Gender, perception and knowledge in the Old French and Latin *Seven Sages of Rome*

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Abstract

Combining manuscript studies with close textual readings, this doctoral thesis aims at shedding new light on the Old French and Latin tradition of the *Seven Sages of Rome* (*SSR*), whose concern with issues related to gender, perception and knowledge will be examined.

The text, a collection of tales in a frame-story, entered Romance literary tradition around the middle of the 12th c. and the spectacular fortune it enjoyed is witnessed by the wealth of its versions and redactions: besides two verse versions (K, C), we can count at least five prose versions (A, L, D, M, H). The analysis conducted in the thesis runs across these seven versions, including the thirteenth-century Latin translation from Old French. By approaching the *mouvance* of medieval texts more as a possibility to retrieve the contemporary reception of the text than as a limit to its faithful reconstruction, the several versions are confronted and compared, highlighting how both plot and descriptions of the characters are subject to substantial variations depending on each version.

In Chapter 1, the attention is predominantly (although not exclusively) dedicated to the construction of female characters in the *SSR*, i.e., the Empress as well as the other women appearing in the tales. The misogyny usually ascribed to the *SSR*'s narrative is therefore put under scrutiny, showing how different texts articulate the antifeminist discourse underpinning the text in different ways. The chapter also attempts to put the variability of the misogynistic features in the context of the reception of the texts.

Chapter 2 focuses on the verse version K, which is analysed by taking into account the context of its only manuscript, BnF fr. 1553. By looking at the other texts contained in the same codicological unit as K, a case is made for K's concern with the deceitfulness of the senses and perception, showing how this relates to gender representations as well as the broader cultural context of the 12th and 13th century.

The third and final Chapter looks at the way in which the problem of the senses and perception is articulated in the later Latin translation of the *SSR*, with particular emphasis on the *reductiones* (i.e. religious interpretations of the frame-story and tales) appearing in its earlier manuscripts. Once again, a case is made for the importance of issues related to the senses and perception in order to understand the reception of the *SSR*, while also showing how this theme is readjusted according to the needs of the producer(s) of the version(s) and their audience(s).

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I first heard the word doctorate, "dottorato", halfway through my BA, when a friend of a friend of a friend obtained a scholarship. As a boy raised in the Italian countryside in a working-class family never could I ever have imagined to be writing the acknowledgments of my PhD thesis, one day. This is exciting!

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Table of Contents

List of tables

List of figures

List of abbreviations

DMF: *Dictionnaire Du Moyen Français, Version 2020* (Dmf 2020).

<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf > [Accessed December 2021].

FEW: von Wartburg, Walther, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Basel: Zbinden,
1973-2001)

TL: Tobler, Adolf, Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Weisbaden: F. Steiner,
1955-)

Introduction

C'est que les marges d'un livre ne sont jamais nettes ni rigoureusement tranchées : par-delà le titre, les premières lignes et le point final, par-delà sa configuration interne et la forme qui l'autonomise, il est pris dans un système de renvois à d'autres livres, d'autres textes, d'autres phrases : nœud dans un réseau. Et ce jeu de renvois n'est pas homologue, selon qu'on a affaire à un traité de mathématiques, à un commentaire de textes, à un récit historique, à un épisode dans un cycle romanesque ; ici et là l'unité du livre, même entendue comme faisceau de rapports, ne peut être considérée comme identique. Le livre a beau se donner comme un objet qu'on a sous la main ; il a beau se recroqueviller en ce petit parallélépipède qui l'enferme : son unité est variable et relative. Dès qu'on l'interroge, elle perd son évidence ; elle ne s'indique elle-même, elle ne se construit qu'à partir d'un champ complexe de discours.[1]

Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, (Paris: Gallimard), p. 34.

Introducing the *Seven Sages of Rome*

The term *Seven Sages* is used as a collective name to indicate numerous multi-lingual texts that are essentially a series of tales encompassed in and connected by the following frame-story: the beloved son to a valiant emperor is unfairly accused of rape by his stepmother who asks and obtains from the emperor that the prince is put to death. Thanks to a prophecy, the prince knows that if he talks before seven days have passed, he will perish, so he does not utter a single word. However, seven sages spend seven days narrating all sort of stories about the trickery of women in an attempt to advise the emperor against the accusations of the empress. When the seven days are up, the prince speaks, tells his story, the emperor is convinced of his innocence and the empress is, in different ways – some of which involve her death – defeated.[2]

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[1] "The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. And this network of references is not the same in the case of a mathematical treatise, a textual commentary, a historical account, and an episode in a novel cycle; the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse." Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 25-26.

[2] The brief outline of the story recalls a recurring episode in literary history, and historiography (e.g., Flavia Maxima Fausta, wife to Constantine I). For the fortune of the narrative involving "a handsome but virtuous youth continently deaf to the importunings [sic] of a wicked lady" see Frederic Everett Faverty, 'The Story of Joseph

From around the 4th, the 5th or the 6th century, this narrative pattern travelled from the East (either India or Persia), where it originated, to the West, passing through several geographies, cultures and thus languages which re-appropriated both the frame and the tales according to their different literary tastes, adding or removing details, expanding or reducing contents.[3] The *Seven Sages*, then, shares the same transmission patterns of other texts that first appeared in the East and were then transmitted to the West, such as the *Panchatantra* and its later transposition into Persian and then Arabic *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*. The fact that the latter went so far as to inspire the composition of Jean de La Fontaine's *Fables*, still a landmark in contemporary French culture especially for the education of children, led the Franco-Algerian visual artist Katia Kameli to conceive her series of installations titled *Stream of Stories* (2015-2019), divided into six interconnected chapters.[4] Kameli's mixed media approach results into a re-reading across the *Panchatantra*, the *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* and the *Fables* that regards this series of texts as a space to aptly question notions of intertextuality, "influences culturelles, la notion de traduction et l'interprétation".[5] *Stream of Stories (Chapter 5)* in particular "examine en quoi chaque déplacement et traduction a enrichi les histoires, donnant vie à de nouveaux personnages, narrations et illustrations".[6]

This kind of dynamic and active transmission, whose richness and interest we hope to demonstrate through the medium of writing only, is also involved in the *Seven Sages*. Indeed, the textual tradition of the *Seven Sages* is made up of multiple texts, sometimes so different

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and Potiphar's Wife in Mediæval Literature', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 12 (1931), 81-128.

[3] The wealth of the different versions and studies on the *Seven Sages of Rome* can be appreciated in: Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, and Anthony J. Farrell, *The Seven Sages of Rome, and the Book of Sindbad* (New YorkLondon: Garland, 1984).
Studies on the Eastern and Western traditions of the *Seven Sages* date back to the 19th century. Early scholars were convinced of the Indian origin of the *Seven Sages*' frame-story. See for example: Auguste Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, and Antoine Le Roux de Lincy, *Essai sur les fables indiennes et sur leur introduction en Europe: suivi du Roman des Sept Sages de Rome, en prose* (Paris: Techener, 1838); Theodor Benfey, 'Beitrage Zur Geschichte Der Verbreitung Der Indischen Sammlungen Von Fabeln Und Erzahlungen; Ursprüngliche Grundlage Der Sieben Weisen Meister', *Orient und Occident,* 3 (1864), 171-83; *Mischle Sindbad*, ed. by Paulus Cassel (Berlin: 1888) and Domenico Comparetti, *Ricerche Intorno Al Libro Di Sindbad* (Milano: Bernardoni, 1869). The idea that the parental version of the *Seven Sages* is the Hebrew text is supported in Morris Epstein, '"Mishle Sendebar": New Light on the Transmission of Folklore from East to West', *Proceedings - American Academy for Jewish Research,* 27 (1958), 1-17 and *Tales of Sendebar. An Edition and Translation of the Hebrew Version of the Seven Sages Based on Unpublished Manuscripts* ed. by Epstein Morris (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967); Benn Edwin Perry thinks that the parental version was produced in the Near East (probably Persia) from originally Greek material. See Benn Edwin Perry, 'Origin of the Book of Sindibad', *Fabula,* 3 (1960), 1-94. For a more recent recollection see Elisabetta Paltrinieri, *Il* Libro degli inganni *tra Oriente e Occidente. Traduzione, Tradizione E Modelli Nella Spagna Alfonsina* (Firenze: Le Lettere 1992).
[4] A description of Kameli's *Stream of Stories* can be found in the website of the artist. See: Katia Kameli, 'Stream of Stories' <https://www.katiakameli.com/install/stream-of-stories-part-one/> [Accessed December 2021].
[5] See *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

one from another that scholars have been able to identify several constellations of texts, the bigger and most important of which are the two broad-categories of the Eastern versions, commonly known as *The Book of Sindbad*, and *The Seven Sages of Rome* (hereinafter *SSR*), which encompasses the majority of the Western versions[7]. Differences and similarities can be recognised between these two traditions. First and foremost, in *The Book of Sindbad* only the homonymous sage takes care of the education of the prince and the seven sages who narrate tales for seven days are the emperor's counsellors. Another striking difference is the silence of the empress in *The Book of Sindbad*, where the sages are the only ones to tell stories. As for the tales, the Western *SSR* shares only four tales with the Eastern versions, namely *Canis*, *Aper*, *Senescalcus*, and *Avis*.[8]

Almost two centuries of scholarship have not been enough to demonstrate how and exactly when *The Book of Sindbad* entered Western literary culture nor is it clear which was the Eastern version that served as basis for the *SSR*. Of course, several hypotheses have been put forward to identify the parental version of the *SSR*, but none of them has been able to shake off (positivist) philologists' shoulders the shivers of their most frightening nightmare, that is orality. However, the idea that *The Book of Sindbad*'s transmission to the West has oral origins, has been explicitly embraced by Killis Campbell, who thought that the narrative was brought westward by Crusaders coming back from Jerusalem.[9] The continuous contacts and exchanges between the East and the West through people's mobility are important to understand the dynamic of the *Seven Sage*'s history of transmission. Epstein Morris too suggested the narrative reached the West thanks to the Radanites, that is "the Jewish merchantmen who forged trade links in the ninth century by every available route between France and China" – however, this interpretation served Epstein's attempt to corroborate his argument in favour of the *SSR*'s dependence on the Hebrew version known as *Mishle Sendebar*, which was later translated into Latin.[10] Thus, while acknowledging the impact of cultural contact, Epstein minimises the

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[7] An important exception is the Old Spanish *Libro de los engaños de la mulheres*, which comes from an Arabic atecedent. See its most recent critical edition *Sendebar. El libro de los engaños de las mujeres*, ed. by Veronica Orazi (Brcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2006).

[8] The nomenclature commonly shared by scholars who work on *The Seven Sages* draws on Karl Goedeke, *Liber de Septem Sapientibus*, Orient und Occident 3 (1866), pp. 385-423. A table with the stories appearing in the Old French and Latin *SSR* can be found in chapter 3 of to this volume; see the list of tables. A further description of the differences and similarities between the Eastern and the Western branches would exceed the purposes of the present work, which focuses only on the Old French and Latin traditions of the *SSR*. However, for studies on the whole *Seven Sages*, see footnote 3.

[9] *The Seven Sages of Rome*, ed. by Killis Campbell (Boston, New York: Ginn & Company, 1907), p. xvii.

[10] Morris Epstein, '"Mishle Sendebar": New Light on the Transmission of Folklore from East to West', *Proceedings - American Academy for Jewish Research,* 27 (1958), 1-17, p. 17. See also Tales of Sendebar. *An Edition and Translation of the Hebrew Version of the Seven Sages*, ed. by Epstein Morris (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967).

importance that orality and the oral exchange of stories had on the transmission of the narrative, suggesting a strictly textual transmission.

I submit that orality is right at the core of the shape and fashion of the *Seven Sages*' transmission and, as such, we cannot but surrender to considering it as its intrinsic and characteristic peculiarity, therefore as something that – if acknowledged – enables us to define and better understand the text as a whole. A positive rather than a positivistic approach to orality might turn out to be more of an advantage than a disadvantage; a further possibility, that is, to try to comprehend and appreciate the structures and mechanisms underpinning not only the transmission of these texts, but also the narrative itself, populated by characters engaging in a lively dialogue through which they exchange tales and, thus, knowledge. As Joseph Bédier notoriously claimed when talking about the "question de la propagation des contes", the oral and the written dimension merge together in a dialogical process that leads to the creation of a hybrid text, in which the oral and written parts cannot be distinguished anymore to the point that we should give "une importance presque identique à la transmission par les livres et à la transmission orale. Les contes passent des livres à la tradition orale, de la tradition orale aux livres, etc., indéfiniment."[11]

The irreducible oral nature of a text such as the *Seven Sages* enables us to introduce another element whose hermeneutic value will be at once perused and demonstrated in the following chapters, that is the malleability of this narrative matter – in other words its *mouvance* or *variance*.[12] These two terms were coined respectively by Paul Zumthor and Bernard Cerquiglini and marked a turn from the positivistic approach of classical philology, predominantly devoted to the careful reconstruction of the original text through the application of the Lachmannian's *stemma codicum* (perfected by Paul Maas) or the 'best-text' method proposed by Bédier.[13] Both Zumthor and Cerquiglini advocate for the intrinsic mutability of

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[11] Bédier, Joseph, *Les fabliaux : études de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris : E. Bouillon, 1895), p. 86.

[12] On the connection between orality and *mouvance* see Paul Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix : De la "Littérature" Médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).

[13] This fascinating debate can indeed be summarised by mentioning the four names of Karl Lachmann, Joseph Bédier, Paul Zumthor and Bernard Cerquiglini. Each of them made an impactful contribution to the field of romance philology and the editing of medieval (and classical, in the case of Lachmann) texts. As it is well known, Lachmann gave the name to the positivist method of editing classical and romance texts: its main scope is to reconstruct the original text, trying to retrieve the author's will by identifying the differences between the manuscripts that conserve a given text. The limits of this method have promptly been pointed out by Bédier who, in his edition of the *Lai de l'ombre*, questioned the possibility of applying strict rules to establish a critical edition and propose to base every edition on the text transmitted by the 'best manuscript'. In the 1970s Zumthor came up with the concept of *mouvance*, which he deemed an intrinsic and irreducible characteristic of any medieval text due to its predominantly oral nature. In the 1980s Cerquiglini wrote his famous *Éloge de la variante*, reaffirming the importance of textual variants and paving the way to what is called New Medievalism. Indeed, Cerquiglini's work was the theoretical core of the seminal issue of Speculum dedicated to The New Philology, see the whole

the medieval text, whose variants must be acknowledged and read as parts of the text's history of transmission. With these premises, Zumthor proposes a distinction between the work (*oeuvre*) and the text. While the former represents "l'unité complexe", that is the "collectivité des versions", the latter refers to the concrete and material manifestation of the work.[14] Zumthor's argute distinction functions perfectly in our situation. Indeed, while the *Seven Sages* is a term indicating a specific work, nonetheless it embraces a wealth of different Eastern and Western versions which had their own circulation and their own relevance for a certain audience. Even without considering the broader transmission from the East to the West, just zooming in on the circulation of the *SSR* in the medieval French and Latin literary culture shows how Zumthor's distinction fits perfectly. While the Old French *SSR* refers to a specific plot and narrative structure, we find a macro-distinction between versions in verse and prose, as well as remarkable differences between the single texts representing a specific version. The following visual will clarify the variety of Old French and Latin versions.[15]

OLD FRENCH		LATIN	MIDDLE FRENCH
Verse	**Prose**	**Prose**	
K (12/13th c.)	A (12th c.)	S (Scala Coeli, 13th c.)	D (de-rhymed 14th c.)
C (fragmentary, 12/13th c.)	L (12th c.)	*Dolopathos* (by Johannes de Alta Silva, late 12th – 13th c.)	H, Translation of the *Historia Septem Sapientum*, (15th c.)
Dolopathos (by Herbert, 13th c.)	M (late 13th c.)	*Historia Septem Sapientum*, 1330s	

Table 1 French and Latin textual tradition of the Seven Sages of Rome

issue of Speculum 65 (1991). See Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) and Paul Zumthor, 'Intertextualité et mouvance', *Littérature (Paris. 1971),* 41 (1981), 8-16. See also Bernard Cerquiglini, *Eloge de la variante. Histoire critique de la Philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

[14] Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale,* p. 73.

[15] The Old French and Latin tradition of the *SSR* raises thorny problems of definition. Besides the nature of the texts in terms of literary genre (a discussion in which this work does not wish to enter), it is difficult to define the different textual forms in which the Old French and Latin *SSR* came down to us. Indeed, are we in front of a series of translations, rewritings, or only different redactions of the same text? While acknowledging the importance of the latter question (which will not however be addressed here), this thesis needed nonetheless a series of working definitions. Thus, it has been decided to use the general term version to refer to each one of them. The term redaction did not seem appropriate to acknowledge the innovative character of the different texts, while the term translation has been of course excluded as a concept that can hardly be applied to medieval transmission of vernacular texts. However, following the existing scholarship the term translation has been sometimes used to refer to the Latin rendition of the prose text *A* and the later translation of the Latin text into Middle French. For further discussion see chapter 3, where these versions are introduced.

Ultimately, then, the *Seven Sages* can be thought of as a collective work in the sense that it was not brought to life by a single individual, who had a clear and coherent vision of what the narrative and its intended audience were to look like, but rather it is the result of the collective action of different agents operating along different historic, geographic and cultural lines.[16]

The table above offers a good overview of what is essentially our corpus, which makes it worth dwelling on it further. First of all, the nomenclature generally used in the studies of the *SSR* to describe the wealth of French and Latin versions of the *SSR* is the one proposed by Gaston Paris.[17] Besides naming the versions, specialists also owe to Paris the knowledge of their organisation as well as their proper study. He was the first to suggest that the *Seven Sages* appeared in Old French around the second half of the 13th century in France, in a verse form that must have been similar to the verse version that came down to us in manuscript BnF fr. 1553, *K*, and to the fragmentary verse version *C*, which lived in manuscript 620 of the Bibliothèque municipale of Chartres, sadly lost.[18] Verse versions were later rendered into prose, and this is namely the case for the versions called *A* and *L*.[19] Version *D* is also de-rhymed, probably from an antecedent verse version very close to *C*.[20] Of all the Old French prose versions, *A* in particular had an enormous fortune testified on the one hand by the numerous manuscripts which secured its transmission (32-odd), on the other by the fact that it served as point of departure for the creation of another thirteenth-century prose version (*M*) and the rendition into Latin (*HL*), which was in turn re-translated into Middle French (*HF*) around the 15th century.[21]

As for the *Dolopathos*, it constitutes a different branch of the French *Seven Sages*. Indeed, the narrative differences with the *SSR* are striking: Dolopathos is the name of the king who justly rules over Sicily; his son, the prince, is Lucimien, whose education is entrusted to the wisest man on earth, Virgil; after the stepmother's attempt to seduce the prince and the latter's refusal,

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[16] Both Zumthors's *mouvance* and Cerquiglini's *variance* indeed complicate the notion of authorship.

[17] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome* (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Françaises, 1876).

[18] Paris suggested that this verse version was composed around 1155, see Gaston Paris *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, p. I; see also Gaston Paris, *La Littérature française au moyen âge* (Paris : Firmin Didot, 1890), p. 247. Paris' hypothesis was then confirmed by the later study of Mary B. Speer, who claims that the verse version was composed between 1155 and 1190. See *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome: A Critical Edition of the Two Verse Redactions of a Twelfth-Century Romance*, ed. by Mary B. Speer (Lexington: French Forum, 1989), p. 70. For further information on philological aspects of these versions see the introductory section of chapter 1, which provides further information. It seemed more practical for the reader to have the relevant information about a given version in the introductory part of the Chapter in which that text is analysed.

[19] Even in this case, see the introduction of chapter 1, where prose versions *A* and *L* are presented.

[20] See *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome: A Critical Edition of the Two Verse Redactions of a Twelfth-Century Romance*, ed. by Mary B. Speer, pp. 28-36.

[21] For further information about *M* see the introduction of chapter 1.

Dolopathos decides to condemn his son to death, but seven anonymous sages start to narrate stories with the purpose of changing the king's mind. Furthermore, in the *Dolopathos* the queen does not narrate any tale. Besides the differences in the frame-story, the *Dolopathos* and the *SSR* only share three tales: *Canis*, *Gaza* and *Puteus*. This text was adapted into Old French by a certain Herbert in the first quarter of the 13th century from the Latin antecedent by Johannes de Alta Silva – which in turn dates between 1184 and 1212[22]. Some scholars have tried to identify the relation between the *Dolopathos* and the *SSR*, reaching the conclusion that, even though they were contemporary, it is impossible to detect if and to what extent these traditions influenced each other[23]. As we may picture, the ghost of the oral transmission once again comes to haunt any attempt to delineate a relationship. Already in 1876, however, Paris considered the *Dolopathos* as "une oeuvre très différente du roman des *Sept Sages* proprement dit" and excluded the *Dolopathos* from his analysis on the *SSR*[24].

This thesis acknowledges the existence of all these versions, which have been all taken into account during the preparation of the work; however, the actual analysis will be restricted to only the Old French and Latin *SSR*, thus leaving the *Dolopathos* on the side. In order to achieve the study of such a large corpus in the framework of three years of doctoral studies, the need arose to further circumscribe it. Thus, this thesis will mainly focus on the verse version *K*, the prose version *A*, *L* and *M*, the Latin version and its Middle French translation.

Of course, there is much more behind the series of acronyms that have been listed above and indeed further details about these versions and their relations are provided in the introductions to the chapters focusing on them.[25] This choice is meant to facilitate the reader through the analysis of each version, as the latter always recalls elements connected to their philological study.

As the title of the thesis suggests, the following chapters are mainly concerned with misogyny and perception – or better with the way the discourse around misogyny and gnoseology unfolds and is articulated across the versions of the *SSR* under scrutiny. In order to explore two different yet strictly entangled aspects of the text such as misogyny and perception,

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[22] The Latin text must have been composed during the episcopate of Bertrand of Metz, to whom the work is dedicated. The *praefatiuncula* reads: *Reuerendo patri ac domino Bertrando, dei ordinatione Metensi episcopo, frater Johannes, qualiscumque in Alta Silua monachus, beate uiuere et beatius uite curriculum terminare.* See Jean de Haute-Seille, 'Dolopathos. Ou le Roi et les Sept Sages', ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Emmanuelle Métry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), p. 48-49.

[23] An interesting (however unsuccessful) attempt to identify a direct connection between the *Dolopathos* and the *SSR* is that of J. Crosland, 'Dolopathos and the Seven Sages of Rome', *Medium Aevum,* 25 (1956), 1-12.

[24] Gaston Paris *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, p. I.

[25] Chapter 1 presents versions *K*, *A*, *L* and *M*, while *H* and its Middle French translation are presented in Chapter 3.

a Bakthinian framework will be adopted, in particular Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and heteroglossia. The variety of texts constituting the Old French and Latin *SSR* can virtually be considered as a unitary system in which, however, a polyphony dominates that cannot and should not be reduced to a monologic one. The lively concert of voices played by the variety of forms and of languages in which the *SSR* was appropriated and delivered must be carefully listened to – thereby recognising the differences between the texts while also putting them into dialogue. This will ultimately give the texts the possibility to inter-illuminate one another, just in the same way in which polyglossia creates the possibility of fruitful exchanges between languages. Bakhtin elaborates the idea of inter-illumination when speculating on the passage from the Epic to the Novel.[26] He believes that the main change between the two genres is characterised by the multiplicity of perspectives and languages entering literary discourse with the raising of the novel – something that, following Bakhtin, reaches its highest expression in the work of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky.[27] If Bakhtin believes that "[l]anguages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" this thesis will show that the same can be predicated of the versions of the *SSR*.[28] The concept of polyphony is also introduced by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens in one of her recent studies on the *SSR*, where she argues that the presence of different voices at the level of the same text, creates a situation whereby "the clash of agonistic points of view make [sic] it possible to hear the fictitious voice of a women's protest against the homogeneity of masculine knowledge and power".[29] Thus, for Foehr-Janssens the dialogical dimension of the *SSR* does not interest only the passage from a version to another, but it is also active at the level of the text itself – where the dialogue between different gendered voices, however fictional, is key for us to understand how patriarchal lines of domination are articulated at the level of the narrative.

Informed by these Bakhtinian principles, the following chapters demonstrate how the differences – but also the similarities – across the several versions bear meaning, a meaning that can be contextualised not only in the broader picture of the *SSR*, but also against the background of the socio-historic landscapes that ensured its transmission – which essentially equals its transformation. Nico Kunkel suggest that even the slightest variations that do not seem to affect the structural coherence of the *SSR*'s plot can however "emphasize different

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[26] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*. trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[27] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. trans. Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[28] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*, p. 12.
[29] Foehr-Janssens Yasmina, 'Misogyny and the trends of a European success: The French prose *Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*', *Narrative culture,* 7 (2020), 165-80, p. 174.

parts of the text or affect a character's reception due to its introduction and depiction"[30]. In this sense, Kunkel invites specialists to leave aside the already well-studied level of macro-variations across the versions (i.e., the disposition of the tales or their substitutions) to focus on the level of the micro-variations, that is those affecting the transmission at a close textual level – something that indeed this thesis does.

It will thus be shown that the *SSR*'s narrative was re-worked and re-appropriated not only according to the taste of who was conducting this operation, but first and foremost according to the scope and use that the text was supposed to serve. This approach of course prompts us to see the various textual manifestations of the *SSR* at the same time as a product and an effect of a given historical context, just as suggested by Hans Robert Jauss' "aesthetic of reception" (*Rezeptionsästhetik*). Jauss' hermeneutic theory came from the necessity of a turn-away from the "aestheticism of the work-immanent method" – that he identifies with Benedetto Croce's Neo-idealistic aesthetic theory, according to which the artwork comes from an *intuizione pura* ("absolute intuition") that is completely a-historical and autonomous –, to head for an approach that he calls "historic-hermeneutic".[31] The latter places both the reader and the literary work in a profoundly historicized socio-cultural context that shapes the "preliminary information and a trajectory of expectations against which to register the originality and novelty" of the verbal artwork.[32] While Jauss' concern was primarily with the definition of medieval literary genre(s) and their evolution, the concept of 'trajectory of expectations' or 'horizon of expectations', as it is more widely known, enables us to see in the *mouvance* of the *SSR* a by-product of the historic context that produced the text. The study of its *mouvance*, then, puts under the spotlight the reception of the text, which is key to anchor the latter to the socio-historical context of its users as well as its producers.

An analysis oriented towards the historicity of textual variance cannot but consider the epistemic value of the materiality of medieval texts. As will be aptly clarified in chapter 2, the approach usually called Material Philology is another to widely permeate this thesis. Theorised by Stephen G. Nichols soon after the publication of Cerquiglini's *Éloge de la variante*, Material Philology regards medieval manuscripts as the reification of different social, commercial and ideological discourses, making manuscripts "a work (and an effect) of production that tells us

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[30] Nico Kunkel, 'Misogyny, Wisdom, and Legal Practice: On Narrative Flexibility across Different Versions of the Seven Sages of Rome', *Narrative culture,* 7 (2020), 181-97, p. 191.
[31] Jauss, Hans Robert, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton : 1982), p. 79.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 79.

not simply about the reception of and public for the representation it contains, but more importantly contextualises those works in material culture"[33].

In very recent years the study of the variance of the *SSR* and its readaptation in different languages and cultural contexts has aroused the interest of specialists in the perspective of the Global Middle Ages. In 2020 the journal *Narrative Culture* dedicated a whole issue to the *Seven Sages Tradition*.[34] The introductory paper, *Shades of Misogyny: Medieval Versions of the Seven Sages Tradition from a Gender Perspective* on the one hand presents the *Seven Sages* as a text that has been generally neglected by specialists in every field and, on the other, promotes a "comparative approach" in order to understand the way in which misogyny is framed across the versions, concluding that "although the misogyny in the different versions of the *Seven Sages* tradition is undeniable, it is much more diverse and fluid than has generally been assumed in secondary literature".[35]

Three years ago, when this doctoral research commenced, the resulting thesis was to cover a gap in scholarship, which had neglected for too long a text that, contrary to its contemporary reception, had an enormous fortune in the Middle Ages as well as the Early Modern period. At the same time, one of the arguments put forward by the resulting analysis was that far from being monolithic and static, the misogynistic discourse underpinning the *SSR* is as flexible and malleable as its narrative. As of today, the French tradition of the *SSR* can hardly be said to be neglected anymore. Indeed, several studies are being undertaken on different aspects of the work – as already the contributions of *Narrative Culture*'s special issue suggest.[36] Moreover, a team of scholars from the Université de Genève and the Univeristé Libre de Bruxelles is currently working on the many continuations of the *SSR* (the Cycle of the *Seven Sages*) in the framework of the project *Canoniser les Sept Sages*.[37] The *SSR*, then, is currently at the centre of the reflections and interests of many scholars and this thesis wishes to add a contribution to the current studies of the Old French and Latin traditions of the text. At the same time, this

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[33] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Why Material Philology?', in *Philologie Als Textwissenschaft. Alte Und Neue Horizonte*, ed. by Helmut; Wenzel Tervooren, Horst (1997), pp. 10-30, p. 12. On Material Philology see also: Stephen G. Nichols, 'Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum,* 65 (1990), pp. 1-10. For further details see also Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[34] *Narrative Culture*, 7 (2020).

[35] Anne Reynders, and Remco Sleiderink, 'Shades of Misogyny: Medieval Versions of the Seven Sages Tradition from a Gender Perspective', *Narrative culture,* 7 (2020), pp. 119-23, p. 122.

[36] Another call for paper was launched in November 2021 for a special issue on the *Seven Sages* for the German Journal *Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung*.

[37] There are six know continuations of the *SSR*: *Marques de Rome*, de *Laurin*, de *Cassidorus*, de *Helcanus*, de *Pelyarmenus* et de *Kanor*. For more information on *Canoniser les Sept Sages see*: 'Canoniser Les Sept Sages', <https://www.unige.ch/c7s/> [Accessed December 2021].

thesis will also make another case for the fluidity of the misogynistic discourse across the versions of the *SSR*, but it will go beyond the mere recognition of this fact by seeking to contextualise the 'misogyny's *mouvance*' in the broader picture of the text(s)' production and reception(s). Besides misogyny, however, perception and gnoseology will be other aspects of the narrative that will be investigated and discussed. In the next section, we will lay some theoretical ground showing why misogyny and perception are related and in what sense they can be approached together in the *SSR*.

Misogyny and perception

 Misogyny and perceptions are strictly related to the *SSR*'s narrative. After all, does not the exchange of tales commence because of the deception engineered by the Empress?

Scholars, however, have always had the tendency to give more relevance to the first term of this couple, misogyny, deemed as the predominant element, thus leaving behind any discussion on perception. Indeed, the *SSR* has always been labelled just as another misogynistic narrative adding up to the towering pile of medieval anti-feminist texts. Sadly, this claim has seldom been accompanied by further explanations or study that could clarify the nature and articulation of the misogynistic discourse – at least until the *Narrative Culture*'s number we have mentioned above.

To the best of my knowledge, misogyny and perception have been investigated only by Katya Skow-Obenaus in one of her papers on the later German *Die sieben weisen Meister*.[38] Skow-Obenaus argues that one of the main traits of the German text is the "relationship between the misogyny implicit in the work and the conflicts generated by the propensity of characters to believe in deceptive appearances".[39] This, according to Skow-Obenaus, makes of the dichotomy between 'Sein' and 'Schein' (reality vs. appearance) an underlying theme, concluding that "since deceptive appearances create illusions that deny reality, and femininity is, in turn, linked with the illusory and the false, the problem of 'Sein' versus 'Schein' reflects the misogyny implicit in every level of *Die sieben weisen Meister*".[40] While Skow-Obenaus identifies the connection between misogyny and perception in the *Die Sieben weisen Meister*

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[38] Katya Skow-Obenaus, 'Seeing is Believing: Deception as a Narrative Tactic in "Die sieben weisen Meister"', *Fifteenth Century Studies,* 21 (1994), 303-22.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 305.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 307.

and the importance this pair had in shaping and structuring the narrative and its meaning, she limits herself to the mere description of how the dichotomy 'Sein' and 'Schein' is reproduced at the level of the frame-story as well as the *exempla*, without exploring their relation any further – let alone explaining their role in the reception of the work. Interestingly, Skow-Obenaus abandons the hermeneutic value of this couple of terms in a much later article on misogyny in the *Die sieben weisen Meister*, where she demonstrates how misogyny is replicated not only in the Sages' *exempla* but also in those of the Empress, who is therefore bound to lose her argument against the Sages.[41] Thus, Skow-Obenaus concludes that "[t]he theme that holds *Die sieben weisen Meister* together is misogyny".[42] This claim does not improve our understanding of the *SSR* as it merely replicates what is already known about the *SSR*. The following pages will hopefully show that such a statement can be applied to the Old French and Latin versions with some difficulties, and only scarifying the complexity of their texts. Indeed, while misogyny remains the structural premise of the *SSR*'s narrative, the receptions that the text enjoyed in medieval French and Latin literary culture demonstrate that there is much more at stake than just misogyny. In other words, I contend that while misogyny permeates as well as animates the whole narrative structure of the *SSR*, the latter was often used and received as a space to also reflect and discuss on the nature of perception and the duplicitousness of knowledge.

The strict connection between misogyny and perception does not however interest only the *SSR* but is actually deeply rooted in medieval Western culture more in general, where women have often been associated with matter, that is the opposite of what is spiritual. This is only one of many couples of opposites that were associated with the one man/woman. Irrational/rational, falsehood/truth, body/mind, matter/form, each of these pairs draws a rigid hierarchy in which the first element, associated to the feminine, is negative while the second term represent the positive counterpart.

As Didier Lett suggests, although the distinction between men and women pre-existed the Bible, medieval scholars and thinkers would justify the natural submission of women to men bringing the Genesis's account of the Creation as their *auctoritas*.[43] The continuous implication of this biblical passage in any discourse concerning the relationship between women and men can be appreciated also in many contemporary studies focusing on gender in medieval Western

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[41] Katya Skow-Obenaus, 'The Whole is the Sum of Its Parts: Misogyny as a Unifying Factor in *Die sieben weisen Meister*', *Fifteenth Century Studies,* 26 (2001), 169-82.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 170.
[43] Didier Lett, *Hommes et Femmes au Moyen Âge. Histoire du genre XIIᵉ-XVᵉ siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), pp. 15-25.

culture and thought. Georges Duby, Howard Bloch, Didier Lett, Adeline Gargam and Bertrand Lançonall[44] point out that the Church's Fathers and ecclesiastical thinkers would all justify the natural subjugation of women to men by commenting on the passage known as Yahwist Creation (Genesis II:7), which imposed itself over the account of the creation narrated in the Priestly version (Genesis I:27). In this regard, drawing from the work of feminist readers of the Scriptures, Bloch remarks that while in the latter the creation of woman and man happens simultaneously,[45] in the Yahwist Creation we find the famous account of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib:

> "Immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam: cumque obdormisset, tulit unam de costis ejus, et replevit carnem pro ea. Et ædificavit Dominus Deus costam, quam tulerat de Adam, in mulierem et adduxit eam ad Adam. Dixitque Adam: 'Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea: hæc vocabitur virago, quoniam de viro sumpta est'".[46]

[Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: "This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man"]

The Yahwist Creation and its commentators influenced the way Christianity received and dealt with relations between genders. Duby, for example, maintains that this description of the creation contributed to shape the conception of the institution of marriage according to the Church.[47] Bloch goes as far as to wonder: "Who knows? If the spirit of this "lost" version of Creation had prevailed, the history of the relation between the genders, beginning for example with the Fall, might have been otherwise"[48]. Unfortunately, the configuration of patriarchal

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[44] Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Didier Lett, *Hommes et Femmes au Moyen Âge. Histoire du genre XIIᵉ-XVᵉ siècle*; Adeline Gargam, and Bertrand Lançon, *Histoire De La Misogynie* (Paris: Arkhê, 2020).
[45] *Et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam: ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos.* Bible, Genesis I: 26-27. "And God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him, masculine and feminine he created them". See Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 22.
[46] Bible, *Genesis* II: 21-23.
[47] Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp. 23-24.
[48] Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, p. 23.

power as well as its reproduction is much more complicated than Bloch frames it – and women's subjugation across the centuries is not the result of the Yahwist Creation's reception, as the latter only represents a (textual) by-product of patriarchal hierarchies of domination, and it is not at all their cause. Bloch's work on misogyny has been in fact harshly criticised by less disingenuous feminist critics. Sarah Kay, in particular, warns that misogyny and its features should not be merely textualised, that is ascribed to a textual domain, as this would undermine the socio-political reality of its consequences.[49] At any rate, a wealth of wide-ranging studies have demonstrated that the origin of women's subjection rests on other aspects, may they be rooted into economy (e.g. the link between the development of the private property and the affirmation of certain modes of production according to Fredrik Engels),[50] kinship (e.g. Claude Levi-Strauss')[51] or both (e.g. Gayle Rubin's attempt to see women as gifts that are exchanged between men to create social ties that reinforce the social order and its hierarchies).[52] The reason why the Yahwist Creation becomes so important when it comes to misogyny in the Middle Ages is that it gave commentators an undisputable *auctoritas* on which they were able to ground the idea of the natural inferiority of women. Duby highlights how one of the prepositions set forth by the Yahwist Creation was, amongst others, that God created the woman as an *adjunctum* ('help') for man:

> "Man came first, and kept that precedence. He was made in the image of God, while woman came second, a reflection of his image. Eve's body was flesh of Adam's flesh, made from one of his ribs, and thus inferior."[53]

Women's inferiority is linked to her creation from the matter, rather than from the pure form, as it is the case for Adam. This episode was interpreted through the lenses of Neo-Platonism: God is the first, pure form; man is the second, and is given matter by God, whose form he acquires; the third moment is the creation of the woman, who is generated by the man's matter,

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[49] Sarah Kay, 'Women's Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the "Roman of the Rose"', in *Framin Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Miri and Kay Rubin, Sarah (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 211-35, pp. 212-213.
[50] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, *Penguin Classics* (Penguin Classics, 2010).
[51] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. ed. by Rodney Needham (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1969).
[52] Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (1975), pp. 157-210.
[53] Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, p. 24.

and as such does not maintain much of the original 'divine' form. This model mirrors Plotinus's Neo-Platonist theory of the emanation of substance from a non-divisible, non-changeable and transcendent One that, passing through the *nous* and then the *anima*, finally reaches the sensible world. The One's emanation is thus constituted by a process of following *hypostasis*, which from the higher level of perfection and 'pure' form reaches the lower level of matter. The more we move away from the first *hypostasis* the less the form of the One will be present, thus the more chaotic, disorganised and imperfect the following levels will be. The Yahwist Creation mimics exactly this process. The woman's creation from the matter (i.e., Adam's rib) rather than the pure form of God makes her inferior as well as the sublimation of everything material. Women's connection with the realm of the matter resulted in her association with the senses, which – following the precepts of Platonism – are the source of all deceits, and with everything that is deemed subsequent, unnecessary and, finally, ornamental.[54]

According to Platonists and Neo-Platonists, knowledge was acquired by reminiscing the pure Ideas that the soul had contemplated before its fall into the realm of matter. In this scheme, the senses have the mere role to trigger the process of understanding that would thus unfold inside the mind in its entirety. After all, the material world was merely perceived as a corrupt copy of the world of the Ideas, where authentic knowledge was to be found. In this gnoseological framework, then, the senses were not to be trusted, as the knowledge they produce was to be considered false, or partial. The senses could just put in motion the inner faculties granting our access to knowledge. This account dominated Western thought until the 12th century, when Aristotle's work was translated from Arabic into Latin. Aristotelian gnoseological system asserts the centrality of the senses in the process of understanding: every possible knowledge, even that of immaterial things, is produced firstly by the senses. Chapter 3 will provide further details on the way these two different accounts on gnoseology were structured and what their impact was on medieval culture. What is important to highlight, for now, is that these two competing discourses generated anxiety in the medieval intellectual environment, as several different questions concerning theology started to be re-assessed under the light of the new Aristotelian framework. This is witnessed in particular by the famous condemnations promulgated by Étienne Tempier in 1270 and 1277. In order to respond to the spread of ideas that were deemed to contradict the precepts of Christian faith in 1270 Tempier "intervened and condemned 13 articles that were derived from the teachings of Aristotle or were upheld by his

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[54] Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, p. 130.

great commentator, Averroës".[55] As Tempier's action did not prove enough to end heated debates and to eradicate erroneous beliefs animating the university landscape, in 1277 Tempier was asked by pope John XXI to conduct an investigation that resulted in the condemnation of an additional 219 prepositions – "many, if not most, […] reflected issues that were directly associated with Aristotle's natural philosophy and, hence, form part of the history of the reception of Aristotelian learning".[56] Amongst the several questions that these condemnations addressed, many were linked to issues relating to knowledge and body – and particularly to how knowledge works in God as well as other intelligences.[57]

Sarah Kay interestingly connects the shift to the Aristotelian gnoseological paradigm to the way women – and the feminine – were perceived in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Kay claims that the new epistemic value attributed to the senses by Aristotelian thinkers generated the anxiety that women could enjoy easier access to knowledge and argues that this resonates in a work such as the *Roman de la Rose*, where misogyny "changes from anxiety to maintain pressure on women to fear of her power as knowing subject".[58]

Ultimately, Kay's suggestion that the gnoseological shift affected the way women were conceptualised in the Middle Ages and caused anxieties that can be recognised in between the lines of medieval texts constitutes another theoretical premise to the present work on the *SSR*. Indeed, as will be shown, the body of women across the Middle Ages is used as a space to think and reflect on the issue of knowledge and what produces it, that is sensory perception. This is, in essence, why studying misogyny and perception in the *SSR* is a primary way into the text.

