacred authority in the invention of Mary's weeping grief at the cross. The ideas evoked thus comprise the power of women's prayer and the special privilege of their tears—what Abelard evoked as *infirmiora sexus praerogativa*—as well as Mary's weeping at the Passion and her reading at the Annunciation. The reading of the *sponsa derelicta*, Mary's reading, and the worldly widow's grief are all briefly superimposed in the meaning potential of this moment that launches the reformation of male desire—or, as for Malcolm and others cited earlier, Yvain's instruction in how to read as a woman.

This is the moment that corresponds to Wolfram's *lactans dolorosa* as the generation of a narrative and an experience of truth. Wolfram's adaptation of Chrétien's exposition shows us a path from the image of Herzeloide and its reception in the narrator's heart (in the transition from the preliminary narrative to the *niuwe mære*) to the audience's reception of Lady Âventiure and Parzival's recognition of the *commortua* and *consepulta*, the woman who dies and is buried with her beloved, as his cousin. As we witness Yvain's path, the grief of the *sponsa derelicta* (she who weeps and reads in search of the new kiss) leads to the kiss of the Annunciation, while we are led from Laudine's psalter prayer to the *pucele's* prelecting of a *romans* and Yvain is led from the gaze of possession to one of reciprocal recognition, from a desire to seize and act upon what he "sees" (unseen), to a suffering participation in others' suffering. The result is a continuity accomplished between loving, suffering and knowing that applies in our reading of and participation in this *romans* just as it applies as the objective of Yvain's reading the grieving woman, as it is expressed in Sigune's *Herzkluse*, and, finally (or rather originally), as it applies to the *sponsa*, whose generative reading act is made to shimmer through the diaphanous body of either poet's narrative art. The extremity of women's grief potentially opens in either poem onto an epiphany of empathy that is then the objective of the narrative experience. The widow serves as a point of convergence of reading and *historia* sacred and secular, of our history and Christ's, sustained in her suffering heart.

⁸⁹ *Vita S. Margaritae*, 2:330C; see pp. 34–35, above.

Sigune's Reading

"My widow is better than that one," Wolfram tells us, and the one-upmanship was more than idle boasting. In both Laudine's grieving reading and Herzelyde's grieving lactation, sacred and profane join in a forced coalescence that corresponds to a contemplative suspension of narrative time, opening a kind of vertical window onto sacred meaning. With Sigune, however, Wolfram made this moment of conjunction into her very function in the narrative. Each scene finds her in a new position of iconic stasis, first in the cleft of a rock-face, next perched improbably in a linden tree, and finally in a cell that is built over a stream. Each of these reveals how she realizes Mary's reading, making scriptural images into lived experience.

A great deal has been made in the scholarship of Sigune's possible relationship to Mary, whether iconographic or moral, and decades ago Arthur Groos drew (renewed) attention to her relationship to the dove and turtledove as the bestiary symbols of mourning and undying widowed fidelity, which served equally as symbols of Mary, the widow, and devotion to the Passion.⁹⁰ The key, however, is neither bestiary lore nor images of Mary's suffering in visual art but rather the behaviour of the dove as it was informed by the dove imagery of the Song of Songs. Sigune's final residence, the cell curiously poised over a stream (lines 435,7–9), provides the clearest reference to the biblical text, doubling the image of the dove's eyes "above streams of waters" and its abode "beside the brimming streams" (Canticles 5:12). The passage was traditionally explicated as revealing the bride's reading of scripture, for just as "the dove's eyes" sought the shadows of approaching enemies (raptors) in the water, so the Christian sought refuge in meditation on scripture.⁹¹ Sigune finds refuge from the raptors of her world—Orilus and his kind—on the one hand in religious devotion (psalter prayer), and on the other in a withdrawal that is simultaneously a total immersion in the fate of her slain beloved. Her first "nesting place," *vor eines velses orte* (below a spur of rock) (138,12),⁹² already expresses this last idea through an image that fused the widowed fidelity of the dove with devotion to Christ's Passion.

This first position is that of the dove in Canticles 2:14, *columba mea in foraminibus petrae in caverna maceriae* (my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall), which both Rupert and Bernard in their Song commentaries identified (respectively) as Mary's or the bride's contemplation of Christ's wounds, "for she turns all her devotion to the wounds of Christ, abiding there in constant contemplation."⁹³ From the early twelfth century onward (if not before), Canticles 2:14 situated the bride of Canticles in devotion to the Passion; moreover, this led to the understanding of the preceding image, *Vox turturis audita est* (The voice of the turtledove has been heard)

⁹⁰ "Sigune," 631–46. An account of Sigune's possible relationship to Mary, useful for its analysis despite dubious conclusions, is found in Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 97–108.

⁹¹ For example, CCC, 5, pp. 122–23; other examples cited in Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 81–83.

⁹² Trans. Hatto.

⁹³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica*, 61:7, p. 152.

(Canticles 2:11), as the endless grieving felt in the same *compassio*.⁹⁴ Before he sees Sigune as the dove of Canticles 2:14, Parzival first hears her *wuofen* (mourning wail) (cf. lines 138,11–14) as the turtledove of Canticles 2:11; the same occurs again to initiate the second meeting at the linden tree (lines 249,11–12). Sigune is not Mary, but she is the *columba* or *turtur* just as Mary was in that her life realizes the truth of the scriptural images of the mourning bird, their common denominator, as experience.