Besides the link between misogyny and perception outlined above, there is also another reason to consider them together in the *SSR*, which rests on their later Latin reception. Indeed, the Latin re-writing of the Old French prose text comes with a series of *reductiones* or *moralitates* that constitute religious interpretations of the *SSR*'s frame-story and *exempla*. These *reductiones*, as we shall see in chapter 3, are all focused on how believers should behave in order to save themselves from eternal damnation – which suggest the Latin text was seen as edifying reading as well as material for religious preaching. Clearly, this means that these

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[55] Edward Grant, 'Aristotle and Aristotelianism', in *the History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition. An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Gary B. Ferngren et al. (New York: Rutledge, 2000), pp. 130-37, p. 134
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 134
[57] Edward Grant, 'The Effect of the Condemnations of 1277', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 537-539. See also Sarah Kay, 'Women's Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the "Roman of the Rose"', pp. 230-231.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

reductiones are particularly concerned with sin and how to avoid sinning so as to be graced with the joy of heavenly salvation. In the Middle Ages, the idea of sin is intricately related to the senses, which are described as open windows for sin to enter men's body and corrupt their soul.

Thus, our study across the different versions of the *SSR* will seek to understand what the reception was of all these diverse yet strictly intertwined concepts of misogyny, perception, the senses, and knowledge.

Chapters' outline

Departing from Runte's contemporary reading of *L'Ystoire de la Male Marstre* (version *M*), the first half of Chapter 1 will be dedicated to the analysis of the misogynistic discourse in this version, which will be conducted on two main levels. The first level relates to the medieval reception of *M* by looking at its manuscript tradition in order to identify the text's purposes and possible audience; the second level is that of the comparison with the other versions of the *SSR*, particularly the Old French verse *K* and the prose *A* and *L*. In the spirit of Bakhtinian inter-illumination, while this comparison will clarify the nature of misogyny in *M*, it will also enable us to better understand its articulation in the other versions. In the second part of Chapter 1, our attention will thus shift to the verse version, *K*, whose female characters display features that make its representation of the Empress (and of other women in the *exempla*) stand out for subverting the expected reproduction of gender roles. This startling description is accompanied by the derision of her masculine counterpart (i.e., the Emperor and the Sages), all elements that make the text worth exploring further.

Chapter 2 will zoom in on version *K* and seek to understand the presence of this unexpected representation of women by adopting the approach of Material Philology. Of course, this entails the analysis of version *K*'s only manuscript BnF fr. 1553, which will enable us to put *K* in its manuscript context. The comparison with the other texts appearing with *K* in the third codicological section of the manuscript – the *Roman de la Violette*, the *Wistasse le Moine*, the *Mahomet* and the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur* – will demonstrate that these texts were not randomly collected but represent a coherent and organic whole. The theme of perception, false appearance and knowledge will be identified as one of the main threads holding together the

disposition of these texts and a case will be made for the medieval reception of *K* as a text deeply concerned with knowledge and its deceptive nature.

The theme of perception and knowledge will be further explored in Chapter 3, which will contextualise *K* in the broader intellectual context of the late 13th century, demonstrating how the competing Platonic and Aristotelian ideas on gnoseology are reflected in a problematic passage of the text: the content and the position of the tale *Inclusa*. The place occupied by this *exemplum* in *K* produces what will be framed as 'gnoseological troubles', as it undermines the narrative's coherence and structure. Relying on the comparison with the prose version *A*, its Latin rendition, and the latter's translation into Middle French, it will be demonstrated that this conceptual problem was spotted and resolved by the Latin redactor. It will be thus demonstrated that the Latin redactor's action on the text is not justified only by its overall active re-writing of the Old French source, but also by its knowledge and concern with the philosophical and theological discourse on gnoseology. Indeed, not only does the redactor show a deep knowledge and understanding of the terms, metaphors and themes of that discourse, but he also displays a significant concern on the part played by the senses in men's indulging into sin. In the final part of the chapter, then, our attention will be shifted to the *reductiones*, the religious interpretations, and see how women and perception are there represented.

Chapter 1

Reading through misogyny

O me miseram in tanti sceleris causa progenitam! O summam in uiros summos et consuetam feminarum perniciem![1]

Heloise of Argenteuil, *Letter to Abelard*, in J. T. Muckle, Mediaeval Studies 15 (1953), pp. 77-82.

Setting the scene

In this chapter, the Old French *SSR* texts will be approached transversally, combining manuscript studies with close textual reading informed by the critical framework of Gender Studies. Starting from a consideration by Hans Runte in the introduction to his edition of *Li Ystoire de la male marastre* (a late thirteenth-century prose version generally called *M*), it will be demonstrated how the *mise en scène* of the Empress in *M* is consistent with medieval views on female education, which want women's agency to be severely contained and controlled.[2] Indeed, while Runte praises the development of the erotic traits of the narrative, the ensuing analysis will instead demonstrate that those very traits reinforce the misogynistic discourse underpinning the text. Thus, it will be argued that Runte's view proves to be cursory and short-sighted if we are to read the text from a gender angle. The study of the character of the Empress in *M* will be then compared with the representation of other women in the *exempla*. Our attention will be devoted mainly to three of them – *Canis*, *Medicus* and *Vidua* – which will be compared with their respective counterpart in other versions of the *SSR*: the prose versions *A* and *L*, and the verse version *K*. The comparison across the versions of the *SSR* will then lead us to focus on the verse version *K*, which gives us an unexpected *mise en scène* of the Empress as well as of the other women populating the *exempla*. *K*'s Empress main characteristic is that she tells her *exempla* in public which, from a feminist perspective, is startling considering the

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[1] "What misery for me – born as I was to be the cause of such a crime! Is it the general lot of women to bring total ruin on great men?" *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. By Betty Radice (London: Penguin), p. 130.

[2] *Li Ystoire de la male marastre: Version M of the Roman des Sept Sages de Rome; a Critical Edition with an Introduction, Notes, a Glossary, Five Appendices, and a Bibliography*, ed. by Hans R. Runte (Tübingen, Niemeyer: 1974).

dichotomy public/private and its role in defining gender roles. While acknowledging that misogyny is a force permeating the whole *SSR*, it will be demonstrated that the misogynistic discourse is not monolithic and is in fact articulated in different ways across its different versions, often responding to and interacting with the context of production and circulation of the text.

Misogynistic discourse: a matter of contemporary readings?

In his edition of *Li Ystoire de la male marastre*, a thirteenth-century prose rendition of the *SSR* commonly called *M*, Runte compliments the narrative ability of its compiler stating that, amidst the Old French versions, *M* is the only one to convey the sense of an "erotic development in the plot"[3]. According to Runte, while the other versions do not mention explicitly the sexual intercourse between the Emperor and the Empress, *M* enjoys lingering on the description of the protagonists' intimacy, thus bringing to the fore the erotic potential of the narrative. Every night, after the Empress' tale against the Prince and the Sages, the Emperor lies in bed with her, enjoying lustful pleasures all night long. This suggests that the Empress is able to persuade the Emperor not only through her *exempla*, but also through her body. Indeed, while other prose versions of the *SSR*, like *A* or *L,* are silent about the couple's intimacy, in *M* the physical element prevails to the point that the text becomes very visual – gestures and moves are described in a way that does not make it hard for the reader/listener to picture the situation. This is evident at the end of the second tale narrated by the Empress, *Aper*. After having already convinced the Emperor to execute the Prince on the next morning, the Empress tries to charm him again with an embrace, while expressing her affection for and trust in the Emperor:

> Lors se coucha li empereres et l'emperris qui mout le seüt atraire. Car elle li mist les bras au col et dist: "Gentius sire, que feroie je se vous estiés mors? Car toute ma jouventé et m'amour ai mise en vous, et si ai tel paour de vous comme vouse poés savoir." – "Dame, dist ore, n'aiés doute car je voel del tout faire vostre volenté."
> Atant l'ont laisiet ester si furent en joie et en solas tant que ce vint au matin que li emprereres et l'empererris se leverent.[4]

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[3] Li Ystoire de la male marastre*: Version M of the* Roman des Sept Sages de Rome, p. XVL.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 18, lines 36-43. This scene is not repeated every night, however the intercourse is always mentioned and introduced with a *formula* that has few variations: "Atant se coucha li empereres et l'emperris et furent la nuit

[So the Emperor went to bed, and the Empress too, who knew how to enchant him. She put her arms around his neck and said: "Kind Sir, what would I do if you were killed? I placed all my youth and love on you, so I am very afraid for you, as you can tell". "Lady, do not doubt that I absolutely want to do what you wish". At this point they were left alone, and they spent the night in solace and amusement until the morning, when they woke up]

Indeed, the reference to the couple's intimacy is not the only element pointing towards an "erotisation" of the narrative, for our attention is captured especially by the traits characterising the staging of the Empress, whose body and physicality are often at the centre of the scene.

The frame-story of *M* presents a young and seductive maiden, who is only thirteen – one year younger than the Prince – when introduced to the Emperor. The latter's counsellors chose her partly because of her noble heritage, as she is the daughter of the Count of Provence, partly because of her appearance and behaviour; in sum, as they say, she is "bele et sage, et de grant linage" ("beautiful, wise and noble"), which makes her a good candidate for becoming the Emperor's new wife.[5] For the contemporary reader's sensibility the maiden's age certainly represents a disturbing note: not even fully adolescent, the maiden is already given away to a much older man. Sadly, this is recorded to be common practice in the Middle Ages, as it was not unusual for a girl to be already married between the age of 12 and 17 – something that concerns particularly the girls of the elite, often used as a means to generate alliances and kinships to secure power and lands.[6]

However acceptable the age of the maiden must have seemed to a medieval audience, some anxiety is manifested by the Emperor's counsellors when suggesting her as new wife: "Sire, nous savons une qui molt est sage et de grant linage, mais mout est jovene quant elle n'a encore plus de treze ans" ("Sir, we know one [maiden] who is very sober and of noble heritage, but she is very young as she is not older then thirteen").[7] The Emperor is not at all bothered by the

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en grant deduit" ("At that point the Emperor and the Empress go to bed and spent the night in great amusement"), *Ibid*., p. 12, lines 60-61.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 4, line 113.

[6] For an overview on the age of marriage for women in the European Middle Ages see David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 103-111. Didier Lett highlights the need for historians to distinguish between 'biologic adolescence' and 'social adolescence'. While the former involves the physiological changes occurring between childhood and adulthood, the latter is the moment of the life between childhood and adulthood recognised by a given society and therefore it is subject to its socio-historical transformations. Lett concludes that girls' childhood ends earlier and more brutally: "[s]ur un plan juridique, l'âge de leur majorité est plus précoce : douze ans contre quatorze ans pour les garçons". Interestingly, this also concerns girls who are to join the monastic life. Didier Lett, *Hommes Et Femmes Au Moyen* Âge. *Histoire Du Genre XIIIe-XVe Siècle*, p. 93.

[7] Li Ystoire de la male marastre*: Version* M *of the* Roman des Sept Sages de Rome, p. 4, lines 116-117.

age of the bride-to-be and indeed, from his point of view, there is no need to be concerned, considering that the younger the bride the more the husband will be capable to correct her wrong behaviour ("Je ne le laissies pour ce, dist li empereres, car ore li porroit on ses males coustumes recoper", "I would not give up on her for this [the fact that she is thirteen], as now one can correct her bad attitude")[8]. The irony conveyed by the Emperor's reply is subtle but sharp, especially when it is framed in the bigger picture of the plot: as a matter of fact, the Emperor will not be able to educate the maiden as he pleases, and she plots and schemes against him, nearly achieving his only heir's destruction. In this sense, the Emperor's desire to reprimand and shape the maiden collides with her being "plaine de ses volentés" ('she is full of her own will', i.e. she does as she pleases)[9]. Thus, the maiden is not only "bele et sage, et de grant linage", she also knows what she wants ("plaine de ses volentés"), and probably even how to obtain it. This translates into a representation of the Empress where physical and intellectual elements are intertwined, and both aspects contribute to charming the men around her from the very first moment the character is introduced, without realising what her grace and good manners actually conceal.

When the delegation of Roman officers goes to Marseille to ask the father for the maiden's hand, the latter is not surprised at all. She knows beforehand of the Romans' arrival and she is ready to welcome them in her best and richest robes ("Lors vinrent en la chambre ou la pucele estoit qui bien avoit entendu la novele si estoit paree trop noblemen", "So they came in the room where the girl was, who already knew everything and was richly ornated").[10] The maiden acts quietly, as befits a well-educated woman, and gives the delegates the answers they want: she is delighted to take the Emperor as her spouse as long as it pleases her *seignour*:

"Sire, dist la pucele, mesire li empereres ait bone aventure, et cil ausi qui il a ci envoies. Et a grant joie nee quant il plaist a mon seignour que il m'ait par loiaute de marriage"

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 4, lines 118-119.

[9] The syntagm "plaine de ses volonté" appears for the first time when the Emperor's man first arrive to Marsaille, where they find the "la pucele qui mout estoit plaine de ses volentés" (Ibid., p. 4, lines 122-123). The actual meaning of this passage is particularly hard to reconstruct as nor the *FEW* nor the *TL* register this expression. Another "etre plains de ses volentes" appears however in *M* once again (*Ibid.* p. 54, line 91) this time in reference to a Sage, Anxilles. In this passage the Empress plots to seduce one of the sages in order to have him on her side, so she asks her men to find out who was the sage "plus abandonnés au pechiet de luxure" ('most inclined to the sin of luxury', *Ibid.*, p. 54, lines 89-90). Anxilles turns out to be the one who in the past did most as he pleased, presumably indicating he indulged in sexual activities ("Anxilles avoit esté li plus plains de ses volentes", *Ibid.*, p. 54, line 91). Considering the context, then, we can safely assume that the term has a sexual connotation here.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 4, lines 132-133.

[Lord, said the girl, the emperor is fortunate and so are the people he sent. […] Blessed be the day of my birth when it pleases my lord (the father?) that he has me through rightful marriage].

That *seignour* generates a meaningful ambiguity, as it could refer to three different characters who usually bear that name: God, the Emperor, or the father. Indeed, the marriage should certainly please God, for nothing just can be done that is against his will; it should also please the maiden's father, because he has full authority over the family, especially his daughter; but this union should also encounter the Emperor's approval, as the final decision is his. It does not exactly matter the way this ambiguity ends up being resolved by the audience – what matters is that the Empress' reply is respectful of the patriarchal hierarchies, something that is actually reinforced by the vagueness of the term *seigneur*. At any rate, this reply proves enough for the delegates to be content with her behaviour and to see an Empress in the maiden.

On the day of their first encounter, the Emperor is also stunned by the beauty and manners of the girl, who on the wedding night behaves in such a way that surprises the Emperor ("Quant li empereres ot la pucele espousé si giut o li la premiere nuit, elle se maintint en tel manière que il en fu tous sourpris"). The – now we can call her that – Empress therefore proves to be a well-behaved and devoted woman, which makes it impossible for the Emperor to detect her *gorre* (trickery). In particular, she is aware that the Emperor has already a son from his first wife and, consequently, of the fact that her offspring will not succeed to the throne, which means that the Prince must be destroyed:

> Lors commença a porpenser une mout mervelleuse traïson, car elle vint a son segnour et puis il fist un trop dous ris, et li mist ses bras au col si le baisa par grant signe d'amour, et li dist: […][11]

[So she begins to think about an incredible treason, because she went to her lord and she smiled very sweetly at him, put her arms around his neck, kissed him in sign of love and then she said: […]]

The incredible treason (*mervelleuse traïson*) the Empress is plotting commences by seducing the Emperor with lustful and charming moves; she smiles tenderly and kisses the Emperor putting her arms around his neck. These moves enable the Empress to achieve whatever she desires, and she convinces the Emperor to agree that the Prince is to be called back home in order to meet and salute his step-mother.

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[11] *Ibid*., p. 5, lines 162-165.

The charming smile, the gentle kisses, the Empress's arms always ready to embrace the Emperor's neck; Runte must have thought of passages like these when presenting *M* as the most erotically connoted version of the *SSR*. But there is even more: as the scenes recalled above show, in *M* sensuality is not only alluded to, it is factually represented. Here the Empress' body – which causes so many (epistemic) troubles in the *SSR*'s plot, as we shall see – is put right at the centre of the stage, under the spotlight. This can be better understood by focusing on the events following the Prince's arrival back to his father's castle. The mutism of the Prince distresses the Emperor enormously, he is at once worried and outraged by his son's behaviour. When the Empress joins the two, beautifully and luxuriously dressed, she offers her help by asking a private meeting with the Prince, arguing that if he is still able to speak then he will certainly do so in the peace of her comfortable chambers. Reluctantly and – it is stressed in the text – only to obey his father's order ("Ales avoec vostre marastre car je le voil", "Go with your stepmother, for I order it")[12], the Prince follows the Empress. Once they are in her chambers, the Empress speaks overtly about her desires, but we witness a significant change of mind with respect to the reason why she asked to meet the Prince. She does not want to get rid of him and secure the throne for her offspring; in fact, she has never been in love with the Emperor, whom she married only to get closer to the Prince. She has madly fallen in love with the latter only by hearing other people talking of him. The contradiction with what we are told before is evident. Is the Empress lying? Has she really been caught by love for the Prince? Either way, what is reinforced is the idea on the one hand of the trickery and deceits of which women are capable and, on the other, of the unreliability of women's desires, which are always changing. While this apparent "change of mind" is common to all the Old French and Latin versions, in *M* the Empress' declarations are particularly astounding because accompanied by a strong attention to the body. "Et je n'ai pas plus de quatorze ans, ce poes vous veoir a ce que selonc l'eage poes sentir la mamelete qui asses novelement me point" ("I am not older than fourteen, you can verify it by touching my breasts, which have just come out according to my age"), the Empress says in front of the Prince, whose face blushes and changes of colour ("li enfes l'esgarda et si devint vermaus et mout grant couleur") and remains immobile.[13] The Empress does not stop, bringing once again the attention to her breasts. This time, however, she involves the Prince's body too, trying to elicit his response by describing with words the physical contact she is asking to have:

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 8, lines 254-255.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 8, lines 260-262 and 271-272.

Certes ne cuidies mie que je vous ai dit tel chose en vain, car se vous ne m'aprochies et metes vostre douce bouche a la moie qui n'est pas vilaine, et sentes de vous chiers bras et de vous belles mains mes dous costs et dure mamelete don je vous ai fait don, je meisme ferai cou dont je vous require[14]

[Do not you think that I have said those things for nothing, for if you do not come closer and put your sweet lips on mine, which is not loathsome, and touch with your lovely arms and beautiful hands my tender chest and flinty breasts that I am giving to you, I myself will do to you the same things I am asking from you]

The Empress' threat is thus accompanied by a vivid and detailed description of gestures and movements that are extremely erotic – this way the Empress hopes to seduce the reluctant Prince, who stands up and steps back instead. The Empress expresses appreciation for the Prince's reaction, for if he had acted as she asked him to without reluctance then it would mean that he was not his father's rightful heir. The Prince keeps moving back, while the Empress seeks physical contact. She eventually takes him by the chin and tries to kiss his lips, but the Prince pushes her back. This innuendo of physical and sexual tension results in the Empress trying to seduce the Prince one last time. If the Prince accepts her, then the Empress will let him do whatever he wants with her body and get all the pleasure that a man can get from a woman ("tout le deduit que nus hom puis avoir de pucele ne de dame je le vous ferai avoir de moi")[15]. However, the Prince refuses her yet again and the Empress reacts by scratching her face, screaming and tearing her dress until she is half naked, showing her "gentle, beautiful and white chest". She remains naked down to her waist, with blood dripping down from her scraped face:

Et [the Prince] si se drecha pour aler sa voie quant cele jeta un cri si grant et si horrible que toute la sale en senti, et a ce jeta ses mains a sa poitrine si deschira sa robe en tele manière que sa tres douce bele blanche poitrine fu descouverte de ci au chaint, et apres la face que elle avoit tendre et bele sour toute creature degrata elle a ses mains et a ses ongles si que li sans en couloit contreval[16]

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[14] *Ibid*., p. 8, lines 273-277.
[15] *Ibid*., p. 9, lines 295-296.
[16] Ibid., p. 9, lines 300-305.

[And the Prince was going his way when she cried so loudly and horribly that everyone heard her, then she started to scratch her chest and teared her dress apart so that her gentle, beautiful, white chest remained naked down to the waist, so she started to scratch her face – which was the most beautiful – with her hands and nails to the point that the blood started dripping down]

The gruesome yet sensual spectacle of beauty we are offered here aims at depicting the Empress as a mercilessly and fundamentally wicked woman, ready to even harm herself to make her trickery succeed. Once again, the primary means through which she intends to obtain what she wants is her body – which is described in detail by *M*'s text. Her breasts are naked and very sweet, beautiful, and white; her face, usually so tender and beautiful, is now covered in blood, which drips down to her stripped body. The insistence on her nudity and beauty makes the Empress take over the stage with her body.

Contrary to what happens in other versions of the *SSR*, *M*'s Empress always relies on her body to persuade the Emperor. In her case the *exempla* do not seem to be enough to convince the Emperor of her innocence, thus she needs to reinforce her argument by using her sensual and attractive body, without which her talking would perhaps be ineffective. This does not happen in other versions of the *SSR* – or at least it does not happen to the same degree. As we shall see more in detail later in this chapter, the verse version *K*, for example, styles an Empress that is younger than the Emperor but not the same age as the Prince. She is of course beautiful and attractive, but never spends the night with the Emperor after she has told her story. What is more important, *K*'s Empress never tells her *exempla* in the secrecy of her chambers – with the sole exception of her first *exemplum*, *Arbor*, narrated at night, she always approaches the Emperor in the morning outside the Church, just after he has attended mass. This essentially means that the Empress' narration becomes a public event, in which the whole court participates, and it is impossible for the Empress' *exempla* to be immediately followed by sexual intimacy with the Emperor. The word is the Empress' only weapon against the Prince and the Sages in *K*.

Far from being a detail that only the pedant critic or philologist would notice, this is a meaningful chronotope, to borrow Bakhtin's terminology, for it frames the action in temporal and spatial settings that are socially connoted: the morning mass and the space in front of the Church.[17] The Empress' speech, thus, is given public relevance. This element is striking not

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[17] "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. […] it expresses the inseparability of space and

only because it occurs only in the verse versions, *K* and *C*, but also because years of feminist theory have invited us to take seriously the opposition between public and private when it comes to women.

At this point, we could even wonder whether in *K*, the verse version of the *SSR*, the events are presented in a certain way because of the text's lack of interest in the development of erotic traits, as Runte seems to suggest; however, it is much more intriguing and perhaps more stimulating to investigate the variances across the *SSR*'s versions trying to pierce the veil of their deep meaning, that is trying to ponder the weight of their interpretative consequences. Hopefully, the basic sketch of the differences occurring between the characterisations of the Empress in *M* and in *K* already demonstrates the importance of looking at the ways the plot(s) unfolds synchronically, which of course entails a simultaneous reading of the various prose and verse versions of the *SSR*. This comparison enables us to recognise and explain the narrative strategies underpinning the representations of the characters – women in particular – across the versions, thereby aiding us to have a better understanding of each unique version of the *SSR* as well as of the *SSR*'s tradition overall. As clarified in the introduction, the comparative approach is animated by the Bakhtinian idea of inter-illumination. Adopting this approach across the different versions of the *SSR* has brought important differences in their representation of the Empress to the fore. This clearly raises the question of how these texts partake in, or challenge, the misogynistic discourse. While Runte applauds the mastery of *M* version's composer, I would argue that those erotic details form the backbone of the misogynistic discourse of this particular version of the *SSR*. Yet *K*'s Empress' more public, less physical persuasive strategies need not indicate that this text does not also – if differently – partake of that discourse. This of course means that the misogynistic discourse is not monolithic; quite the opposite it can be articulated in the most different ways, as the synoptic reading of the *SSR*'s will aptly demonstrate.

But first a clarification is needed on how "misogynistic discourse" is here intended. Working within a Foucauldian framework in order to tackle Western representations of the non-Western world, Stuart Hall provides a clear definition of discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic".[18] This series of statements constitutes what Michel Foucault

time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature […]" Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*. trans. Michael Holquist, p. 84.

[18] Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest', in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), pp. 185-225, p. 291.

ultimately calls a 'discursive formation', which in turn is welcomed as sanctioned knowledge about a specific topic.[19] Essentially, then, discourse produces knowledge – a knowledge that is eventually translated into practice. An important point in Foucault's later thought is indeed the way knowledge and power are related, and this relationship entails power using discourse/knowledge to preserve itself.[20] Thus discourse/knowledge does not have to be true in order to be recognised as such; indeed, discourse is constructed in order to best serve power and its preservation, so that the dominant can always prevail over the dominated. This holds true for every line along which power acts, including that of gender and namely men's domination over women. As Didier Lett clearly puts it:

"La différence sexuelle est inscrite dans le corps et la société médiévale a construit un discours sur la différence des sexes à partir de cette donnée 'naturelle' en attribuant à l'un et à l'autre sexe et en s'appuyant sur les fondements scripturaires, une identité, des caractéristiques qualifies de féminines ou de masculines."[21]

Constructing a discourse that wants women to be irrational, garrulous, unreliable, over-sexualised, means to create the necessity for men to guard and control women. In a very much criticised work, Howard Bloch tried to reconstruct the origin and following developments of the medieval misogynistic discourse, coming to the conclusion that misogyny has a quasi-citational nature. Indeed, Bloch argues, discourses about women sound like all and the same because: "the discourse of misogyny is always to some extent avowedly derivative; it is a citational mode whose rhetorical thrust displaces its own source away from anything that might be construed as personal or confessional."[22] With this Bloch wanted to put forward the idea that misogynistic tropes are always similar to themselves, that they are always the same in every epoch and never finish repeating themselves; at the same time, however, he seems to consider misogyny not as a discourse that is sanctioned and performed (i.e., translated into

[19] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. ed. by Alan Sheridan (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 34-43.
[20] Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* ed. by Stuart Hall (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2013), pp. 1-59.
[21] Didier Lett, *Hommes et femmes au Moyen Âge. Histoire du genre XIIe-XVe siècle*, p. 13. The vastness of the bibliography on women in the Middle Ages required of course a careful selection. In this I was aided by two helpful literature reviews: the whole volume 'Les médiévistes et l'histoire du genre en Europe', *Genre & histoire*, 3 (2008); and the *mise au jour* in Didier Lett, Camille Noûs, 'Les médiévistes et l'histoire des femmes et du genre : douze ans de recherche', *Genre & histoire* (2021).
[22] Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 47.

practice) but rather as an a-historic textual trope. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the main criticism that has been directed to Bloch is indeed that of having textualised misogyny, almost depriving it of its socio-political, hence historic, nature.[23] The danger of such a view is quite evident: relegating misogyny to the mere level of the text means to fail to recognise how deeply emmeshed in social practice misogyny actually is.[24] In opposition to Bloch's view, Roberta Krueger suggests that "we read misogynistic outbursts as marking a dialogue about gender roles within a specific context".[25] Following Krueger's invite, this and the following chapters will seek to understand the different ways in which the misogynistic discourse can be activated, whilst putting it in the context of its creation and reception.

Such is the critical framework through which I intend to conduct the comparative reading of the *SSR*'s versions. By applying this approach, I do not intend to deprive the text of its historicity or to over-read the *SSR* through categories and concepts that were not familiar to the medieval world. My intention is instead to propose a re-reading of the *SSR* that considers the latest findings in the field of history and gender studies, so as to avoid simplistic readings that tend to minimise features that could instead add another piece to the puzzle of our understanding of the culture of the Middle Ages.

Before moving on to the actual analysis of the texts, however, is necessary to introduce them from a philological point of view. Such a complex and varied tradition of texts requires the critic be aware of their nature – which is fundamental to guide the interpretation.

Between verse and prose. Versions *K*, *A*, *L* and *M* of the *Seven Sages of Rome*

Four texts will constitute the core of our analysis in this chapter. While one of them is in verse (*K*), the other three are in prose (*A*, *L* and *M*). In introducing them, we shall follow what is generally accepted as their chronological order of appearance.

We will thus start with the verse version *K*, which is likely to be the oldest witness of the Western tradition of the *Seven Sages*. Gaston Paris was the first scholar to posit the production of *K*'s archetype (which he calls V) around the "XIIᵉ siècle au plus tard",[26] providing the approximate date 1155 – exactly when the genre of octosyllabics romances was flourishing.[27]

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[23] This remark has been already made by Sarah Kay: Sarah Kay, 'Women's Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the "Roman of the Rose"', pp. 211-35, pp. 212-13.

[24] Besides Kay's article, comments on Bloch's work can be found in *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 6, fall 1988.

[25] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 105.

[26] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, p. I.

[27] Gaston Paris, *La Littérature française au moyen âge* (Paris : Firmin Didot, 1890), p. 247.

This date has generally been accepted by scholars, including Mary B. Speer, to whom we owe a meticulous modern critical edition: "I am inclined to propose 1155-1190 as the period during which the verse archetype was composed, perhaps just a little later than Gaston Paris's suggestion of c. 1155."[28] Whatever the origin of its archetype, version *K* came down to us through only one manuscript, BnF fr. 1553, where it runs from f. 338r to f. 267v. This miscellaneous *codex* is generally dated to around the last quarter of the 13th century – 1285 n.s. to be precise, and if we want to follow the date that appears in the *explicit* of one of the texts it contains, the *Roman de Violette*. Some scholars claim that the copy was made in Cambrai, basing their claims on textual evidence.[29] Further information on this fascinating manuscript will be provided in chapter 2, where the focus is on the codicological section in which *K* has been copied.

K is an interesting witness of the *SSR* in and of itself, especially for its long prologue. The voice of *K*'s poet/*jongleur* is vivacious and engaged in an energetic dialogue with its audience – the wane of courtly values is criticised in a fashion that resembles the lyrics of the contemporary *trouvère* Rutebeuf.[30] Of interest is also the fact that in *K* the Seven Sages' narrative is provided with a backstory taken from the *Vengeance Nostre Segneur*. Before the beginning of the actual *SSR* frame-story, the Emperor, Vespasian, is said to be living in Constantinople and to be sick with leprosy. He is healed by touching the Holy Shroud carried by Veronica from Jerusalem to Rome by the will of God. This event marks Vespasian's conversion to Christianity, which will then lead him to wage war against the Jews to avenge Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Once the war is won and the Jews condemned to their diaspora, Vespasian is sad to be back home, but he seems to be relocated in Constantinople rather than Rome. After the description of the Prince's late baptism and the poet's tirade against his depraved times, the plot of the actual *SSR* can be

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[28] *Le Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, ed. by Mary B. Speer, p. 70. This view is also reconfirmed in the 2017 French edition of the verse K by the same author together with Foehr-Janssens: *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), pp. 65-74. Prior to these editions, the texts was edited by Heinrich Adelbert Keller in 1836 and Jean Misrahi in 1933. See respectively: *Li romans des sept sages, nach der Pariser Handschrift herausgegeben von Heinrich Adelbert Keller* (Tübingen: Fues, 1836) and *Le roman des sept sages*, éd. by Jean Misrahi (Paris: Droz, 1933 [reprinted: Genève, Slatkine, 1975]).

[29] About manuscript BnF fr. 1553, see the important study Lepage, Yvan-G., *Un Recueil Français de La Fin Du XIIIe Siècle* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553), *Scriptorium*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1975, pp. 23-46. Further studies are to be found in Olivier Collet, 'Du "Manuscrit de jongleur" au "Recueil aristocratique": Réflexions sur les premières anthologies françaises', Le Moyen Âge, 113 (2007), 481-99 and Olivier Collet, '"Textes de circonstance" et "raccords" dans les manuscrits vernaculaires: les enseignements de quelques recueils des XIIIe-XIVe siècles', in Van Hemelryck, Colombo Timelli (éds): Quant l'ung amy pour l'autre veille. Mélanges de moyen français offerts à Claude Thiry. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 299-311.

[30] Madeleine Jeay, 'La mise en scène du narrateur dans le prologue du *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* (Paris, Bnf, ms fr. 1553)', in *D'Orient en Occident: Les recueils de fables enchâssées avant les* Mille et une nuits de Galland *(*Barlaam et Josaphat, Calila et Dimna, Disciplina Clericalis, Roman des Sept Sages*)* ed. by Marion Uhlig and Yasmina Foehr-Janssens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 147-64, p. 159.

said to start. The merging of the two traditions of the *SSR* and *Vengeance Nostre Segneur* is fascinating, but to my knowledge there is no published study to date that investigates the matter.[31] Regretfully, this subject has not found its way into the present work either – but could nonetheless be a stimulating topic for future research endeavours. The presence of narrative material from the *Vengeance Nostre Segneur* leads critics to think that *K* was perhaps redacted after 1200 when, according to Loyal A.T. Gryting, the oldest vernacular version of the *Vengeance* was composed.[32] Clearly, the *terminus ad quem* is constituted by the date of manuscript BnF fr. 1553.

A manuscript that unfortunately was lost during World War II, Chartres, Bibl. Munic. 620, conserved an acephalous and generally fragmentary mix of prose and verse of the *SSR*. Starting with a part of the *exemplum Tentamina* in prose, this redaction, usually called *C*, continued with *Roma, Avis, Sapientes, Vidua, Virgilius, Inclusa* and *Vaticinium* in verse. Fortunately, in 1912 Hugh A. Smith published a diplomatic transcription of the text, which was then used by Speer to produce a critical edition of *C*.[33]

C is not the only other, even though fragmentary, witness of the verse version – another indirect witness is the de-rhymed redaction usually called *D*. Conserved in only one manuscript from the 15th century, BnF fr. 5036, it has been edited by Paris.[34] Smith was the first one to suggest that *D* derives from an antecedent similar to *C*, a hypothesis that was then confirmed by the study of Speer.[35] On a narrative level, *D* has two peculiarities: the text commences with a genealogy that links the *SSR*'s Emperor, Marcomeris, to the destruction of Troy. Marcomeris is in fact said to be one of Priam's sons saved by his wetnurse who, following an unusual trajectory, first takes the child to Rome, then to Constantinople where, at the right age, he obtains the Empire of Rome and Constantinople, also becoming king of France. Only after this genealogy is described, does the proper *SSR* begin.

The ensuing analysis will mainly focus on the verse version *K* of the *SSR*, for two main reasons: on the one hand, it is the most complete verse version available; on the other, it seemed

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[31] In her edition of K and C Speer promises the publication of a paper that, however, does not appear to have been ever published.

[32] *Le Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, ed. by Mary B. Speer, p. 71. See *The Oldest Version of the Twelfth-Century Poem* La Venjance Nostre Seigneur, ed. by Loyal A. T. Gryting (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952), p. 31.

[33] Hugh A. Smith, 'A Verse Version of the Sept Sages De Rome', Romanic Review, 3 (1912), pp. 1-68; See also *Le Roman des Sept Sages De Rome*, ed. by Mary B. Speer; see also *Le Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, and Mary Speer.

[34] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*.

[35] *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Mary B. Speer, pp. 25-39.

easier to restrict the scrutiny only to this witness for the sake of simplification. References to the other versions, *C* and *D*, are added when deemed necessary or relevant.

The most important Old French prose verision of the *SSR* is certainly *A*. Indeed, *A* is the most spread and widely known version, as it gave place to, amongst other, a Latin transposition, the *Historia Septem Sapientium*, which was in turn translated into many other European languages.[36] From the 13th century onwards, this text enjoyed a wide circulation, which is confirmed by the number of manuscripts that secured its transmission – Runte's *recensio* counts no less than thirty-one manuscripts[37]. Such a great number of witnesses has of course discouraged scholars from embarking on any attempt to edit the text until 2006, when the online edition coordinated by Runte was released on the website of "The Seven Sages Society".[38] Nonetheless, a paper and more accurate edition has been promised in an article by Marco Maulu in 2016.[39]

A seems to come from two different sources. Already Paris identified two different sections, which he called A^1 and A^2. A^1 runs up to the eleventh story, *Sapientes*; A^2, occupies the last quarter of the text, which goes from *Vidua* to *Vaticinium* and comprehends the frame-story's conclusion. Paris thought that while A^1 followed a prose text coming from the prose redaction *L* (thus $L = A^1$), the final section A^2 put into prose a former verse version coming from *V*, the lost verse archetype of *K* (thus A^2 = de-rhymed *V*). Paris believed that *A*'s redactor was copying from a fragmentary text of *L*, ending with *Sapientes* – hence the need of integrating the text with a de-rhymed verse redaction to achieve the copy of the final part. Paris' view entails, of course, that the redaction *L* was produced before *A*. Indeed, he suggested that *L* comes from a lost Latin archetype called *Liber de Septem Sapientibus*, that *L* would share with its antecedent, which would be the Latin version of the *Scala Coeli* (S).[40] According to Paris, this lost archetype had only 13 stories instead of the usual 15, two of which, *Noverca* and *Filia*, replaced *Vidua* and *Roma*. The two missing stories are *Inclusa* and *Vaticinium*, usually told respectively by the seventh Sage and the Prince. The narration of the two last stories is then replaced by a

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[36] For a broader overview see Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, and Anthony J. Farrell, The Seven Sages of Rome, and the Book of Sindbad (New York, London: Garland, 1984).

[37] See Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages', 2014:
<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021]

[38] See *Idib*. An edition based on manuscript BnF fr. 2137 has also appeared in Section de Traitement Automatique des Textes Littéraux Médiévaux. *Les Sept Sages de Rome. Roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*. (Nancy: Centre de Recherches et d'Application Linguistiques, 1981). We will rely on Runte's electronic edition.

[39] Maulu, Marco, *Osservazioni sulla metodologia di edizione del* Roman des Sept Sages de Rome: *Il gruppo* L, in Romance Philology, vol. 70, fall 2016, pp. 411-434.

[40] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome* (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Françaises, 1876), p. XI.

trial by combat in which the Empress and the Prince deploy their own champions in order to demonstrate their innocence. The Empress' champion is defeated and the text closes with the Empress' execution.

Paris' hypothesis has not gone unchallenged. In 1907, Killis Campbell suggested the possibility that *L* actually came from *A*, referring to the "obviously composite nature" of *L*'s text.[41] The same impression is shared by Povl Skårup, who proposes a *stemma codicum* that, while acknowledging a contamination between at least the first parts of *L* and *A* (= *A¹*), connected by the same lost archetype, posits *A* as prior to *L*.[42] Marco Maulu, who is preparing an edition of *L*, has recently reassessed the textual tradition of *L*, and thus its collocation in the *stemma codicum*.[43] However, Maulu believes that rather than focusing on which redaction came before, it is more useful to look at *L* as an example of the malleable nature of the narrative matter of the Seven Sages – thus as a place where the narration and the organization of the tales is re-shaped and re-fashioned by mixing elements coming from different sources, either textual or oral.[44]

Li Ystoire de la male marastre is a later prose version of the *SSR* known as *M*. It came down to us in four manuscripts that were copied between the 14th and 15th century. This version is characterised by a significant alteration in the frame-story, as it introduces a new, additional character, Marques, who is said to be the son of one of the Sages, namely Cato. This is particularly relevant because amongst the many continuations of the Old French *SSR*, there is a *Roman de Marques de Rome*, which focuses on the latter's adventure after the Emperor and the Prince of *SSR* falls into the trap of his own wife's machinations. Besides adding a character from which a new story stems, another peculiarity is that *M* has only 9 exempla out of the 15 that usually compose the *SSR*: *Arbor, Canis, Aper, Medicus, Gaza, Avis, Vidua, Inclusa* and *Vaticinium*. The exempla *Senescalcus, Puteus, Roma, Tentamina, Sapientes* and *Virgilius* are replaced with *Filius, Nutrix, Anthenor, Spurius, Cardamum* and *Assassinus*. Basing his hypothesis on the scarce literary quality of the new additions, Runte believes that *M* was produced in two different moments, by two different authors. According to Runte, *M*'s archetype, which included the traditional tales and was essentially similar to the prose *A*, was composed before 1298, probably even prior to 1277; the substitution of the tales was then

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[41] *The Seven Sages of Rome*, ed. by Killis Campbell (Boston, New York: Ginn & Company, 1907), p. XXXIV.
[42] Povl Skårup, 'La Filiation Des Versions Françaises Et Latines Du Roman Des Sept Sages', *(Pré-) Publication, Romansk Institut, Aarhus Universitet,* 64 (1981), 32-53.
[43] Maulu, Marco, *Osservazioni sulla metodologia di edizione del* Roman des Sept Sages de Rome.
[44] *Ibid.*

carried out after 1298 by a scribe – for reasons that are not specified.[45] This hypothesis comes from two main observations: first, the date of composition of the *Roman de Marques de Rome*, M's continuation, which has been set to 1277; second, in M the exemplum Assassinus, a version of the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain, presents motifs that are not attested in Europe before 1298. Without entering the debate concerning the origins of M, briefly, it can be concluded that M was composed before the 14th century – especially considering that its oldest manuscript, Ashburnham 52, cat. Ashburnham-Libri 125, was composed around 1300.[46]

Misogynistic discourse: a matter of medieval readings?

It is a matter of fact that an anti-feminist discourse is at play in every version of the *SSR*. This could hardly be any different considering that, by and large, the narrative attempts to prove with a series of arguments the evilness of women. However, in *M* the misogynistic traits are dramatically exacerbated – both in the frame and in the stories.

As we have seen above, in *M* the Empress is fourteen, one year younger than the Prince ("Car jovenes iestes [the Prince] si n'aves pas plus de quinse ans et iestes beaus sour tous ceaus que je ains mais veise. Et je n'ai pas plus de quatorze ans […]", You are young as you are not older that fifteen and you are more beautiful than anyone I have ever seen. Me, I am not older than fourteen)[47]. Even though they are the same age, the way the Prince and the young Empress are educated is utterly different. While the Prince is sent away to study the Seven Arts with the best Masters of Rome, the Empress will complete her education by marrying the Emperor, an older man who will be able to reprimand and correct her bad behaviour – just as we have mentioned above. The education of a woman is therefore cast in terms of repression and containment – essentially, she must please her husband. Even though the Empress will put forward her desires and try to affirm her power, thereby making it hard for the Emperor to tame her, order is restored by the execution of the dangerous Empress at the end of the narrative. Indeed, the Empress represents a real menace for the symbolic order, because her actions threaten to subvert a hierarchy that is basically made up of relationships between men. What is at stake is the kinship between father and son as well as the homosocial relationship between the Emperor and his barons – both crucial for the preservation of feudal power and order.

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[45] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre*, ed. by Hans R. Runte, p. lix.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. xxxix.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 8, lines 259-260.

Kinship and feudal relations are strictly interconnected. The barons are the first to worry about the Emperor's marital status, for having only one heir does not secure the maintenance of power in case of the heir's death. At the same time, the barons do not hesitate to defend the Prince unconditionally; indeed the barons too hear the Empress' cry and see her ensanguined body, but not even for a second do they question that the Prince might have raped the Empress. Their concern is directed only towards the consequences that the Prince's death might have: the end of the Emperor's heritage. Women's interests are not even contemplated; what counts is only the maintenance of power.

The dynamics underpinning the feudal structures have long been analysed and discussed. Much of the work of Georges Duby was dedicated to the evolution of marriage practices in the Middle Ages, highlighting their importance in shaping and maintaining power and in establishing power relations.[48] At the same time, the immanence of feudal power structures in medieval literary discourse has been brought to the fore repeatedly. To provide but few examples, while Erich Köhler notoriously claimed that the Troubadour lyric represented the sublimation of the feudal relationship between the lord and his vassals, Sarah Kay has convincingly attempted a reading of the *chansons de geste* against the romance drawing on the importance of feudal hierarchical structures and familial kinships to really grasp their meaning.[49] The importance of the familial structure in the French Middle Ages and its importance in shaping society and culture led Bloch to sketch a "literary anthropology of the French Middle Ages".[50] All these accounts suggest that in the Middle Ages women's body is the place where different lines of power intersect: the reproductive ability of women, displaces feudal power in their body, where it is reified. This is ultimately the reason why women are to be guarded and controlled – and this is also reflected in their education model.

The distinction between the education for girls and the one for boys does not come across only in this passage of the *SSR*, which one could wrongly see as an isolated and, from a modern perspective, distasteful example; it can also be found in other, perhaps more authoritative, documents.
The need for boys and girls to be educated in different ways is pointed out in two of the most influential didactic treatises of the Middle Ages, which were written by Robert de Blois, a

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[48] Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore London : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).
[49] Erich Köhler, *Sociologia fella* fin'amor (Padova: Liviana, 1976). See also Sarah Kay, *The Chansons De Geste in the Age of Romance : Political Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1995, 1995).
[50] Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies : A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

thirteenth-century northern French author. Robert's take on education can be easily recognised in the titles of his main treatises: *Enseignement des Princes* (*Education of Princes*) and *Chastoiement des dames* (*Correction of Ladies*). The wording is important. "Enseigner" , from the Latin "*insignare" (literally to leave marks on somebody's mind), in Old French means to "montrer, indiquer" but also "instruire dans une science, dans un art", which is the meaning that interests us here;[51] "chastoiement", from the Latin "castigare" (to chastise, to punish), can mean "peine sévère infligée a quelqu'un pour le corriger" as well as "réprimande, avertissement, instruction, bon conseil. Exhortations".[52] Thus, while the term "enseignement" refers to an education that, however prescriptive, is positively connoted, "chastoiement" can bear a negative meaning, linked to the idea of coercion. In other words, the two titles reinforce the idea that while boys were thought to be "educated", i.e. provided with means that are necessary for them to occupy the public space, girls were to be chastised, corrected, contained. Needless to say, the one in charge of this coercive education is usually a man, either a father or a husband – as is the case for the maiden of *M*.

Commenting on the nature of Robert de Blois' didactic poems, Roberta Krueger maintains that they convey the sense that "boys are to be *educated*, that is, led through to assume their role in government; girls are to be *guarded* and not indulged"[53]. A similar conclusion is drawn by Adam Fijałkowski who, in analysing the works of Vincent of Beauvais, notices that for this cleric of the thirteenth century "[b]oys should be educated in both the spiritual and the intellectual spheres, whereas girls should, first and foremost, be protected against evil"[54]. This meant of course repressing the maiden's desires, considered the worst of evils.

The concern with education is not secondary when it comes to the *SSR*. It is worth remembering that the *SSR* was often seen as a wisdom text. In relation to the broader tradition of the *SSR*, Marco Maulu comments that:

[O]n peut constater comment, malgré les changements au niveau d'époque, de langue, de commanditaires et de lecteurs, la connotation du *Lss* [Book of the Seven Sages] en

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[51] *FEW* IV, p.712.

[52] *FEW* II-1, 472a.

[53] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 159.

[54] Adam Fijałkowski, 'The Education of Women in the Works of Vincent of Beauvais, Op († 1264)', Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert (2000), p. 513-26., p. 515. Fijałkowski highlights that Vincent de Beauvais dwells on the education of women in the last ten chapters of his treatise *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*.

tant que recueil didactique et exemplaire au caractère misogyne reste toujours bien visible, au-delà des variations diatopiques, diachroniques et diastratiques.[55]

The didactic value of the *SSR*, then, seems to be one of this text's features – of course together with its misogynistic tone. The way in which Maulu draws these conclusions interests us here because he adopts a manuscript-based approach – which enables the critics "de mieux comprendre à quelle époque une certaine version s'est diffusée, à travers quelle typologie de manuscrits ou imprimés et par quelles œuvres elle a été accompagnée".[56] This is what ultimately puts us in the position to find new answers to some of the questions that have animated the discussion around the *SSR* – like, for example, the literary genre to which the *SSR* belongs, which seems to interest Maulu the most. In fact, by observing the manuscript context in which the *Dolopathos* and some versions of the *SSR* appear, Maulu challenges Foehr-Janssens' view that the *SSR* is to be considered a "roman de clergie".[57] He believes that the didactic-moral nature of the texts which can usually be found in the same manuscripts as the *SSR*, suggests that the *SSR* was likely received in the same way – as a didactic text. Ultimately, following Maulu, the label of *roman* would therefore leave out the variety of forms and purposes that the text has taken across the centuries.

The didactic-moral tone of the *SSR* is more or less explicit depending on the version. To provide but two examples, we can think of the version commonly known as *S* and the Latin *Historia Septem Sapientum* – the latter will interest us in the last chapter. The rendition *S* of the *SSR* redacted by the Dominican Jean Gobi is included in his collection of *exempla* commonly known as *Scala Coeli*, composed between 1323 and 1330.[58] In the prologue to the work Jean Gobi admits that it is impossible for men to grapple with the brightness of heavenly matters without the medium of "similitudines et exempla".[59] Since the human soul seems to long for heavenly things when it is amused by the narrations and *exempla* about the Saints, Jean Gobi

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[55] Marco Maulu, 'La Fortune du Livre Des Sept Sages de Rome à travers sa tradition textuelle : quelques remarques autour de la tradition du Dolopathos et de la Historia Septem Sapientum', Medioevi Rivista di letterature e culture medievali 2019, pp. 95-125, p. 100.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[57] Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, *Le temps des fables: Le Roman des Sept Sages ou l'autre voie du roman* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1994).

[58] Jean Gobi, 'La Scala Coeli De Jean Gobi', ed. by Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Édition du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1991), pp.54-77.

[59] "Cum enim, reverende pater, impossibile sit nobis superlucere divinum radium nisi sub velamina similitudinis et figure, ut testatur in angelica ierarchia. Hi nest quod mentis nostre racio in tam excellenti luce non figitur nisi eam aspiciat per similitudine et exempla", *Ibid.*, p. 165.

continues, he composed the *Scala Coeli*, which, through the study of earthly facts, might enable us to access and contemplate everything eternal.

> Quia vero noster animus videtur ad celestia inhiare eo quod delectetur narracionibus et sanctorum exemplis, idcirco ad gloriam et honorem omnipotentis Dei et beatissime Virginis matris ejus, beati Dominici patris mei ac beatissime Marie Magdalene hanc Scalam Celi composui, ut per eam interdum, postposito alio studio terreno et curioso, ascendamus ad contemplenda aliqua de eternis.[60]

[Since our soul seems to aspire to heavenly things when it is amused by narrations and Saints' examples, for this reason for the glory and honour of God, of his mother, the most blessed Virgin Mary, and of my father Dominic and of the most blessed Mary Magdalene, I composed this *Scala* Coeli, so that through it, leaving aside every other earthly and profane love, we may ascend towards the contemplation of everything eternal]

In this context the *SSR* appears under the rubric *foemina* and is of course supposed to be a useful warning against the threat represented by women – a type of earthly knowledge, then, that is functional to the understanding of heavenly matters. In order to achieve his aim, i.e., theological knowledge, Jean Gobi collects *exempla* coming from all sorts of religious sources but he admits to include also material that he did not find in written form ("conscripta"), but heard in the preaching of other people: "Verum aliqua interdum inserui applicando ad mores vel recitando que ita conscripta non reperi, sed in predicationibus aliorum audivi" [Sometimes I have included things which I have adapted according to moral or prayers and which I have not found written, but heard in other people's preaching"].[61] Jean Gobi's redaction of the *SSR* comes probably from the latter type of source. Indeed, we know that the Latin version of the *SSR* was used for preaching purposes. Unfortunately, the Latin *Historia Septem Sapientium* does not have a prologue, but we can still reconstruct what its use might have been by looking at the way in which the text presents itself in the manuscripts. In some of them the *Historia Septem Sapientum* is followed by *reductiones* that aim to provide an interpretation in religious sense of the *exempla* and the frame-story. At the same time, the text is often accompanied by

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[60] *Ibid*., p. 165.
[61] The other sources and *auctoritates* are mentioned by Jean Gobi: "[e]xpono libros a quibus flores elegi secundum quod a Deo est mihi donatum: ex Vitis Patrum Jeronimi, ex Libri Dyalogorum Gregorii, ex Floribus sanctorum Jacobi de Voragine, ex Historiis Scolsticis, ex Speculo Exemplorum Jacobi Vitriaco, ex Glosa Jeronimi super Bibliam, ex Summa fratris Vincencii, ex Libro magno de Donis Spiritus sacti, ex Mariali Magno, ex Libro de Vita et Perfectione Fratrum Predicatorum, ex Alphabeto Narracionum". *Ibid*., p. 165.

other religious or didactic-moral texts. These elements, together with other features that will be better discussed in the last chapter, made Detlef Roth conclude that the *Historia Septem Sapientium* was likely used for didactic as well as preaching purposes.

All these considerations make it possible to speculate whether the same is happening for a version such as *M*. Indeed, by shifting our focus on the manuscripts that transmit *M*, we can see that the text was considered as a didactic-moral one, rather than as literary fiction. In the study of the manuscript tradition of *M* we are facilitated by the fact that is is relatively contained – differently from other prose versions such as *A*, *M* occurs only in the following four manuscripts compiled between the 13th and 14th century:

- BnF fr. 573
- Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2998 (formerly 232 B.L.F.)
- Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2999 (formerly 233 B.L.F.)
- Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ashburnham 52 (cat. Ashburnham-Libri 125)

The manuscripts can be clustered in two different categories based on the textual material they contain. The first cluster is constituted by the two codices of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal:

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2998[62]	Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2999
Istoire de la male marrastre (M) (fo. 1r-58r)	*Livre de la fausse marrastre* (M) (fo. 1r-55r)
Enseignement de sapience (fo. 58v-62r)	*De sapience* (fo. 55r-58v)

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to consult the manuscript first-hand, and it would be therefore imprudent to say with certainty that the *Enseignement de sapience* and *De sapience* are the same texts. If this was the case, however, then these texts would be excerpts from the *Miroir du monde*, a prose text close to the *Somme le Roi*, a moral treatise which was supposed to help the penitents in the moment of confession.[63] At any rate, there is clearly an interest in wisdom and didacticism in these accompanying texts.

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[62] The content of the manuscripts has been found on the database IRHT, 'Jonas. Répertoire Des Textes Et Des Manuscrits Médiévaux D'oc Et D'oïl' <https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr> [Accessed December 2021].
See also 'Arlima. Les Archives de Littérature du Moyen Âge', <https://www.arlima.net/contributeurs.html#> [Accessed December 2021].
[63] Edith Brayer, 'Contenu, structure et combinaisons du "Miroir du Monde" et de la "Somme Le Roi"', *Romania*, 79 (1958), 1-38. Airlima suggests that the *Enseignement de sapience* of Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2998 is in fact

The second cluster, where we find the manuscript from the BnF and the Biblioteca Laurenziana, present a much more complex and varied series of texts – which go under the rubric "de sapience" or "de philosophie" in the BnF's codex.

Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ashburnham 52	BnF fr. 573
Brunetto Latini – *Tresor* (1r-120r)	Brunetto Latini – *Tresor* (13r-146v)
Nicolas de Senlis - *Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin* (121r-135v)	Anonyme – *Chronique de Turpin* (version Johannes) (147r-162r)
Pierre de Beauvais - *Olympiade* (135v-135v)	Anonyme - *Généalogie des rois de France* (162r-162v)
Anonyme - *Généalogie des rois de France* (135v-136r)	Anonyme - *Sept sages de Rome*, version M (163r-191v)
Anonyme - *Sept sages de Rome*, version M (136r-162r)	Anonyme - *Enseignement de sapience* (191v-193v)
Anonyme - *Enseignement de sapience* (162r-163v)	Henri de Gauchy - *Information des princes* (195r-269r)
Henri de Gauchy - *Information des princes* (162r-163v)	Anonyme - *Lettre d'Hippocrate à César* (269v-272v)
Anonyme - *Lettre d'Hippocrate à César* (166r-241v)	

Even a rapid glance at the content and organisation of these two manuscripts leaves us startled by their proximity.[64] We do not know a lot about their composition, nor do we have compelling information about their first owners. All we know is that manuscript Ashburnham 52 was composed at the beginning of the 14th century, while manuscript BnF 573 dates to the first half of the 15th century. According to Runte, the redaction of *M* they present comes from different archetypes. Indeed, Runte suggests a two-branch *stemma codicum* for the manuscript tradition

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an extract from the Miroir du monde. See Arlima. Les Archives de Littérature du Moyen Âge', <https://www.arlima.net/contributeurs.html#> [Accessed December 2021].
 Unfortunately, nothing significant is said about Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2999.
[64] Once again, unfortunately it has not been possible to consult the manuscripts directly, nor did I have the opportunity to compare these two interesting witnesses behind the level of their contents. However, I could benefit from the studies of the manuscripts in *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre*, ed. by Hans R. Runte, pp. xxiii-xxxii.

of *M* where we find Ashburnham 52 as the only witness of a branch that transmits a redaction that is close to the original text, while BnF 573 is one of the representatives of the other branch. At any rate, the relationship between these two codices interests us here less than their content. As has been argued above, the reception and function of a text can be elucidated by looking at other texts appearing in the same manuscript.[65] It is quite clear that version *M* had a didactic function – and therefore it must have been received as a didactic text. The other texts accompanying *M* in all its manuscripts can hardly be considered just "literary". The seminal Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, written between 1260 and 1267, is a prose vernacular encyclopaedic work; the twelfth-century *Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin* is the vernacular translation of the *Historia Karoli Magni*, a medieval forged chronicle fictitiously attributed to Turpin, archbishop of Reims and contemporary of Charlemagne;[66] the *Information des princes* is a vernacular translation of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*; the *Lettre d'Hippocrate à César* is a fictitious letter in which Hippocrates provides Caesar with tips and remedies to heal illnesses. In this wide-ranging intellectual context, that goes from history to philosophy and medicine, *M* seems to find its place as a text with a didactic function. This is now clear, but who was *M* supposed to educate? *M*'s proximity to texts concerned with French royals and their education (*Généalogie des rois de France*, *De regimine principum*) makes is possible that an aristocratic – male – youth was probably its target.

This view is corroborated by textual elements too; the didactic value of *M* does not come across only when considering the text in its materiality (i.e., its position in a manuscript), but it is also confirmed by a close reading.

The reason why a prince, thus a future leader, should be educated is not clarified in other versions of the *SSR*, whereas in *M* we find a solid argument in favour of their education. The Emperor wants his son and his companion Marques to be educated in order for them to learn how to lead themselves and other people during the earthly life and the heavenly life through a proper conduct in society ("[…] li fu avis que bien fust tans que il fussent mis a doctrine par quoi il peuissent iaus et autrui conduire en ceste mortel vie, et en la celestial par bone conversation")[67]. At the same time, the text is disseminated with references to dictums of sages, especially when introducing the stories. The *conte* Avis is introduced thus:

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[65] Olivier Collet, 'Du "Manuscrit de jongleur" au "Recueil aristocratique": Réflexions sur les premières anthologies françaises', *Le Moyen Âge,* 113 (2007), 481-99.
[66] The fact that the versions of the Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin are different makes hard to imagine a kinship between the two manuscripts. We can nonetheless imagine that a manuscript containing these texts could have been seen as a sort of 'model'.
[67] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, p.1, lines 9-10. I propose a translation of "conversation" as "proper conduct in society" considering that the DMF suggests the meanings: "Genre de vie, conduite (parmi

"Honorable chose et honeste est que les forseneries soient menees par bons compasemens si comme dist li sages"[68]

[It is honourable and honest when foolish actions are conducted with accuracy, as the sage once said]

The *conte* Cardamum is also introduced by a *sententia* taken from an unspecified sage:

"Honourable chose est de soi sagement maintenir en cest siècle selonc les aviersites et le tribulations que Dieus consent a avoir en ceste mortel vie, si comme fist jadis Cardamum li seneschaus de Pierse"[69]

[It is honourable to keep behaving wisely in the earthly life through the adversities and troubles that God let us live, just as Cardamum, the seneschal of Persia, did]

Commenting on these verses, Runte states that "[i]n einem prinzipiell frivolen und zuweilen selbst erotischobszönen Werk wie der "Histoire" müssen diese Stellen als fehl am Platze erscheinen"[70] – and so he argues that these passages are to be seen as an "interpolation" introduced by a later copyist.

As we have mentioned, Runte believes that *M* was composed at two different moments. According to him, the first part – with the nine traditional stories and the frame – must have been assembled "at a date prior to 1298 and possibly prior to 1277"; the second part, with the introduction of the six new *exempla*, must have been composed after 1298.[71] This is of course not the right place to dwell on philological issues. For the scope of this chapter, it suffices to say that, following Paris, Runte believes that at some stage of its textual history *M* must have appeared in a (lost) manuscript containing its sequel, *Li Marques de Rome* – which introduced the interpolation of the somewhat prophetical sentence told by the Empress at the moment of her execution:

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les semblables)", "Vie en société, situation de gens qui vivent ensemble", "Entretien entre des personnes en petit nombre". See: 'Dmf : Dictionnaire Du Moyen Français, Version 2020 (Dmf 2020). Atilf - Cnrs & Université De Lorraine', 2021) <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf > [Accessed December 2021].

[68] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, p. 27, lines 1-2.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 52, lines 1-2.

[70] "In a mainly frivolous and sometimes even erotic-obscene work like the "Histoire", these passages appear to be out of place". R. Runte Hans, *'Zur Textgeschichte des 'Roman des Sept Sages de Rome'',* Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 75 (1974), 368-76 , p. 372.

[71] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, p. lix

"Par Dieu, sire, dist elle, ne m'en puis escondire. Vostre fieus est il plus sages qui onques fust de son tans, mais avant qu'il ait autant vescut comme vous aves iert li bien ausi hors dou sens comme vous aves este de cesti chose"[72]

[For God's sake, lord – she said – I cannot conceal it anymore. Your son is the wisest of all in his time, but before he will be older than you are now, he will end up being out of his mind just as it has happened to you]

What Paris and Runte argue might of course have happened, and this might also be the reason why *M* was composed first – providing *Li roman de Marques de Rome* with a backstory in a "cyclic" manuscript. Yet, these allegedly later interpolations are shared by all the manuscripts of *M* that came down to us, which makes it more probable that those lines are in fact part of the textual tradition of *M*. Postulating the existence of an "original" of *M* without the presence of those lines is mere speculation, which is not grounded in any philological methodology – neither the (Neo-)Lachmannian, which intends to reconstruct the authorial text through a rigid comparison between the extant manuscripts, nor the *Bédiérisme*, which considers each manuscript as an authoritative represent of a given text. Furthermore, drawing on the evidence (i.e. manuscripts) that are available to us, we could state that, to some extent, the original of *M* is in fact the prose version *A* (generally recognised as the "base" for *M*) and that *M* is already a *remaniement* of that original text. It seems thus more worthwhile to elaborate on the text as it is, rather than postulate intermediate stages that cannot be reconstructed on any solid basis. The text as came down to us as well as its position in all the surviving manuscripts strongly argue for a didactic slant.

To conclude, *M* is particularly concerned with education. The didactic reception of *M* is certified not only by its materiality but also by elements that can be found in the text itself. Relevance is given to the Prince and his companion's education – who need to learn how to manage themselves and the others and how to behave properly in society. This model is in striking opposition to the way the young Empress' education will continue once married to the Emperor: he will personally correct and change her wrong behaviour. The latter model resonates with the idea of women's control and containment that can be found in some influential education treatises of the Middle Ages. In such a context, the hyper-sexualisation of

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[72] *Ibid.*, p. 74, lines 172-175.

the Empress' character and the fact that, despite her young age, she is so seductive, manipulative, and double-faced reinforce on the one hand the idea of the necessity to control women, while on the other unveil the anxiety provoked by her very uncontrollability.

It is now worth observing whether the characterisation of the Empress resonates also in the stories that the Sages tell the Emperor in order to delay the execution of the Prince. Of course, in the context of these stories a misogynistic discourse is intrinsically active – yet the comparison with the respective *exempla* in other versions of the Old French *SSR* will show how in *M* the antifeminist traits become even more exacerbated.

Misogynistic discourse in version *M*

The description of the Empress in *M* is particularly intriguing because it adds noteworthy details that are not present in other versions of the *SSR*. In *M*, the Empress is only a thirteen-year-old maiden when given away to the Emperor, and she is fourteen when she tries to seduce the reluctant Prince – showing a voracious sexuality. At the same time, there is a striking attention to her body, as the Empress uses it as a primary means through which she attempts to obtain what she desires: her breasts are put under the spotlight when she tries to seduce the Prince; her arms seek to trap the Emperor when she tries to convince him of her innocence and to execute his son. These elements are significant details in the construction of the misogynistic discourse at play in *M*, and it is interesting to understand if and how this portrayal resonates in the exempla that are part of the *SSR*.

In this section we will zoom in on three *exempla* of *M*, *Canis*, *Medicus* and *Vidua*, which will be compared to the respective renditions in other versions of the Old French *SSR*, the verse *K* and the prose *A* and *L*. The limited space of this thesis prompted us to select only three of the fifteen tales that *M* comprehends. This choice was driven by two main factors: on the one hand, the necessity to focus on *exempla* that *M* shares with the rest of the Old French and Latin tradition of the *SSR* so as to maintain a comparative approach; on the other, considering the limited space of the discussion, it was important to select *exempla* that would better condensate the main tendencies that the text displays and the issues and problems that it raises.[73] As seen so far, on a strictly textual level, *M* tends to innovate and add several details, which in turn

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[73] As explained in the introductory section presenting the textual structure of *M*, this version shares with the rest of the tradition only nine exempla: *Arbor*, *Canis*, *Aper*, *Medicus*, *Gaza*, *Avis*, *Vidua*, *Inclusa* and *Vaticinium*.

bring to the fore a considerable exacerbation of the misogynistic discourse as well as the reproduction of the feudal symbolic order. While these themes will continue to be explored at the level of the *exempla* selected, observing the variances that these stories display across different versions will enable us to grasp the real weight of each and every detail, ultimately enabling us to better understand the bigger picture of the reception of the *SSR*'s versions.

Canis

In every version of the Old French *SSR*, Canis is the second tale to appear and the first to be narrated by a sage – who in *M* is called Bancillas.[74] The story is set in Rome on a Christian holiday, "li rois des dimanches" (the Sunday after Pentecost, that is the Trinity Sunday), when all the Barons of the city used to gather and attend the goal-post game (*quintaine*).[75] Amongst the people enjoying the public spectacle there is a knight who has a fifteen-month-old baby, who is safely at home – an old castle surrounded by walls – looked after by the wet nurses and his mother. However, instead of staying with the baby, the lady and the wet nurses decide to look at the games from the top of the castle, so they climb the wall and sit on the edge of the building while the baby sleeps in a cradle in his room. Hidden in the ancient walls dwells a mysterious and horrible snake that, disturbed by the noise of the games, comes out of his lair and, noticing the baby, tries to assault him. While the snake is approaching the cradle, the knight's dog jumps on the beast and tries to save the baby's life. While the animals are struggling and biting each other, they turn the room upside down, including the cradle, which falls over in such a way that the baby does not get hurt, and is shielded by the cradle itself. The dog gets bitten by the venomous snake, but eventually manages to get the better of the evil creature. After the fight, the dog is mourning its painful wounds when the wet nurses climb down the wall and see the bloodshed. The cradle is upside down, without the baby, and as the ladies see the dog covered with blood, they immediately think that it has devoured the knight's son, so they decide to flee away to avoid punishment. Soon after, the knight's wife comes back too and, seeing the scene in the room, jumps to the same conclusion and, weeping, passes out. When the knight comes back asks the lady what has happened, and she tells him that the dog has devoured the baby. At the same time, the dog runs towards the knight to greet him, acting as if – the text says – the dog wanted to inform the knight that he saved his son's life. However,

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[74] Canis is one of the tales that the Western tradition of the Seven Sages shares with the Eastern Book of Sindibad. For an overview on the history, origin and fortune of this tale see the unchallenged recollection in Alexander Haggerty Krappe, 'Studies on the "Seven Sages of Rome"', Archivium romanicum, XI (1927), 163-76.

[75] For *M*'s Canis see *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, pp. 14-17.

because he trusts what the lady told him, the knight unsheathes his sword and murders the dog, whom he calls Berengier ("Li chevalier qui mal fu apenses, cuida que sa femme li euist voir dit, si sacha s'espee, et dist: 'Ha, Berengier, morir vous estuet'" – The knight, who was advised wrongly, thought that his wife said the truth, so he unsheathed his sword and said: "Oh, Berengier, you must die!").[76] Only after the dog's death does the knight start to wander around the room, eventually,turning the cradle over, thus finding the baby. Following the trail of blood, he then finds the snake's mauled body. Realising what has really happened, the knight becomes so furious that, unsheathing his sword once again, he walks towards his wife, who in turn runs away to escape death.

Bancillas highlights that the knight is so sad for what he did, pushed by the lie of the woman ("pour la mencoigne de la femme") that he decides to leave his castle and roam the world until he finds a story as gruesome as his ("si aroit trouvee ausi estraigne aventure comme la siue estoit").[77] In order to convince the Emperor of his argument, Bancillas underscores that he should not execute his son just for what the Empress says, as in this way he will end up as the knight of the story – who killed the dog only because he believed what a woman said.

When compared to the other versions of the *SSR*, *M*'s *Canis* stands out for three main reasons:

1 In *M*, the infant's mother stays with the wet nurses by the baby and joins them to watch the games, thus preferring superficial amusements to her motherly duties;
2 After the knight finds out what really went on in the baby's room, he tries to murder the lady;
3 Bancialls states that it all happened because of the lady, who gave the wrong information to the knight.

The narration of the events is quite different from the prose *A* and *L* (which share a very similar version of *Canis*)[78] and the verse *K*. The first two elements listed above – i.e. the mother who abandons her son and her attempted murder – are an innovation of *M*. Both in K and in *A/L* only the wet nurses are left at home to attend to the child, while the mother joins the knight at the joust, and in neither of these versions does the knight think of killing his wife when he

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 15, lines 41-43.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 16, lines 56-57.
[78] Indeed, until the ninth tale, *Sapientes*, these two versions are so similar that they can almost be considered as the same text. For the description and discussion on these two versions and their relation, see the introductory section above.

realises what has actually happened in the room – he only breaks his sword and declares he will go wandering the world to expiate his guilt.

However, there is a very important detail bringing *M* closer to *A* than to *K* – that is the Sage's explanation of the *exemplum*. In *K* the mother is at the joust with her husband but, as she comes back earlier than him, she comes across the wet nurses who, having just seen the disaster in the baby's room, are fleeing to avoid punishment. The lady stops them to ask the reason of their concern and, hearing that the dog devoured her beloved son, passes out. In the meantime, the knight comes back and, finding his wife has fainted, asks what the matter is. The wife relates what she has learnt from the wet nurses, so the upset knight enters the castle and, after he sees the bloodshed, he himself concludes that the dog has killed the baby. The text is very clear: "Lors quide bien *a son avis* / que li chiens ait l'enfant occis" ('So he thinks that, *in his opinion*, the dog killed the baby').[79] On that "a son avis" lies the difference between *K* and the other prose versions *A*/*L* and *M*. In fact, even if the lady had already told him her version of the event, it is the knight himself who jumps to the wrong conclusion, on his own. Afterwards, as the knight sits on the bed, holding his head in his hands, he hears the child sobbing, so the knight stands up, goes towards the cradle, turns it over and sees the truth: his son is still alive. The knight calls immediately the whole court to join him and see that *merveille*.[80] Only after he finds the mauled body of the snake, does he realise what really happened. The knight breaks the sword with which he decapitated the dog and makes vows of penitence. Then comes the admonition of Bancillas in *K*:

> "Bon rois, enten a ma raison:
> quant cil vint droit a sa maison,
> se il eust le bierc torne
> s'eust l'enfant el bierc trove.
> Des que l'enfes fu troves vis,
> il n'eust pas son chien occis.
> Malvaise haste ne valt rien,
> si m'ait Dex et saint Aignien."[81]

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[79]*Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 186, vv. 1337-38, italics mine.
[80] *Ibid*. p. 188, vv. 1357-1364.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 190, vv. 1381-1388.

[Good king, just listen to me: if once back home he had turned over the cradle he would have found the baby. And if he had found out that the baby was alive, he would have not killed the dog. Ill haste is worth nothing, God and St. Agnes help me!]

Therefore, in *K*'s *Canis* the problem is not the fact that the knight kills his beloved dog because of the wrong information given by a series of women (the wet nurses and his own wife) but the wrong and hasty conclusion drawn by the knight himself: he should have better pondered the situation before committing such an awful crime. If there is something to avoid, it is the "malvaise haste", that is the evil haste.

All in all, *K*'s Canis cannot be merely seen as a tale against women. Of course, there are female characters (i.e. the wet nurses) who do not attend their roles and choose something frivolous in place of their duties – but in turn the description of the baby's mother presents a remarkably positive woman:

> "La dame ert gentil aumosniere
> et a tous faisoit biele chiere,
> povre ne voloit escondire
> tou jors ert en joie, sans ire"[82]

[The woman would make generous donations, and would welcome everyone nicely, she would not chase away poor people, she was always happy, without evil passions]

Neither *M* nor *A/L* dwell on the description of the wife, and it is no wonder that these versions accuse the lady of misleading the knight in the first place. In *M* and *A/L*, the knight kills the dog only after hearing the lady's words, even before checking the room – this is what makes the lady guilty. In *A*, the knight accuses the woman directly:

> "Dame, mon levrier m'avez fet ocirre por nostre enfant que il avoit garanti de mort. Si vous oi creue, don je n'ai pas fet que sage. Mes ytant sachiez, ce que je ai fet par vostre conseil, nus ne m'en donra penitence, mes je la me donrai"[83]

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[82] *Ibid*., pp. 179-181, vv. 1181-1184
[83] Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages (2014)
<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021].

[Lady, you made me murder my dog for the fact that it saved our child's life. Thus, in believing you I did not act wisely. But know it: no one is going to punish me for what I have done because of your advice, so I will punish myself]

The knight charges on his wife the responsibility for the innocent dog's murder, and he will punish himself for believing her. The final statement of Bancillas also points clearly to the accusation of *Canis*' lady, of course, and to the unreliable nature of women's words in general – including the Empress:

> "Sire, se vous par le conseil de vostre fame volez destruire vostre filz sanz le conseil de vos barons, si vous em puisse il ausi avenir comme il fis au chevalier de son levrier"[84]

[Lord, you want to execute your son under the advice of your wife without the further advice of your men, then it might happen to you what happened to the knight and his dog]

Medicus

Medicus is the fourth story appearing in *M*, the third narrated by a sage, Anxilles.[85] It tells of Ypocras, the greatest physician in the world, and his nephew Patroclum, who becomes more learned than his own uncle, thereby provoking Ypocras' jealousy. When the son of the king of Hungary is affected by an unusual disease, the king sends for Ypocras, who, fearing that he might not be able to heal the boy, sends his nephew instead. Patroclum goes to Hungary and, after visiting the king's son, understands that the boy is not his legitimate offspring. After convincing the queen to reveal the truth (the boy is in fact the son of the count of Namur), Patroclum is able to give the boy what he needs to recover: beef, cooked without making foam and without letting steam out of the pan ("char de buef, et le fist cuire sans escumer et sans point d'alaine issir dou vaissiel ou elle fu cuite").[86] After seven days, the boy is brought back to health, and the king and the queen are so grateful that they reward Patroclum with all sorts of jewels. Once back home, Patroclum tells Ypocras what happened in Hungary, so the latter realises how learned his nephew has become. Two years later, Patroclum and Ypocras are

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[84] *Ibid*.

[85] Medicus is the fourth exemplum even in verse *K* and prose *A* and *L*. For a narratological and philological study of Medicus see: Alexander Haggerty Krappe, 'Studies on the Seven Sages of Rome', *Archivium romanicum*, VIII (1924), 386-407 and from the same author 'Studies on the "Seven Sages of Rome"', *Archivium romanicum*, XI (1927), 163-76. *M*'s *Canis* can be read in *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, pp. 19-21.

[86] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, p. 20, lines 32-33.

wandering in a garden when Ypocras suddenly smells an herb that he cannot recognise so he asks his nephew whether he knows what the herb is. Patroclum picks the herb up and identifies it, also adding that he can smell even a better one. While the boy is bending over to find the other herb, the uncle pulls out a knife and stabs the nephew in the heart ("e le mourdri ensi par envie qu'il eut de cou qu'il seut que il l'avoit sourmonte de sens et de clergie" – 'and he murdered the boy for envy, as Ypocras knew that the nephew had surpassed him in wisdom and knowledge').[87] After murdering his nephew, Ypocras even burns the books that Patroclum had written on how to heal every disease: he gets rid of those books specifically because they were written too clearly, and physicians would have not earned any money if people became able to cure themselves ("Et encore il fist il piis, car li bacelers avoit fait pluseurs volumes de fisique, il quell aprendoient a curer toutes manieres de maladies. Et ceaus arst il pour ce que il li sambloit que se il demorassent ja mais nus ne gaignast a fisique, ca trop estoient si esperiment apert").[88] After fifteen years, Ypocras' wife falls in love with a boy of the city ("Ele amoit un jovenciel a cui elle ne pot mie parler")[89] and decides to kill her husband through a wicked stratagem. She knows from Ypocras himself that if someone eats the meat of a sow killed during her oestrous cycle, this person will die unless s/he drinks the water in which the meat was cooked. The woman manages to find such meat and serve it to the unsuspecting Ypocras. When he understands that he has been fooled by his wife, he asks for the cooking water, which she had already gotten rid of. Ypocras becomes sick with diarrhoea, leading him to a death full of regret: he killed his nephew and burned all the books that might have saved his life. And even worse, he is the one who showed his own wife how to destroy him ("Aprés ma femme ai je monster la voie de moi metre en tel poit que je mesme ne m'ai pooir d'esntachier").[90] The wisest man on earth thus ends up destroying himself and his nephew, just as the Emperor is doing with his own son, Anxilles concludes.

By and large, this is also how *Medicus* runs in the other versions *K* and *A/L*. The structure is very similar:

1. Ypocras has a nephew, whose knowledge starts to bother the uncle;
2. The son of a king (the king of Greece in *K* and the king of Hungary in *A/L*) gets ill from an unusual disease that no one is able to cure;

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[87] *Ibid.*, p. 21, lines 49-50.
[88] *Ibid.*, p. 21, lines 52-54.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 21, lines 61-62.
[90] *Ibid.*, p. 22, lines 75-76.