Sigune's perch in the linden tree is her most singularly memorable position and that which is most obviously birdlike. However, it is also the most problematic, as comment in the scholarship has shown.⁹⁵ This image in particular at once provokes and defeats all attempts at reduction, both sacred and profane, which makes it for my argument the most instructive of the three. Groos insisted on Sigune's position in the tree as a "metaphorical identification" with the "turtledove on the dry branch,"⁹⁶ which entered commentary on Canticles 2:14 with Bernard of Clairvaux, who cited it as the widowed bride's conversion solely to heavenly things. As others have duly noted, Sigune's branch is decidedly green, a fact for which the notion has either been rejected or, alternatively, seen as a cautionary exemplum with the dove positively clinging to her earthly existence (a green branch) as Sigune does to the deceased.⁹⁷ But, repeatedly and above all, association with the dove and the turtledove, with or without the dry branch, has been rejected for lack of unambiguous mention in the text—such as Wolfram provides for Belakane, whose "happiness settled on the dry branch even as turtledoves still do" (cf. lines 57,9–14).⁹⁸ This—a transparent reference to *bîspel* and *bilde geben*—is, with regard to Sigune, precisely what we must not expect.

Sigune's leafy perch can be most directly understood, first, as an intensification of the identification between her, the dove, and devotion to the Passion as introduced in her first station, in which Parzival "finds the dead prince lying in the virgin's lap" (cf. lines 138,22–23). The second scene continues the embrace from the first but constitutes its elevation

⁹⁴ Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 230–31; and Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 77–81. In German, the dove's mourning call could be rendered as *wuofen* (examples in Messelken, p. 87). How close the understanding of this behaviour comes to Wolfram's Sigune is readily apparent in the extremely popular "Branch B" of the Latin *Physiologus*—of which the first vernacular translations (though in Old French) began to appear in the twelfth century: "Es gibt einen Vogel, der heißt Turteltaube. Von diesem steht geschrieben: 'Die Turteltaube läßt sich hören in unserem Lande' (Canticles 2:12). Der Physiologus sagt von der Turteltaube, daß sie ihren Mann sehr liebt, daß sie enthalten mit ihm lebt und nur ihm die Treue halt. Wenn es also passiert, daß ihr Mann vom Habicht oder vom Vogelsteller gefangen wird, verbindet sie sich mit keinem anderen Mann, sondern verlangt immer nach dem einen und sehnt sich jeden Moment nach ihm, und in dieser Erinnerung und diesem Verlangen verharret sie bis zum Tod" (as quoted and trans. in Jussen, *Witwe*, p. 219). Groos discusses the *Physiologus* in relation to Sigune at length ("Sigune," pp. 639–45, this passage on p. 639).

⁹⁵ For a critical overview, see Backes, *Stellenkommentar*, pp. 161–66.

⁹⁶ Gross, "Sigune," 633.

⁹⁷ The last position is taken by Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 134–35; similarly Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp 100–101. To be sure, Groos, "Sigune," 638, addressed the "green" branch, and his solution remains to my thinking perceptive, if not wholly satisfactory.

⁹⁸ Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," p. 100; Nellman, commentary to *Parzival*, pp. 589–90 (249,14); and Backes, *Stellenkommentar*, p. 166. Wenzel, "Herzeloide und Sigune," pp. 229–30, remains sympathetic to Groos's conclusions.

and thus a movement heavenwards; it is entirely in keeping with the dove's search for isolation and seclusion "on the summits of mountains or in the tops of trees."⁹⁹ The dove's devotion to its crucified beloved, moreover, was often visualized, both verbally and materially, as its nesting in the centre of the cross as a tree. In this "nest in the tree," as Hugh of Fouilloy put it, the dove (soul) seeks Christ as a faithful widow in unceasing remembrance of his suffering: "Redit saepius ad arborem, frequentat nidum, videt effusionem sanguinis, indicium videlicet mortis; dum haec attendit gemit" (Often she returns to the tree, remains close to the nest, looks on the flowing blood, the reminder of his death. And as she looks on this she mourns).¹⁰⁰ Sigune's nesting place would thus reify the metaphor of cross as tree in its relevance to devotion to the Passion. But as suggestive as such a description is of Sigune, Wolfram renders its *exemplary* value seemingly useless: Sigune mourns not the absent Christ but her (very physically) present earthly beloved; she does not merely seek a treetop refuge but also persists in embracing her dead (and now embalmed) beloved there. As we have seen, Sigune's literal "imitation" of the image denies its allegorical referent as well as its edifying value. And herein lies the rub: invariably, the assumption has been that Sigune either mirrors these images of the dove and is therefore to be read in terms of the bestiary exemplum—a living *bîspel*—or she cannot be read for exemplary value and therefore the dove, turtledove, and the pertinent images from Canticles cannot be used to inform our understanding of her place in the narrative.¹⁰¹ *This winged bîspel flutters too fast for simple folk*: what we need here is a different way of reading, which is what Wolfram's (and Chrétien's) widows represent and teach.

Sigune's embrace opens an avenue for meaning derived from the secular experience of grief, which has given rise to a third position. As Ute Schwab shows, Sigune's seemingly endless embrace of her dead beloved, whether it be regarded as sublime, grotesque, or merely impossible, would have suggested the *Schoßhaltung*—a ritual form of *Totendienst* in which the newly deceased was held in the lap of a close relative—more readily than Mary's embrace of the dead Christ (as yet iconographically unknown). On this point there will be more to say shortly. In Sigune's case the gesture would not only be obsessively extended (over a year), but would also occur in utter isolation, thus negating its ritual function, which in itself—she is neither wife nor relative—it would not be Sigune's place to perform.¹⁰² Whether she thus becomes a cautionary example of

99 "... qui semper in jugis montium, vel in verticibus arborum morantur." This phrase was a standard element of commentary on Canticles 2:11–12, as seen in the *Glossa ordinaria*, PL 113:1141 (cited in Groos, "Sigune," p. 624), and Bernard's *Sermones super cantica*, 59.7, p. 139.