3   Ypocras's nephew is sent over to take care of the prince, who turns out to be the illegitimate son of the king (his real father is the lord of Frise in *K*; it is again the count of Namur in *A/L*). Once this is clarified, the nephew is able to give the boy the appropriate medication;

4   The nephew comes back home and tells the uncle his success, making Ypocras so jealous that he starts thinking to murder his nephew;

5   When walking in a garden, the nephew bends over to pick up a herb and Ypocras stabs the boy;

6   Ypocras burns all the books (which in versions *K* and *A/L* were written by Ypocras in person, while in version M it is the nephew who wrote them);

7   Ypocras gets sick with diarrhoea and dies.

What is remarkable, here, is that *M* introduces a new character, Ypocras' wife, who is entirely absent in the other versions. What is more, Ypocras' wife shares some traits with *M*'s Empress: she has insatiable desires, and she is not afraid to pursue them by deceiving, tricking and eventually murdering. Moreover, it is noteworthy that she achieves all this by using Ypocras's own knowledge against him. This unveils an anxiety underlaying the whole narrative of the *SSR*, namely the concern that women can use men's own knowledge against them. In fact, in the framework of the *SSR* the woman is using the ultimate expression of man's rationality – the word – to disrupt the hierarchical and kinship order that, taken together, constitute the backbone of patriarchal and feudal society.[91]

In the previous section we explored the differences regarding the idea of education for boys and girls in the Middle Ages: while the former need to be taught how to properly behave in society, the latter must be guarded, controlled, and protected from their own unpredictable desires. The example of Ypocras' wife testifies exactly to the anxiety for controlling and repressing women. The lady falls in love with another man and manages to murder Ypocras by turning his own knowledge against him. This clearly suggests that women should not be granted access to knowledge – and whoever trusts them and shares knowledge with them will perish because of his stupidity. Thus, the wisest of men ends up being murdered in the silliest of ways. In this sense, the attack here is addressed mainly to men who let women deceive them – women are condemned only in as much as they cannot refrain themselves from acting in the way in which their innate evilness makes them act.

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[91] See the discussion above and related footnotes 46, 47 and 48.

Vidua

Guarding and controlling women is necessary because their irrationality leads them to continuous changes of heart. This is probably the most widespread commonplace about women: "la donna è mobile", as the famous aria of Verdi's *Rigoletto* goes. The woman is fickle – in fact, so fickle that she can change her mind even when she is showing the most affectionate feelings towards her legitimate husband; but even in such a case, her feelings are excessive, uncontrolled, childish, irrational. This is exactly what happens in the story known as *Vidua*.[92] In *M*, *Vidua* is the eighth story, and is narrated by the fourth sage, Lentulum. It is about a knight who lives happily in Juskiame with his newlywed wife. They love each other deeply, which in the end is the reason why the knight will perish. One day the knight is sharpening a stick when the woman throws her hand towards the knife. The lady's action is not motivated in the text, she is only said to suddenly move her hand towards the knife, which gives her a small wound and a little bleeding. The knight is so sorry for the incident that he gets sick and dies. This provokes the desperate reaction of the widow, who decides she will die for her husband just as he did for her. After the knight's burial, the widow remains by the grave, where she wishes death will find her. The woman's relatives try to dissuade her from such a decision, accusing her of behaving childishly and reassuring her that, considered her young age, she will find an even nobler marriage ("Dame, ce ne feres vos ja, car on le tenroit a enfance et a grant folie, car vous iestes encore uns enfes si vous remarierons plus noblemen que vous onques ne fustes").[93] However, the woman is stubborn in her decision and so her relatives decide to build a small shed by the grave that may shelter her from bad weather. The cemetery happens to be very close to a gibbet where criminals are executed and exposed to public shame. The night of the knight's funeral is a very cold one – it is the thirteenth day after Christmas, we are told – and seven criminals are hanging on the gibbet. The local marquis, whose duty it is to maintain the justice ("tenoit grant rente de la justice mantenir"),[94] guards their corpses to prevent the criminals' relatives from stealing them and giving them a proper burial. While the marquis is

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[92] In the verse *K* and in prose *A Vidua* is the twelfth example to appear, the last but one told by a sage. *Vidua* is not included in *L*, where it is replaced by *Filius*. For an overview on the origins and evolutions of the narrative see: Hans R. Runte, 'Variant Widows: On Editing and Reading *Vidua*', in *Medieval Codicology, Iconography, Literature, and Translation: Studies for Keith Val Sinclair*, ed. by Peter Rolfe Monks and Douglas David Roy Owen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 240-47. For *M*'s *Vidua* see *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, pp. 35-38.
[93] *Li Ystoire De La Male Marastre,* ed. by Hans R. Runte, p. 35, lines 14-16.
[94] *Ibid*., p. 35, line 28.

on his horse tending to his duty, he spots the light of the fireplace in the small shed where the lady is mourning her husband. Pushed by the harsh weather, the marquis decides to go there and warm himself up. The lady lets him in the shelter, they start talking and the knight reproaches her silly behaviour: what she is doing will lead to nothing, she is so young and beautiful that she will find a new and wealthier husband. The lady remains firm in her decision: she will not leave the grave. Once the marquis feels restored, he goes back to the gibbet – but finds out that one of the bodies has been stolen. What to do? In despair, he decides to go back to the shed and ask for the woman's advice. Once she has heard the story, she suddenly changes her mind about her plan of dying from love for her husband ("Quant la dame l'oi si demener si ot mout tost changiet son corage")[95] and decides to help the marquis. She suggests exhuming her husband's corpse and hanging it at the missing corpse's place. However, she will do it under one condition: the marquis must marry her. The man agrees, but when they set about committing the misdeed the knight asks the lady to start first ("mais que vous commenchies!").[96] From this point on, the lady will do everything alone. She digs up the husband's corpse with bare hands and loads the corpse on her own shoulders, carrying it to the gibbet. The marquis refuses to be involved in the operation but urges the lady to complete the task before dawn. To her queries for help, the marquis keeps responding that he cannot do anything – otherwise he would be considered as vile and coward ("se je le pendoie a tous jours mais en seroie plus couars").[97] Once again, the woman takes the lead, and hangs her husbands' corpse on the gibbet. At this point, the marquis remembers that the criminal's corpse had a wound on the neck, the replacement should have it too, otherwise his fraud will be discovered. The woman invites the marquis to grab his own sword and wound the corpse himself, but he replies that when the knight, her husband, was still alive, they promised loyalty to each other, and he cannot break the oath. Therefore, the lady fetches the sword and wounds her husband's neck. Now everything is settled, and the lady approaches the marquis, saying that she has done it all just for the love of him. To her puzzlement, the marquis replies that he would never marry a woman who did such a thing without even one complaint: she should be burnt for what she has done to the corpse of a man who died for her love. Scared by this reply, the lady flees away. Lentulus concludes that the Empress is like *Vidua*, who clearly did not love her husband. And neither does the Empress, for if she really loved the Emperor and the story about her assault was true, then she would not have mentioned anything, in order to preserve his relationship

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[95] *Ibid.*, p. 36, lines 53-54.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 37, line 69.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 37, line 92-93.

with the Prince, his son ("Or sacies de voir que se elle vous amoit de droit, et ce fust voirs que vostre fieus li vausist avout fait tele vilonnie come elle dist, n'en deuist elle avoit ja parlé").[98]

In this case the structure does not change significantly from the other versions that include *Vidua*, *K* and *A*. The main difference, however, is the extreme "passivisation" of the character of the marquis (who is a knight in the other versions). While in *K* and *A* the marquis/knight helps at least to dig up the husband's corpse and carries it to the gibbet, in *M* the woman does everything by herself.

What is most striking, however, is the conclusion drawn by Lentulus at the end of his tale: of the Empress really loved the Emperor, then she would not have said anything about the assault – this statement does not appear in any other version. What the fickle wife of the *exemplum* and the Empress have in common is their unreliability: they might show a heartfelt affection for their husbands, but they both are ready to betray them to satisfy their selfish desires. Indeed, according to Lentulus, the Empress' selfishness is proved by the fact that she told the Emperor about what happened between her and the Prince. What the Sage is saying is that even if the Prince actually tried to assault her, the Empress should not have said anything: a truly good woman would not have put a son and a father against each other; she would have accepted the assault and put the relationship between them, two man who are to rule an empire, before her own interests.

In this final statement of *Vidua*, we find the most overt manifestation of the anti-feminist discourse at stake in *M*, in which the homosocial dimension stands out particularly. The behaviour of the Empress is not only jeopardising a kinship relation but, first and foremost, a political relation. In fact, in feudal society not only did the preservation of land and estate depend on male succession, but there also was a strong anxiety about ensuring that the family maintained the power rightfully – and the only way to do so was to guarantee that blood was preserved and male heirs protected, especially in uncertain times when life was so precarious. In this sense, a royal marriage was a public (that is political) business.[99]

It is not a coincidence that *Vidua* is introduced by the description of a sort of political crisis. On the sixth day, when Lentulus arrives to the court to rescue the Prince from execution, the Sage warns the Emperor that if his son is executed, then misfortune will befall him – and it will be similar to the misfortune of the marquis of Juskiame ("je di que vous iestes plus Decius

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[98] *Ibid.*, p. 38, lines 119-121.

[99] See in particular Duby's chapter on *Royal Families* in Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, pp. 189-210.

c'onques ne fu li marchis de Juskiame")[100]. The Emperor replies ironically: he would indeed be a fool, he says, if he missed the opportunity to fall for another of the Sages' tricks, which will eventually prevent him from accomplishing what he knows is right, i.e. his son's execution ("Certes, dist li empereres, mout seroit ore fols qui n'ascouteroit vous bourdes por moi jeter hors de mon propos").[101] As the Emperor tries to exit the room, the entire court gets in his way and prevents him from leaving, threatening him into listening to Lentulus' *exemplum*. Should he not do so, the barons warn, they will personally harm the Empress, the one responsible for this situation, and if he does proceed with the execution of his son, the heir, then they will humiliate him in front of everyone and the Empress will be destroyed:

> "Dont s'en vot li empereres atant d'iaaus partir, mais li baron le detinrent qui li dissent tout apertement que puis qu'il estoit teus qu'il ne vorroit preudomme ascouter, il meteroient main a l'emperris qui a cou l'amenoit que li son fil faisoit destruire sans raison, et bien se gardast il meisme que se on pooit trouver par nule manière que li damoisiaus fust destruis sans desierte, il meisme en seroit vergones et l'emperris destruite"[102]

[Thus the Emperor wanted to leave the room, but the barons stopped him and said openly that since he acted in such a way that he did not want to listen to the righteous man, they would harm the Empress, due to whom he wanted to kill his son with no reason, and he should have been careful, for if in any way they would prove the innocence of the prince, then the Emperor would be humiliated and the Empress destroyed]

The threat put forward by the whole court has the effect of scaring the Emperor to the point that he excuses himself for his behaviour, admitting that he was not lucid and, as a result, was acting in an unreasonable way ("Beau segnor, or ne vous esmierveillies de ce que je di ne faic, car cuers ires n'est mie del tout sages").[103] Lentulum replies that this is exactly why he needs to listen to the story, which is the only remedy to his folly. The tension between the Emperor and the court explodes here, right at the middle of the plot, where the accusation of the woman and the reaction of the Emperor become a blatant political matter. The decision that the Emperor will make will affect the political order, the masculine hierarchy – a structure so sturdy

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[100] *Ibid.*, p. 34, lines 118-119.
[101] *Ibid.*, p. 34, lines 119-120.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 34, lines 121-127.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 34, lines 129-131.

yet so fragile – that must not be jeopardised. If the Emperor intends to execute his son, then the barons will revolt against him and destroy what they consider the source of their troubles, the Empress. This suggests that the kinship between father and son is granted much more importance than the relationship between husband and wife. Indeed, in a society such as the feudal one, where political order depends on women's exchange between men and the kinships that derive from it, this is hardly a surprise. What is more, misogyny is an inevitable consequence of the dependence between political order and kinship – misogyny stems from the anxiety to control women's body, which is the space that determines the success or failure of the exchange[104].

What is striking is that the exacerbation of the misogynistic discourse in M runs alongside the emphasis on the kinship between father and son, on the one hand, and the relationship between the Emperor and the barons, on the other. Once these homosocial bonds start to wobble, the tension between the Emperor and his barons explodes, and the Emperor risks losing his status and recognition. Lentulus' final anti-feminist statement says it all: no woman should jeopardise the homosocial bond; if she does so, she is automatically an evil woman. Nobody – except for the Emperor – believes or even cares about what the Empress says: she is deemed guilty from the start, the Prince must be innocent. Indeed, the barons do not cooperate with the Sages in delaying the Prince's execution because both parties, the Empress and the Prince, must undergo a rightful process – justice is not their concern at all, what counts for them is protecting the heir to the throne. In *M*, the barons participate actively in the public moment when the Sages tell their stories, forcing the Emperor to listen to the good *exempla*, even when he does not want to do so: "Ne vous chaut, sire, dissent dont li baron, car il fait bon oir bons exemples, car d'iaus ascouter ne oir ne puet venir nus maus qui les veut metre a oevre" ('Do not worry, sir – the barons said – it is good to listen to good examples, as from hearing or listening to them does not come any evil to those who want to put them into practice').[105]

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[104] Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (1975), pp. 157-210. To be precise, in this pivotal paper Rubin talks about *sexism* as the force maintaining the patriarchal system. In recent year the notion of sexism has been nuanced by Kate Manne, *Down Girl : The Logic of Misogyny* (New York, NY: University Press, 2017) where a distinction is drown by sexism and misogyny. According to Manne the former refers to the idea that there are biological differences between the sexes determining social role; misogyny would be the enforcement of patriarchal hierarchies through law. In this picture, while both sexism and misogyny cooperate towards the maintenance and reproduction of patriarchal power, the latter translates into practices that aim to violently repress women and their agency. Rubin seems to refer exactly to the latter mechanism, thus her sexism can certainly be read as misogyny.
[105] *Ibid*., p. 52, lines 97-100.

In the framework of *M* we witness the emergence of a courtly community in the *SSR* narrative as well as the exacerbation of the misogynistic discourse. The conjunction of these two features must not to be seen as mere coincidence but instead as the appearance of feudal society in literature. It has been mentioned already that feudal society is based on the exchange of women between men through marriage and, by extension, on kinship relations.[106] This has consequences on the way the system is structured and maintained – first and foremost the anxiety to control women's bodies and sexuality, which finds its discursive endorsement exactly in the construction of misogynistic discourse. In other words, misogyny is a by-product of a society that aims to control women in order to replicate itself. In this sense, "misogynistic discourse tells us far less about its object than about the men that produce it".[107]

Following this line of thought, then, it is probably extremely stimulating to see in which contexts and in what terms a certain misogynistic discourse is activated. In the case of *M*, we have tried to retrieve a socio-cultural context for the production of the text – or at least its circulation. By observing the organisation of the manuscripts in which the text is transmitted, I concluded that the text seems to be a didactic one and might as well, as such, have been used for the education of the aristocratic elites. This type of instructive or didactive atmosphere, as it were, has been then observed in *M*'s text too – the difference between the education for girls and boys comes across when observing the way in which the young Prince and Empress are educated: while the former is sent to study the seven arts, the latter's behaviour is to be corrected and chastised by her much older husband, the Emperor. In this context, it has been interesting to see that the Empress – unlike what happens in other versions of the *SSR* – ends up being extremely eroticised; indeed, her scantily dressed body is often at the centre of the scene, especially when she is trying to achieve her machinations. This new reading leads me to problematise the one provided by Runte, who praises the narrative abilities of *M*'s compiler for developing the plot in an erotic direction. The erotization of which Runte talks about proves problematic for whoever approaches the text through the lenses of gender criticism. Our reading shows that the expansion of the narrative's erotic traits is accompanied by the exacerbation of the anti-feminist discourse. Indeed, the comparison with other versions of the *SSR* – particularly the prose versions *A* and *L*, and the verse *K* – has demonstrated that, beside the frame-story, even the *exempla* feature misogynistic traits that are absent, or at least not as

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[106] On the importance of the family structure in the French Middle Ages and their importance in shaping society and culture, see again Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*. See also Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*.
[107] Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 114

accentuated, in other versions. Moreover, the misogynistic discourse in *M* is accompanied by a stronger participation of the whole (masculine) courtly community, which of course gives us a clearer sense of what the political implications of the narrative are – hierarchical feudal structure must not be endangered by women; therefore, they should be guarded and controlled.

The comparison of *M* with other versions of the other versions of the *SSR* such as *A*, *L* and *K*, suggests that there is no such thing as a master-misogynistic discourse, as it were, that is always reproduced in the same way, with the same features – quite the opposite, it can acquire different shades and meanings, it can have even different purposes.

Misogynistic discourse in version *K*

The analysis of version *M* showed that the text gives unusual prominence to certain traits that are usually associated with (bad) women: irrationality and uncontrollable sexuality in the first place. *K* is a clear example of how misogyny operates differently even in closely related narratives. In turn, *K*'s misogynistic discourse likewise features elements that distinguish it from the rest of the texts considered.

As already mentioned in the introductory section, *K* is a verse version of the *SSR* which came down to us in an anthology manuscript copied towards 1285 in Cambrai. *K*'s text innovates the *SSR*'s narrative by providing it with a backstory borrowed from the legend of the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur*. Before becoming the protagonist of the *SSR*, Vespasian rules justly over Rome when he falls sick with leprosy, from which he is healed by touching a patch of the Holy Shroud that Cilofida (=Veronica) had brought to Rome from Jerusalem at the behest of God, who wants Vespasian to avenge Jesus Christ's Passion. After this miraculous healing, the Emperor converts to Christendom and goes to Jerusalem to fulfil his duty. Once the Jews are defeated, Vespasian moves back to his "contree" – the place is not mentioned, but we are led to assume it is Constantinople – and marries the daughter of the Duke of Carthage, who gives him a son. Six years later, his wife dies to the Emperor's great dismay ("Molt ai eu cuer irour / car j'ai la roine perdue / miudre dame ne fu veue", My heard is full of sorrow / for I have lost the queen / no one has ever know a better lady than her).[108] At this point, the usual narration of the *SSR* starts: the Emperor sends for the Sages, who take over his child's education while the Emperor's counsellors advise him to take another wife. Vespasian is still mourning

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[108] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 130, vv. 293/95.

the loss of his first wife when the community of barons comes to him during a "geudi de Rouvison"[109] and convince him to choose a noble woman to marry, as would be appropriate ("Ne poriies longhes garir / ne chaste ensi tenir / car vous estes de biel eage. / Prendes femme de haut parage" – 'You cannot live this life and be chaste for you are young. Take for wife a noble woman').[110] The poet's comment on the wedding does not leave space for doubts: Vespasian ended up marrying a woman who is actually a devil, who should have been strangled instead ("Tant il diren que il le fist / et a .i. dyable se mist / c'on deust prendre par la geule!", "So much did they encouraged him that he took as wife a devil, that should have been taken by her throat instead").[111] The poet lists Vespasian's new wife amongst the most terrible women he knows from historiography and literature ("la femme au roi Constentin, / la Salemon ne la Fortin, / ne la femme Artu de Bretaigne", "the woman of king Constantine / the woman of Solomon and that of Samson the strong / the wife of Artur of Bretagne")[112]. These other women are however surpassed by the Empress in wickedness and knowledge of cunning (*enghien*) and trickery (*art*). She is in fact so skilled at the latter that she is able to take the place of the Emperor. In this couple the Empress is the man – or better, she is the lady and the lord at the same time:

> "Li rois n'a pas la dame prise,
> mais ceste lui, par tel devise
> qu'ele devin dame et signor:
> ele a souspris l'empereor!"[113]

[The king has not taken the woman, but the woman him, in such a way that she became lady and lord: she has tricked the Emperor!]

The Empress commands Vespasian as she pleases, the Emperor is but a puppet in her hands. By losing his place as the man of the couple, Vespasian loses all dignity, and for this reason he should be stoned ("L'en devroit l'omme lapider / ki sa femme lait trop monter", "Stoned should be the man / who lets his wife prevail").[114] A statement like this unveils the anxiety that women

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[109] A Thursday of the *Rogation Days*, which are days of fasting and praying in Western Christianity happening before Easter.
[110] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 138, vv. 413/16.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 138, vv. 421/23.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 138, vv. 425/27.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 138-139, vv. 431/34.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 139, vv. 435/36.

could dismantle the male hierarchy by prevailing over men, thereby appropriating their power and social domain.

The implications of this anxiety can be better understood by reading *K*'s prologue, where the Empress is introduced as the one who has more knowledge than the Sages and, as such, wins the dispute that she and the Sages are about to undertake:

> "Et bien aves oi la somme
> par coi femme sot plus que homme
> et com ele venki par *plait*
> a Rome les saiges tous siet"[115]

[And you have heard the account on a woman who knew more than men, and on how she defeated all the Seven Sages in Rome through a trial/discussion]

The use of the word *plait* in this context is meaningful, as it inscribes the Empress and Sages' altercation in a jurisprudential domain. According to the *FEW* the word "plait" can be intended as "discussion" (discussion) or "querelle" (quarrel), but the main meaning is "procès" (trial) or "affaire judiciaire" (judicial affair) – even "audience judiciaire" (court hearing) or "court du roi, d'un seigneur" (a king's or lord's court).[116] The rhetorical confrontation between the Empress and the Sages can therefore be seen as a legal trial – a legal trial that in *K* takes place in a public space. Here lies what can definitely be consider the most significant difference between the prose and the verse versions we have discussed above: whilst the narration of the Empress' *exempla* occurs in the bedchamber in all the other Old French (and even Latin) versions of the *SSR*, the Empress speaks publicly in the verse *K*.[117] In the verse *K* the Empress approaches the Emperor outside church, just after the morning mass, and she tells her *exempla* right there:

> Li rois se leva au matin
> la messe oir a Saint Martin
> et la roine maintenant
> apries lui vait ireemant.

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[115] *Ibid*., p. 118, vv. 39-42.
[116] See the entry *plaid* (< PLACITUM) FEW IX, 6b, 7a.
[117] This trait is shared even by the fragmentary verse C.

La dame le roi apiela:

'Sire, dist ele, entendes cha!'"[118]

[The king wakes up in the morning to go to the mass at Saint Martin, and the queen, very upset, follows him immediately. The queen speaks to the king: "Sir, she said, listen to me!"]

The consequences of the Empress' speech – namely the Emperor calling for the execution of the son – take place immediately after her *exempla*, in the same public space where the act of narrating happens. This means that the Empress' words are effective by themselves, regardless of the charming effect that her body and fascinating moves may have on Vespasian, the Emperor. This already allows us to draw a significant difference between *K* and *M*, where the Empress' body and her sexuality often take over the scene. While the Emperor's orders are being carried out, the Sages providentially show up and tell the *exemplum* that will save the life of the son. The narration is then suspended, the day is over and the Emperor and the court retire for the night – but we are not told anything about what happens in the secrecy of the imperial chambers, not even single word is spent on that, and the narration starts again in the morning. This creates a narrative cycle that culminates on the eighth day, when the Prince tells his story and finally convinces the Emperor of his innocence.

Conversely, the prose versions are all consistent in setting the Empress' telling of *exempla* in the privacy of the bedchamber, at night, while the salvific intervention of the Sages takes place in the foreground of the gathered court. In *A* and in *L* these different settings are introduced by the same *formulae*. Before the Empress tells *Arbor*, for example, *A*'s text goes as follows:

"Il fu tart, la court departi, les portes furent closes. Li empererez vint a l'empereriz […]"[119]

[It was late, the people of the court had left, and the doors were closed. The Emperor went to the Empress]

[118] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 190, vv. 1407-1412.
[119] Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages (2014)
<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021].

Once the whole court has left the palace and the doors are closed, the Emperor meets the Empress, who is thus able to tell the *exemplum* that will push the Emperor towards the execution of the Prince. The setting in which the Sages tell their stories is completely different and introduced by another *formula*, as the following line at the beginning of Bancillas' Canis in A clarifies:

"Les portes furent ouvertes, et le pales empli des barons de la terre"[120]

[The doors were opened, and the palace filled with the barons of that land]

The different setting for the speech of the Empress and of the Sages is neither a matter of style nor casual, as it carries several ideological implications. It suffices to think of the classical dichotomy between private/public and private/political, which has been at the centre of the feminist debate from the 1970s to our days – with the final goal of re-politicising the domestic/private sphere. Theorists of the social contract such as Hobbes and Rousseau already considered the presence of two different spheres: one public – thus political; the other domestic – thus removed from politics.[121] The first sphere was men's domain, while the second pertained to women – who, according to those thinkers, were deemed incapable of entering the public/political sphere because they lack the needed abilities or (psychological) characteristics. The meaning and the implications of this distinction have been analysed in different ways: the most interesting and convincing are the Marxist interpretations that see this difference as a consequence of the division of labour.[122] What interests us here, is that the private/public dichotomy was already at stake during the European Middle Ages, especially along the lines of social classes, as the anxiety to segregate women in the domestic sphere was particularly present among the elites.[123]

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[120] *Ibid.*

[121] See the entry public/private in Jane Pilcher, Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. Second edition. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017), pp. 124-128.

[122] Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex', *Signs,* 1 (1976), 137-69.

[123] Sarah Rees Jones resorts to archaeological evidence to argue that space was highly gendered during the Middle Ages and considered the ensuing distinctions built on the concepts of public and private, which were already considered by intellectuals such as Giles of Rome. At the same time, however, she acknowledges that things might have been different according to the social status, as the anxiety to control the activity of wealthier women pointed to an increase in the restriction of their public presence. Sarah Rees Jones, 'Public and Private Space and Gender in Medieval Europe', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 246-61. Rees Jones (*Ibid*., p. 249) quotes Roberta Gilchrist (1994, p. 53) "increasing status seems to be accompanied by greater segregation of women's quarters". See Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 53.

K's *mise-en-scène* of the Empress is therefore particularly interesting. Indeed, the Empress overtly occupies the public arena and speaks for herself, without needing to use her sexuality or body to be heard or for her message to be effective. In order to obtain what she wants the Empress only uses her voice. The use that the Empress makes of her voice is interesting for it is a far remove from the misogynistic stereotype that wants women's speech to be void or superficial. The Empress seems to master the art of rhetoric even better than the Sages do – to the point that the woman is the only one to speak like an actual, eloquent sage, a *clerc* well versed in the *ars oratoria*. In fact, the *formula* introducing her *exempla* suggests that she knows them because she read of them in written sources:

> Sire, dist ele, jel dirai,
>
> Car par auctorité le sai.[124]

[My lord, I will tell you, as I have read it]

This is even more relevant if we consider that, instead, the Sages usually only reassure the Emperor that they are going to say the truth ("Je vous dirai voir, par ma foi").[125] When introducing his *Tentamina*, Gentulus states that the events he will narrate had happened in his own region:

> "Rois, plus ne vous voel demander
>
> mais tant vous proi, par saint Omer,
>
> que fachies arrester l'enfant,
>
> que n'aut ne arier ne avant,
>
> tant c'une oevre t'aie contee
>
> que ja avint en ma contree"[126]

[King, I do not intend to ask for more, but I only beg you, in the name of Saint Omer, that you may stop the execution of the child, that it may be frozen until I have told you a fact that happened in my region]

On the subject see also *Histoire de la vie privée. 2 De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance*, ed. by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

[124] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 168, vv. 983/84.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 178, v. 1164.

[126] *Ibid.*, p. 248, vv. 2469-2474.

This way of introducing a Sage's tale is relevant because a good number of *fabliaux* commence in exactly the same way. This suggests that the Sages' *exempla* are inscribed in a narrative dimension that is closer to the domain of the *fabliaux* than it is to scholarly or didactic works, as we would probably expect. In *M*, as we have seen, the Sages' *exempla* are introduced by *sententiae* and dictums that establish that kind of educative atmosphere. Oddly enough, in *K* this is done by the Empress, who introduces her second *exemplum*, *Senescalcus*, alluding to the *Disticha Catonis* and David's Psalter:

> "A son fil le dist Catonnet,
>
> quant il estoit jovenes varlet,
>
> que lire lechon sans entendre
>
> a escarni se puet l'on rendre.
>
> Si le mist David el Sautier
>
> et commencha a preechier :
>
> 'Cil ki plus a plus doit donner ;
>
> li fors hom doit grant fais poter ;
>
> ki set le sens sel doit apprendre,
>
> environ lui au peuple espendre"[127]

[Cato said to his son, when he was a child, that reading without understanding is shameful. David put it like that in the Psalter and started to preach: "Who has more, more has to give; a strong man has to carry a bigger load, who has knowledge has to teach and disseminate it amongst people]

While the editors of *K* have identified the quote from Dionysius Cato, the one concerning David's Psalter has so far dodged any attempt of identification.[128] However, the fact that these convincing *auctoritates* are only used by the Empress and never by the Sages testifies that the overturning of a social order is indeed at stake. Indeed, the Empress' words surprise even *K*'s editors: "Cette citation d'un ouvrage savant prend un relief particulier dans la bouche d'un personnage féminin par ailleurs engagée dans un duel rhétorique et savant avec les sept sages et qui affirme détenir son savoir par *auctorité*".[129]

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[127] *Ibid*., p. 192, vv. 1429-1438.
[128] *Ibid*., p. 193, footnotes 59 and 60.
[129] *Ibid*., p. 193, footnote 59.

Not only is the Empress occupying a public space, but she is doing so by using masculine means, a masculine *ars* – namely the *ars oratoria*. In this sense, we see how the ambiguity of the word *ars* is at stake in the *SSR*'s narrative. Indeed, when, at the beginning of the frame-story, the Emperor summons the Seven Sages at his court, he demands the Prince be taken with him with them and be taught the *sept ars*:

> "Bien vigniés vous, dist il, signor!
>
> Molt ai eü au cuer irour,
>
> car j'ai la roïne perdue;
>
> miudre dame ne fu veüe.
>
> Onques de li n'oi que .i. oir:
>
> de chou ai ge molt le cuer noir.
>
> N'a ke .vii. ans, biaus valetons,
>
> mais par amours vous requerons
>
> que vous le mennois por aprendre;
>
> des ore mais doit bien entendre.
>
> A l'escole soit mis cest mars
>
> et vous l'aprendé des *.vii. ars*.
>
> J'en penserai si del merir
>
> ne vous en devrois repentir"[130]

["Sirs" he said "You are very welcome. I have had much dismay in my heart, for I lost the queen; a better woman has never been seen. I had from her only one heir, which makes my heart black (i.e., which makes me melancholic). My heir, a handsome boy, is only seven years old, but we ask, for your love, that you take and educate him; now he should be able to understand. I want him to be schooled from this March and that you teach him the seven arts. I will take care of what you deserve, you will not regret it.]

Amongst the *ars* that the Prince will master there is, of course, even *dyaletike*[131] (dialectic), which is at the centre of the *SSR*'s narrative – and which will be masterfully used by the

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[130] *Ibid*., pp. 130-131, vv. 291-304.

[131] The other *artes* learnt by the child during his stay with the Sages are medicine, astronomy, necromance, music, theology (*Ibid*., p. 136, vv. 359/62 / vv. 368/73 / vv. 379/80):

> "Cascuns des sages l'ot .i. moys
> Et li aprendent des vies loys

Empress too. In this sense, it is quite striking to see that the epithet introducing the Empress is usually "ki moult savoit d'enghien et d'art".[132] At this point we are definitely allowed to wonder if the *ars* that the Prince learns with the Seven Masters has something to do with the *art* that the Empress practices so masterfully. Even a rapid look at the *FEW* makes us notice that the word *art* (< ARS) had a double meaning in the French Middle Ages: on the one hand it would refer to sciences and disciplines that were learnt in didactic contexts, on the other, it took on the meaning of ability too, including abilities that could have a negative outcome or impact, hence *art* having the meaning of ruse, trickery, deceit. Considering the spectrum of meaning of the word, we can safely assume that an intended wordplay is at stake. Indeed, in *K* the Empress does not use anything other than rhetoric, a masculine art, one of the seven arts, in fact. This suggests that in *K* what is brought to the fore is the anxiety that a woman could be able to appropriate such a dangerous *ars* as rhetoric – dangerous in so far that it is able to blur the boundary between truth and falsehood. This is particularly evident at the end of the prologue, where once again the Empress is not only said to have won against the Seven Sages by *plait*, as we have seen above, but even to have killed them thanks to her *art*:

> "Huimais porois oir la somme
>
> par coi femme sot plus que homme
>
> que as .vii. sages estriva
>
> e par son *art* tous le mata"[133]

[Now you can hear the account according to which a woman knew more than men so that she competed with the Seven Sages, killing them with her art]

Et en apries de la nouviele
Qui asses li sambla biele
[…]
Illuec aprist il le gran sens
Et devint bons fusesiiens
Les ars aprist d'astrenomie;
De tout son sensa ma clergie.
Il aprist de nigremanche
[…]
Il sot de la dyaletike
Et si sot les chans de musike"

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 166, v. 950.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 128, vv. 249-252.

These statements are startling, as they subvert the actual evolution of the narrative, in which the grand finale sees the victory of the Sages and Prince and the execution of the woman. This means that the emphasis is put more on the dynamic portrayed in the *SSR* – a woman who is able to outwit the Sages by using their own (masculine) arts against them – than on the mere development of the sole plot.

Becoming the other: Sages as women?

Given that the Empress in *K* is represented like a sort of master, who is able to handle and use in her favour masculine tools as rhetoric, it is interesting to observe how the Sages – who are her counterpart in this narrative – are portrayed; this will clarify what is at stake in *K* in terms of women representation.

According to version *K*, the *Seven Sages of Rome* are summoned to Constantinople by the Emperor to educate his beloved son. As the Sages reach the city and learn of Vespasian's intentions, they engage in a sort of challenge in order to get the honour to tend to the education of the Emperor's son, so each Sage puts forward himself to take care of the Prince's education, promising Vespasian that the Prince will learn everything as quickly as possible. As the last Sage, Berous, promises that he will pass on all his knowledge to the Prince in only one year, the Emperor reassures them that the Prince's education will be entrusted to all of them. Moreover, they should not worry at all about the recompense for this service, as the Emperor will pay well for it ("J'en penserai si del merir / ne vous en devrois repentir").[134] The Prince therefore sets off to Rome along with all the Seven Sages, and starts the path of his education immediately. After seven years, solicited by the Empress, Vespasian sends for his son, who is asked to come back to court. The news is received in a frantic way by the Sages who, after meeting the Emperor's delegates, sit in the *vergier* (the garden) fearing that the Emperor will find a flaw in the education they have given to the Prince and thus punish them. One of the Sages, Baucillas then suggests the preparation of the son be tested ("Oir devrions et veoir / s'il est auques de grant savoir", "We should listen and see / whether he is knowledgeable").[135] The Sages are in distress in the *vergier* even before reading in the stars the misfortunes that are looming over them and the Prince. They do not seem to retain any of the characteristics usually

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[134] *Ibid.*, p. 134, vv. 341/42
[135] *Ibid.*, p. 142. vv. 479/80

representing a Sage as wise, tranquil, and strong in the adversity, for they sit closely next to each other and panic ("Illuec s'asirent les a les, / car chascuns d'iaus fu esfrees")[136] until Gentillus glimpses something in the sky. Indeed he spots a sign of the dreadful events that are going to unfold – once in Rome, should the Prince speak in the presence of the Emperor, he will say something that will upset his father; the Prince will therefore be killed together with the Sages. They are so selfish and focused on their own disgrace that they completely overlook another sign in the sky that only the Prince will be able to see – thereby finding a way to salvation. After Gentilus's reading, the Sages send for the Prince, who joins the old and troubled Sages, who immediately address the Prince regretting the moment they decided to take over his education ("Mar veismes ta noureture. Molt nous sera et aspre et dure").[137] It is remarkable that the Prince mistakes the Sages' distress for a concern about money:

> Dist li enfes: "Signor, pour coi?"
> Si m'ait Dex, che poise moi!"
> Se li rois ne vous voloit rendre
> le serviche de moi apprendre,
> se je puis estre empereour
> chascun de vous donrai honor"[138]

[The child said: "Why, Sirs? God help me, I am sorry about it. If the king is not willing to reward your service, I will gift you all with honours if I will become emperor]

Once the Sages clarify that it is not money that concerns them, the Prince looks at that sky and spots a little star ("petite estoilete") in which he is able to read a way to save his life and the Sages': if he remains silent in the presence of the Emperor for seven days, then their lives will be spared.

The contrast between the Prince's lucidity and tranquillity and the Sages' dismay and anxiety is surprising – and does not appear anywhere else in the *SSR*. Even though the other versions are consistent in stressing how the Prince's knowledge surpasses the Sages', the other versions show a certain reverence for the Sages' characters, who are not ridiculed and deprived of the noblest attributes that are usually attached to the figure of the Master. To provide but

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[136] *Ibid*., p. 142. vv. 484/85
[137] *Ibid*., p. 144. vv. 515/16
[138] *Ibid*., p. 144. vv. 517/23

one example, in the prose versions *A* and *L* they do not lose self-control when reading the prophecy in the stars and they do not show any regret for assuming the duty of educating the Prince, nor are they afraid that what they have taught him will displease the Emperor. Even in those versions the Prince is presented as wiser and more knowledgeable than the Sages, but their value or the validity of their teaching is never questioned.

In this regard, a *caveat* should be made. We should be cautious, particularly in *K*, and distinguish on the one hand the narrative need to emphasise the intellectual development of the Prince (who surpasses the Sages in knowledge) and, on the other hand, the actual attempt of mocking and parodying the character of the Sages. We have already mentioned that, as the Sages are asked to take the Prince back to Constantinople, Gentillus proposes to test the child's knowledge to avert Vespasian's punishment. However, the Prince had been already trialled a few lines before in the "test of the ivy leaves" scene, which is common to all the *SSR*'s versions. This scene runs more or less consistently across the versions. The Sages agree to test the Prince in the hardest subject they have been teaching him: astronomy (*astrologie*) so, as the night falls, they put ivy leaves under his bed and wait until morning to see if he perceives any change. As he wakes up, the Prince calls his masters and asks what happened during his sleep: either the bed was lifted or the sky got closer. In *K* this scene ends with the recognition by the Sages of the great *sens* (intelligence) of their disciple, whose mental faculties would shortly surpass theirs soon, if he was able to perceive even the thickness of a leaf ("Lors sorent bien que de grant sens / les passeroit en poi de tans / quant il de tant s'aperchevoit / comme la fuelle espesse estoit").[139] When Gentullus proposes to test the Prince a second time, then, it is only to certify the accomplished superiority of the Prince in *sens*. In fact, while the Sages are able to recognise the danger of forthcoming events by looking at the sky, they do not have enough *sens* to perceive the presence of another little star (*petite estoilete*) shining in another part of the sky. The Prince has thus acquired the necessary intelligence and knowledge to read in the sky a possibility for salvation that the Sages overlooked. Not by chance, this is also the moment where the Sages recognise the Prince as a master ("Dist Baucillas: "Vous estes maistre!"), which marks the achievement of the Prince's education.[140] From this point on, the Prince will take the lead and will also design a plan to overcome the adversities they all are going to face: the Sages will arrive in turns at the Emperor's court and justify the Prince's silence to his father, thereby securing his life and the Masters'.

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[139] *Ibid*., p. 138. vv. 397-400.
[140] *Ibid*., p. 146. vv. 553.

Beside designing the plan that will lead to their salvation, the Prince becomes also the one who replies wisely to the Sages, thereby outwitting them:

> Dist Bancillas: 'Il est en vous'
> si m'ait Des le glorious !
> Dis li enfes : 'Ansi est en De
> le glorieus de maieste'[141]

[Bancillas said: 'It is up to you, if the glorious God helps me!' The child replies: 'Actually it is up to God, whose majesty is glorious]

These words provide the intradiegetic narrator with the opportunity to make an optimistic comment: no bad event cannot be turned into a good one by those who know how to look at the moon ("car onques ne fu l'aventure / tant pesante, ne ainc si dure / que l'en nel puisse trestourner / ki en la lune set garder").[142] However, this enthusiastic take on knowledge only relates to the Prince, as the Sages are instead mocked, parodied and deprived of the reverence that is usually granted to the figure the wise Master. In *K*, the Sages are cowards, irrational and greedy – as the continuous insistence on money suggests. This greed for money is a recurrent trait, which also present in *Sapientes*, one of the Empress' *exempla* that narrates the story of a wise boy (whose name is Merlin) who unmasks the greediness of the Sages of Rome. In this *exemplum*, the Sages managed to become wealthier than the Emperor himself after establishing that any person who wanted to know the meaning of their dreams was to give them a golden ingot, and if the Sages were not paid, the dream would not become true. What is more, the Sages of the *exemplum* had also cast a spell on the Emperor, who was not able to go out of the city walls without losing his sight – a trickery that is again unmasked by the wise boy. Such a negative representation of the Sages does not come as a surprise at all considering that *Sapientes* is one of the Empress' stories. What is however striking is that an *exemplum* where a negative characterisation of a Sage is described comes from the mouth of one of the seven masters, Ausire, who in *K* narrates *Medicus*, which we have already encountered above. What is remarkable in *K*'s *Medicus* is the parodic tone that Ausire uses to ridicule Ypocras, the greatest physician who ever lived. Before going into further detail, it is worth remembering that in *Medicus* Ypocras kills his nephew fearing that the boy would surpass him in fame and

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[141] *Ibid.*, p. 150, vv. 631/34.
[142] *Ibid.*, p. 148, vv. 593/96.

knowledge. *K*'s Ypocras is obsessed by the idea of maintaining his fame to the point that he burns all the books that he himself had written, in order to prevent once and forever other people equalling or surpassing his own knowledge ("k'i ne voloit que de son sens, / seust nus hom apries son tens"). Ypocras pays for his actions with a descent into hell: while he is dying, devils come to haunt his body for one whole year ("Et dyable si l'emporterent, / .i. an ot tout son cors regnerent"), something that he would have avoided if he did not have the unreasonable fear of sharing his knowledge and teaching people. In other words, the concealment of knowledge results in him dying haunted by devils. But how does Ypocras die? By diarrhoea, Ausire informs from the outset of his narration:

> Onques ne fu a icel tens
> nus hom ki fust de grignor sens,
> quar onques ne fu la dolour
> ne la fievre ne la langour
> don il ne garist femme et homme.
> Jamais n'avra son per a Romme,
> kar il garissoit les mesiaus
> chiaus qui portoient les flaiaus.
> Et menoison si l'ocioit!
> Trestoute autre gent garissoit.[143]

[There was no other men of greater intelligence for there was no pain, fever or illness from which he could not heal man or woman. There will never be a man like him in Rome, for he would heal those suffering from leprosy and those who had rattles. Yet he died from diarrhoea! He was able to heal everyone.]

Ausire emphasises how a man with the most remarkable knowledge, able to heal everyone, "femme et homme", ended up dying in the silliest way possible: by diarrhoea. However, the *exemplum* goes even further. As Ypocras' death was approaching, people ("evesque" and "clergier") wanted to learn everything he knew in order to benefit from his knowledge after his passing, but Ypocras replies confusedly to their questions so as to keep his knowledge concealed:

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[143] *Ibid*., p. 206, vv. 1697-1706.

Une fois l'en, l'autre le moys

(de chou furent il en soupois)

et une fois en la semainne,

l'autre le jor, c'est oevre sainne[144]

[Once a year, the other once a month' they were puzzled by this reply 'and once a week, the other one a day, this is a healthy behaviour]

People asking answers to Ypocras are never able to find out what an *oevre sainne* (healthy habit) actually consists of: "onque plus n'i porent aprendre / n'en sa parole riens entendre" ("Nothing more were they able to learn or comprehend from his words").[145] This can be explained by the idea that knowledge is hard to penetrate, as Marie de France stresses in the prologue of her *Lais*:

Costume fu as anciens

ceo testimoine Preciens

es livres que jadis faiseient

assez oscurement diseient

pur cels ki a venir esteient

e ki apprendre les deveient

que peussent glosser la letre

e de lur sen le surplus metre.[146]

[As Priscian witnesses, the ancients spoke obscurely in the books they wrote so that the successors who wanted to learn could expand on their words and add something more through their intelligence]

In the space of the prologue to the *Lais*, as we can see, the obscurity of the words of the *anciens* provides the *modernes* with the possibility to jump nimbly on the shoulders of the giants and, through a hermeneutic act, add something more to the comprehension of the wor(l)d. No wonder the *anciens* did it on purpose, as they knew humankind would have developed the

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[144] *Ibid*., p. 212. vv. 1813/16.
[145] *Ibid*., p. 212. vv. 1817/18.
[146] Marie de France, 'Lais', ed. by Laurence Harf-Lancner and Karl Warnke (Paris: Les Livre de Poche, 1990), p. 22, vv. 9-16.

mental abilities to interpret them successfully ("Li philosopes le saveient / par els meismes l'entendeient / cum plus trespassereit li tens / plus serreient sutil de sens").[147] However, when Ypocras finally clarifies his words, we see that there is nothing obscure to unpack, as his mysteries were actually enshrining a lame and rather obvious *tetrafarmakon*:

> 'Une fois l'en, prendre poison,
>
> iche seroit droite raison,
>
> et une fois le mois, sainner,
>
> on ne poroit mius esploiter
>
> […]
>
> […]
>
> et une fois mangier le jour ;
>
> hons qui vivroit de tel labour
>
> je ses cors mal ne sentiroit
>
> desci au jor que il morroit'.[148]

[Once a year, one should eat fish, which would be right, and once a month one should be leeched, one could not do anything better […] and one should eat once a day – the man who will live like this will never feel pain in his body until the day of his death]

This is all the more so, as this recipe of long-life did not protect the greatest physician against dying in the most embarrassing way, from diarrhoea.

The ridiculed Sage does not only pertain to *K* but is actually a widespread motif in Old French literature, especially when the Sage's ridiculing is put in relation with a woman. It happens, for example, in the *Lai d'Aristote*, whose plot has been well summarised by Ladd:

> Aristotle, tutor of the young Alexander, reproves his pupil for the time wasted on his love for a « damoisele » of the court. Alexander agrees to abandon her, until the girl herself sees a way to get revenge on the philosopher. She attracts Aristotle's attention with a series of three songs, so

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[147] *Ibid.*, p. 22, vv. 17-19.
[148] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 214. vv. 1821-1828. The editors report here a gap of two lines, that they reconstruct through the derimee text D, which runs as follows: "Une fois l'an seigner, une fois le moys menger poisson, une fois la sempaine gesir avec femme et une fois le jour menger feroit vivre l'omme en santé jusques a l'eure de sa mort" (*Ibid.*, p. 214). The editors ascribe this omission to a broader tendency of K's copyist to avoid references to sexuality and sexual intercourse. We hope to clarify this aspect in the following chapters.

that he forgets philosophy and declares his love for her. She complains that Alexander has deserted her and says that she will become Aristotle's « amie » if he will play horse for her. The sage agrees, and Alexander in hiding profits from the spectacle as the girl sings a fourth song. Aristotle, when confronted, recovers face by telling the king that he was trying to show him a lesson: if one so wise might succumb to feminine ways and fall so low, how much more careful should his young pupil be. The author suggests another lesson — that it is useless to reprove love — and all retire with honor.[149]

In the *Lai d'Aristote*' we find a woman who manages to seduce and outwit a Sage. In order to do so she uses her voice too, but in a different way than our Empress: while the former charms Aristotle with her chanting, thereby reproducing the classical topic of the woman-mermaid, the latter turns rhetoric, that is one of the Sages' arts, against them. In this sense, the space that the Empress occupies in *K* is unique in the context of the *SSR*'s versions that came down to us. This uniqueness is certified by the parodic description of the Sages, which results into an overturning of gender roles where women hold power of wherewithal deemed to be masculine.

In the verse *K* the Empress is always the first to tell her *exemplum*, and she does so in the morning, reaching the Emperor after mass. *Coram populo*, that is publicly, she speaks. This, of course, has huge implications if we considered the consequences of the private/public division that has always enacted on the difference between women and men. If compared to the prose version, where the Empress tells her *exemplum* in the Emperor's room generally following it with sexual intercourse, the public presence of the Empress together with her rhetoric ability comes to jeopardise the phallogocentric order of speech. Indeed, once this order is subverted, its guardians – the Sages, the *clergie* – passes to the other, feminine, end, just in the same way in which in the relationship with the Emperor, the Empress is said to be the lady and the lord at the same time, as we have seen above.

Some conclusions

In this chapter the misogynistic discourse that characterises the *SSR* has been analysed by focusing on versions that are in some ways at the opposite ends of its Old French traditions, the prose *M* and the verse *K*. It has been shown that the over-sexualised representation of the

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[149] Anne Ladd, 'Attitude toward Lyric in the Lai d'Aristote and Some Later Fictional Narratives', *Romania,* 96 (1975), 194-208., p. 196.

Empress in *M* cannot be seen merely as "erotic", as it is rather a trait that reinforces the misogynistic discourse behind the text. This conclusion has been drawn by putting some *exempla* from *M* in the wider context of the *SSR* tradition through their comparison with the respective *exempla* in the prose versions *A* and *L* and in the verse *K*. This comparison has disclosed two main aspects. On the one hand, the misogynistic discourse in *M* proves to fit perfectly in the misogynistic discourse constructed across the Middle Ages. *M* puts homosocial, feudal relationships under the spotlight and displays a strong interest in didacticism (both in the text itself and in the surviving manuscript contexts), interlinked factors that undoubtedly shaped its misogyny and resulted in its portrayal of women as sexually voracious, fickle and selfish. On the other hand, the verse version *K* displays a different articulation of antifeminist discourse. The Empress is knowledgeable and eloquent. Unlike *M*'s Empress, in *K* she does not rely on her body to win her argument against the Sages: she only speaks, and her speech is public. This representation is surprisingly accompanied by a parody of her counterpart, that is the Sages. While this suggests that an overturning of gender roles is here at stake, my claim is that there is no intention to challenge sanctioned representations of gender. Quite the opposite, *K* puts at the centre of the *SSR*'s plot the anxiety that women could take over men, by appropriating those means that ensure the reproduction of the patriarchal order. The Empress masters masculine *artes*, such as rhetoric, and is thus able to outwit the Sages and put under threat the Prince – and everything that the latter represents in a feudal society.

While both versions partake in the *SRR*'s well-known misogyny they also show how its discourse operates differently. This chapter attempted a contextualisation of *M*'s misogynistic discourse in the socio-cultural landscape that characterised its production and circulation; but what about *K*? Indeed, after identifying the main characteristics of the misogynistic discourse in the verse version *K*, the next chapter will seek to address a tantalising question: why did this unexpected rendition of the misogynistic discourse appears in this version of the *SSR*?

The outlaw, the woman, the heretic

Quid faciemus his malignissimis vulpibus […] *quae nocere quam vincere malunt, et ne apparere quidem volunt, sed serpere?*[1]

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Opera*, II, *Sermon* 65.

Introduction

The previous chapter substantiated the idea that the Old French *SSR* is not one single and coherent text, but it can rather be understood as a hyper-text embracing many different texts, appearing in different forms, in different contexts. The ecdotic principle "quot codices, tot recensiones" became the rule of the transmission of the *SSR*'s narrative. Indeed, besides the phenotypical forms these texts have taken (i.e., verse or prose), it is the manuscript context in which they appear that better explains to us their nature as well as their function – or at least the nature and function that they have assumed in a particular moment of their material history. We have seen that the prose version *M*, for example, has been transmitted through four manuscripts, all containing texts with apparent didactic purposes; we have thus been able to link this manuscript configuration with *M*'s representations of female characters and have seen how the misogynistic tropes – women's maliciousness, evil cleverness, wicked eloquence – happen to be considerably exacerbated. This hypothesis was then confirmed by the comparison between *M* and other versions of the *SSR*, the prose *A* and *L* and the verse *K* versions. The close synoptic reading across these texts suggested that the representation of female characters was not the same in every point of the *SSR*'s tradition, as fundamental differences were noticed in the ways they were portrayed. In this sense, the verse redaction *K* attracted our attention, as from the first few lines of the frame-story it proposes a *mise en scène* of the Empress that

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[1] "What shall we do with these most evil foxes who […] prefer harming to winning and who do not even want to reveal themselves overtly but sneak?" Philipp Roelli, *et al.*, 'Corpus Corporum 2021' <http://www.mlat.uzh.ch/MLS/> [Accessed December 2021].

seemed to be particularly worth exploring. In fact, here the Empress has two main characteristics:

- The Empress speaks in a public setting. She does not wait for the doors of the castle to be closed and does not approach the Emperor in his room to narrate her story; on the contrary, she generally finds the Emperor right in front of the monastery where he has just attended Mass. In this same setting, the Sage of the day arrives and tells his own story.

- With the sole exception of the scene where she tries to seduce the Prince, the Empress does not make use of her sexuality or even her body to convince the Emperor to execute his son. The Empress only uses her words, which, furthermore, enjoy the validation of "auctorité".

This latter detail is of the utmost interest for our analysis, as it suggests that there is a reversal of roles at play in *K*. Indeed, not only has the Empress become the "husband" to her man, but she is also so eloquent that she masters rhetorical knowledge better than the Sages, thereby defeating them. In such a context, another element strikes us, namely the description of the Sages themselves, for they stand out for their cowardice, selfishness, and greed. Their short-sightedness is ridiculed especially in the tale *Medicus*, where the comic death of the great Hippocras is staged – he dies from diarrhoea after having murdered his nephew and burnt all his books, both of which could have saved him.

While the previous chapter has identified "tendences" and recursive characteristics in the description of the Empress and other characters in *K*, the following lines will attempt to understand the meaning and the implications of the role reversals that are staged in *K*, thereby adding new elements to our understanding and interpretation of the text. I intend to tackle this matter by maintaining an approach that is as much as possible manuscript-oriented, consistently with what has been done in the previous chapter. In that case, we have demonstrated that the manuscript context (i.e., environment of production/circulation/reception) has significant consequences on the text – version *M* is usually associated with texts that have markedly didactic intents, which is absolutely consistent with the emphasis the text puts on the misogynistic traits of the narrative. The main questions in this chapter stem from this observation of the close, at times even symbiotic, relationship between the text and its manuscript context: why did this verse version of the *SSR* find its place in manuscript BnF, fr.

1553?[2] What does the representation of female characters tell us about this version of the *SSR* and the manuscript overall? What does the manuscript context tell us about the representation of female characters in version *K* instead?

This approach is a good strategy to better understand the way in which *K* was received during the Middle Ages, thus adding new nuances to the spectrum of the *SSR*'s reception history.

Material Philology and the *K* version of the Old French *SSR*

The approach adopted to explore *K* will be twofold. On the one hand, the necessity of a close reading of the text is acknowledged and conducted accordingly; on the other, the close reading is informed by a manuscript-focused approach. This means that the observations that will be drawn will be read in the broader context of manuscript BnF fr. 1553, and vice versa, which will hopefully provide elements for a new and compelling understanding of *K* and, therefore, of the history of the *SSR*'s reception altogether.

The idea of looking at a text while considering the wider context of its manuscript(s) is hardly a novelty in the field of Romance Philology. Stephen G. Nichols was indeed one of the first scholars to put the emphasis on the importance of such an approach, which he calls Material Philology:

> Material philology takes as its point of departure the premise that one should study or theorize medieval literature by reinserting it directly into the *vif* of its historical context by privileging the material artifact(s) that convey this literature to us: the manuscript. This view sees the manuscript not as a passive record, but as a historical document thrusting itself into history and whose very materiality makes it a medieval event, a cultural drama. After all, manuscripts are so often the only surviving witness – or the most reliable guides – to the historical moments that produced and then reproduced the literary text often in bewildering forms.[3]

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[2] As it has already been highlighted above, a fragmentary verse version of the *SSR*, usually called *C*, was conserved in a manuscript that unfortunately was lost: Chartres, Bibliothèque municipale, 0620 (0261).

[3] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Why Material Philology?', in *Philologie Als Textwissenschaft. Alte Und Neue Horizone* ed. by Helmut Horst and Wenzel Tervooren (1997), pp. 10-30, p. 11. In an earlier work, material philology is called materialist philology instead, cfr. the Introduction of Stephen G. Nichols, and Siegfried Wenzel, *The Whole Book : Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1996).

Nichols' view comes mainly – although not exclusively – from the need of what he calls a *renovatio* of philology as a discipline, which he deemed to have crystallised into an obsolete and positivistic approach to the text.[4] Whilst the latter approach provided a methodology and a series of quasi-scientific tools for the study and reconstruction of medieval texts, it has often failed to acknowledge and recognise the rich history behind the medieval manuscript. Indeed, this type of philology strives to reconstruct a text according to the authorial intentions, thereby projecting onto the Middle Ages an anachronistic category of author that would perhaps better fit modernist literary studies.[5] The anxiety for editing a text that is as close as possible to the original generated frustration towards the multiple variants that very often characterise a medieval text. Now, embracing Bernard Cerquiglini's take that "medieval writing does not produce variants, it is a variance" – a sort of motto for contemporary medieval philologists –, Nichols grants historical importance to each and every manifestation of the text across the process of its transmission.[6] Following this line of thought, Nichols argues that each manuscript, even one transmitting fragmentary text(s), is valuable because it represents the way in which a particular text was received in a specific context, which ultimately means that the "same work" can be known in different ways by different audiences, whilst still remaining that "same work".[7] These variances, following Nichols, are to be studied and explored because "the modifications performed on the text by a particular manuscript not only constitute a crucial history of reception of that text, but they also can help to inform how we may choose to theorize and historicize it".[8] Thus Nichols suggests we see the manuscript not as a passive container, a repository of a text, or a series of texts, but rather as an active agent in shaping our understanding and in aiding us to reconstruct the history of textual transmission. Indeed, by observing the manuscript we are able to retrieve the historical background against which the text was copied, thereby learning how it was received, interpreted and used. Thus, Material Philology:

> […] demands that one look closely at the relationship of the individual version to its historical context in a given manuscript. Arguing that the individual manuscript contextualizes the text(s) it contains in specific ways, materialist philology seeks to

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[4] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum,* 65 (1990), pp. 1-10.

[5] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Why Matherial Philology?', pp. 10-30, p. 12.

[6] Nichols quotes this passage by Cerquiglini in *Idib*., p. 1. Cfr. also Bernard Cerquiglini, *Eloge De La Variante. Histoire Critique De La Philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 111.

[7] Stephen G. Nichols, 'Why Matherial Philology?', pp. 10-30, pp. 11-12

[8] *Ibid*.

analyse the consequences of this relationship on the way these texts may be read and interpreted. More particularly, it postulates the possibility that a given manuscript, having been organized along certain principles, may well present its text(s) according to its own agenda, as worked out by the person who planned and supervised the production of the manuscript.[9]

What follows will indeed seek to understand what was the intellectual agenda of the person who composed or asked for the composition of manuscript BnF fr. 1553. This chapter will demonstrate that not only Nichols' observations are validated by practical experience, but also that often considering the manuscript context in which a text appears is key to the understanding of both the text and the manuscript. The dialogue between these two interacting realities, that is text and manuscript, is therefore crucial.

Nichols' approach has triggered a renewed interest for the manuscript and its importance in philological studies. In the last couple of decades many workshops, conferences and initiatives in the field have in fact been animated by the principles promoted by Material Philology. One of the most interesting results of this enthusiasm is the recent *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*,[10] which proves to be particularly interesting for our inquiry as it provides theoretical as well as practical attention to codices containing more than one text, which is the case for BnF fr. 1553. As its title suggests, the book focuses on those manuscripts that usually fall under the problematic category of "miscellany" – that is manuscripts made up of one or more codicological units containing at least two or more texts. In this sense, the editors talk about these types of manuscripts as "one-volume libraries", that is an "individual collection of texts in one book that contains all its scribe or patron might need for professional or other purposes".[11]

In the introduction to the work the editors expose the notion of "miscellany" as inadequate to embrace the vast range of forms, processes and techniques involved in the production of these types of codices. After reviewing the main recent works on the subject matter, they decide to rule out the use of the term miscellany and replace it with "multiple-text manuscripts" or

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[9] Stephen G. Nichols, and Siegfried Wenzel, *The Whole Book : Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 2.

[10] Michael Friedrich, and Cosima Schwarke, *One-Volume Libraries : Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts* (Berlin Boston : De Gruyter, 2016). This remarkable edited book testifies to the influence of Material Philology on other "philologies" too, as it collects contributions from specialists in a variety of fields ranging from Latin to Chinese studies.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 2. As the editors declare, the expression one-volume library is taken from an article by the Arabist Franz Rosenthal: Franz Rosenthal, 'From Arabic Books and Manuscripts V: A One-Volume Library of Arabic Philosophical and Scientific Texts in Istanbul', *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 75 (1955), 14-23.

"composite manuscripts", depending on the nature of the manuscript. While a multiple-text manuscript indicates "a codicological unit 'worked in a single operation' (Gumbert) with two or more texts or a 'production unit' resulting from one production process delimited in time and space (Andrist, Canart, Maniaci)", a composite manuscripts designates a "codicological unit which is made up of formerly independent units".[12] The need to come up with a taxonomy that is at once generic and effective comes from the volume's attempt to embrace the many configurations and forms that manuscripts can assume temporarily but even geographically. As for the temporal aspect, manuscripts' material composition might change over time, and in this sense, we should distinguish between production units (*unités de production*) and circulation units (*unités de circulation*).[13] The unit of production "se définit comme l'ensemble des codex ou des parties de codex qui sont le résultat d'un même acte de production", a production that is made up of a series of operations that take place in a limited space and time; the unit of circulation "se definit comme l'ensemble des éléments qui constituent un codex à un moment determiné", and as such might coincide with the unit of production itself or might be the result of a transformation of an original unit of production.[14]

As for the geographic differences, the editors point out that the taxonomy used to classify Western manuscripts can hardly be applied to different manuscript cultures, which often relied on other supports than parchment or paper assembled in the form of a codex – it suffices to think of the West African palm-leaf books or of the Chinese bamboo-slip or wood-slip manuscripts.[15]

All this is of the utmost relevance when looking at manuscript BnF fr. 1553, where *K* appears. The scenario that opens up while leafing through the folios of this codex is exactly that of a collection of many heterogeneous texts, different in length, form, theme and genre. As we shall see more in-depth in the next session, this certainly makes of BnF fr. 1553 a multiple-text manuscript, which poses us a series of very thorny questions: why do such different texts live in the same manuscript? Was their collection fortuitous or part of a coherent intellectual

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[12] Michael Friedrich, and Cosima Schwarke, *One-Volume Libraries : Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, pp. 15-16. The works cited are: Peter J. Gumbert, 'Codicological Units: Towards a Terminology for the Stratigraphy of the Non-Homogeneous Codex', in *Il codice miscellaneo. Tipologie e funzioni. Atti del convegno internazionale*, ed. by Edoardo Pecere and Crisci Oronzo (Cassino: Università degli Studi di Cassino, 2004), pp. 17-42 and Patrick Canart, Paul Andrist, Marilena Maniaci, *La Syntaxe Du Codex : Essai De Codicologie Structurale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

[13] This concepts are introduced in Patrick Canart, Paul Andrist, Marilena Maniaci, *La Syntaxe Du Codex : Essai De Codicologie Structurale*, pp. 59-62.

[14] Patrick Canart, Paul Andrist, Marilena Maniaci, *La Syntaxe Du Codex : Essai De Codicologie Structurale*, p. 59.

[15] Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke, *One-Volume Libraries : Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, pp. 12-15.

project? Is it possible to retrieve the intellectual plan – if there ever was one – at the base of the manuscript's compilation? More simply: does manuscript 1553 represent a structured, organised, coherent ensemble of texts that could be considered as a "one-volume library"?

To the best of my knowledge, the most recent and innovative reflections on multiple-text manuscripts have been made in the context of collective works trying to clarify the state of the art in a variety of fields. In this sense, *One-Volume Libraries : Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, with its collection of essays focusing on Tibetan, Latin, Coptic, Chinese and Arabic studies, is certainly a good example. However, the impact this volume has had on the activity of researchers is witnessed by the edited volume *The Emergence of Multiple-Texts Manuscripts*,[16] whose aim is to study the production of multiple-text manuscripts in different cultural contexts going beyond the level of their phenomenology. Indeed, in the introduction to the work, the editors point out that the habit of collecting different types of texts in the framework of one, unitarian, manuscript is a recursive practice that can be observed in several cultures. But besides being a common practice, it is also a meaningful one, as it has a direct impact on the ways texts and knowledge are conceptualised:

> Determined by intellectual or practical needs, this process [of collecting texts] never has neutral outcomes. The resulting proximity and juxtaposition of formerly remote content challenges previous knowledge, triggering further development and raising new questions: anthologies and collections have an overt or at times subtle subversive power that can give birth to unexpected changes and even drastic revolutions. The new books emanating from all this mark advances in knowledge transmission and renew book culture.[17]

Far from being a sensationalist statement, this passage elicits further questions. One, however, is particularly tantalising and will be addressed in this chapter: in the context of a multiple-text manuscript, is it possible that the juxtaposition of different texts is able to produce new meaning, hence new knowledge?

In order to shed light on these questions, the next section will introduce manuscript BnF fr. 1553. Details about date and place of composition will be provided, while recent scholarship concerning the cultural context in which the codex was produced will be discussed. My final

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[16] Alessandro Bausi, Michael Friedrich, and Marilena Maniaci, *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).
[17] *Ibid*., p. VII.

aim is to show that the texts occupying the five different codicological units of manuscript 1553 were not collected randomly but are instead part of a broader intellectual project in which the verse redaction of the *SSR* found its place.

Manuscript BnF fr. 1553: a one-volume library

The imposing manuscript BnF fr. 1553 is made up of 524 folios (265 x 185 mm) containing around 51 different texts spread out across at least four distinct codicological units. We owe this and other important codicological and palaeographical remarks to Lepage, who was the first to analyse the manuscript.[18] Lepage considers this codex to be structured as follows:

A = ff. 2-162v

B = ff. 163-287v

C = ff. 288-383v

D (D^1 = ff. 384-436v + D^2 = ff. 437-524v) [19]

According to Lepage, the first three sections (A, B, C) were composed simultaneously by three different scribes, while in the fourth section he discerns the presence of two different units, D^1 and D^2 copied by several different hands.[20] While Lepage considered D^1 to be already attached to the original unit of production (that is, A+B+C+D^1), he thought D^2 to be a later addition – so, following up to the discussion above, Lepage ultimately thought that manuscript BnF fr. 1553 ought to be considered as a composite manuscript, because section D^2 was attached to the original unit of production in a later moment.[21] However, this view has later been challenged by Kathy Krause who, by observing a certain continuity in the decorations of the letters and

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[18] Yvan- G. Lepage, 'Un recueil français de la fin du XIIIe siècle (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553): Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553', *Scriptorium,* 29 (1975), 23-46.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 25.

[20] "Les trois premières unités (A, B, C) sont dues à trois copistes (A, B, C) qui ont très bien pu travailler simultanément" (Ibid., p. 25). Lepage does not expand on this, and Olivier Collet seems to have a different outlook on the material composition of the manuscript, which in his opinion "a été produit par une équipe de copistes qui ne se sont pas toujours partagé la tâche de façon mécanique". Olivier Collet, '"Textes de circonstance" et de "raccords" dans les manuscrits vernaculaires: les enseignements de quelques recueils des XIIIe XIVe siècle ', in *Quant l'ung amy pour l'autre veille: Mélanges de Moyen Français offerts à Claude Thiry*, ed. by Maria Colombo Timelli and Tania van Hemelryck (2008), pp. 299-312, p. 300. Collet does not substantiate this remark with more details, and it is not exactly clear whether he refers to the whole codex or only to the last unit (D). Therefore, we will rather follow the study of Lepage, who argues that the copying ran quite harmoniously across the first three sections, while he identifies a significant disruption of the copying in the fourth section (D).

[21] Yvan- G. Lepage, 'Un recueil français de la fin du XIIIe siècle (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553): Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553', p. 26.

the folios, which were likely made by the same hand, and also by considering the uniformity of the pagination, claims that D² was already integrated in the original manuscript. So Krause argues that, even though Lepage's hypothesis cannot completely be discarded, we should "considérer le manuscrit tel qu'il existe aujourd'hui comme ayant été un tout dès le début".[22] Whatever the original configuration of the manuscript was, we will see how it can be considered as a coherent, organic multiple-text manuscript.

The date and place of composition of manuscript BnF fr. 1553 – at least for what concerns the first three parts – can be inferred by many elements, all of which suggest that it was produced in nowadays Picardy – probably Cambrai – in the second half of the 13th century, more precisely around 1285. The elements supporting this chronology are the following:

- The *explicit* of the Roman de la Violette, which can be found in the third section (C) at f. 325v, says that the copying of the text was accomplished in the month of February 1284 (= 1285 n.s.)[23]
- After the transcription of the *Roman de Troie* (f. 1v - 161v), which appears in the first section (A), we find a *planctus* for the death of Enguerrand de Créquy (f. 161v-162r), bishop of Cambrai from 1273 to 1285, date of his death.[24]

The presence of the eulogy for the death of the bishop of Cambrai is one of the elements that led scholars to put forward conjectures about the place of composition of the manuscript, which with all probability is Cambrai. It was once again Lepage who first suggested a north-eastern origin for the manuscript, basing this conclusion on the presence of typically Piccard linguistic elements. This geography has been later supported by Krause, who highlights that many texts of the anthology are – of course to a different extent – connected to Picardy.[25] Olivier Collet

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[22] Kathy Krause, 'Géographie et héritage : Les manuscrits du *Roman de La Violette'*, Babel (Mont-de-Marsan) (2007), 81-99, p.91, footnote 3.

[23] "Chi define li Roumans de Gerart de Nevers et de la Violete qui fu escris l'an de l'Incarnation Nostre Signour Jhesucrist mil .CG. et .1111. XX et quatre, el moys de février". The manuscript is available on Gallica: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8454669r/f654.item.zoom [Accessed December 2021]. See also the Appendix, Figure 3.

[24] Or at least this is the view of Edward Le Glay, 'Complainte romane sur la mort d'Enguerrand de Créqui', *Mémoires de la Société d'Émulation de Cambrai,* 14 (1832-1833), pp. 129-44, p. 136. Lepage suggests that Enguerrand de Créquy died "sans doute à la fin de l'année 1284 (n. st.) ou au début de l'année 1285 (n. st.)" and maintains that the *planctus* was written down and put in the collection in January (Yvan- G. Lepage, 'Un recueil français de la fin du XIIIᵉ siècle (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553): Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. 1553', p. 24). See the Appendix, Figure 2, for an image of the incipit of the *planctus* in the manuscript.

[25] These texts are: the *Roman de la Violette* (fols. 288r-325v), written by Gerber de Montreuil to please Marie de Ponthieu; the *Roman de Wistasse le Moines* (fols. 325v-338r), a famous pirate from Boulogne in the 12th century; a part of the prose *Chronica* by Baldovino d'Avesnes, on the death execution of Pierre de la Brosse in Montfaucon

goes even further, suggesting that the manuscript was compiled in the Cambrésis, noting that besides Gui de Cambrai's *Roman de Barlaham et Josaphat*, the manuscript is the only witness of another text that is strictly related to Cambrai: the fabliau *Dou maunier de Aleus* by Enguerran le Clerc d'Ois (f. 506r-508r).[26] All in all, Collet argues, the exact temporal reference (that is the date of accomplishment of the copying of the *Roman de la Violette*) and the presence of such a well-localised text as the *planctus* for Enguerrand de Créquy are elements that "tendent à nous indiquer une attention précise à la ville de l'évêque", where all this material must have been at hand.[27] Alison Stones is also convinced of this possibility and, commenting on the illumination appearing in the frontispiece, claims that the manuscript was illuminated "in the orbit of Maître Henri" – whose work we know from ms. BnF fr. 412 – and that BnF fr. 1553 was made to please a cleric, possibly a canon of Cambrai's Cathedral.[28] Collet does not seem to share this view as he claims that the manuscript must have come out of a commercial circuit, rather than a private network or a professional scriptorium, and that despite the absence of an ownership mark, we can nonetheless assume that its owner was "un individu profane de condition élevée".[29] Indeed, Collet is persuaded that the pieces contained in the manuscript represent the intellectual model of the secular elite of the time:

> "Nous pourrions ainsi dire qu'il [BnF fr. 1553] représente le vademecum d'un « preudome » du XIIIe siècle; que sur un mode quelque peu différent du genre d'œuvres qui fleurit au moment de son élaboration, il constitue, non pas tout à fait un Miroir, mais un modèle indirect d'attitude intellectuelle et de comportement pour l'élite laïque."[30]

Stones' idea that manuscript BnF fr. 1553 was composed to please a cleric of Cambrai's Cathedral is debatable even when considering the socio-political environment of the city at the

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(fols. 254r-254v); the *Roman de Barlaham et Josaphat* by Gui de Cambrai (fols. 198r-254v). See Kathy Krause, 'Géographie et héritage : Les manuscrits du *Roman de La Violette'*, pp. 81-99.

[26] Olivier Collet, '"Textes de circonstance" et de "raccords" dans les manuscrits vernaculaires: les enseignements de quelques recueils des XIIIᵉ XIVᵉ siècle ', pp. 299-312, p. 303.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 302

[28] Alison Stones, 'The "Terrier de l'Evêque" and Some Reflections of Daily Life in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century', in *Tributes to Jonathan J. G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture* ed. by Susan L'Engle and Gerald B. Guest (London: Harvey Miller, 2006), pp. 371-84, p. 372. An image of the frontispiece can be seen in the Appendix to this thesis, Figure 1.

[29] Olivier Collet, 'Du "Manuscrit de jongleur" au "Recueil aristocratique": Réflexions sur les premières anthologies françaises', *Le Moyen Âge,* 113 (2007), 481-99, see pp. 496.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 496.

moment of the manuscript's composition. Historical records suggest that the relationship between the bishop Enguerrand de Créquy and the Canons of the Cathedral Chapter did not always run smoothly, to put it mildly.

In 1277 Cambrai's citizens rose against the Cathedral Chapter under the leadership of the provost and the bailiff of the city. The upheaval was so violent that the canons had to flee the city and seek refuge in Valenciennes, from where they excommunicated the whole city and summoned the intervention of the archbishop of Reims, Pierre Barbet (1274-1298). As witnessed by the records of the trial chaired by Pierre Barbet in person, the rioters assaulted and kidnapped the Chapter's treasurer, who was then imprisoned in the house of Baudouin de Créquy, a relative of Bishop Enguerrand de Créquy. According to our source, Baudouin's nephew and brother, Jean and Philippe de Créquy, were also directly involved in the attack against the Chapter. After breaking down what the punishment should be for the other main actors of the revolt, the trial's record reports that the members of the De Créquy family who took part to the operations were to be imprisoned in the Chapter's prisons and that once released they had to repent in front of the canons, while swearing that they would never again disrespect the Church, its rights, and privileges:

> Apries: messires Bauduins sires de Creki chevaliers ki ne fu mie a ces prises, mais il tint le tresorier pris en ses maisons, Jehans ses fius, mesire Phelippe ses freres chevaliers et Henris Declere escuiers et Blans Vilains ki a ces prises furent, enterront en le prison de capitele et i seront a le volente de capitele, et quant il isteront de le prison il venront en capitele et la jurront en apiert solempneument ke ces prises et ces tenues en prison il ne fisent mie en depit de le eglise u de capitele de Cambray ne de leur drois u de leur franchises et ke dore en avant il ne feront nule riens pas iaus u par autrui a ensiant a leur prejudisce u en leur grevance.[31]

[After: Sir Baudouin lord of Créquy who did not attend this storming (of the Chapter of the Cathedral) but who held the treasurer as captive in his house; Jean, his son, Sir Philip, his brother, knight, Henri Declere, squire, and Blans Vilains, who all were at the storming, will enter the Chapter's prisons and will stay there until the Chapter wishes. When they will be released, they must go to the Chapter, where they will publicly and solemnly swear that by assaulting the Chapter and holding the treasurer captive

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[31] Eugène Tailliar, *Recueil d'actes Des XIIe et XIIIe siècles, en langue Romane-Wallonne du Nord de la France* (Douai: Société impériale d'agriculture, sciences et arts, centrale du département du Nord (Douai). Éditeur scientifique, 1849), p. 332.

they did not intend to disrespect the Church or the Chapter of Cambrai nor their rights and privileges. They will also have to swear that henceforth they will not do anything to – or push anyone to – elicit prejudice or sufferings.]

This punishment was not deemed enough by Pierre Barbet. Indeed, Baudouin, Jean and Philippe de Créquy, together with their companions Henris Declere and Blans Vilains, were also ordered to publicly humiliate themselves: on a Sunday or on a holiday, they had to do a procession in the Church of Cambrai wearing a hooded tunic without a belt ("en cauces et en coles sans coroie") while explaining the reason for their punishment. Pierre Barbet wanted this to be replicated in the churches of Reims, Arras and Tournai.[32]

The genealogy of Enguerrand de Créquy as well as his biography have always proven difficult to reconstruct. Indeed, Edward Le Glay mentions that our Enguerrand de Créquy has long been confused with a homonymous man who was bishop of Thérouanne from 1301 to 1330. Le Glay himself posits the death of Cambrai's bishop in 1285, providing us a landmark for dating manuscript BnF fr. 1553, as we have seen above.[33] As for Enguerrand's kinships, problems hold as well. In his accurate and unchallenged *La France Pontificale*, Honoré Fisquet reports that Baudouin d'Avesnes wants Enguerrand to be the son of Baudouin de Créquy and Alix de Heilly et Rumilly, while Aubert Miraeus – who Fisquet thinks more trustworthy – declares that Enguerrand was the third son of Philippe de Créquy and Alix de Picquigni, "sœur de Gérard de Picquigni, vidame d'Amiens".[34] Thus, according to Fisquet "Baudouin de Créqui [sic] était le frère et non le père de l'évêque Enguerrand",[35] while Philippe was his father. The portion of trial's record that we have just seen, however, complicates the picture. Indeed, Baudouin seems to be the father of Jean and the brother of Philippe: "Bauduins sires de Creki chevaliers […] Jehans ses fius, mesire Phelippe ses freres chevaliers".[36] However, the document of the trial does not strike us to be extremely reliable on the subject, considering that in the first few lines it suggests that "Jehan" is at once son and nephew of "Phelippon de Creki",

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

[33] Edward Le Glay, 'Complainte romane sur la mort d'Enguerrand De Créqui', 129-44.

[34] Honoré Fisquet, *La France Pontificale (Gallia Christiana) : Histoire Chronologique et Biographique des Archevêques et Évêques qe tous les Diocèses de France Depuis l'Etablissement du Christianisme jusqu' à nos Jours, Divisée en 18 Provinces Ecclésiastiques*. Vol. Cambrai (Paris: E. Repos, 1863), pp. 169-72. It's worth reminding that Baudouin d'Avesnes (1219-1289) is the author of the *Chronique universelle*, an Old French historiography starting with the origin of the world and ending with the year 1278. Aubert Mireus was an ecclesiastical historian lived between 1573 and 1640, author of the *Rerum Belgicarum chronicon* (1636).

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 169. See also Edward Le Glay, 'Complainte romane sur la mort d'Enguerrand De Créqui', p. 132.

[36] Eugène Tailliar, *Recueil d'actes Des XIIᵉ et XIIIᵉ siècles, en langue Romane-Wallonne du Nord de la France*, p. 332.

who is also called former bailiff of Cambrai ("adont baillius de Cambray"), a role that is later attributed to a certain Jakemes de Sains[37]:

> Nous Pieres par le grasce de Diu archeveskes de Rains faisons savoir a tous ke com li capiteles de la eglise de Cambray cessat et fust issus de la cite de Cambray pour plusieurs injures faites al capitele et a le eglise en le personne dou tresorier de Cambray et des mainies daucuns canoines de Cambray er en autres manieres, par mon signeur Phelippon de Creki chevalier, Jehan fil le signeur de Creki son neveu, par monsigneur Phelippon de Creki chevalier, adont bailliu de Cambray, par Arnoul dit Coispiel provost et par les sierjans de Cambray et par leur compagnons et leur aideur et aussi par le cite u aucuns de le cite de Cambray, si com li capiteles disoit […][38]

[Us, Pierre, Arch-bishop of Reims by grace of Lord, inform everyone that as the Chapter of the Church of Cambrai stopped and left the city of Cambrai due to the many attacks addressed to the Capitol and the Church through the treasurer of Cambrai and some of the Canons of Cambrai, and perpetrated by Sir Philip of Créquy, knight, Jean, son of the Lord of Créquy his nephew, by Sir Philip of Créquy, the baillif of Cambrai, by Arnoul said Coispiel provost and by the sergeants of Cambrai and their companions and their helpers and by the citizens of Cambrai, as the Capitol reported…]

Regardless the level of accuracy with which we can reconstruct the kinship between the members of the De Créquy family involved in the developments of 1277 and our bishop Enguerrand, what is important is the fact that they played an important role in the assault against the Cathedral Chapter, to the point that one of them, Baudouin, was also deeply implicated in the kidnapping of the Chapter's treasurer.