100 Hugh of Fouilloy, *Aviarius*, 29, pp. 146–50. See also Jussen, *Witwe*, pp. 237–40; related remarks in Groos, "Sigune," 635–37, and Messelken, "Rabe und Taube," pp. 105–6. An excellent study of the symbolism of the Tree of the Cross, also in relation to romance texts, is Greenhill, "Cosmological Tree," 323–71.

101 Groos, too, sought to demonstrate "strong and apparently deliberate echoes of the turtledove tradition ... which Wolfram employs in delineating Sigune's exemplary character," or "to articulate the exemplary nature of Sigune's chaste fidelity" ("Sigune," 635, 641). Jacobson, "Cundrie and Sigune," 1–11, sees Sigune as an exemplary penitent, although for a sin that is not her own but rather a human universal.

102 Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 107. For Schwab, the extremity and incongruity in Sigune's fulfilment of *Totendienst*, or ritual mourning, contributes to an appraisal of her as a solely cautionary figure, intended to evoke revulsion and disgust; see also pp. 132, 135.

immoderation or not, to explain the embrace in this way only begs the question, once again, of the perch in the tree.¹⁰³

If Sigune is not exemplary, then neither is she a penitent; she suffers not primarily for guilt, but simply for love. Similarly, if Sigune “follows” the dove, then she does so by immersing herself in the images of its suffering fidelity; its “nesting places” serve as her residences, points of immersion that constitute intersections between the sacred and the wilfully personal historicity of her existence. The same images that inform her first station, the dove’s mourning call and its place in the clefts of rocks, served—as seen in the *Rheinisches Marienlob* of the early thirteenth century, a text that addresses its female monastic audience as “pure doves”—to identify Mary as the dove of Canticles; that is, Mary was the dove *because* she “sighs and weeps in the crevices of the rock” or *because* she “has always been found in the holes of the five wounds,” in other words, because she fulfilled prophetic images as *historia*, as the monastic audience was to do in their *lectio* of the same text.¹⁰⁴ To go one step further, in Aelred of Rievaulx’s rule for women who had chosen Sigune’s third nesting place, the enclosed cell, the same three-way identification between the dove in the wounds, Mary, and the female religious gives place to a vivid call to the bride of Christ to enter sacred *historia* by stepping up to the cross next to Mary and John to experience the same images in her own life:

Hasten, linger not, eat the honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk (Cant. 5:1). The blood is changed into wine to gladden you, the water into milk to nourish you. From the rock streams have flowed for you (Ps. 77:16), wounds have been made in his limbs, holes in the wall of his body, in which, like a dove, you may hide (Cant. 2:14) while you kiss them one by one. Your lips, stained with blood, will become like a scarlet ribbon and your word sweet (Cant. 4:3).¹⁰⁵

Such texts as these are where we should seek the confluence of image, experience and affective devotion that informs, whether directly or indirectly, Wolfram’s portrayal of Sigune. They are a far cry from the moralizing exempla of bestiary literature and derive from a different understanding of image and *historia* altogether; their aim is not the emulation of specific virtues or behaviour (whether sacred or secular), but rather the immersion in an experience of shared pain. If Sigune is a dove, the bride, or Mary, then only because she reads the scriptural images as Mary did. Similarly, Sigune does not recapitulate Mary’s experience at the cross, she does not suffer along with her wounded, scourged, dying beloved; Schianatulander is no Christ-figure any more than Parzival is. She instead re-experiences the images of scripture as her own experience; her experience is a renewal of Mary’s reading of those same images, their embodiment as life, as her own suffering. That is, quite simply, her experience is Herzeloide’s experience: *o amici, hoc ego experta sum, or dez weiz ich wāriu mære*.

This is then also where we discover the decisive explanation for Sigune’s perch in the tree. Sigune is the narrative reiteration of Herzeloide’s *lactans dolorosa*.¹⁰⁶ where

¹⁰³ On this point, accordingly, Schwab is silent.

¹⁰⁴ Messelken, “Rabe und Taube,” pp. 80, 86–89.

¹⁰⁵ *Rule*, pp. 90–91.

¹⁰⁶ Bertau, *Regina lactans*, pp. 278–79.

the one image shows us the nursing mother and evokes the embrace of the dead beloved, the other shows us the embrace of the dead beloved such that it accomplishes the meaning of the lactating mother: image becomes incarnate experience. Herzeloide, Sigune, and Mary are one in a singular experience: the intensity of grief experienced as a loving embrace or the intensity of love experienced as a grieving embrace. This was the central mystery of Rupert's Mary, the significance of the "bundle of myrrh" that is the beloved resting "between my breasts," the simultaneity of maternal joy and widowed grief, of conception and compassion, Mary's explanation of "how I knew these things." The one experience contains the other even in the very truth that all three communicate: the incarnation of the image as experience. Sigune's perch in the tree thus implies Mary's position in a more familiar image, the Tree of Jesse, the tree that itself becomes image through her incarnation of the prophetic word.¹⁰⁷ Twelfth and thirteenth-century examples still reveal this older visual idea, with Mary holding her child at the centre of a tree;¹⁰⁸ in the *Speculum virginum* we saw this idea of the *virga Iesse* as it was used to visualize the virgins' completion of Mary's reading. Wolfram uses it in Sigune's case to communicate the same: what Mary knew in the conception and bearing of Christ, what Herzeloide knew through her bearing of Parzival, Sigune knows and makes known through *compassio* with a dead beloved—and we know, as Parzival comes to know, by entering her suffering heart.