Unfortunately, while there is a certain abundance of work on the history of Cambrai, possibly far more than is the case for other French cities of the North, exhaustive research about and reconstruction of the revolt of 1277 are yet to be conducted.[39] Henri Platelle is the only historian who dedicates a few lines to those events, suggesting that the reasons for the revolt are to be found in the longue-durée of Cambrai's "luttes communales".[40] Indeed, one of the

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[37] *Ibid.*, p 331.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 328.
[39] The diocese of Cambrai happens to be one of the most well documented, which led historians to research a lot its history. The most remarkable works are: Henry Dubrulle, *Cambrai à la fin du Moyen Âge (XIIIᵉ-XVIᵉ siècle)* (Lille: Imprimerie Lefebvre-Ducrocq, 1904); Michel Rouche, Louis Trenard et al., *Histoire De Cambrai* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1982).
[40] Henri Platelle, 'Les luttes communales et l'organisation municipale (1075-1313)', in *Histoire De Cambrai*, ed. by Louis Trenard (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1982), pp. 43-59.

earliest communes of the region is the one established in Cambrai in 1077,[41] which was soon dismantled thanks to the gory intervention of bishop Gérard II of Cambrai, to whom the doors of the city were closed, and Baudouin II of Hainaut. This attempt failed dramatically, but other and more successful ones were carried out in the following centuries. Already in 1102, a new revolt was followed by the formation of a commune that was then dismantled by King Henry V of Germany in 1107. Emperor Frederick I is also reported to have abolished a commune in 1182 while granting Cambrai's citizen the possibility to build a "paix" endowed with judicial powers. Bernard Ribémont argues that the term "paix" (Latin *pax*) was preferred over that of commune (Latin *communia*) in order not to upset the sensibility of those who felt threatened by this institution.[42] This is not the place to describe in detail the fascinating and exciting "luttes communales" that animated Cambrai and the Cambrésis from 1077 to 1313.[43] What is important to remark is that even though the commune was made and unmade several times across the centuries, Cambrai's citizens had an important role in shaping the seminal *Loi Godefroy* (*lex Godefridi*), an example of constitution promulgated into law by Godefroid de Fontaines, bishop of Cambrai from 1219-1239, which remained in place until the 16th century.[44] Issued after a period of violent tensions and fights between the bishop and Cambrai's citizens, who questioned the power and privileges of religious institutions, the *Loi Godefroy* reaffirmed the unquestionable supremacy of the bishop while, however, instituting a college of fourteen aldermen and two provosts who were to be appointed by the bishop. Therefore, if the commune was officially abolished, yet "la solidarité bourgeoise demeurait exigée avec le devoir d'entraide et la présence aux assemblées convoquées par les prévôts".[45] This prevented the spirit and the experiences of the previous communes from being erased. Indeed, even though the bishop was reassured by the dependency of these lay bodies on his power, not always did the laity approve of and support the religious counterpart – especially in case of conflicting

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[41] The oldest commune that we have records about is that of Huy, established in 1066. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[42] "Le terme de communia d'ailleurs sent le souffre et les clercs devan en parler traite cette organisation, vue comme une offense à l'Église de façon particulièrement péjorative, la communia étant par exemple qualifiée d'odiosa ou d'abominabilis". On lui préfèrera donc le mot pax, au demeurant significative d'un des vecteurs essentiels d'une charte de commune, à savoir assurer la paix et régler les conflits", Bernard Ribémont, 'Réglementation de la violence en contexte urbain (XIIᵉ-XVIᵉ siècle). L'exemple de Cambrai et du Cambrésis', in *Droit et violence dans la littérature du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Philippe Haugeard and Muriel Ott (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 219-38, p. 222. It is interesting to see that, even though the establishment of the commune led to the gruesome slaughter of their supporters, yet they start to raise as institutions that are to ensure internal and external peace and harmony in order to create the conditions for trade and economy to flourish. See *Ibid.*, p. 219-20.

[43] For a more complete overview see of course Henri Platelle, 'Les luttes communales et l'organisation municipale (1075-1313)', pp. 43-59.

[44] Bernard Ribémont, 'Réglementation de la violence en contexte urbain (XIIᵉ-XVIᵉ siècle). L'exemple de Cambrai et du Cambrésis', p. 221.

[45] Henri Platelle, 'Les luttes communales et l'organisation municipale (1075-1313)', p. 54.

interests. Platelle argues that the frictions that have always characterised the complex relationship between the laity and ecclesiastics exploded into ferocious and overt conflicts especially when another religious institution, the Cathedral Chapter, started to gain more power, becoming as influential and authoritative as the bishop. According to the historian, what led to Cambrai's citizens revolts was a combination of old and new factors. The generally approved and accepted principle of tax exemptions for ecclesiastics and their vassals – which had always been fought by the laity – entered in contradiction with the increase of taxes charged on the citizens, who thus rebelled. Platelle does not expand further on these events, nor does he provide further information on their political configuration and alliances, but he suggests that in the centripetal triangle of competing forces constituted by the Chapter, the citizens and the bishop, the latter used to take the part alternatively of one or the others following his own interests. Platelle's analysis provides us with all the elements to suggest that in the revolt of 1277 Bishop Enguerrand de Créquy was supporting the members of his family involved in the assault against the Cathedral Chapter.

This argument proves persuasive enough to believe that it is highly unlikely that the eulogy for the death of Bishop Enguerrand de Créquy would find a place in a codex conceived and compiled for a Canon of the Cathedral. Conversely, however, it would be absolutely consistent with the contemporary socio-political climate of Cambrai if manuscript BnF fr. 1553 was to please someone belonging to the urban élite, as Collet argues.

Besides singling out a perspective audience for manuscript BnF fr. 1553, that is the urban élite, Collet proposes that the manuscript represents an actual intellectual model for a "preudome du XIIIe siècle"; following up to the discussion that has been carried out in the previous section on multiple-text manuscripts, it can be confirmed that manuscript BnF fr. 1553 represents indeed the one-volume library of a *preudome* of the 13th century.

Collet's argument provides the present analysis with solid basis. Indeed, his remarks point to the fact that there actually is a project underlaying the organisation of the manuscript, because it was supposed to serve a specific purpose – that is the education and perhaps the entertainment of a specific social class. Far from displaying a collection of random texts roughly brought together, manuscript BnF fr. 1553 represents a structured and refined object; it is the achievement of a coherent intellectual project that saw a reasoned and careful selection and disposition of texts.

This consideration suggests that if we really want to understand the nature of a text such as *K*, then we cannot neglect its manuscript context. Indeed, we are invited to look at *K* not only as a witness of the Old French tradition of the *SSR*, but also as one manifestation of a broader and

coherently conceived intellectual project – of which *K* is at once part and expression. It becomes therefore important to study *K* at once as a testimony of the Old French *SSR* as well as part of a coherently disposed series of texts. Such a "syntactic" approach has two main objectives: the first, and probably less original, is that of respecting the historicity of the text, embracing and not surrendering to the idea that "mouvance" is indeed an intrinsic aspect of medieval literature and its transmission; the second is to show that the textual environment in which a text appears has a crucial effect on its meaning, or the array of meanings that a text can bear.

It is not the first time, however, that manuscript BnF fr. 1553 is approached this way – that is considering a codicological section of the manuscript in order to clarify and expand the meaning and interpretation of a single text. Valeria Russo has recently argued that in the section D^2 (f. 437r-524v) it is possible to observe a series of texts that are all coherent in representing the same moralising idea of love.[46] In her article, Russo follows the pathway of the reception of the anonymous *Dou vrai chiment d'amours* by looking at the texts accompanying its transmissions, thereby proposing a new understanding of its generic nature.[47] Commenting on the series of texts surrounding the *Dou vrai chiment d'amours*, Russo argues that:

> Cette succession thématique dévoile une logique de fond qui implique […] la constitution d'un *exemplum* positif d'amour : le discours amoureux fournit l'idéal éthique d'un rapport humain respectueux de l'orthodoxie (cf. *VraiChim* et *Dou dieu d'amours*) et l'exemplarité féminine incarnée par la Vierge soutient la *pars construens* de la critique humaine.[48]

Once again – and this time in a less theoretical way – a case is made for the structural coherence of manuscript 1553, which invites us to see if patterns can be observed in the section of the manuscript containing our *K* and what these pattern would be. It is worth mentioning here too that, as Russo suggests, the compiler (or indeed whoever conceived the manuscript's structure) might have had a good understanding of the texts and their content.[49]

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[46] Valeria Russo, 'Le discours amoureux dans le contexte manuscrit (à partir du *Vrai Chiment d'Amours*)', *Medioevi. Rivista di letterature e culture medievali* 2019, pp. 59-94.

[47] The ultimate goal of Russo is clearly put, she is willing to "savoir quel type d'amour habite quel type de tradition attestée par ces grands objets qui rassemblent tant de textes". *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[49] "Il faudrait croire […] à la possibilité que le compilateur du ms. de la BnF connaissait bien le contenu et la visée du VraiChim" *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Thus, drawing on Collet's proposal of seeing in manuscript 1553 an intellectual model representing the emerging bourgeoisie of the North, and on Russo's conclusions on the series of texts appearing in section D^2, in the following lines the focus will be shifted to the third codicological unit, C, of manuscript 1553, of which *K* occupies an extensive part (f. 338v-367v). Departing from the conclusions reached in the previous chapter – the presence of an unexpected representation of the Empress and female characters in the tales – the following lines will be devoted to justifying the presence of those traits by looking at the manuscript context in which our text appears.

Version *K* and its place in manuscript BnF fr. 1553

K is placed in the third codicological section of manuscript 1553 (fos. 288-383v). The other texts appearing here are:

> f. 288v-325v: *Roman de la Violette* by Gerbert de Montreuil
>
> f. 325v-338r: *Wistasse la Moine*
>
> f. 338v-367v: *Sept sages de Rome*
>
> f. 367r-379v: *Mahomet* by Alexandre du Pont
>
> f. 379v-393v: *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur*[50]

An extensive analysis of the texts appearing here with *K* (using critical editions and the manuscript when possible)[51], will show whether these texts share similar traits with one another, and if so, what those might be. This will put us in a better position to understand what the compiler or patron's reasoning for including them might have been. This approach will then facilitate our study towards an in-depth understanding of *K* in two main ways:

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[50] According to Lepage, the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur* begun being copied in the codicological unit C, by the scribe who was working on it, but from fol. 384, section D (= D^1) starts, and the copy continued under the hand of a new scribe.

[51] This was particularly easy with the *Wistasse le Moine* and the *Mahomet*, which are relatively short texts appearing only in manuscript BnF fr. 1553. I had to resort to *Roman de la violette ou de Gérard de Nevers, en vers, du XIIIe siècle, par Gibert de Montreuil*, ed. by Francisque Michel (Paris: Silvestre, 1834). To the best of my knowledge, the verse version of the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur* currently lacks a critical edition, but I had the opportunity to access to the diplomatic and interpretative transcription of the text in BnF fr. 1553 produced in the framework of the research project Hypercodex (2005-2007) of the University of Geneve. Here I express my gratitude to Prof. Olivier Collet for the kindness with which he shared with me the results of the research.

- It will be possible to anchor the interpretation of this verse version of the Old *French Sept Sages* to the history of its reception. As we have argued, considering the materiality of a text's transmission can enable us to place it in a particular cultural and historical environment – for *K* this means that we will observe the textual changes across the prose and verse versions seeking to explain them by looking at the broader context surrounding the reception of *K*.

- Departing from the conclusions that will be reached after the jointed analysis of *K* and its manuscript, it will be possible to shift the attention to the broader Old French and even Latin tradition of the *SSR*, proposing a hitherto unexplored interpretation of this group of texts.

Roman de la Violette

The *Roman de la Violette* (hereinafter *Violette*) was composed between 1227 and 1229 by a certain Gerbert de Montreuil, who is deemed to be the same Gerbert, author of a 17090-verse continuation of Chrétien de Troyes *Conte du Graal*.[52] The *Violette* is one of the most representative works of what Paris first called "cycle de la gageure" (the wager cycle). With this name, Paris refers to plots that follow this narrative pattern: "an innocent woman is falsely accused and later vindicated".[53] Dedicated to its commissioner, Marie de Ponthieu (ca. 1190-1250), the *Violette* is interesting for its characteristic courtly setting as well as the many interpolations of lyric poetry. In its 6654 octosyllabic rhymed verses, *Violette* tells the story of a knight, Gerart de Nevers, who is in love with the most beautiful and respectable lady of the court, Euriaut, whom he is going to marry. One day, Gerart brags about Euriaut's love and fidelity provoking the jealousy of the evil Liziart, who claims that he will be able to seduce Euriaut and make love to her. Certain of Euriaut's virtue, Gerart accepts the provocation and bets his belongings and estates. Liziart tries immediately to seduce Euriaut, who refuses him. As he realises that he will never be able to corrupt the chaste lady, Liziart sets up a plan: he convinces Euriaut's mischievous maid, Gondrée, to collaborate with him and together they

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[52] Michel Zink, *Le Moyen Âge. Littérature Française* (Nancy: Pr. Univers., 1990), p. 75.

[53] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 128. Paris summarises it better: "Un homme se porte garant de la vertu d'une femme à l'encontre d'un homme qui se fait fort de la séduire; par suite d'apparences trompeuses, la femme semble avoir en effet cédé au séducteur, mais enfin son innocent est reconnue". Gaston Paris, 'Le cycle de la « gageure »', *Romania,* 128 (1903), 481-551, p.481. Other Old French works that can be considered part of the wager cycle are: *Le Roman du Comte de Poitiers*, *Li Contes du Roi Flore et de la Belle Jehane*, *Le Roman de la rose ou Guillume de Dole* by Jean Renart.

contrive a ruse. Gondrée pierces a tiny hole on the wall of the room where Euriaut baths and at the first occasion, Liziart spies on naked Euriaut, on whose right breast he spots a little violet-shaped birthmark. The plan works: right in front of the barons and knights gathered at the court, Liziart declares that he made love to Euriaut – the evidence he brings is the fact that he knows about her birthmark. Gerart is ruined, he loses everything and takes Euriaut away in the forest in order to kill her and thus avenge the shame received. Gerart, however, does not manage to murder his beloved Euriaut, who he abandons to the dangers of the forest while he rides his horse back to the court. Once back, Gerart overhears a conversation between Liziart and his servant, where he learns the truth: Euriaut is actually innocent and remained faithful all along. At this point the quest starts to find Euriaut and win her love back. Of course, everything ends well: Gerart is able to find Euriaut and marry her, while the evil Liziart is destroyed.

Even though indirect sources suggest a good spread of this amusing romance during the Middle Ages, besides manuscript BnF fr. 1553 the text is today conserved only in three other manuscripts:

- New York, Morgan Library and Museum, M.036
- Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits, fr. 01374
- Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, fr. 4° v. XIV. 000

In manuscript BnF fr. 01374, *Violette* appears together with *chansons de geste* as well as *romans*[54], while in the Saint Petersburg's manuscript it is accompanied by a *dit d'amour*, that is Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère*. In the New York manuscript, the *Violette* appears as the only text.

As for manuscript 1553, the presence of *Violette* in the third section of the manuscript is particularly significant for two main reasons. First, it establishes a narrative space that is closer to the *roman* than it is to the devotional and didactic literature that characterises section B, where lives of the saints and several other religious and didactic texts are copied. Second, *Violette* mirrors *K* in terms of plot.

We will first discuss the first point: the *Violet*'s position in manuscript BnF fr. 1553 marks a new generic space. Indeed, the preceding section B (f. 163-287v) starts with Goussin

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[54] The texts appear in this order: *Parise la duchesse* (fos. 1-21); Chretien de Troyes's *Cliges* (fos. 21-65); *Vie de saint Eustache* (fos. 65-75); *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur* (fos. 75-90); Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube's *Girart de Vienne* (fos. 91-132); Gerbert de Montreuil's *Roman de la Violette* (fos. 133-173); Aimon de Varennes's *Florimont* (fos. 173 - ?).

de Metz's *Image du monde* (f. 163r - 197v), and follows with Gui de Cambrai's *Barlaam and Josaphat* (f. 198 - 254v) and a short prose excerpt from the chronicle of Baudouin d'Avesnes on Pierre de la Broce (f. 254v) before continuing with a series of religious texts: the *Vie de saint Brendan* (f. 254v - 266v); *Vie des saintes Marie et Marthe* (f. 269v - 271v); *Evangile de l'Enfance* (f. 271v - 285v); *Songes de Daniel* (f. 285v - 286v); *Comment Dieu forma Adam* (f. 286v - 287v); *Adam et Eve* (f. 286v - 287v); *Vie de sainte Anne* (f. 287v). With its markedly courtly character, the *Violette* breaks the flow of religious texts and inscribes the new codicological unit in the domain of the *roman*. Therefore, in manuscript BnF fr. 1553, the *Violette* becomes the perfect joint-text that at once marks the rupture with the series of didactic and religious texts of the previous section while establishing a thematic and generic continuity with the general educative tone of the compilation.

Besides its role as a joint-text, the *Violette* also stands in dialectic opposition with *K* in terms of plot. In both plots there is a woman accused of adultery, lewdness, insincerity – a woman whose behaviour jeopardises the good name of the man who loves her. The obvious difference is that while in the *Violette* a good example is set (Euriaut is steadfast in her virtue and actually innocent), in *K* the Empress is in fact guilty, and with her sinister wit tries to convince the Emperor to condemn his son to death. Hence, in this section of manuscript BnF fr. 1553, an example of "good woman" (i.e. Euriaut) is juxtaposed to the example of a "bad" one (i.e. the *SSR*'s Empress).

If we believe that our manuscript was organically organised, then we can argue that the principle behind this disposition follows rhetorical precepts – the polar distinction between these two models of women is indeed dialectical.

Studying the place occupied by *les arts d'aimer* in multiple-texts manuscripts, where they are often accompanied by *fabliaux* as well as satiric and religious texts, Amy Heneveld observes that some codices are composed in accordance with the guidelines of rhetoric; in particular, one of the principles that seems to lie behind the organisation of texts is indeed that of dialectic, which reflects the "goût de contraste si répandu au moyen âge".[55] Heneveld builds her working thesis departing from the studies by Sylvie Lefèvre and Weigh Azzam on manuscript BnF fr. 837, in which both scholars are startled by the proximities of texts that are in contrast with one another in terms of theme and genre – so much so that Lefèvre declares that when leafing through the folios, "on a l'impression parfois qu'au fil des pages le scribe enfile une perle

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[55] Amy Heneveld, '« Chi commence d'amours », ou commencer pour finir : La place des arts d'Aimer dans les manuscrits-recueils du XIIIᵉ siècle', in *Le recueil au Moyen Âge. Le Moyen Âge central*, ed. by Olivier Collet and Yasmina Foehr-Janssens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 139-56, p. 144.

rouge, une perle noire pour fabriquer une sorte de rosaire paradoxal"[56]. Heneveld contents that just as rhetoricians show a tendency to discuss a topic by presenting the topic itself and its opposite – according to a dialectic mindset – in the case of *les arts d'aimer*, "les recueils refléteraient alors ce même mécanisme en montrant à la fois, par exemple, comment aimer et comment ne pas aimer".[57] At any rate, the moment of *dispositio* is already one of the stages – the second – towards the creation of a discourse that is informed by the principles of rhetoric, and it is tantalising to imagine compilers organising manuscripts following those criteria, suggests Heneveld, who concludes: "Perçus comme de longs discours hétérogènes, les recueils auraient ainsi été organisés suivant des indications fournies par les traités de rhétorique".[58] All things being equal, we can think of the presence of *Violette* and *K* in the same codicological section in similar terms: while Euriaut represents a good model of woman, capable of loving her man with steadfast will, *K*'s Empress would rather embody a bad model – the deplorable type of woman that should thus be avoided.

Going from the organization of the manuscript to the *dispositio* of content in a single text, a very similar approach can be observed in another work from the Middle Ages that is frequently mentioned together with the *Seven Sages*, that is Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis*. This collection of *exempla* is organised around a dialogue between a master and his disciple and dates back to the 12th century[59]. The *Disciplina clericalis* is interesting for the startling presence of narratives coming from the most different sources, ranging from classics to folklore, and when reading this collection of 34 *exempla*, not only it is predictably easy to come across misogynistic claims, but we also find a section (from exemplum IX to XIV) that is overtly dedicated to warning men against evil women. Surprisingly, however, this section opens and closes with a significant caveat against the generalisation of women's behaviour. When elicited by his disciple to tell *exempla* about the dishonesty of women, the master admits that even though he will do so yet he fears that a "naïve reader" ("simpli animo legens") will

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[56] Cited in *Ibid*., p. 143. See of course, Sylvie Lefèvre, 'Le Recueil et l'œuvre unique. Mobilité et figement', in *Mouvances et Jointures. Du manuscrit au texte médiéval*, ed. by Miléna Mikhaïlova (Orléans: Paradigme, 2005), pp. 203-07. See also Weigh Azzam, 'Un recueil dans le recueil. Rutebeuf dans le manuscrit Bnf F. Fr. 837', in *Mouvances et Jointures. Du manuscrit au texte médiéval*, ed. by Miléna Mikhaïlova (Orléans: Paradigme, 2005), pp. 193-201.
[57] Amy Heneveld, '« Chi commence d'amours », ou commencer pour finir : La place des arts d'Aimer dans les manuscrits-recueils du XIIIᵉ siècle' p. 154.
[58] *Ibid*., p. 153. Notoriously, the five canons of classical rhetoric are *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *pronuntiatio*.
[59] Petrus Alfonsi was a Jew cleric converted to Christendom in 1106, he died around 1140. He took the name Alfonsi in honour of his protector, Alfonso I, of whom Petrus was the personal doctor.

commit the error of thinking that the mischievousness of women could affect them too.[60] If the meaning of this passage can seem rather obscure, it is clarified by the comment to the last *exemplum* representing an evil woman, *Puteus* (*Disciplina clericalis* XIV).[61] To the disciple's atonement in front of women's wicked cleverness, the master replies:

> *Non debes credere omnes mulieres esse tales, quoniam magna castitas atque magna bonitas in multis reperitur mulieribus, et scias in bona muliere bonam societatem reperiri posse, bonaque mulier fidelis custos est et bona domus*[62]

[You should not think that every woman is like that, for in some of them great chastity and goodness can be found, and know that in a good woman a good partner can be found, and that a good woman is a faithful caretaker and a good household]

After this remark, the disciple asks the master whether he knows an *exemplum* of a woman who uses her intelligence for the good, the master tells it and afterwards moves on to the topic of the philosophers' intelligence.

Even though there is a disparity between the number of *exempla* dedicated to "evil women" and those about "good women", even here the dialectic principle of argumentation seems to have been acknowledged as well as respected. Furthermore, the section dedicated to women opens and closes with *exempla* of good ones.

The fact that the Euriaut is presented as a model to follow should not surprise us because manuscript BnF fr. 1553 is not the only codex in which the *Violette* is used to provide an example of a good woman. Indeed, in manuscript 0468 from the Bibliothèque municipale of Tours, which contains a collection of *exempla* written by a Dominican in the 15th century, the Violette appears under the rubric "Des dames nobles".[63]

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[60] *Legi in libris philosophorum quibus praecipiunt ut ab ingenio feminae perversae custodiat se homo. […] Sed tu si super ingenio illius sive de fabulis sive de proverbiis aliquid memoriter tenes, vellem renarrando me instrueres. Magister: Faciam, inquit, tui causa libenter. Sed vereor ne si qui nostra simplici animo legentes carmina quae de mulierem artibus ad earum correptionem et tuam et aliorum instructionem scribimus viderint […] aerum nequitiam in nos redundare credant.* Pietro Alfonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, ed. by Orazio D'Angelo (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2009).

[61] *Ibid*., pp. 80-82. It is important to remind that the story *Puteus* appears also in all the versions of the Old French *SSR*.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 82.

[63] Gerbert de Montreuil, *Le Roman de la Violette*, ed. by Mireille Demaules (Paris: Stock, 1992), pp. 207-209. Demaules warns that even though the manuscript was assembled in the 15th century, the *exempla* were already circulating around the second half of the 13th century.

Now, however, a caveat must be made. By saying that the *Disciplina clericalis* styles an example of "good woman" alongside evil ones, I am obviously not trying to make a case for the pro-women stance of Petrus Alfonsi – nor do I think that this example of "good woman" is unproblematic. I am rather trying to point out that the disposition of the woman-related *exempla* in the *Disciplina clericalis* follows a dialectic structure: an alternative model is proposed which is dialectically opposed to what is deemed to be the evil one – even though always consistent with the misogynist patriarchal spirit permeating the Middle Ages, as we shall see shortly. I suggest, therefore, that the same kind of dialectic structure is present in this section of manuscript 1553: while *Violette* represents a trustworthy, virtuous woman unjustly accused of having given in to temptation, *K* styles the exact opposite example, that is an evil and selfish woman who tries to destroy her stepson and, with him, her husband and heritage.

Years of feminist scholarship in Old French literature have warned us against the dangers of considering unproblematic a certain description of women as caring, loving, selfless and faithful. Even the alleged idealisation accorded to women by troubadour lyrics has been exposed by feminist readings as actually a reproduction of the patriarchal order, thereby outdoing the "optimistic" views of many critics of the 19th and 20th century. Indeed, where the latter saw a literary portrayal of women's dignity and nobility, feminist critics from the 1970s onwards have identified a passivisation of woman's roles; where early critics saw a praise of women's virtue, feminist readers have shown how those virtues – fidelity, abnegation, self-sacrifice – were related more to men's social recognition than to only women alone. Ultimately, feminist readers have unmasked the "homosocial" character of those female virtues: the good reputation of the man rests on the repression of his woman's desire, will and self-determination. This is definitely the case of the *Violette*, as the social recognition of Gerart depends entirely on Euriaut's chastity and fidelity – that is on Gerart's capacity to contain and control Euriaut's sexuality. This conclusion is convincingly reached by Krueger who, commenting some texts of the Old French "cycle de la gageure", shows how, far from being a proof of the high moral values accorded to historical women, these plots are perfect examples of the "displacement of woman's sexual and reproductive autonomy". Krueger continues:

> Each story revolves in some way around the threat female sexuality poses to chivalric honor, a threat whose ultimate realisation would produce illegitimate male heirs. The

heroine's role is that of an object of exchange between two knights who use her as a testing ground for their own honor.[64]

With Krueger's pertinent reading in mind and with awareness about its implications, it is not however inconsiderate to view in the juxtaposition between the *Violette*'s Euriaut and K's Empress two competing models of woman that were widespread during the Middle Ages, and that can easily remind us of the dichotomy between Eve and the Virgin Mary. Even though it replicates patriarchal patterns, the *Violette* stands in a blatant dialectical opposition to *K* because it exalts the virtues of a woman who is deemed good, thereby proposing a model that all women should follow.

The juxtaposition of these two contrasting examples of women, Euriaut and the Empress, seems however to be disturbed by the presence of another text between them, the *Wistasse le Moine*. As we shall see more in depth in the following section, this text is not at all concerned with women, who are rather marginal. The spotlight is all taken by its protagonist, Eustache, and the pranks with which he tormented his feudal Lord, Renaud de Dammartin. The latter, I argue, is the *fil rouge* that links such different texts as the *Violette*, a courtly roman, and the *Wistasse le Moine*, a melange of literary genres and sources.

The *Violette* is extremely connected to the Dammartin family, for Gerbert de Montreuil dedicates it to Marie de Ponthieu, who was also his patron and the wife of Simon de Dammartin. According to the analysis of Krause, Marie in person demanded Gerbert de Montreuil for the composition of this poem, which was to serve a political purpose – that is the social and political rehabilitation of Simon, who had lost rights on his family's lands.[65] Simon's crime was to have supported his brother Renaud de Dammartin, the traitor who sought alliance with John Lackland against Philip August, king of France. After the defeat of the English coalition in the battle of Bouvines, Simon was exiled and even though Marie, an only child, was supposed to inherit the county of Ponthieu in 1221, at the death of her father Guillaume of Ponthieu, the land was confiscated by the French crown, which entrusted its administration to

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[64] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 131.

[65] Kathy Krause, 'From mothers to daughters: Literary patronage as political work in Ponthieu', in *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100–1400. Moving Beyond the Exceptionalist Debate*, ed. by Heather J. Tanner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 113-34. On the subject see also: John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert De Montreuil, 1190-1230* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

the bailiff of Amiens.[66] While Marie was able to regain her lands in 1225, after petitioning Louis VIII, Simon could not make return before 1230/31, after the death of Louis VIII.[67] According to Krause, then, Marie asked for the production of this work in order to inspire clemency for her exiled husband Simon, who should be identified in the knight Gerart de Nevers. Indeed, the fictional Gerart bought into a foolish wager, which he lost because he was deceived by despicable traitors; however, Gerart has the possibility to redeem himself, regain Euriaut's love as well as the county of Nevers. The poem would then suggest that while Simon failed the French crown, he should still be given the same opportunity of redemption that Gerart had.[68]

In a carefully organised manuscript such as BnF fr. 1553, the proximity between the *Violette* and the *Wistasse le Moine* should not be seen as a mere coincidence. When introducing the manuscript, it has been noted that many critics identified the presence of very localised texts, all linked to nowadays Picardy if not directly to the Cambrésis. The protagonist of the *Wistasse le Moine*, Eustache, was a famous pirate from the region of Boulogne and his opposition to Renaud de Dammartin must have been known in the area, especially considering that it was later consigned to literature. Marie de Ponthieu's issues with the French crown were certainly not concealed – especially considering that the bishop Enguerrand de Créquy, whose eulogy appears in the manuscript, was related to Marie de Ponthieu, as Krause notes:

> "En fait, il se trouve que l'évêque déploré, Enguerrand de Créquy, était cousin de Marie de Ponthieu : sa mère, Aalis de Picquigny, était cousine germaine de Marie. En plus, les seigneurs de Boulogne à l'époque du pirate, Eustache de Boulogne (pendu par les Anglais en 1217), étaient Ide et Renaud de Dammartin, lequel était le frère de Simon de Dammartin, mari de Marie de Ponthieu"[69]

Violette's position in the manuscript is certainly not fortuitous. While inscribing the new manuscript section in a new generic context, the *Violette* shows clear connections (dialectic or

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[66] *Ibid*., pp. 118-119. For the historical reconstruction Krause draws on Henri Malo, *Un grand feudataire. Renaud de Dammartin et la coalition de Bouvines. Contribution à l'étude du règne de Philippe-Auguste* (Paris: Champion, 1898).

[67] *Ibid*., p. 119.

[68] According to Krause, other text commissioned by Marie de Ponthieu served the same political purpose, in particular the *Continuation de Perceval* attributed to Gerbert and the *Dit des Quatre Sereurs*. See Kathy Krause, 'From Mothers to Daughters: Literary Patronage as Political Work in Ponthieu', pp. 113-34.

[69] Kathy Krause, 'Géographie et héritage : Les manuscrits du *Roman de la Violette*', Babel (Mont-de-Marsan) (2007), 81-99.

historic) with other texts nearby, that is *K* and the *Wistasse le Moine* – whose amusing story we are about to discover.

Wistasse le Moine

Wistasse le Moine (hereinafter *Wistasse*) is a thirteenth-century anonymous text that came down to us only in manuscript 1553, where it occupies around thirteen folios (325r-338r). Critics usually refer to this text as a *roman*, even though our Monk does not retain anything of the valiant courtly hero of the genre.[70] In fact, *Wistasse* is often mentioned amidst texts such as the *Roman de Renart*, *Fouke Fitz Waryn* and *Robin Hood Ballads* – which are all linked by the fact that their protagonists are all "tricksters" or outlaws challenging authority and circumventing it. Another aspect complicating the definition of the *Wistasse* in terms of genre is the fact that it blends and mixes narrative materials coming from the most diverse sources: historical chronicle, literature, oral and folkloric accounts.

The *Wistasse* narrates the deeds of a historical man, Eustache Busket, who lived around 1170 and 1217 and whose story has been carefully reconstructed by Conlon.[71] Eustache was born in the village of Courset, in the northern region of Boulogne, to a Lord, Baudouin Busket. According to Conlon, Eustache spent part of his youth somewhere in the Mediterranean, learning the Italian art of naval combat. It was around 1190 that Eustache's life changed abruptly. There are in fact historical records of a trial in which Eustaches's father, Baudouin Busket, was involved against a certain Hainfrois de Hersinghen – and which ended with Hainfrois ambushing and murdering Baudoin. Eustache sought immediately justice from his Lord Renaud de Dammartin, the Count of Boulogne, who decided to resolve the dispute by calling a trial by combat. As his champion died, Eustache did not manage to avenge his father's death – which he would however do later. Records show that notwithstanding their divergences and because of his social status, Eustache became Renaud de Dammartin's seneschal until Hainfrois de Hersinghen accused Eustache to be stealing from Dammartin – which led Eustache to flee away and hide in the forests around the area of Boulogne. The *Wistasse* focuses on all the tricks and ruses with which – after his escape – Eustache tormented his Lord, thereby

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[70] Margherita Lecco has no doubt on the romance nature of the *Wistasse* "in quanto raccolta di brevi episodi di *peripezia*". Margherita Lecco, 'Memorie epiche in *Wistasse le Moine* (Ancora su *Wistasse* e le *Chansons de Geste*)', *Romance studies: a journal of the University of Wales,* 31 (2013), 67-83, p. 67.

[71] D. J. Conlon, *Li Romans De Witasse Le Moine : Roman Du Treizième Siècle* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 14-22. For other historical reconstructions see also Glyn S. Burgess, *Two Medieval Outlaws : Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) and Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo. (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2013).

quenching his thirst for revenge. As we have already mentioned, the description of Eustache's outlaw life is imbued with a mix of motives coming from *chansons de geste*, *romans* and folklore, making the *Wistasse* a sort of "in-between" text for which it is hard to find a generic collocation. After the description of the several pranks played on Renaud de Dammartin, we find Eustache in England, serving King John Lackland – who offers to Eustache thirty ships that our hero uses to rob and plunder French ships across the English Channel. When the Lord of Boulogne, Renaud de Dammartin, breaks with the King of France, Philip August, and goes to England to seek alliance with John Lackland, Eustache fears for his life and thus moves back to France. Here, Eustache tries and manages to make an alliance with Philip August, who is happy to have the pirate by his side. Even though Eustache is thought guilty of plotting with the English army when Philip August's fleet is defeated in Damme, nobody dares accusing Eustache, who continues to fight against the Englishmen. It is during one of these naval battles, the battle of Sandwich of 1217 to be exact, that the Englishmen manage to destroy Eustache's vessel and murder him. In this regard, the text closes with a moralising couplet: "Nus ne puet vivre longhement / Qui tos jors a mal faire entent" ("Those who always do bad cannot live long").[72]

It has already been mentioned above that the *Wistasse* can be thought of as an "in-between" text, for it is a lively mix of different literary genres as well as sources. In particular, there are two domains mixing up and animating the narrative: history and fiction. This is interesting especially if we think that other texts appearing in the same codicological section of manuscript BnF fr. 1553, share the same characteristic. The *Mahomet* and the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur* focus on historical subject, that is respectively the life of Muhammad and the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Vespasian – to this we shall return later.

This is not the place for an in-depth and complete description of the *Wistasse*, for which we refer to the relatively recent studies of its keenest reader, Margherita Lecco.[73] For the scope of the present analysis, the most important observations about the *Wistasse* are those of Cristina Azuela who, seeking to clarify the narrative role of Eustache, focuses her attention on the surprising presence of a sort of "second prologue" in the text.[74] She remarks that in the *Wistasse*

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[72] Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo, p. 141, vv. 2307/2308.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] Cristina Azuela, 'Was Eustace Diabolical? Magic and Devilry in *Le Roman De Wistasse Le Moine'*, in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2017), pp. 337-77, pp. 340-341.

two distinct descriptions of the Monk can be identified, respectively the magician and the outlaw, which correspond to two different parts of the text.

In the first instance (from v. 1 to v. 280) Eustache is described as an evil magician, a wizard trained by Satan in person; these lines narrate the mischiefs he commits by using magic.[75] The tavern scene is a good example. During his journey back from Toledo, Eustache and three of his fellows stop in Montferrant in a tavern run by a woman innkeeper. Here the brigade gets food and wine, but when the bill arrives, the innkeeper does not want to accept their money, as they are willing to pay with currency that is only valid in Tours or Paris ('Wistasces n'avoit nul denier / De la monnoie dou païs / Fors que tornois et paresis')[76]. As a result, the innkeeper doubles the price and: "Por .III. sols c'orent despendus / Paierent il .VI. sols ou plus" ("Even though they spent three shillings, they ended up paying six or more"). Eustache immediately avenges this outrage by casting a spell on the innkeeper. Before leaving, he tosses a bewitched seed on the tavern's floor and the innkeeper starts immediately to act foolishly: she gets naked, opens the barrels with the novel wine – it is the grape harvest season ("Che fu en unes moustisons")[77] – and invites all men in. Turmoil takes over the tavern, whose floor is covered in wine that eventually flows in the streets, attracting the attention of women and men who get undressed as they enter the tavern: men pull down their trousers, while women pull their skirts up to their belt or navel.[78] Once the citizens of the town realise that the disorder was caused by the four strangers, they start to run after them, but with another magic trick (a river appears and forces the pursuers to withdraw) the brigade is able to confuse and stop them.

In the second instance (from v. 280 to the final v. 2307), our antihero Eustache removes his magician clothes to take on those of the wit, the outlaw. The narration of the several pranks Eustache plays on his Lord and other authority figures puts emphasis on the resourcefulness of clever Eustache and the helplessness of the stupid counterparts – with no mention of Eustache's magic skills. A good example – which also demonstrates the lively tone of the narration and its linguistic realism – is the passage concerning Eustache's escape from England back to Boulogne, in which he disguises himself as an English minstrel. As we have already mentioned above, when Renaud de Dammartin is in England seeking alliance with John Lackland against Philip August, Eustache tries to go back to Boulogne undercover. Dressed up as a wandering

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[75] See the Appendix, Figure 3.
[76] Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo, p. 88, vv. 56-58.
[77] *Ibid*., p. 88, v. 47.
[78] "Mais nus n'osoit laiens entrer / Ki ne seust son cul moustrer / A chascun de chiaus qui entroit" (Nobody would enter without showing up his or her bottom to everyone inside) *Ibid*. p. 88, vv. 85-87.

minstrel, he sneaks on a ship and as a merchant invites him to get off, Eustache reassures the man that he will pay with five pounds ("estrelins") or his viol for the journey ("Je vous donrai por le passage / .V. estrelins u ma ïiele.").[79] So the merchant asks the false minstrel what he is able to sing, and Eustache replies that he knows all sorts of songs, as he is now coming back from Nohubelland (Northumberland) after having already spent five years in Ireland – that is the reason why his face looks so pale: he has been drinking only beer, and now he is happy to go back drinking some good French wine ("Je vieng devers Nohubellande, / .V. ans ai esté en Irlande; / Tant ai beü de la goudale / Tout ai le vis et taint et pale. / Or m'en revois boire des vins / A Argentuel ou a Prouvins").[80] At this point, the merchant asks the false minstrel what his name is, and Eustache replies thusly:

> "Sire, j'ai a non Mauferas,
>
> Englisseman de Canestuet.
>
> Ÿa, ÿa, Codidouet!'
>
> Dist l'estrumiaus: "Tu ies Engles?
>
> Franchois cuidoie que fuissies.
>
> Ses tu ore nule chançon?
>
> - Oïe. D'Agoullant et d'Aimon;
>
> Je sai de Blanchandin la somme,
>
> Si sai de Flourenche de Romme.
>
> Il n'a el mont nule chançon
>
> Dont n'aie oï ou note ou son.
>
> Je vous esbainoiasses bien,
>
> Mais ne chanteroie pour rien,
>
> Car ceste mers molt m'espavente;
>
> Je n'i poroie metre entente
>
> A dire chose ki vausist."[81]

["Sir, my name is Mauferas, and I am an Englishman from Gansthead. Yes, yes, by God". The helmsman asked: "Are you English? I thought you were French! Do you know any song?" "Yes! I know a song about Agoullant and Aimon; I know the story of Blanchadin and also that of Flourenche de

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[79] *Ibid*., p. 138, vv. 2186/87.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 138, vv. 2193/2198.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 138, vv. 2200-2215.

Romme. There is not in the world a song of which I have never heard either the music or melody. I would amuse you, but I am not going to sing: the sea frightens me so much that I would not be able to!]

These verses can be deemed representative of the description of Eustache's pranks in the "second part" of the *Wistasse* because here we see Eustache sorting himself out of a situation of potential danger (the merchant could in fact give him to Renaud's men in exchange for money), just by using his cunning and cleverness. Thus, in this case, Eustache is far from being the evil and sinister person, holding a mysterious knowledge – as happens in the first part of the text. On the contrary, in this "second part", Eustache uses his intelligence to rob and ridicule his Lord, Renaud de Dammartin, or to satisfy his needs (in this case a lift to Boulogne). Furthermore, the narration of Eustache's pranks is conceived in order to generate laughs in the audience, not fear. In the passage mentioned above, disguised as a minstrel Eustache presents himself as "Mauferas", which must have not gone unnoticed by the audience. In fact, in the word "Mauferas" we can recognise a compound word: "mau" + "feras", which can be understood as "I am going to act badly" or "I am going to do wrong". The fact that the audience is already aware of the disguise, creates an ironic effect, as the untrustworthiness of the fake minstrel can be identified by the name revealed to the merchant. The hilarity of this passage is reinforced by Eustache's attempt to sound like an "Englisseman": "Ÿa, ÿa, Codidouet", he says to his clueless interlocutor. This provokes laughter in the audience because the word "Codidouet" reproduces what was probably understood as a typical English adjuration by a medieval "francophone" speaker – as suggested by Onions, who argues that the expression would stand for "God it wot" or better "Got it wite", for phonetic reasons.[82] This is not an hapax in Old French literature, as it can be found in Henry D'Andeli's *Battaille des vins*, and in the second branch of the *Roman de Renart*. The latter case is particularly relevant because at the verses 2393/95 of the *Roman de Renart*, we find the famous fox trying to disguise himself as an English wandering minstrel, and, when asked whether he knows the "lai dam Iset", he replies: "Ya, ya, goditoet". This is important when it comes to the question of "intertextuality", on which the whole structure of the *Wistasse* is based. The author, in fact, shows a great knowledge of other Old French works, as the list of the *chansons* and *romans* known by the false minstrel suggests.[83]

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[82] C. T. Onions, 'Middle English (I) Wite God, Wite Crist, (II) God It Wite', *The Review of English Studies,* 4 (1928), 334-37, p. 336. Here Onions' reconstruction is followed for lack of alternatives. This passage seems unfortunately unknown, probably as a consequence of the relative neglect known by the *Wistasse*.

[83] On the intertextuality of the *Wistasse* see, once again, see the extensive bibliography of Margherita Lecco: Margherita Lecco, 'Wistasse Rossignol: L'intertesto Tristaniano in Wistasse Le Moine ', *Romance Philology, 59*

What is striking here is the difference in tone and intention of these two representations of Eustache, the magician and the outlaw. We should probably not be surprised by these kinds of contradictions in a medieval text, yet the difference between the two parts is not only sharp but also certified by the presence of two different prologues[84].

The *Wistasse* starts almost abruptly, and the narrative voice addresses the audience only briefly. In manuscript BnF fr. 1553, at f. 327vb, after an illumination picturing Eustache listening to the teachings of Satan and the red rubric "Chi commenc li romans de Witasse le Moine", the text begins:

> Del Moigne briement vous dirai
>
> Les examples si com je sai.
>
> Il se rendi a Saint Saumer
>
> A .VIII. liues pries de la mer;
>
> Illuecques noirs moignes devint[85]

[I am briefly going to tell you stories about the Monk as I know them. He went to Saint-Omer, by the sea, where he became a Benedictine monk]

The text continues describing the "magic" training and skills of Eustache, then moving on to the tavern scene, thus following our hero to his stay at the abbey of Saint Omer, where he commits another bit of sorcery, the last one. Eustache transforms water into blood and makes a piece of pork look like an ugly old lady, scaring people so much that he can take over the abbey and bring food and other goods to the tavern, where he gambles all night pawning crucifixes and other sacred icons:

> Les crucefis et les ymages,
>
> Trestout metoit Wistasce en gages.
>
> N'i remanoit nis bote a mogne;

(2006), 103-20; *Id*., 'Wistasse Le Moine e le Chansons de Geste dei Maghi-Ladri', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie,* 126 (2010), 71-97; Id., 'I Cavalieri nella "Raske". Ancora sui rapporti intertestuali tra Wistasse Le Moine e Le Chansons De Geste', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 112 (2011), 417-33; Id., 'Memorie epiche in Wistasse Le Moine (Ancora Su Wistassee Le Chansons De Geste)', *Romance studies : a journal of the University of Wales,* 31 (2013), 67-83; Id., *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo. (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2013).

[84] Cristina Azuela, 'Was Eustace Diabolical? Magic and Devilry in Le Roman De Wistasse Le Moine', pp. 337-77.

[85] Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo, p. 87, vv. 1-5.

> Tout embloit Wistasce le Mogne[86]

[He gambled crucifixes and sacred images. Nothing remained to the monks [of the abbey]. Eustache the Monk stole everything!]

This is the last ruse that Eustache commits with his magic; after this episode we find the "second prologue", where the ludicrous intent of the text is first introduced. Here, the narrative voice admits that the main intent is to amuse the audience and to elicit laughter.

> A l'entendre ne vous anuit.
> Je vous dirai encor anuit
> Tel chose qui vous fera rire;
> Ja le m'ores conter et dire.
> [...]
> Or oiies d'Uistasce le Moigne
> Ki vers le conte de Bouloigne
> Mena guerre molt longement,
> De coi fu li commenchement.[87]

[You will not be bored to listen to me. I am going to tell you again today things that will make you laugh. You will hear me saying them! Now, hear about Eustache the Monk, who fought a lot against the Count of Boulogne – which was where everything started]

In medieval literature it is not unusual to find verses addressing the audience in different places of the same text. Probably a legacy of the performative and predominantly oral origin of this poetry, allocutions usually prepared the audience to an extra-diegetic comment or a digression, for example, and by no means need they always be thought of as "prologue". What happens in this passage is singular because these verses introduce a significant change of scenery and of tone. It is only at this point that the birth and heritage of the historic Eustache Busket is mentioned – something that we would rather expect at the beginning of the narrative, when the character is first introduced and his origins and kinships should be clarified. Beside his genealogy, the historical events that led Eustache to become an outlaw are described and considered as the "commencement" to his (real?) story. The narration of the following events

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 93, vv. 277-280.
[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94, vv. 281-284 and vv. 301-304.

abandons the magic elements and fiction intertwines with actual history. This is indeed the part where the description of Eustache as a diabolic being is replaced in favour of that of the trickster, the outlaw, which means that even the intertextual setting is subject to change.[88] In these verses Eustache is compared to two famous magicians who often come up in Old French literature, Maugis and Basin, and Eustache is said to have even more knowledge than them.[89] After the comparison with the magicians, Eustache is then related to other well-known characters, that is Travers, Barat e Haimet – thieves from a fabliau by Jean Bodel.[90] This prologue-like passage can indeed be seen as a "junction" between the two competing descriptions of Eustache Busket: on the one hand the evil magician trained by Satan who relies on magic to confuse entire communities of people; on the other, the clever outlaw whose dishonesty harms mainly those who embody some sort of authority, first and foremost the despised Count of Boulogne. Lecco argues that while the former type of description draws on oral and legendary tradition, the second relies on a mix of historic as well as literary references.[91] While the proximity that Eustache's portrayal as a magician enjoys to oral accounts can hardly be assessed, the references to Maugis and Basin as well as Jean Bodel's prologues make it undisputable that *Wistasse*'s poet is inscribing the text in a specific literary domain, that oscillates between *roman* and *fabliau*.

The main distinction between the first and the second part is the way Eustache's character is presented by the narrative voice – while in the latter it tends to stand with Eustache, no matter how unfair his ruses are, this is not true for the former. Indeed, even if the ruses involving magic are hilarious, they are framed as the action of a depraved man, causing fear, confusion and chaos amongst common people. The tone tends to be anti-Eustache – even more so as the Monk despises religion, for which he shows no kind of respect; and unsurprisingly after all, for he was educated by Satan in person! Indeed, in the first part of the *Wistasse* the focus is mainly moral, the text wants to warn against a specific type of intelligence and perverse knowledge, the obscure knowledge Eustache learnt in Toledo. In the second part, the tone becomes fabliau-like, as the reference to Jean Bodel's famous thieves anticipates – and, as it usually happens in the fabliaux, the narrator stands by the wit's side.[92] This contradictory presentation of

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[88] See also Cristina Azuela, 'Was Eustace Diabolical? Magic and Devilry in Le Roman De Wistasse Le Moine', pp. 337-77.

[89] Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo, p. 4, vv. 286-287.

[90] *Ibid*., p. 4, v. 299.

[91] *Ibid*., pp. 7-12.

[92] On this see also Azuela: "Thus, we may argue that although there are multiple allusions to the devil, and that Eustace seems devoted to performing numerous villainous acts that can even be vicious, throughout the development of the most extensive segment of the text (Segment B) there is no trace of his diabolical connections

Eustache's character seems to be then reorganised and harmonised in the moralising couplet closing the text: "Nus ne puet vivre longhement / Qui tos jors a mal faire entent". These final verses, then, condemn the actions and deeds narrated – that, in the second part and until that point, receive instead the admiration and consent of the narrative voice.

The presence of these two competing narratives around the character of Eustache is explained if we look at the reception that he has enjoyed across the years. Lecco suggests that while the earlier sources about the life and deeds of Eustache do not make mention of magician-like traits, the later English chronicles abound of these kinds of details. Indeed, talking about the differences between earlier and later sources Lecco claims that Eustache is not described as a necromancer in sources dating before 1250:

> La più vistosa [differenza] riguarda l'attività necromantica di Wistasse, della quale non si fa menzione nelle "Sources traditionelles" anteriori al 1250 (e di poco successive), e che vi diviene in seguito frequente al funto di farsi topica: da ribelle di cattiva natura […], Wistasse diventa esparto di stregoneria e creatore di magie in proprio […].[93]

Lecco goes even further by suggesting that the romance imaginary influenced the official later chronicles rather than the other way round. Indeed, following Lecco, the *Wistasse* found its narrative basis in legendary oral accounts mediated by literature rather than historical sources.[94] Following Lecco's argument, it is perhaps possible to argue that the *Wistasse* shows the work-in-progress of the blending and mixing of the narrative traits pertaining to the magician and the outlaw. Indeed, we have observed above that while these two competing descriptions of Eustache co-exist in the context of the *Wistasse*, there actually is a clear and neat division between the two representations, as the two prologues clearly suggest. Only at the very end of the text do we find the last couplet condemning Eustache for his misdeeds, thus reminding the reader of the accusatory tone at the beginning of the text. Azuela discusses these contradictions by claiming that, because magic involves only a minimal part of the text, the *Wistasse* is overall more interested in describing Eustache as a trickster rather than a diabolic character. Azuela's conclusions sound quite unsatisfactory, however, if the question we are seeking to answer is

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nor any judgment of his acts. What is more, the narrator's cruel jokes in the face of his atrocities, as well as his evident admiration of Eustace's misdeeds, shows a position analogous to the fascination that tricksters exert on both their narrators and their audience, even when they may seem at the same time evil or disquieting". Cristina Azuela, 'Was Eustace Diabolical? Magic and Devilry in *Le Roman de Wistasse le Moine'*, p. 373.

[93] Margherita Lecco, *Saggi Sul Romanzo Del XIII Secolo*. Vol. 2. Wistasse le moine: con edizione critica e traduzione del testo, pp. 11-12.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

related to the meaning that this contradiction bears per se, but also in the context of the section of manuscript BnF fr. 1553 under scrutiny. Indeed, I argue that it is wholly coherent with the way knowledge, intelligence and appearance are represented here.

The texts coming immediately after the *Wistasse* are *K* and the *Mahomet*, which are both concerned with knowledge, cleverness, false appearance, deception and their duplicitous nature. In *K* and in the *Mahomet* two different types of "Other", a woman and a "sarrasin", are embodied by the respective protagonists, the Empress and Muhammad. Despite, or perhaps because of, their role as the "Other" they are empowered with the finest intellectual abilities. During the analysis of *K* it has been highlighted that the Empress is portrayed as more knowledgeable than the Sages. She is the only one speaking "par auctorité", and she is compelling to the point that she is said to be able to defeat them with her arguments – even if she ends up murdered. Conversely, the Sages do not fulfil at all the stereotype of the wise man – they are instead coward and unprepared to face the dispute with the Empress. *K*'s Empress and Eustache Busket are both culpable of having great intelligence and knowledge that they use against authority, respectively the Emperor and the Lord, for selfish purposes. The main way they do so is by mystifying reality, that is by making themselves look like something they are not. The Empress pretends to be the selfless and loving wife, who acts to protect the Emperor; Eustache disguises himself in several ways, so once he is a lumberjack, once is a shepherd, once is an English wandering minstrel. Because of their cunnings and ruses, the Empress and Eustache end up murdered. Just as the *Wistasse, K* ends with another moralising few lines pointing to the condemnation of the reckless Empress:

> "Or en a ele sa deserte.
> Li cors s'estent, l'ame s'en va;
> Cil l'ait ki deservie l'a!"[95]

[She has what she deserves. Her body is being destroyed; her soul is vanishing. People get what they deserve!]

In this section of manuscript 1553, however, Eustache and the Empress are not the only ones to be condemned for their deviant behaviour. Another character embodying an evil kind of

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[95] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), p. 388 vv. 5066/68. See also the Appendix, Figure 5.

knowledge and intelligence, culpable of creating a new religion opposed to Christendom, appears here: Muhammad.

Mahomet

Mahomet is a 1997-octosyllabic-verse text composed by the otherwise unknown Alexandre du Pont around 1258 in Laon according to the text's explicit[96]. In the prologue, the author states that he took the *matière* for his "petit romanch" from a Latin text written by a monk named Gautier. Indeed, the *Mahomet* is a translation and amplification of Gautier de Compiègne's *Otia de Machomete*, which is dated around 1155[97].

The text is a fictional biography of the prophet Muhammad, who is portrayed as a scheming and sinisterly clever man. The *Mahomet* is framed as a reliable account of the Prophet's life, whose accuracy is supposedly proven by the fact that it draws on the account made by a cleric converted from Islam to Christianity:

> En la terre le roi de Franche
>
> Mest jadis à Sens en Bourgoigne,
>
> Uns clers avoecque .j. chanoigne,
>
> Ki Sarrasins avoit esté,
>
> Mais prise avoit crestiienté;
>
> Mahom del tout laissié avoit;
>
> Car toute la gille savoit
>
> Que Mahommès fist en sa vie,
>
> Le barat et la trecherie"[98]

[In the land of the King of France, in Sens, Burgundy, once lived a cleric who had been Muslim but then converted to Christianity. He abandoned Muhammad's teachings because he knew all the deceits, trickeries that Muhammad did in his life.]

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[96] "Chi faut li Romans de Mahon / Qui fu fais el mont de Loon / En l'an de l'Incarnation / De nostre signor Jhesucrist / Mil et .cc. cinkante et wit" [Here ends the romance of Mahon, which was done on the "Mount of Laon" (?) during the year of Jesus's Christ incarnation 1258].

[97] John Tolan, 'Gautier De Compiègne', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, ed. by David Thomas, Alex Mallett et al. (Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 2011), pp. 601-03, p. 601.

[98] Alexandre du Pont, 'Roman De Mahomet', ed. by Joseph Toussaint Reinaud (Paris: Silvestre, 1831), p. 1, vv. 5-12.

According to this passage, this newly Christian cleric rejected his former beliefs because he was aware of Muhammad's ruses. The plot, in fact, dwells on the alleged misdeeds committed by the selfish Muhammad, which culminated in the creation of his new, outrageous cult. Muhammad is presented as a man of incredible intelligence and education: not only is he well versed in the seven arts, but he also masters them due to his smart sense of intuition. Thanks to "geometrie" Muhammad could tell the distance between two places just by seeing them; thanks to "musike" he was able to sing every chant in tune; thanks to "astrenomie" he could tell if someone would have a short or long life, if the harvest and the weather would be good; thanks to "artimetike" he could guess how many bricks made up a tower.[99] However, the *art* at which Muhammad was best was – unsurprisingly – "retorike":

> Par retorike et par raisons
> savoit-il bien que jamais hons
> rendre vaincu ne le péust,
> jà soit chou que bon droit êust[100]

[He knew well that nobody could beat him in rhetoric and arguments, however right the other person was]

It is indeed through his eloquence (together with his cunning) that Muhammed is able to deceive everyone – from his Lord's wife to the entire population. As the Lord whose wealth Muhammad was profitably administrating dies, Muhammad is able to convince the Lady that he would be the ideal man for her to marry. An older man, Muhammad points out, would not be a good match for a flourishing woman as she is – he would be careless and inattentive to her needs because too busy coughing and looking after his decaying body; a younger spouse, in turn, would be unfaithful and would also squander all her wealth, and beat her up if she dares to speak up. Muhammad himself, however, would be the perfect husband: he has already demonstrated his value for he administrated his Lord's wealth with care, making the Lord become even richer – this clearly means that he would do even better if that wealth belonged to him. Muhammad's argument is strong enough to interest his Lady, which is hardly surprising considering his rhetorical abilities:

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[99] *Ibid.*, pp.3-4, vv. 38-57.
[100] *Ibid.*, p. 4, vv. 58-61.

> Estre veritable se faint,
>
> Vous le cuidissiez ester .j. saint.
>
> Il parole par grant savoir;
>
> Casa sa dame velt dechevoir.
>
> Maistres de retorique samble,
>
> Tante soutil parole assamble[101]

[He pretends to be trustworthy and you would think he is a saint. He speaks with great knowledge as he wants to deceive his Lady. So subtly he constructs his arguments that he sounds like a rhetoric master]

While the Lady is persuaded by Muhammad's proposal, there is a considerable obstacle to their union: the Lady's subjects might end up loathing her if she marries someone of a lower social status, but Muhammad leaves the meeting reassuring the Lady that her people would not be but happy should she really marry him. And they were. Muhammad gathers all the barons of the court promising them lands and goods in exchange of their approval – and of course their greed does not let them reject the deal. The marriage is readily organised, and the Lady marries Muhammad with all the (Western!) rituals. However, something incredible happens. Suddenly Muhammad falls on the floor, shaking and emitting foam from his mouth. Even though he recovers immediately, the crowd gathered for the marriage's celebrations is disconcerted, and the Lady is the first to run away, desperate and crying in her chambers while lamenting that Muhammad lied about his health. However, Muhammed immediately conceives a new plan in order to reassure his new wife. He confesses to the Lady that what happened earlier was not due to his poor health; quite the contrary, something miraculous had happened: the Archangel Gabriel visited him in order to communicate God's intention. Just as already happened with Moses, human corruption provoked the contempt of God, who thus wanted Muhammad to start a new religion:

> Tous li mondes est entechies,
>
> De mal et de vilains pechies,
>
> Et Jhesucris ne morra mais
>
> Pour rachater bons ne malvais;
>
> Si ne nous velt pas tous perir

---

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 19, vv. 410-415.

> Qui la loy ne poons tenir,
>
> Si grant fais nous alegera,
>
> Batesme del tout ostera
>
> Un hom .x. femmes avera
>
> Ne ja point ne s'en meffera;
>
> Par Gabriel le m'a mandé
>
> Nostre Sires et commandé" [102]

[The world is enmeshed in evil and sin, and Jesus Christ will not come on Earth and die again in order to save people, either good or bad. However, God does not want to damn us all, and therefore decided to loosen some restrictions: he will eliminate the sacrament of baptism, and a man will be allowed to have ten women without sinning. God informed and commanded me this through the Archangel Gabriel].

The Lady remains suspicious about these words, which however will be certified by a hermit who had previously been threatened and instructed by Muhammad – thus convincing the Lady of Muhammad's trustworthiness. She rejoices to the hermit's words and even though she is sworn to secrecy by Muhammad, at the first mundane occasion she starts to brag to other ladies about her husband, visited by the Archangel Gabriel, who asked him to start a new, marvellous cult. The text uses the misogynistic common place of women's garrulity in order to stage the spread of Muhammad's lie: his story does not take long to become a rumour, and through their wives it reaches the barons of the court, who declare themselves ready to do whatever Muhammad asks. At this point, the only thing left to finally convince his people of his divine mission is a miracle, and with his cunning Muhammad is able to provide them with one. He gathers all the barons on a mountain inviting them to pray, and as he summons God, Muhammad pretends honey and milk – that he had previously hidden there – appear. After this miracle another one follows: at his sign, a bull that Muhammad had trained, shows up, bringing between his horns two table on which the new law was written:

> Que ne soit mais batesmes fais
>
> A homme, ni espousement,
>
> Ne nus des autres sacraments;
>
> Faite soit circoncisions

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[102] *Ibid.*, p. 43, vv. 993-1004.

Et de bestes oblations

Et c'une femme ait .x. barons

Et que .x. femme ait uns hons,

Et que les gens de toutes terres

K'il porront sousmetre par guerres

Fachent de lor loy devenir"[103]

[No baptism shall be administrated, nor marriage nor other sacraments. Circumcision shall be practiced and animal sacrifices. A woman shall have ten men, and ten women shall a man have. They shall convert every population that they may subjugate through war]

This passage is particularly interesting because here the alleged "loi" proposed by Muhammad does not only allow polygamy but also polygyny – this, we assume, being the ultimate sign of Muhammad's debauchery.

    The last few lines cited above allow us to close this overview on the *Mahomet* with reference to war. Clearly this theme fits well into the Crusade climate in which the text was produced,[104] and we see how all the responsibility is shifted on the side of the Muslims: their law demands they use war and violence in order to convert people and impose their religion – the consequence is of course that Christendom is under attack and hence must respond with the same violence. The text closes with a war against the Persians in which Mahomet does not take part directly. When elicited by his soldiers to join them on the battlefield so that he may show support to his people, Muhammad replies that his age would not allow it, and cowardly withdraws in a monastery with women and children. Here they learn about the tragic debacle of the Muslims, and through another oration Muhammad convinces the survivors to have faith in their God and keep living according to his law. The most striking thing is that, once again, through his words and incredible eloquence, Muhammad is able to turn to his favour a situation that threatened to unmask his mendaciousness and evil ruses instead. The poem closes with a fictional description of Muhammad's levitating burial.

    For what concerns the connection to *K*, we see that the *Mahomet* casts a shadowy portrayal of knowledge and intelligence. Muhammad knows and masters the seven arts, yet he

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 63, vv. 1523-1532.

[104] According to Reginal Hyatte, the *Mahomet* was composed during a pivotal moment in the history of Christian and Muslim relations, that is the disastrous outcome of the seventh Crusade, the first led by Louis IX (1248-1254). See *The Prophet of Islam in Old French: The Romance of Muhammad (1258) and The Book of Muhammad's Ladder (1264)*, ed. by Reginald Hyatte (Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 1997), pp. 1-2.

uses them in an evil way – for bad rather than for good. This suggests to the readers/audience that they should be aware of the potential sinister nature of knowledge – especially when it is accompanied by an incredible eloquence and rhetoric skills that can confuse good and evil, truth and falsehood. The problem, once again, rest on the fact that Muhammad manages to present himself as someone he is not, a prophet, through the use of his cleverness as well as his incredible rhetoric skills. Even in this case, then, false appearance is posed as a problem, to the extent that rhetoric can confuse our perception of reality and the way we read it. Then, in manuscript BnF fr. 1553 Muhammad represents another embodiment of the dangerous duplicitous nature of knowledge.

The outlaw, the woman, the heretic

Appearances are deceptive because our senses are mendacious; they can easily be misleading and therefore can obstruct our access to real knowledge – they ultimately displace the truth. This is the message that comes out of the sequential reading of the texts gathered in the third codicological section of manuscript BnF fr. 1553.

Distrust against appearance and knowledge is the main theme holding together the triptych *Wistasse le Moine*, *K* and *Mahomet*. Indeed, in the *Wistasse* Eustache, the anti-hero, with his tricks and disguises is always able to fool his clueless Lord; while Muhammad, with his ruses and rhetoric, manages to fulfil his intent of accumulating wealth and power. As for the Empress, we have analysed in chapter 1 the ways she deceives the Emperor in *K*, that is mainly by fascinating him with her words and by feigning her love. We can easily include the *Violette* into the triplet. Indeed, while we chose to put the emphasis on the dialectic tension between the *Violette* and *K* – which plays an important part in the organisation of the manuscript – Euriaut's trustworthiness is put into question because of Liziart's mischievous ruse. In this case Liziart, the villain *lausenger*, seeks the destruction of the valiant and priceworthy knight Gérard de Nevers by conceiving a subterfuge that will deceive everyone at court, turning falsehood into truth.

The idea that a concern with knowledge and its duplicitous nature is at the centre of this part of the manuscript is corroborated by Victoria Turner's recent study on the *Mahomet*.[105] Turner

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[105] Victoria Turner, *Theorising Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Legenda, 2019).

reaches similar conclusions regarding the interpretation of the *Mahomet* and its presence in this section of BnF fr. 1553 by bringing to the fore its concern about knowledge and deception, which she justly links to anxieties about the relation between reason and faith haunting the intellectual climate of the 13th century. According to Turner the *Mahomet* ought to be interpreted as an attack against the gullibility of the masses rather than simplistically as yet another account against the Saracens and their wicked ways. In so doing, Turner challenges previous and established readings of the *Mahomet*, especially Hyatte's claim that the text served propagandistic purposes in a time when – after the disastrous defeat of Louis IX – interest was lost in the cause of the Crusades.[106] The lack of direct attacks against the Saracens, in Turner's opinion, demonstrates that the text is concerned with epistemology rather than politics. Indeed, according to her analysis, Alexandre du Pont's *Mahomet* serves as an example as to how to protect oneself from misplaced faith as well as to identify the truth beyond what is perceived. Turner's conclusions articulate the idea that while islamophobia is obviously the structural premise of a text such as the *Mahomet*, it is not the text's primary concern – which for Turner rests on the problematic, because duplicitous, nature of knowledge in relation to faith and reason.

While acknowledging Hyatte's attempt to retrieve the historical background against which the *Mahomet* was conceived, Turner seems to dismiss his historical approach in favour of hers. I would like, instead, to nuance and complicate the picture by suggesting that these two readings do not need to be mutually exclusive. Indeed, while the reception that the text enjoys in manuscript BnF fr. 1553 is consistent with the results of Turner's analysis (and ours for that matter), the *Mahomet* might have been used and received differently by other textual communities, especially if we keep in mind that references to "holy" wars are present in the text. Denying the multiplicity of meanings that a text can bear or that can be more or less deliberately attributed to a text would undermine our analysis of the *SSR*, which has brought to the fore the malleability enjoyed by this narrative matter, which can be and has been manipulated and readjusted according to the taste and purposes of both the compilers and audience.

Just as it happens to be the case for the *Mahomet*, in *K* too the troubled relation between knowledge and appearance is at stake. A long digression on the deceitful nature of appearances

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[106] *The Prophet of Islam in Old French: The Romance of Muhammad (1258) and The Book of Muhammad's Ladder (1264)*, ed. by Reginald Hyatte (Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 1997), pp. 1-2.

is present right in the middle of *K* – in a strategic position, considering that it serves as the introduction to the tale of the third sage of seven, Malquidas who will narrate *Puteus*.[107]

The character of Malquidas is particularly interesting. Already his description tells us something about the obscure nature of appearances:

> A tant es vous dant Malquidas!
>
> Vestus estoit de molt biaus dras.
>
> L'un grenon blanch et l'autre noir,
>
> Il est de mervillous savoir
>
> Et des ii gambes estoit tors;
>
> Molt savoit et d'ars et de sors.
>
> A lui venoit l'on aconter
>
> Les avisions et mostrer
>
> Et il toutes les espieloit
>
> Et la verité en disoit.
>
> Signor, tones cha vos oreilles!
>
> Et dont ne son che grans merveilles
>
> Que hons sit res disfigures
>
> Est de tel sens enlunines?[108]

[Here comes Sir Malquidas! He was dressed in fine clothes. His beard was half white and half black. He had an incredible knowledge and both his legs were twisted. He knew a lot about trickeries and ruses. Everyone went to tell him their dreams and he would explain the visions and unveil their truth. Now, everybody, ears to me! Isn't it an incredible wonder that such a disfigured man is in fact enlightened by a great intelligence?]

Notwithstanding his horrendous looks, Malquidas is in fact intelligent and clever. His knowledge, however, has a double nature. Just as his half white and half black beard, he is not only knowledgeable in the seven arts, but he is also very prepared on "ars et sors". This is

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[107] Actually in *K* Malquidas tells two exempla: the first is about Julius Caesar competing with his son to be considered the best and most powerful Roman Emperor, a recurring theme that we have seen coming up in *Medicus*; the second is of course *Puteus*. To my knowledge, critics have never discussed the possibility to consider the first *exemplum* about Julius Caesar as independent from *Puteus*. At any rate, in the Eastern versions of *The Seven Sages* usually the Sages tell more than one tale.

[108] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), pp. 222-223, v. 2011-2024.

meaningful because – as we have already seen in the first chapter – that couple of adjectives usually introduces the Empress. Malquidas' name too, warns us about his character. His name can be thus read: mal + quidas, where "quidas" stands for "quidar", which means "believe true or probable". Therefore, the form would have the meaning of "wrongly believed" or "believe evil". This constructs another layer of contradictions that matches the dubious and confusing portrayal that is given of knowledge.

The last few lines quoted above – marked by the poet's allocution to the audience – introduces a long digression about appearances and the fact that they should never be trusted. The poet begins:

> "Vois et avoir et ambleure
> Si vient auques contre Nature"[109]

[Sometimes voice, wealth and stride contradict Nature]

The focus is on three aspects – voice, wealth, stride – and it is shown how those qualities are distributed amongst humans and animals in a way that is often not consistent with their Nature. So, it is argued, there might be a beautiful horse, so majestic that he could belong to an emir, that however will not be able to trot, while an ordinary donkey or a lamb might have a beautiful stride. In the same way, there might be a very well educated and wise cleric who might become an abbot, but he might not be able to speak to the crowd and might not be able to sing in tune; however, there might be a bad looking cleric, with the face covered in blisters, that will have an enchanting voice, yet one would not care about that, because his look will turn his chant into cries. As for wealth, there might be a noble man, who ideally would be "large" and generous but will never be rich enough; while a petty and avid man will be rich but stingy and will use his money in order to destroy lands and wage pointless wars. This digression elicits the audience to thinking of appearances as something potentially dangerous, because they might generate a false knowledge that ends up concealing the real *nature* of things.

Once again, the duplicity of knowledge is put into question. Malquidas appears as a deformed, monstrous man yet his knowledge is impressive – but also suspicious. His ability of interpreting people's dreams and visions can be linked to the tale *Sapientes*, where the Sages use their knowledge in exchange for money, becoming rich enough to surpass in wealth the king. At the

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[109] *Ibid.*, p. 224, vv. 2025-2026.

same time, in the *Wistasse*, Eustache is also said to be able to read dreams and visions as well as to forecast the future, a skill that he developed during his apprenticeship with Satan. Knowledge and trickery here go hand in hand, and it is easy to see in the sequence, *Wistasse le Moine*, *K* and *Mahomet* a warning against their dangers.

While warning against the dangers of false appearance and false knowledge, *K* also underscores the importance of dominating one's intellectual faculties, whose wise and rational use protects from false appearance and thus deception. This is evident in the surprising passage describing the late baptism of the Prince in *K*'s prologue (vv. 159-184). Vespasian has victoriously come back from the war waged against the Jews and has married the nameless daughter of the duke of Cartage, who soon begets him a noble and beautiful heir. The beloved Prince is not immediately baptised, even though raised according to the teaching of Christianity – as was customary in Vespasian's days:

> La gent estoient d'autre sens:
> costume estoit a icel tans
> que ja varlés n'i fust levés
> tant que XIII ans n'eust passés,
> fors presigniés avant estoit;
> adont les XIII ans atendoit.
> Lors s'ert auques issus d'enfanche
> et si entendoit sa creanche,
> sour fons estoit regenerés,
> d'oile et de cresme estoit sacrés[110].

[People had different views those days. Back then the custom wanted the youngster not to be baptised before he was thirteen years old, provided that he had already been presigné (= marked with the cross sign); after that he would wait until he was thirteen. At that point he would just come out of childhood and able to understand his belief; thus, he would be brought to the baptismal font and consecrated with oil and chrism.]

Vespasian's son is only *presigné* at the moment of his birth and is baptised only when he is older, at 13, that is once the Prince is "issus d'enfanche" (come out of childhood) and able to

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[110] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), p. 124, vv. 168-178.

understand "sa creanche" (his belief).[111] This is of the utmost importance for our argument. His age makes the Prince aware of his becoming a true Christian through baptism. Indeed, receiving the sacrament at an age where he is able to understand his belief puts the Prince in the condition of being able to interact directly with the Priest, without the medium of godparents:

> Si parin ne parloient pas
> pour lui a cel jor, n'ert pas gas;
> de sa bouche au prestre disoit
> que saint batesme requeroit.
> Lors ert levé molt aceptable
> quant il renoioit le Dyable[112]

[That day his godfathers did not speak in his place; with his own words he said to the priest that he wanted to receive the Holy Baptism. Indeed, the baptism was very just, as he renounced Satan]

Thus, the Prince's abjuration of Satan comes directly from his mouth, making him conscious of the meaning of that act. Sealed by the formulaic dialogue between the officer of the sacrament and the godparent, where the first asks "abrenuntias Satanae?" and the second replies "abrenuntio", the abjuration of Satan was – and still is – part of the baptismal liturgy. Had the Prince been an infant at the moment of his baptism he would have needed a third party, a godparent that is, speaking in his place; however his being thirteen makes it possible for him to spouse the precepts of Christianity willingly and, especially, to reject Satan personally.

The description of the Prince's late baptism, which is not present in any other extant Old French version of the *SSR*, is startling not only because it brings to mind one of the main points promoted by medieval heretic movements, many of which were in favour of late baptism, but because the latter enables the Prince to be aware and in control of his choices.[113] And he is

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[111] The term *presigner* and its liturgical value is hard to determine. In is edition of *Le Besant de Dieu*, where the term appears, Pierre Ruelle argues that it refers to the moment of baptism liturgy when the officer would draw the cross sign on the infant's forehead outside the Church, before the actual ritual. Thus, Ruelle suggests the term means the initiation to Christian values, which I follow here. See Le Besant de Dieu *de Guillaume le Clerc de Normandie*, ed. by Pierre Ruelle (Bruxelles: Université de Bruxelles, 1973), pp. 199-200.

[112] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), p. 126, vv. 179-184.

[113] This passage of *K* has been commented by Mary B. Speer, who claims that the poet has no interest in promoting heretical views with this description of the Prince's baptism, as the introductory verses ("La gent estoient d'autre sens: / costume estoit a icel tans") inscribe the scene in the past, which means that the text is only reporting an ancient practice. I argue otherwise (i.e. the presence of this scene in manuscript BnF fr. 1553 is explained by looking at the vivacious historical context of 13th century Cambrésis) in a forthcoming paper. See Mary Speer,

clearly doing the right one, when refusing Satan – which is tantamount to refusing everything that is false.

These two passages, the introduction of Malquidas' *Puteus* and the Prince's late baptism, testify to *K*'s anxiety about false knowledge and appearance: our perceptions can prove to be wrong at any time, hence we have to always be aware of the dangers that they provoke.

Following this line of thought, and building on Turner's conclusions on the *Mahomet*, we can say that *K* is not more concerned with the anti-feminist discourse than it is with providing a warning against the deceitfulness of knowledge and appearance: behind a clever and eloquent person, a danger is, or at least, can be hidden. This conception is embodied by figures that better represent a suspicious "other": an outlaw (Eustache Busket), a woman (*K*'s Empress) and the first "sarrazin", the heretic Muhammad.

The discourse around false appearance, misplaced belief, corruption of other people, has always involved especially the latter category, the heretic. In a useful recollection of the representation of heretics in a set of medieval sources ranging from legal documents to sermons, Lucy J. Sackville shows that the stereotypes surrounding the mysterious figure of the heretic deal with false appearance, which is also accompanied by sophistry.[114] Saint Jerome warns against the dangerous eloquence of heretics, whose persuasive arguments prove difficult to handle even for clerics: "De hereticis manifestus est sensus, quod sophismatibus suis et arte dialectica sepe opprimant ecclesiasticos".[115] Their rhetoric ability is definitely one of the first means through which they are able to dissimulate their real nature, thus pretending to be someone they actually are not. The idea that heretics operate this way finds its scriptural basis in the Gospel passage where Matthew alerts against false prophets: "Attendite a falsis prophetis qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces".[116] Sackville remarks that the Ordinary Gloss of the Bible takes the false prophet and ravening wolf to stand for the heretics. This evangelic line led to the establishment of the metaphor of ravening wolves to refer to heretics and their way of operating and, consequently, a whole discourse was raised

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'The Prince's Baptism in the *Roman Des Sept Sages*: Formal and Doctrinal Intertexts', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 27 (1986), 34-52; Diego Palombi, *The baptism scene of the verse Roman des Sept Sages in the context of its manuscript (BnF fr. 1553)*, II Congreso O camiño do Mediovalista (forthcoming).

[114] Lucy J. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (Woodbridge, UK Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 2011). The first and seminal study on the *topoi* concerning heretics and heresy is Herbert Grundmann, 'Der Typus des Ketzers in mittelalterlicher Anschauung', in *Kultur- Und Universalgeschichte: Festschrift Für W. Goetz* (Leipzing: 1927), pp. 91–107.

[115] *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. by Emil Friedberg (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1881), C.24 q.3 cc.36, 33, I, 1000, 999.

[116] "Beware of false prophets who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits may you know them", Matthew 7.15. In Lucy J. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century : The Textual Representations*, p. 162.

on the contrast between their outward and inward nature. Indeed, they would disguise themselves with the cloak of pity to attract and corrupt people.[117] While dissimulating admirable Christian values and principles, then, their ultimate aim is nothing else but the corruption of people, their eternal damnation. The wolf is not the only animal that was taken to symbolise heretics, who were also compared to foxes. The latter association was taken from the passage of the Song of the Songs where the spouse is addressing her lover saying: "Capite nobis vulpes parvulas quae demoliuntur vineas"[118]. The little fox that destroys the vineyard was interpreted to stand for the heretic who corrupts the Church and Christians, that is the vine. Already present in the work of Augustine, through the work of authoritative ecclesiastics such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Alain de Lille this interpretation enjoyed a wide dissemination – to the point that the link between the fox and the heretic became strong enough for Jacques de Vitry to use the term *vulpicules* to indicate heretics in his *Historia Occidentalis*.[119] Testified by the association with animals that in medieval bestiaries represent cunning, wit and deception, such as the fox and the wolf, false appearance is at the centre of Stephen of Bourbon's description of the Waldensians in his *Tractatus de diversiis materiis praedicabilibus*.[120] Here Stephen de Bourbon talks about the origins and rise of this heterodox movement. Started in Lyon from the initiative of a semi-illiterate (*cum non esset multum literatus*) rich man named Valdes, this movement and its "heretic" principles spread rapidly amongst people, to the point that they stole the preaching office from qualified clerics and thus ended up being excommunicated, first, and then declared schismatics by the 4th Lateran Council, which also marked their expulsion from Lyon. Stephen of Bourbon wants them to have joined other heretics from Lombardy, with whom they allied and mixed and exchanged heretical behaviours and thoughts. This account closes by warning the readers/audience against the Waldensians, who dissimulate holiness and faith (*speciem sanctitatis et fidei pretendentes*), while they do not hold any type of truth (*veritatem autem ejus non habentes*). Furthermore, the Waldensians are regarded as absolutely dangerous and treacherous (*tanto periculosiores quanto occulciores*), as they had the habit of disguising themselves in several different ways (*se sub*

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[117] *Ibid*., 163.

[118] "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vine", Song of Songs 2.15. In *Idib*., p. 156.