In this, and only in this, does Sigune's experience offer access to sacred truth, for her and for us: as her experience of the Word. But that is exactly the point of Wolfram's poetics of *triuwe*. Meaning is made only through a shared experience of the inner truth, not through *bilde geben* or *bilde nemen*, not through *bîspel* or mirrors or allegorical representation. Meaning was found in *triuwe* to women's truth, in the reciprocity of wounded hearts.

There is intriguing evidence of the rarest sort, material testimony to the reception of the Yvain/Iwein story from around 1220, to indicate that the audience of the German adaptation of Chrétien's romance two generations later retained an acute awareness of the widow's significance as only just stated. In a cycle of *al secco* paintings that runs across three walls of a room of the castle of Rodeneck in South Tyrolia, eleven separate scenes present the story up to the point of Iwein's first appearance before Laudine.

107 This association merits further treatment, which cannot be undertaken here. The "tree" in question was interchangeably the Tree of the Cross, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Paradise, as is suggested in the French Grail romance tradition in a scene in which Perceval encounters an angelic child in a tree—and which may have inspired Wolfram's scene. Sigune's linden tree, which has often been taken as a reference to the love idylls of the Minnesang, performs similarly to the linden tree under which Tristan and Isolde are caught by Mark: as a symbol that refracts the sacred through the profane and itself raises the question of their interpenetration as of the relation between love human and divine. On the cosmological tree and the scene from the Perceval continuations, see Greenhill, "Cosmological Tree," 323–71; on Wolfram's possible use of the continuations, Curschmann, "Erzähler," 15; and on the significance of the linden tree, Groos, "Sigune," 638; Wenzel, "Herzeloide und Sigune," pp. 229–30; and Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," pp. 7–17.

108 Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, plates vi, vii, x. In an illustrated manuscript of ca. 1220, the same visual idea made an early appearance in a German vernacular work as the frontispiece to Priester Wernher's "Three Songs of the Virgin" (Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellonska MS germ. oct. 109, fol. 1^v).

The sequence has been described by others and the point that I wish to make amply noted: front and centre in the composition, opposite the doorway which forms the only entrance, is a scene that never occurs in the text: Laudine grieves over the dead body of her husband, holding him in her lap (figs. 8.4 and 8.6).¹⁰⁹ The text grants us a view only of Laudine grieving over the body on its bier, but even should the Rodenegg scene be a more expressive variation on that narrative moment, it is markedly out of place. Three scenes make up this shorter middle wall (figs. 8.4–8.5): immediately to the right, Iwein storms the sanctuary, pursuing his victim to the very gates of his castle; to the left, still fully armed, he receives the ring from Lunete that will allow him to see Laudine—and looks not forward to the funeral on the following wall, but rather back at the grieving woman whose presence there so radically interrupts his own charge from outside to inside, as it will so radically alter his own life.¹¹⁰ One scene, then, is offered for contemplation as if its content comprised the whole. Laudine's arresting presence in this visual narrative bears an uncanny similarity to Sigune's existence somehow inside and outside, subordinate to and yet beyond narrative time; just as either does to the sculptures of Mary as *pietà* that would emerge a century later.

As mentioned earlier, Hartmann's text, on which the Rodenegg paintings must be based, does not include Laudine's psalter prayer, but neither does it relate this "Deposition" or "Lamentation" pose, to cite the iconographic types that have been evoked as possible models for the artist's work.¹¹¹ The same types have frequently been cited as models for Sigune's "Lamentation" over Schianatulander.¹¹² Finally, we might have cited a Lamentation scene as a chronologically admissible inspiration for Herzeloide's (imaginary) fulfilment of the same embrace. But none of these associations is finally compelling. The pose in which the deceased is taken onto the lap of a mourning relative needed, and possibly had, no properly established sacred model, whether visual or verbal, in these early decades of the thirteenth century; the ritual gesture of the *Schoßhaltung* was instead well known in secular literature, most prominently displayed by men on the battlefield.¹¹³ On the other hand, this gesture was, as far as we can tell, not part of the repertoire of female mourning; in this regard Wolfram's Sigune constitutes—possibly—the earliest example on record.¹¹⁴ But such considerations somewhat lose sight of the forest for the trees. What so strikingly links these three portrayals of a woman's grief over her dead beloved is their iconic isolation, the way

109 Curschmann, *Wandel*, p. 17; also Bonnet, *Rodenegg*.

110 As described by Curschmann, *Wandel*, p. 17. The scenes are badly damaged; I am most grateful to Anne-Marie Bonnet for permission to use her reconstructions in executing my own (cf. Bonnet, *Rodenegg*, plates 12, 14, 16).

111 Curschmann, *Wandel*, pp. 17–18; Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, p. 55.

112 Wenzel, "Herzeloide und Sigune," pp. 226–27.

113 As argued extensively, with many examples, by Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 77–99.

114 Schwab's evidence belies her own conclusion on this point: In reply to Peil, who first recognized Sigune's exceptional position (Peil, *Gebärde*, pp. 133–34), she compiles a catalogue of examples, but none of those preceding Sigune in fact shows a woman performing this ritual act (Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, p. 98).

each interrupts the rushing flow of (male) narrative to command a “viewer’s” attention, the way each then also attains a significance that extends far beyond its moment in time—in Sigune’s case, the very pose is protracted into the surreal, continuing well over a year later in her perch in the linden tree. Should it not be here, in the intensification and monumentalization of a woman’s grief, that we should seek both the impetus behind this new addition to the repertoire *and* the affinity with Mary’s lament over Christ? “Through its very absurdity,” as Schwab writes, “reaching beyond human possibility and thus prohibiting imitation *ad litteram*, the action points, or rather forces the viewer into the sphere of *compassio*, where his *triuwe* is to be proven.”¹¹⁵

This, I think, is the key. Whether or not the Rodenegg artist consciously adapted Marian iconography to his Iwein cycle, the isolation and monumentalization of Laudine’s embrace captures the visual origin of Yvain’s/Iwein’s wounding in love and isolates it for individual, extra-narrational contemplation, which elicits entry into Laudine’s wounded heart even as it seeks to wound the viewer’s: we are to know and share her tears and in this we join Mary’s experience. This is, after all, the image that Yvain—and we, the audience of the *romans*, with him—must learn to “read.” If the artist resorts to the interpolation of an improbable or even physically impossible gesture (Ascalon, or Chrétien’s Esclados, must surely still be armed), then it is in order to communicate an intensity of love and suffering as a moment suspended in time; the embrace is the visual rendition of the mourning widow’s determination not to allow the inevitable separation from the beloved body. It is the widow’s appeal to her onlookers for compassion with her pain. The same embrace enters the textual tradition of Mary’s lament over Christ with the *Quis dabit*.¹¹⁶ “In gremio meo te mortuum teneo,” (I hold you dead in my bosom), Mary says, when Christ has finally been taken from the cross.¹¹⁷ Both Sigune and Mary initially refuse to relinquish their beloved for burial; failing in this, they seek to die and be buried with him.

There is indeed nothing imitable nor intended as such in these extreme portrayals of a woman’s grief. The “widow” takes and holds her position as the central, generative image in each case—Mary’s, Herzeloide’s (continued in Sigune) and Laudine’s—because she makes reciprocal suffering all but a moral imperative; she serves to *require* this response. Wolfram gives us the verbal rendition of this imperative, isolating the same image as chosen by the artist at Rodenegg:

115 “Es ist beiden Szenen [Sigune’s embrace and Mary’s as pietà] ... wohl gemeinsam der abseitig-ausserwirkliche und eben dadurch emblematisch-wirkungsvolle Charakter. ...Durch das Absurde, das *ad litteram* nicht nachzuahmen ist, weist, ja drängt dieses Handeln, das Menschenmögliche überbietend, den Beschauer in die Sphäre der *Compassio*, worin sich seine ‘*triuwe*’ beweisen mag,” Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 107–8.

116 If not before: I have not been able to investigate this specific point myself. Moreover, it is not clear when the gesture enters the textual tradition of the “*Quis dabit*,” as, once again, this gesture is not in the version transmitted by Oglerius. It was included, at the latest, in the first half of the thirteenth century, and the formula was then taken up in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. See Schwab, *Sigune, Kriemhilt, Maria*, pp. 100–103.

117 “*Quis dabit*,” ed. and trans. Bestul, pp. 180–81.



Figure 8.4. West wall of the Iwein cycle, Schloss Rodeneck, South Tyrolia, ca. 1220. © Schloss Rodeneck, reproduced with permission of Rafael Emmenegger and Graf Oswald von Wolkenstein.

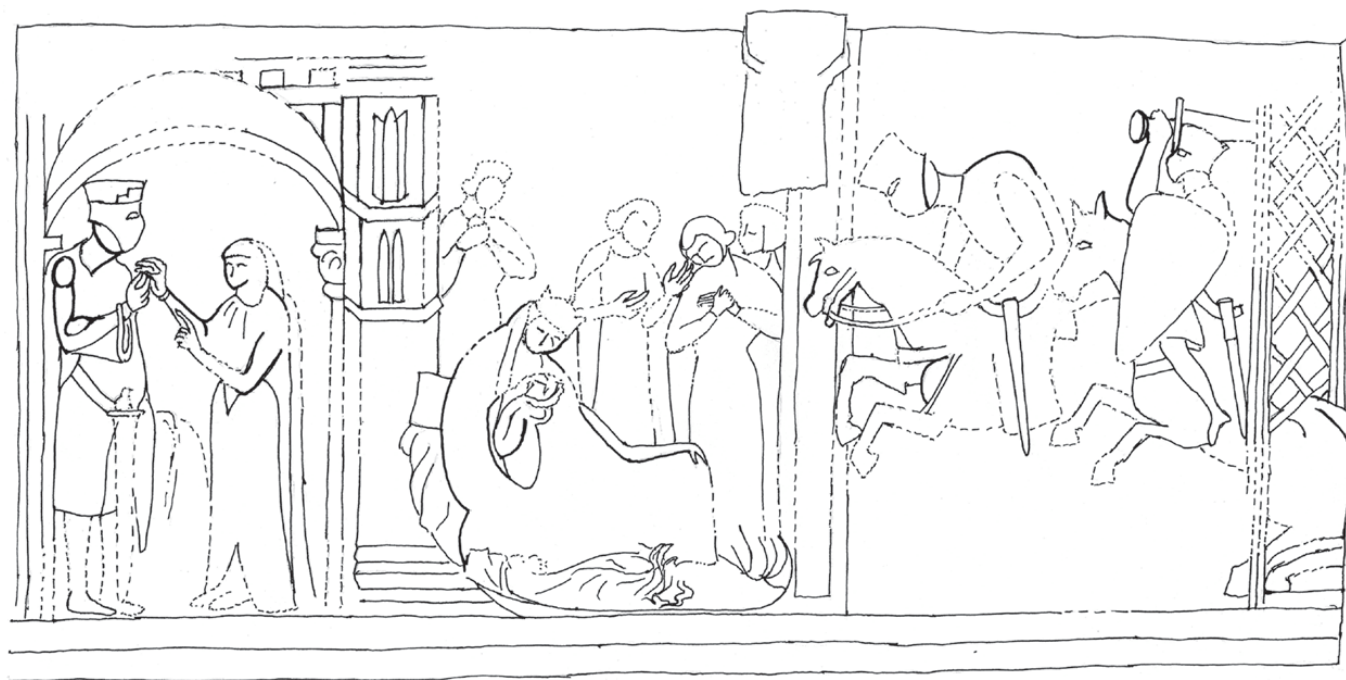


Figure 8.5. Contour reconstruction, west wall of the Rodenegg Iwein cycle. © Morgan Powell.



Figure 8.6. West wall of the Iwein cycle (detail), Schloss Rodenegg, South Tyrolia, ca. 1220.

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ein gebalsemt ritter tôt
 lent ir zwischenn armen.
 swenz niht wolt erbarmen,
 der si sô sitzen sæhe,
 untriwen ich im jæhe.

(249,16–20)

(A dead knight embalmed lay between her arms. Should anyone see her sitting thus and feel no compassion, I would charge him with *untriuwe*.)

Untriwe: for Wolfram, this is no less than the sin of disbelief. Evoked thus before Sigune's third entrance one might as easily say, "Such a one is unworthy to hear this tale," or *Swerz niht geloubet, der sündet*. This call to compassion encompasses onlookers inside and outside the text, audience, narrator and protagonist, and had previously found all but identical expression in the tradition of Mary's lamentation:

Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
 matrem Christi si videret
 in tanto supplicio?
 Quis non posset contristari,
 piam matrem contemplari
 dolentem cum filio?¹¹⁸

(Where is the man who, seeing the mother of Christ in such distress, would not weep? Who could possibly remain unmoved, contemplating the pious mother as she suffers with her son?)

In the "Quis dabit," the injunction extends even to angels who "sorrowed with [Mary] ... if they were able to sorrow," for "what angel ... would not weep here, even contrary to nature, where contrary to nature, the author of nature, the immortal God, lies dead as a man?"¹¹⁹ Hartmann von Aue devised his own echo of such extremity in his portrayal of the lamentation of Enite (Enide): there it is nature itself, the surrounding forest and hypothetical beasts who must in absence of all other onlookers echo her pain and *helfen weinen* (help her weep); while the call for compassion from all present—very close to Wolfram's—occurs in the preceding scene, in which Erec is in the same position as Parzival and the devotee of Mary's *compassio*, observing the *compassio* of Cadoc's beloved.¹²⁰

118 "Stabat mater dolorosa," stophe 3, as cited in Kraß, *Stabat mater*, p. 294.

119 Bestul, ed. and trans., p. 181.

120 "si hâte auch gwnnen / von jâmer solhe swaere / daz doch niemen waere / alsô vestes herzen, / haete er ir smerzen / zuo den zîten gesehen, / sît ich der wârheit sol jehen, / si enmüeste im erbarmen" (*Erec*, 5327–34).

For Enite's lament, see *Erec*, lines 5746–54, 5860–68, 6081–83. See also, Kraß, "Mitleidfähigkeit," 294–97.

These scenes require exactly what their authors' injunctions claim: reciprocity, a recognition of other as self such that the heart opens—or rather is “stirred with compassion and pierced to the point of tears,” as Peter of Blois described the conjunction of tears for Arthur and for Christ. This was no call to action or to *imitatio Christi*, to acts of charity or *misericordia* (to say nothing of vengeance); neither is the truth it seeks constituted as a model of moral progress contained in the narrative itself.¹²¹ It was a call instead to feel as woman feels, to enter her helplessness, weakness, and her desire and embrace them as one's own; a call thus to reconstitute the mirroring gaze of wounded hearts in which humanity, as woman and through woman, had last known its saviour on earth. Such was the new conception of truth in narrative—both as we read it in Wolfram and as he and his contemporaries had seen and heard it in Chrétien.

121 While Yvain—as outlined above—makes such progress, this is itself a model of the reception of suffering; its truth is constituted not through action, but through mutual recognition.

CONCLUSION

THE READING AND grieving widow had become, by 1200, the face of the woman in the mirror of the reading revolution that transformed Western understanding of the place of man before God. She stands at the end of a succession of mediary translations that consistently serve one and the same experience of identification achieved between audience and bride, and that we have been able to trace from the beginning to the end of the long twelfth century. Rupert's new Marian reading of the Song of Songs itself derives from the possibly original locus of this identification as it was embedded in the much older liturgy for the feast of Mary's Assumption. His project, however, translated the same into a hermeneutic event accessible to "immature" and "female" souls, through which they could "read" the scriptural images as Mary had. From there it was translated into an alternative, audio-visual *lectio* for women in the monastic life in the *Speculum virginum* or, in Hildegard's audio-visual gnosis, into the model of a new authority for a woman's unmediated apprehension of divine teaching. The woman's reading position enters the conception of vernacular textuality as the locus of a reorientation of identification in narrative in the *Chanson de Saint Alexis* as staged in the St Albans Psalter. In the rendering of scripture *en romans*, this position fused with a new conception of the poetic performance space itself, from there to enter narrative representation, where figures of secular *historia* could double and prefigure the audience's own transformation as envisioned in the delivery of the text. Finally, then, it rejoins and cross-fertilizes, it seems, the expanding treatment of Mary's narrative, most especially in her suffering at the cross, to deliver a new poetics of truth in the reception of romance narrative. In this process of translation for new audiences and the corresponding sites of delivery, Latin becomes vernacular, *lectio* becomes oral performance, scriptural images acquire bodies in narrative or visual art, the experience of the liturgy is transferred to instruction and poetic entertainment. Through all these changes however, the experience that is aimed for remains the same one with the same claim to gnosis and truth and the same authorizing privilege as a "female" and "illiterate" access to the Word.

What we have most basically discovered in pursuing this woman in the mediary mirror is that there was an alternative way of reading being articulated in the twelfth century that has as yet barely been detected in the pages of modern scholarship: an alternative poetics of body and truth, an alternative to the oppositions between letter and spirit, kernel and chaff, masking exterior and inner truth—all the familiar dichotomies that subtended exegetical reading and allegoresis. The alternative resides in the possibility that the body and bodily experience themselves can reveal truth to the extent that they approach the abject humility of God-in-human-flesh. The body here reveals in and through its materiality and historicity, in its particularity as in its pain: it shuns exemplarity even as the "true woman" shuns praise and all external display, all semblance of manifest, external excellence. Thus, the body as object-to-be-read negates its

own quality as sign to empty itself of the presumption inherent in all re-semblance. Here the body can only become more itself, sink into its own immanence to the point that it attains the inverse perfection evinced by Christ on the cross. Where external perfection is inherently suspect, truth in the other is grasped only as the sense of loss and bereavement of the suffering body; that is, through empathy achieved, identification with the other in the fullness of his or her humanity. It is finally by knowing Parzival or Yvain as ourselves, their struggles as ours, that we know something of Christ through their respective narrative fates and not by knowing or decoding Parzival or Yvain as Christ. The woman in the narrative mirror taught her audience how to do just this. She does not teach imitation but rather herself seeks identification with Mary's experience as the steadfast, suffering beloved and mother, even as she requires the same from protagonists and audience. Mary as the protagonist of the *Stabat mater*, the steadfast woman as mirror of Christ's human pain, was the position from which the human soul learned to read as woman.

The search for and articulation of this new reading is not hidden from view nor is the field in which it was articulated one that can be easily overlooked: it occurs through the *lectio* of the Song of Songs. Here we discover somewhat differently the significance of this biblical book, even the reason for its extraordinary and pervasive predominance in twelfth-century letters and thought, meditation, and devotion. The Song of Songs was the site of the creation of a new reading experience; the text itself, in contemporary understanding, created or generated this experience, one in which the search for oneness with the Word was a process of identification with body and bride as self, in which the images of human sensual and sexual experience become not objects of renunciation but rather points of immersion through which to experience the humanity of the flesh in its communion with the humanity of the bridegroom. To read the Song was to immerse oneself in the dialogue of humanity and divinity as each sought to know the other, a song of separation and union in which knowing was a communion experienced as suffering and love, the body in pain and joy; the song of two voices seeking perfect reciprocity in love and in pain, a moment of perfect, reciprocal knowing, figured finally as enclosure in one heart. Meaning and truth were to be found in moments of continuity with this experience, moments in which the body knew itself as the chiasmic complement of Christ's place in the stable at Bethlehem, sucking from Mary's breast, or hanging from the cross.

With the discovery of the moment at the centre of a claim to vernacular literary truth we have also identified the place of romance narrative within the hermeneutics of the sacred. It is worth reviewing in conclusion what this means for our understanding of the mediary landscape that generated this new literary form.

First, what we have called courtly romance served the communication of Christian truth and was driven by parallel developments in Christian devotion. It embraced a project defined by this message, which also contributes to its understanding as a distinct reading experience, a genre. To announce a text as *avanture* or *âventiure* implied it operated within the new body poetics and its larger model of knowing and truth.

The development of new vernacular narrative is complicit with the history of exegesis, but not such that the latter serves as a model for the former or offers methods

through which to encode or decode meaning. Rather, their common ground lies in the understanding of narrative as the recreation and renewed projection of a reading experience and above all in the conception of reading as an encounter with sacred history as presence. We need to consider whether and to what extent *en romans treire* and *ze diute sagen*, the process of inscription in the vernaculars, can be understood as the imaginative projection of scriptural images as *historia*; that is, as the projection of a reading process whereby the “meaning” found, an identification of self in sacred history, is placed in a new narrative context that enables a renewed identification through shared experience.

Where *lectio* seeks truth as an experience of presence, exegesis likewise becomes “an exercise of recognition of self in history,”¹ a search for an experience of identification so strong that it could substitute for the reader’s own factual absence at the events. In this it at once subscribed to the historian’s idea of truth as guaranteed by the eyewitness and substituted for the same an experience achieved through reading empathy. This convergence of exegesis and history, of reading to “be her” and reading to “be there,” of empathy and presence, describes the space in which the new poetics of narrative emerged. It did not operate in opposition to historical truth any more than it sought autonomy from sacred truth. The new body poetics and the idea of reading empathy were fully interdependent. They had their adherents and their detractors; the latter were no doubt most numerous among the likes of Thomasin; that is, among the more traditional clerics and *magistri* who saw themselves as potentially or factually displaced by this new mediation of knowledge. There is no basis in contemporary sources for an opposition between historical truth and a new narrative “fiction” other than this reactionary position, which thereby seeks peremptory disqualification of the latter as simply lies. As long as we discuss romance narrative in terms of an opposition between fiction and history, our attempts to grasp what is at stake are inevitably deflected back into the very opposition that served this disqualification. The operative polarity is instead one between the truth of cognition, whose vehicles are *exempla* (*bispele*) and other applications of allegoresis, and the truth of experience, which is the claim made for “new” *mære* and *avanture*.

There did exist, finally, among the authors and audiences of the new narrative, a keenly developed awareness of its place in epistemology and poetics, as well as a discourse—a conceptual and terminological toolbox—that served to articulate the same. True to the nature of its justification and the audiences it (at least ostensibly) served, this discourse and its terminology were not those of the schools, which the Middle Ages had inherited from antiquity and have to this day been at the centre of our own inquiry. Their very authority derived from the predicated necessity of a knowing without schooled learning; the appeal to the same may at times have served to justify “extra-curricular” explorations, the possibility to operate outside the boundaries of learned tradition, and at others have been truly motivated by a concern to meet the needs of otherwise excluded groups.

Here we encounter an explanation not only for the intellectual complexity and literary quality of the first generation of romance narrative but also for its—still lamentably

¹ *JP*, p. 469.

neglected—existence in an almost symbiotic relationship to scripture *en romans*, texts whose declared purpose is to deliver the art of exegesis or religious instruction as recast in the vernacular. The authors of romance narrative were themselves no more *illitterati* than the most prolific of twelfth-century biblical commentators, Rupert of Deutz, was truly an unschooled monk. We should think of them instead as among the most intellectually adventurous minds of their time, in the company of Peter Abelard or Hugh of St Victor—and with no lesser commitment to their religious beliefs. This might seem no surprise, except that—within our previous idea of romance as a fictional world unto itself, one even outside the bounds of the communication of Christian truth—there was no more a school or other intellectual milieu from which to envision these authors' emergence than there existed an intellectual foundation for their purported idea of truth in fiction. Nor could much explanation be found for the persistent nonchalance with which contemporary witnesses and manuscript collections alike treated what the scholars of our own time considered such a radical divide, even antipathy, between texts of religious instruction and romances glorifying a chimera, a fictional truth.

What began, then, as an inquiry into supposed female vernacular readers and patrons ends up demonstrating how to understand new vernacular scripture—whether Arthurian or antique narrative, or exegesis and religious instruction—as varying facets of one experience, an experience that reveals truth in the body, in reading empathy as united with the truth of history. The key lies in recognizing that affective identity with the sufferings of Christ was felt to bring one into the presence of the crucial events of sacred history, and vice versa: to have been present at these events would be to know the truth and the Word as Mary and the apostles did, to know the Man-God by sharing his experience. All of this applies, however, because of the body that God took from Mary. The woman as bride and audience is our way of knowing these experiences; she makes them “our own” because she knew them as body, in her body, one time for all before us. This is why the mystery lady in the audience is always potentially Mary herself, why the successful constitution of meaning depends on moments of identity achieved between bride and protagonist, bride and audience. In such moments *historia sacra* becomes not only true but also “real” in an experiential sense, and secular history becomes not merely factual, but also “true” in the full Christian sense. The truth becomes a manifest dimension of human experience here, now, and among “us.”

What, now, should we make of the idea of female readers of new vernacular literature? The illustration tradition of Richard of Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amours*—which provided a visual epigraph at the outset of this study—includes, in a different manuscript from the late thirteenth century, a very rare attempt to visualize the reception of romance narrative (fig. 9.1). Here, if anywhere, in a text so self-consciously staged as a written appeal to the author's ladylove, we ought finally to find the elusive female reader of vernacular literature. The illustration instead shows a man seated in a private chamber with an open book on his knees. Neither is his gaze directed at the pages nor are these directed to his face—they are turned instead as if offered to the viewer. The man's gaze is preoccupied with something far more immediate: armed figures in full battle dress (so close that the outstretched hand of the foremost among them all but touches the book) appear to address him, “For when one hears a *romans* read, one



Figure 9.1. *Bestiaire d'amours*, late thirteenth century, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 308, fol. 86d v. © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

perceives the adventures just as if one could see them in the present.”² It is not clear that what happens here corresponds to our idea of reading at all. If the text is to be believed, the illustration instead demonstrates that romance texts operate even as pictures did for Ooliba, creating the illusion of presence of the persons and events they portray.

What occurs when the objective is instead a more generalized representation of the reception of the text in the mind or (as Richard would far prefer) in the heart, we have already seen: a lady stands between the doors of the eye and the ear to “her” memory (fig. 0.1). This model of female reception of Richard’s example of vernacular scripture is a vernacularization of the audio-visual address to the bride. It may or may not involve the literate perusal of texts; its central concern is rather a conception in the womb of memory. For a truly telling visual representation of the female reception of new vernacular narrative, and one chronologically closest to the fact, we are best referred instead to the grieving widow of the Rodenegg Iwein cycle. This Lady, placed in iconic stasis front and centre, is no less—and perhaps still more—the mirror of audience/viewer participation than she is a figure from the story itself.

² *Bestiaires d'amours*, p. 5; as quoted above, p. 1, note 2.