[119] Lucy J. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century : The Textual Representations*, p. 158. "Capite nobis vulpes parvulas, quae demoliuntur vineas" Per vulpas, quae sunt faudulenta animalia et in speluncis terrae habitantia intelliguntur heretici; per vineas, Ecclesia intelliguntur", Alain de Lille, *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum*, Pl, 210, 71.

[120] Étienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirées du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon, Dominicain du XIIIᵉ siècle*, ed. by Albert Lecoy de la Marche (Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1887).

diversis hominum habitibus et artificiis transfigurantes).[121] In Stephen's *Tractatus* the Waldensians are linked to the mythological Proteus, indeed, he continues, when they captured one of the most prominent of them (*quidam maximus inter eos*) they found evidence of the many disguises he could take on (*secum ferebat multorum artificiorum indicia*): *Aliquando ferebat habitum et signacula peregrini, aliquando baculum penitenciarii et ferramenta; aliquando se fingebat sutorem, aliquando barbitonsorem, aliquando messorem, etc.* (Sometimes he would wear the clothes of the pilgrim; sometimes he would bring the cane and the iron tools of the penitent; sometimes he would pretend to be a cobbler, other times a barber or a reaper).[122]

The description that Stephen de Bourbon provides of the Waldensians has not eluded Karen Sullivan, who compares the duplicity and tendency to deceit attributed to Waldensians with some vivacious characters from Old French literature, such as Richeut, Tubert and the famous Renart from the *Roman de Renart*. Sullivan argues:

> Like the Waldensians, these characters seek mastery over their social superiors, not through force, because they are not strong, nor through law, because they are not in the right, but through guile, because that is the only resource left for the weak and illegitimate.[123]

In the section that introduces the *Wistasse* its proximity to the *Roman de Renart* was noted as well as demonstrated by mentioning the strikingly similar scene in which both Eustache and the vulpine Renart disguise themselves as *jongleurs*. However, this is only one of the many personae that our Monk disguises himself as in order to get the better of his feudal Lord. Just as Stephen of Bourbon's Waldensians, Eustache disguises himself as a beggar, a woman, a lumberjack, a leprous, a pilgrim etc.

These three texts, then, the *Wistasse*, *K* and the *Mahomet*, reproduce the same type of discourse around knowledge and false appearance that can be found in sources dealing with heretics. However, while inquisitors and ecclesiastics involved in the "war on heresy" – as R. I. Moore defines it – had a specific target in mind, that is those who were generally thought to dissent from Christian orthodoxy, in this section of manuscript BnF fr. 1553 the attack is on

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[121] *Ibid.*, *exemplum* 342, p. 293.
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] Karen Sullivan, *Truth and the Heretic: Crises of Knowledge in Medieval French Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Bristol: University Presses Marketing distributor, 2005), p. 221.

epistemology, as it were. Indeed, the possibility of accessing true knowledge through appearance is called into question, and this stance is substantiated by the embodiment of this problem by three different types of alterities all guilty of threatening the socio-political order: an outlaw, a woman, and the Sarasin. Two of them, Eustache and the Empress, pay harshly for their misdeeds: the first is destroyed at the naval battle of Sandwich (1217), while the second is burnt at the stake.

The Empress ends up condemned and murdered in all the versions of the Old French *SSR*, yet *K*'s ending is striking on account of the Empress's reaction when confronted with her death. She does not show any sign of weakness or fear, not in front of the Emperor nor in front of God. Once the Prince has told *Vaticinium* and has spoken his truth about the accusation of assaulting his stepmother, the Emperor asks the Empress if what the Prince says is true. She confirms that the Prince is not lying, but she still tries to motivate her actions. Indeed, the Empress declares that if she acted the way she did, it was only out of fear, but not fear for herself. In fact, she was worried that the Prince would steal his father's throne, thereby destroying him:

> Li rois li dist: "Fu chou voirs, dame,
> Que il a dit? N'en mentés mie!
> - Oïl, se Dex me beneïe,
> Fait la dame, il vous a dit voir,
> car tout adiés avoie espoir
> que il vous tolist vostre terre
> et essillast et feïst guerre;
> et pour chou vausisse jou, sire,
> que ses cors fust mis a martire
> et livres a destruiement."[124]

[The king asked: "Is it true, lady, what he said? Do not you lie to me!" "Yes, may God bless me!" the lady replied: "he told you the truth. I was afraid he would steal your land, send you into exile and wage war against you; because of this I wanted, sir, that he would suffer martyrdom and destroyed]

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[124] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), p. 386, vv. 5030-5039.

The same passage is maintained in version *A*, where the Empress tries to justify herself in just the same way (i.e. she acted out of love for the Emperor), but it is interesting to notice that it is completely rewritten in the fragmentary verse version *C*.[125] Here the Empress cannot help but surrender to the unprecedent and marvellous qualities of the Prince, whom she start praising:

> "[…]
> - Est ce voir, dame?" dist le roi.
> - Oïl, dist elle, par moi foi!
>   Nous savoie de rien blasmer
>   don't il deüst plus tost parler.
>   Or parole, ce m'est avis!
>   Grant joie en ont toz ses amis,
>   moi meïsme en est mout bel.
>   Mout est sages li damoisel!
>   Onques mes hon de son enfance
>   ne fu de si grant atenance![126]

["Is this true, lady?" "Yes" she said "by my faith! I have not been able to say anything bad that would make him talk. Now he speaks, I can see! All his friends are rejoiced by it, and I am pleased too. The boy is very wise! There has never been anyone his age with this great self-control[127]]

This reply provokes the wrath of the Emperor who, accusing the Empress of being a "sarmonniere" and a "losengiere", orders his men to take and burn her at the stake, and indeed the poem closes abruptly saying that the "sejanz" happily obeyed, for they despised the Empress: "Et cil le font isnellement, / car il ne l'amoient noient".[128]

K's text fashions instead an Empress that clings stubbornly to her ruse and until the very end she seeks a justification for her behaviour. But it is too late. The Prince has spoken, his truth prevails over her eloquence and she is destined to die. Once again, however, her rhetoric

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[125] As mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 1, where the Old French prose versions were introduced, the final part of A is very similar to the verse version K. As for version L, the end of the story is completely changed: the seventh Sage and the Prince do not get to tell their stories, and on the seventh day a trial by combat takes place which leads to the execution of the Empress.
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 500, vv. 2057-2066.
[127] I follow the editors in translating the word "atenance" as "mîtrise de soi", that is self-control.
[128] *Ibid.*, p. 500, vv. 2077-2078.

abilities are acknowledged and praised, even though indirectly. This time is the Emperor in person to admit that with her *art* she has defeated the Seven Sages:

> "[…]
> Trop avés des ore regné
> ki mon fil voliiés dampner
> et pour noient a mort livrer
> et les sages *avés matés*
> par vostre art, mais vous en morrés!
> […]"[129]

["Power has already been exerted too much by you, who wanted to condemn and kill my son for no reason, who has defeated the Sages with her art. But now you will die for this!"]

While *K*'s editors, Foehr-Janssens and Speer, translate the verb *mater* with "mettre à l'échec", "put into check", with reference to chess, the literal meaning is, according to the *DMF*, "épuiser, abattre qqn", "tire someone out", or "vaincre (un adversaire), dompter", "defeat an enemy, master, tame". I find the second range of translations more appropriate for the context. Indeed, even though the Empress' ruse has been exposed and she will thus be condemned, this does not necessarily entail that she lost the argument against the Sages. We have abundantly stressed this point: during the seven days that precede her execution, the Empress shows an incredible knowledge and rhetoric skills, even more than the Sages. Regardless of the final outcome, the altercation is eventually won by the Empress, and this is testified by the fact that the Emperor declares it clearly in the final, crucial verses. Thus, albeit she is destroyed, the Empress' knowledge and her wicked use of it remains to haunt the audience, all the more so as she does not show any sign of regret or repentance for her actions, and she dies without asking to be confessed or summoning for the help of God or the Virgin Mary:

> Onques ne se volt confiesser
> ne Dieu ne sa Mere apieler.[130]

[She has never wanted to ask for confession, nor she summoned God or his Mother]

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[129] *Ibid.*, p. 386, vv. 5044-5048.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 388, vv. 5063-5064.

This leads to the moralising couplet with which the text ends:

> Li cors s'estent, l'ame s'en va:
> cil l'ait ki deservie l'a.[131]

[The boy dies, the soul goes away: one gets what one deserves (what goes around comes around)]

These verses strikingly recall those closing the *Wistasse*: "Nus ne puet vivre longhement / Qui tos jors a mal faire entent". Indeed, both the couplets share the moralising and sententious tone, and are the perfect ending to describe the faith of those who use their cleverness to undermine the structured hierarchies of power. Indeed, while Eustache, with his pranks against his Lord, attacks the feudal power, the Empress destabilises the father-son kinship, that is one of the lines along which feudal power is maintained and reproduced. The outrages perpetrated by Eustache and the Empress are avenged with their death.

The outlaw and the woman are not the only "Other" around which the discourse on knowledge and appearances is constructed. Muhammad is in fact the heretic who dared to create a new religion, which is opposed to Christendom and wants to convert and subjugate the whole world. Such an outrage cannot be avenged with anything else than a Crusade. War, as it has been noted, is certainly a central issue in the *Mahomet*: the new cult wants its followers to wage war against those who do not believe in it, which ultimately means that Christianity is in danger, it is in fact threatened, and Christians must reply with a Crusade. The fact that the responsibility for Crusades is shifted to the "Sarrazin" side, however, make Crusades become a matter of defence. Christians, however, shall not worry for they are destined to win. Just like the Persians are able to defeat the Sarasin army, which is left without guidance by the coward Muhammad, Christians will defeat Muslims and their perverted beliefs. In this context, it is significant that the *Mahomet* is followed by a text that is interested in another, similar "holy war", that is the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur*, a fictional account on the destruction of Jerusalem led by Vespasian to avenge Jesus Christ's passion.

It has already been noted that an abridged and condensed version of the Vengeance's narrative is integrated in *K*, where it functions as the *SSR*'s backstory. However, this narrative does not appear only in these two places of the manuscript, but also in the fourth codicological section

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[131] *Ibid*., p. 388, vv. 5067-5068.

D, where we find a prose *Vie de Pilate* (fos. 406-408v). While the presence of three different versions of the *Vengeance*'s certainly testifies to the compiler or commissioner's interest in this narrative, the position of the verse *Vengeance* at the end of the codicological section under scrutiny is not fortuitous. The rise of Muhammad must be stopped by a Crusade. And indeed, the prophet is figuratively punished with the account of the horrendous destruction of Jerusalem in the *Vengeance*.[132]

The plot of the *Vengeance* has been briefly introduced in the previous chapter, where it was presented as the *SSR*'s backstory. In that case we found many of the element that constitute the *Vengenace*'s narrative: Vespasian malady; his miraculous healing thanks to the holy shroud carried to Rome by Veronica; his will to avenge Jesus Christ's passion after acknowledging the power of God. Of course, the actual poem of the *Vengeance* abounds in particulars that are omitted in the rewriting appearing in *K*, in particular the horrendous account of the siege of Jerusalem, which sees the Jews completely overwhelmed and subjugated by the violence and the strategic skills of the Romans, who deprive them of access to water and food supplies. Interestingly, in the *Vengeance* the Romans are portrayed not only as pagans, but also as followers of Muhammad. When Veronica is received at the Roman court in order to present Vespasian with the holy shroud and accomplish her holy duty, she is received in the imperial chambers followed by a crowd of barons and nobles who want to assist. Amidst them, the emperor's son, Titus, stands out for his sumptuous looks: "La fu Tytus, vestus d'un hermin peliçon / Le jour porta couronne en l'ounour de Mahon" (There is Titus, dressed in ermine fur / That day he wore a crown in honour of Muhammad).[133] Vespasian himself declares that if and when God will enable him to go back to Rome alive after the victory on the Jews, he will recant the precepts of Muhammad and will receive baptism: "Se Damediex autisme me laisse revenir, / Jou volrai Mahonmet et laissier et guerpir, / Si me ferai en fons baptisier et servir".[134] The members of the imperial family are not the only ones to be described as followers of Muhammad, the Romans are also collectively called "paien et sarrasin";[135] it is implicit, then, that the conversion of Vespasian at the end of the poem will mark the conversion of the whole Roman empire. On the very day of the army's return to Rome, the Emperor is welcomed by

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[132] This view is also shared by Tuner who, commenting on its position in the manuscript says that the *Vengeance* "seems almost to offer a corrective to Muhammad's seemingly successful creation of a Saracen community, uniting Christian readers by depicting the defeat and undoing of Christianity's enemies and thus showcasing God's power" Victoria Turner, *Theorising Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Legenda, 2019), p. 152.

[133] Hypercodex, vv. 594-95.

[134] *Ibid.*, vv. 1264-66

[135] Cfr. *Ibid.*, vv. 779, 800, 801, 1111, 1962, 2170.

Saint Clement, who invites him to receive the holy sacrament of baptism. Vespasian accepts and asks for the baptismal font to be prepared for him. In front of the whole city of Rome, Vespasian removes his clothes and submerges in the holy water, followed by his son Titus. As soon as the Romans see this, they come to the Emperor and ask to follow his new cult: "Quant cil de rome virent le signor baptisier: / "Sire, baptisiés nous et si nous ensaigniés[136] / La loy que vous tenés et si lairons le viés"" (When the Romans saw their Lord receiving the baptism: "Sir, baptise us and teach us your cult and we will leave the old one").[137]

This suggest that there is no possibility of salvation for those who oppose Christendom in any way. The Jews are dreadfully subjugated by the Roman forces, who are said to be followers of Muhammad. However, as they realise the incredible power and miracles of which God is capable, they do not hesitate to recant their former beliefs and convert to Christianity. In one way or another, the heretics will always be defeated – there is only one true and trustworthy God to believe in.

Some conclusions

The sequential reading of the *Wistasse*, *K* and the *Mahomet* suggests that the section of the manuscript BnF fr. 1553 where they appear creates a space to invite to a reflection on the matter of false appearance and the duplicitous nature of knowledge. The *Violette* can easily be included to this tryptic too, for its plot deals as well with the ruse perpetrated by a *lausenger* to the detriment of a valiant knight and his woman. Knowledge and false appearance, then, seem to be a central concern for the compiler or whoever asked for the composition of BnF fr. 1553. Building up on Turner's idea that the *Mahomet* is not concerned with islamophobia as much as it engages in a severe attack against the gullibility of the masses and the dangers that appearances conceal, I argue that something very similar can be predicated on *K*. Indeed, this text should not be seen as just another medieval product of the antifeminist discourse, but rather as a text posing the problem of the ambiguous features of knowledge and intelligence. Of course, this is not to say that the misogynistic discourse is not at stake in *K*. Quite the contrary, misogyny remains the *a priori* background against which the whole problem of knowledge is

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[136] The form *ensaignés* in this place creates a good play of words generating an interesting ambiguity. Indeed, this form could be interpreted to come for the verb "enseigner" (to teach) but also from the verb "ensaigner", which literally means "to mark with a sign", but in relation to Christian baptism could well mean "to mark with the sign of the cross", that is to be recognised as a Christian.

[137] *Ibid*., vv. 2320-22

discussed. The outlaw, the woman, and the heretic, then, are to be seen as the embodiment of a matter of concern, rather than the direct target of the discourse that unfolds along the lines of these poems.

Reading *K* in its broader manuscript context proved useful to enlarge our understanding of the narrative, but also of its fortune and reception. This chapter has in fact demonstrated that in a specific textual community the *SSR*'s narrative served as a tool to question knowledge and appearance. This consideration suggests we look *K*'s text more in detail in order to investigate further if and how the matter of knowledge and appearance is treated.

The next chapter will be dedicated to a tale, *Inclusa*, whose treatment of the matter of appearance and knowledge will be considered not only under the light of its implication in the context of the *SSR*'s plot, but also in the broader terms of its reception in the later Latin tradition. Indeed, the fact that the status of knowledge is put into question does not however mean that the problems it brings are automatically solved: not only is knowledge questioned, but also the way we access it, that is the senses. This raises considerable epistemological troubles – especially after the medieval assimilation of Aristotelian precepts about gnoseology. For the Stagirite, in fact, the senses are the primary way to access knowledge.

Chapter 3

Gnoseological troubles

Nos itaque ista, quae fecisti, videmus, quia sunt, tu autem quia vides ea, sunt. Et nos foris videmus, quia sunt, et intus, quia bona sunt.[1]

Augustine, *Confessiones*, Liber XIII, 53.

Introduction

Chapter 2 puts forward the idea that in the triptych *Wistasse le Moine*, *K* and *Roman de Mahon* in manuscript BnF fr. 1553, *K* can be understood as a text that is less interested in the antifeminist discourse than in posing the problem of the ambiguous features of knowledge, intelligence, and appearance. Of course, this is not to say that *K* does not engage at all with a misogynistic discourse but rather that misogyny is the premise to the whole problem of knowledge.

However, saying that knowledge and its status are put into question is not tantamount to suggest that the issues it brings are organically exposed, discussed and thus happily resolved. *K* seems to struggle not only with the idea of knowledge, but also with the way we access it, thereby shaking the structure of medieval gnoseology. We have seen the text warning against appearances in the long digression that introduces the sage Malquidas and his tale *Puteus*, yet we find the Sages reproaching the Emperor for believing the words of the Empress better than his own eyes. The Sages' accusation raises gnoseological troubles. Indeed, at the beginning of the narrative, when the Emperor and his men hear the Empress' cries for help and burst into the room where she and the Prince were, the scene that the Emperor witnesses does not seem to leave space for doubt. The ripped dress of the Empress, the scratches on her ensanguined body, the Empress' distress; everything seems to point in one direction: the Prince has assaulted

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[1] "As for ourselves, we see the things you have made because they are. But they are because you see them. We see outwardly that they are, and inwardly that they are good." Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 763.

the Empress. Thus, when the Sages advice the Emperor to trust his sight, they actually risk nullifying their own effort to free the Prince from the accusation of rape.

This contradiction comes to a head at the moment of the tale *Inclusa*, one of the most important considering that it is the seventh and last tale of the Sages in the Old French versions, both in the verse *K*, *C* and the prose *A*. The tale revolves around three characters: a jealous husband who locks his wife in a tower, which she flees with the help of her lover and, of course, a good dose of deception. At the end of his narration, the Sage invites the Emperor to believe in what he sees, to trust his eyes better than the Empress' words – once again, almost as if the Emperor did not see the Empress's dress torn apart, her body covered with blood; almost as if words were not the only wherewithal the Sages have available to convince the Emperor of the Prince's innocence.

The contradiction raised by this passage creates enormous problems and their implications will be analysed through the comparison of *K* with other moments of the *SSR*'s tradition, namely prose version A, and the Latin and Middle French versions – always following the synoptic and dialogic approach that has informed our study so far. This time, in order to better understand the importance and interest of the problems concerning *Inclusa* as well as its place in the narrative, it will be necessary to look at the bigger picture of the *SSR*'s tradition and include the Latin version, which was composed from a prose version of *A*, and the Middle French version, which in turn is a later translation of the Latin text. In these two texts, in fact, a solution seems to be found by the author/redactor. Indeed, *Inclusa* is put in the mouth of the Empress, rather than the Sage's.

Challenging previous interpretations on the rearrangement of the tales in the Latin version of the *SSR*, in the next sections I shall argue that the Latin redactor did not only recognise a problem in the Old French text used as a base, but also that the ultimate reason why the tale ended up being reorganised is due to its gnoseological implications. As a matter of fact, the Latin text manifests a solid concern, if not anxiety, about the theme of the senses, warning against the deceitfulness of perception. The latter emerges significantly when looking at the *reductiones*, that is moral interpretations of the tales provided by the Latin redactor(s) which are usually included at the end of each tale or at the end of the whole *SSR*'s text. Investigating the *reductiones* is a very effective strategy to understanding the ways in which the text was to be received in a particular socio-cultural context as they work as a sort of commentary, even though predominantly religious.

Speaking of reception, the present chapter will also argue that the gnoseological troubles raised by *K*, to which the subsequent Latin text seems to respond, is strikingly coherent

with the contemporary philosophical and theological disputes on perception and the nature of the senses. The 13th and 14th centuries are indeed characterised by heated debates on the subject matter. The translations from Arabic into Latin of many Aristotelian works (in particular the *De Anima* and the *De sensu et sensato*) pushed medieval thinkers to reconsider some of the – until then – unchallenged Platonic ideas about senses and their role in achieving knowledge.[2] Whereas for Plato, and later for Neo-Platonists, senses constitute a mere mechanism that triggers the memory of the Ideas contemplated by the soul before its fall into the body and thus the material world, the Aristotelian account of knowledge insists on the importance of the body itself: knowledge is achievable only through and by virtue of the senses. The change in the epistemological paradigm led philosophers and theologians to rethink some of the most delicate and sensitive medieval questions, like for example the relationship between the body and the soul or the way in which the knowledge of God and other angelic substances is attained.

As it is often the case, the dissemination and impact of ideas that could overthrow the accepted narrative on what ultimately ensures the reproduction of the symbolic order can be also retrieved by looking at the laws and other measures attempting to preserve the *status quo*. The pervasiveness of Aristotelian ideas on the senses and their influence on medieval thought is witnessed by the crucial condemnations of the bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier, in 1270 and 1277. Overall Tempier's condemnations addressed 233-odd prepositions that were considered unacceptable as they questioned some of the principles of Christian faith.[3] As Sarah Kay noticed: "at stake in the condemnations […] are numerous prepositions relating to knowledge and the body".[4]

Kay's work has been key in structuring some of the ideas that will be exposed in the following lines. In her paper *Women's Body of Knowledge*, Kay puts forward the idea that the epistemological change so far discussed provoked serious anxieties in the medieval cultural setting as it troubled the equation between men/reason and women/body – which ensures men's domination over women. If senses, through the body, are what enable us to know, does it not mean that women enjoy a privileged access to knowledge by being closer to its source, the

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[2] The *De Anima* and the *De sensu et sensato* become part of the university curriculum after 1255. See Dominik Perler, 'Perception in Medieval Philosophy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*, ed. by Mohan Matthen (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013), pp.51-65, p.52.

[3] Tempier's accusations were directed predominantly at the work of Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. In particular, Siger of Brabant's strict Aristotelianism, mediated by his Averroism, led him to make statements that were deemed controversial in the Scholastic climate of the 13th century. See John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150-1350). An Introduction.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 72-73.

[4] Sarah Kay, 'Women's Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the "Roman of the Rose"', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Miri Rubin and Sarah Kay (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 211-35, p. 229; see in particular note 51, p. 235.

senses? Kay shows that this concern resonates significantly in one of the most influential works of medieval French literature, the *Roman de la Rose* where misogyny "changes from anxiety to maintain pressure on women to fear her power as knowing subject".[5] What triggers Kay's analysis is the presence in the complex text of the *Rose* – particularly in Jean de Meun's continuation – of female characters like the *Vieille* (the Old Woman) and *Nature*. They are at once framed as Master of Arts for their knowledge and eloquence, and as women who of course embody the most common anti-feminist stereotypes: the former is portrayed as a procurer, while the latter excuses herself several times for the fact that, being a woman, she is not able to refrain from talking. Kay situates these contradictions in the wider picture of the 13th century, when the prominence of the neo-Aristotelian epistemology based on the body ended up questioning the relation between the body (female) and the spirit (male) – resulting in a recrudescence of the misogynistic discourse, which in fact permeates the *Rose*.

Acknowledging that the *SSR* entered medieval culture in the second half of the 12th century in a version that resembled the one of *K*,[6] it is probably not far-fetched to locate this verse version, as it appears in manuscript BnF fr. 1553, in the intellectual climate of the 13th century, when the controversy on the value of the senses in relation to knowledge and knowing became prominent.

A very similar point can be made for the Latin translation. However, some adjustments must be considered here as the Latin text does not only deal with philosophy, but first and foremost with theology. The presence of the religious interpretation of the frame-story and the tales suggests the text was received as an edifying reading when it was not used for preaching purposes, as we shall see shortly. A different use of the text certainly entails an emphasis on different aspects of the narrative, but it also involves different theoretical premises. From this perspective, the Latin text moves away from the strict philosophical discourse on sensory perception and embraces the theological stance on the subject matter: the senses allow evil to enter our soul, and this makes them problematic, for a good Christian should always be in control of them. This will be shown in the second part of the Chapter, which is dedicated to a close analysis of the Empress' tale *Virgilius* and its *reductio*. While the relocation of *Inclusa* in the Latin text demonstrates a clear awareness of the genealogical questions it raises and, perhaps, of the intellectual debate on perception too, the *reductiones* – of *Virgilius*, but also of other tales – are concerned with a different type of discourse. Indeed, more than engaging with

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

[6] Mary B. Speer, ed., *Le Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome: A Critical Edition of the Two Verse Redactions of a Twelfth-Century Romance* (Lexington: French Forum, 1989), pp. 67-71.

the philosophical debate, the *reductiones* serve to warn the believers against the deceitfulness of the external senses, culpable of making humans weak and vulnerable when confronted with the continuous attempts of Satan to break into their soul and destroy it. In this sense, the Latin translation appears to be closer to prescriptive religious texts (i.e. *exempla*, but also sermons) which resort to the Augustinian account on the senses and perception.

Fundamental for the development of the Christian anthropology as well as the establishment of a Christian liturgy, as Eric Palazzo argues, Augustine's gnoseological thought aims to rehabilitate the corporal senses by putting them in relation with the internal, spiritual sense of the heart.[7] Already in the 3rd century Origen sought a reconciliation between the body and the soul by envisaging a correspondence between the corporal and the spiritual senses, which was certified by the incarnation of the Verb as well as by the fact that the revelation brings a series of "heavenly" feelings, as after the revelation one ears, tastes, smells, feels in a heavenly way.[8] Augustine takes and expands the idea of the spiritual senses by claiming that the inner sense of the 'heart' is what ultimately enables humans to connect and communicate with God.[9]

Despite the Augustinian attempt to rehabilitate the corporal senses and pacify the troubled relation between the body and the soul, especially from the 12th century the predominant tendency is to strongly denigrate the body and the senses.[10] Palazzo argues that this is mainly due to the way the Scriptures were interpreted, in particular the Genesis' episode of the Fall. While it is more of a sin of pride, medieval thinkers have always proposed the Fall as a sin of flesh – or, rather, a sin of sex.[11] This resulted in the tendency to identify a direct connection between sin and sex, that is to say between sin and the perversion of the senses. In this respect, Palazzo brings up the example of the private prayers of Anselm of Canterbury, in one of which he declares: "Est enim cor meum immundum, omnes sensus corporis mei immundi"[12] – a condition that continuously puts him to have "hands full of blood contaminated

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[7] Éric Palazzo, *L'invention Chrétienne Des Cinq Sens Dans La Liturgie Et L'art Au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2014), pp. 65-76.

[8] *Idib.*, p. 61.

[9] According to Palazzo, the rehabilitation of the carnal senses through the spiritual ones is crucial for the establishment of Christian liturgy, as the ritual aims at the "positive" activation of the senses. While referring to the work of Jean Leclercq, Eric Palazzo claims that: "la liturgie était, par excellence, le 'lieu' de l'activation sensorielle du corps et de tout ce qui compose le rituel afin de produire l'effet sacramentel recherché, favorisant la réalisation pleine et entière de la théologie de l'Église". See *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[10] *Ibid.* p., 73.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 35-41.

[12] Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 36. "So my heart is impure, all the senses of my body are impure", PsOR5, 26-27. Cfr. Jean-François Cottier, ed., Anima mea*: Prières privées et textes de dévotion du Moyen Age latin. Autour des* Prières *ou* Méditations *attribuées à saint Anselme De Cantorbéry (XIe-XIIe Siècle)*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 74-75.

by all things depraved, prepared to achieve any evil actions, indolent to do any good action".[13] The same diffidence towards the senses, which are regarded as gateway to sin, can be found in the religious interpretations of the frame-story and the *exempla* of the *SSR*, thereby inscribing the Latin translation of the Old French text in the ecclesiastical milieu of the 14th century.

Having identified this problem in the verse *K*, we will see how it plays out in following versions of the text: prose *A*, its Latin translation (which will be called *HL*) the Middle French translation of the Latin (which will be called *HF*). To facilitate the reading of the ensuing analysis, it is worth providing some details about the nature of and relationship between these texts.

From French to Latin and back: the prose *A*, the Latin *HL* and the Middle French *HF*

An exhaustive overview of the prose version *A* and its tradition has been provided in chapter 1. Here, the reader will be reminded only of the essential information relating to its date of composition as well as its place in the bigger picture of the Old French *SSR*.
Version *A* is generally dated around the beginnings of the 13th century and author and place of composition of the work are unknown. The text appears in 30-odd manuscripts of various types that have been divided into seven groups by Runte in his electronic edition of the text.[14] Probably a prosification of an earlier verse version, *A* served as base for the following developments of the text: the other prose versions respectively called *L* and *M*, as well as the 14th century Latin translation (*HL*), which is here examined.[15]

We owe much of the information we have about the Latin translation *HL* to Detlef Roth and his work on the edition of the text(s).[16] Roth claims that *HL* probably belongs to the second quarter of the 14th century and that it was produced either in Alsace or the South of Germany by a German ecclesiastic. He based his observations on two elements: on the one hand, the translator used a manuscript containing *A*, in Old French, which makes a border region such as Alsace a good candidate as potential place of origin; on the other hand, however, a large number of manuscripts containing *HL* seems to have been produced in the South of Germany – a fact

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[13] *Manus meae plenae sunt sanguine, omnibusqque sordibus sunt pollutae, promptae ad omne opus prauum, pigrae ad aliquid bonum operandum*, PsOR14, 24,25. Cfr. Jean-François Cottier, ed., Anima mea*: Prières privées et textes de dévotion du Moyen Age latin,* pp. 186-187.
[14] Hans R. Runte, Portal, Society of the Seven Sages. (2014). https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107 [accessed December 2021].
[15] *L* and also *M* have been presented in the introduction of chapter 1.
[16] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*. 2 vols, *Münchener Texte Und Untersuchungen Zur Deutschen Literatur Des Mittelalters* (Tübingen: 2004). We should indeed talk about texts rather than text because, as we shall see shortly, the editor identifies four different forms of *HL*, present in as many groups of manuscripts.

that might indeed suggest that the text could belong to that area.[17] Accepting the conundrum of possibilities about the place of production of *HL*, Roth admits that its most interesting feature is the incredible fortune it enjoyed in Germany and beyond. Indeed, besides appearing in 72-odd manuscripts, 8 incunabula and 2 sixteenth-century editions, *HL* has been also translated in almost every European language.[18] Such an enormous *recensio* already suggests significant textual instability, which is indeed one of the characteristics of *HL*. Roth proposes four different critical editions of the Latin text corresponding to as many redactions, which he identifies by dividing *HL*'s manuscripts in four groups based on two main elements: the length of the tales and the nature, presence, and position of the *reductiones*. As has already been mentioned, the *reductiones* – or *moralitates*, as they are called in some manuscripts – are religious interpretations of the frame-story and tales of the *SSR*.[19] In manuscript groups I and III they appear after the section of the frame-story connected to the following tale, just before the next narrator starts telling their story.[20] In groups II and IV, the *reductiones* are not always included – but when they are, they appear at the end of the main text and constitute a sort of appendix closing the overall *HL*.[21]

In relatively recent years, many scholars have underscored the importance of reading the *reductiones* as a constitutive part of *HL*. Challenging Brigitte Weiske's view that *HL*'s *reductiones* were not integrated in the original Latin text, Roth convincingly argues that "the

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[17] *Ibid.*, pp.7-14 for his discussion about *HL*'s date and place of origin. As for the date of composition, it should be mentioned that the oldest manuscript of group I, which conserves the form of the text probably closer to the original, is conserved in manuscript Universitäts-bibliothek Innsbruck, 310, and is dated 1342.

[18] Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, 'Traducción, reescritura y cambio de género: del *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* a la *Historia Septem Sapientum Romae'*, in *Traduire le Vernaculaire en Latin au Moyen Age at à la Renaissance*, ed. Françoise Fery-Hue (Paris: École des Chartes, 2013), pp. 65-91, p.70. See also Roth's work for more accurate description of the manuscripts and *incunabula* used to edit the Latin text: Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, p.17-119. For a general overview on the Latin text and its spread see Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, and Anthony J. Farrell, *The Seven Sages of Rome, and the Book of Sindbad* (New York, London: Garland, 1984). The widespread dissemination of the text as well as the authority usually granted to Latin led 18th century scholars to believe that *HL* was actually the text from which the Old French version derived; this view was promptly invalidated by Paris, who demonstrated that the Latin text was only a much later translation of and Old French text, see Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome* (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Françaises, 1876), pp. XXVIII-XLIII.

[19] *HL*'s editor, Roth, calls them "geistliche Auslegungen", which literally translates into the English "spiritual interpretations". I find this terminology too vague for such a clear goal: the Christian appropriation of secular literature. For this reason, I will tend to refer to *reductiones/moralitates* as "religious interpretations".

[20] To give one descriptive example, *Arbor*'s *reductio* - the first story of the Empress - appears right after the part of the frame-story introducing the first story of the Sages, *Canis*.

[21] For example, in two manuscripts of group II (Würzburg, Franziskanerklster, MS 115, f.166r and Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Theol. 108, f.176vb) a rubric opens the collections of "moralitates": *Explicit hystoria Septem Sapientum Incipit Moralitas Cuiuslibet hystorie in Speciali et sunt omnes predicabiles et proprijssime ad mores hominum trahende*. See Detlef Roth, 'A Consideration on the Original Structure and the Transfromation of the Historia Septem Sapientum Throughout Its Manuscript Tradition', *Medieval Sermon Studies,* 44 (2000), 87-107, p. 87.

spiritual interpretations were conceptualised as part of the unity of the Historia".[22] According to Roth, not only did the translator/redactor conceive the *reductiones* to be read together with the main text of *HL*, but many of the modifications and additions that differentiate the Latin translation from the Old French model can only be explained if we look at the way some details are used to propose a religious interpretation of the tales.[23] Roth particularly stresses this point because he ultimately believes that the presence or absence of the *reductiones* in the text or at the end of it can convey much information about its reception and use. In this sense, he claims that the manuscripts that include the *reductiones* are more likely to have been used for religious purposes – and specifically for individual meditation, edifying reading, or even preaching. This is an important point on which we shall return in the final part of the Chapter. For now, let it suffice to mention that Roth believes the text of group I to be excessively long and too detailed to have served preaching purposes, while its *reductiones*, just as lengthy, could hardly have been integrated into sermons. "Rather," Roth continues "the text appears to function as a kind of theological lesson which is directed to a textual community rather than to auditors".[24] The stress on the theological lesson, as it will be discussed later, is crucial – especially when we will comment on the relation between knowledge, perception, and the Latin reception of *SSR*. Coming back to Roth's discussion, however, while the redaction of groups II and IV, which lack the *reductiones* in several manuscripts, might also have had the same purpose as edifying reading, the shape and organisation of the texts in group III indicates that it might have been

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 88; but of course see also see also Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, pp. 199-204. Roth engages especially with the work of Brigitte Weiske on the *Gesta Romanorum* (Brigitte Weiske, *Gesta Romanorum*. Band 1: Untersuchungen zu Konzeption und Überlieferung; Band 2: Texte, Verzeichnis vols (Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992). Weiske argues that the presence of more than one religious interpretation for the same tale makes it unlikely for them to be part of the original project of the redactor-translator of *HL*; moreover, when considered individually, the religious interpretations would not fit in the larger picture *HL*, as they would interrupt its narrative. Roth responds to this by highlighting that, firstly, the *reductiones* can be found in over a half of the manuscripts that preserve *HL*, even the earliest codices of the tradition; and that, secondly, there is a close correspondence between the changes and addition of the Latin text and the *reductiones*. Roth's view has been discussed and validated by Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, 'Traducción, reescitura y cambio de género: del *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* a la *Historia Septem Sapientum Romae'*, pp. 65-91. See also the more recent Csilla Gábor, 'The Seven Sages as Reading for Edification: Medieval Narratives of the Seven Sages of Rome', *Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities,* 21 (2016), 15-33.

[23] As a matter of fact, the details included in *HL* do not aide the narrative flow, nor they become important for the development of the narrative itself. Quite the contrary, they can be thought of as mere "narrative embellishments" that find their explanation only if looking at the corresponding *reductiones*. Indeed, every detail – through the use of allegoric interpretation – is translated into a religious element, action or behaviour.

[24] Detlef Roth, 'A Consideration on the Original Structure and the Transformation of the *Historia Septem Sapientum* Throughout Its Manuscript Tradition', p.102. This view is later confirmed in the introduction to the critical edition, where Roth points out that in the manuscripts the text of group I are usually accompanied by sermons and other edifying readings, once again suggesting that the text was to be used as individual reading rather than oral delivery or preaching "[…] die primäre Funktion der >Historia< der Redaktion I nicht im Gebrauch für Predigtzwecke zu liegen, sondern eher in der Erbauungslektüre". Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*. (Tübingen: 2004), p. 177.

conceived and used as an aid for preaching. This, Roth argues, is due to two main factors: on the one hand, the presence in two manuscripts of group III of a rubric that defines the *reductiones* as *predicabiles et proprijssime ad mores hominum trahende* ("suitable for preaching and very appropriate to incline men to good behaviour");[25] on the other, not only is the text of *HL* significantly abridged, but the tales are also given a new series of *reductiones* which are quite succinct as well. Particularly this latter observation leads Roth to believe that the text was rendered more suitable for preaching purposes,[26] which would be further confirmed by the fact that the heading introducing *HL* in the oldest codex of group III, Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Hs 27983, presents the text more as a collection of *exempla* than a unitary and coherent text held together by a frame-story: "Secuntur hystorie septem sapientum" ("The stories of the seven sages [will] follow").[27] This, Roth claims, "suggests the intention of transforming the Historia into a collection of exempla, which in all likelihood was primarily intended as an aid for preaching".[28]

Similar conclusions are also reached by Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, though from a different angle. Cañizares Ferriz rightly believes that *HL*'s translation from the Old French into Latin entails not merely a linguistic transposition and claims that what is at stake is also the more problematic translation from one literary genre into another: that is, from the *roman* into the *exemplum*. Rather than a translation, Cañizares Ferriz suggests *HL* is a rewriting.[29] Indeed, every translation requires a certain degree of manipulation of the original text to the point that they all can be thought of as a rewriting, yet, Cañizares Ferriz argues, some transformations can be intentional, which is to say that they can be attributed to the will of the translator, who – in the case of *HL* – is interested in readapting the text in order to make it fit in generic categories different than those of the original text.[30] Scope and use of the text (*finalidad y uso*) are for Cañizares Ferriz decisive in determining the form and shape of *HL* – and it should not surprise us that in the 15th century, a period in which the text, according to Cañizares Ferriz, is seen more as a leisure reading than as an educative one, the *reductiones* cease to be included in print versions.[31] Following this line of thought, the Middle French translation of *HL*, *HF*,

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[25] Detlef Roth, 'A Consideration on the Original Structure and the Transformation of the *Historia Septem Sapientum* Throughout Its Manuscript Tradition', p. 87.
[26] Roth corroborates his thesis by remarking that some manuscripts of group III present a sort of table of contents with a summary of both tales and the *reductiones* (*Ibid*., p. 104).
[27] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[28] *Ibid*. p. 104.
[29] Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, 'Traducción, reescitura y cambio de género: del *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* a la *Historia Septem Sapientum Romae*', pp. 65-91, p. 91.
[30] *Ibid*., p.72.
[31] *Ibid*., p.75.

seems likewise less concerned with the preaching potential of the *SSR*, as it lacks of *reductiones*. However, what remains predominant also in this version is the educative interest of the text.

The wealth of Latin versions required a decision to make the analysis feasible within the three years in which this research has been conducted. Even though partial and not representative of the entire Latin tradition of the *SSR*, it seemed reasonable to focus on the oldest redaction, which is represented, according to Roth's study, by the text of groups I and II.[32] Another point in favour of this choice is the already noted concern with the theological discourse. The text of group I and II shows a great familiarity with the intellectual language by, for example, making explicit reference to terms usually appearing in philosophical or theological treaties. Given the nature and scope of our inquiry – which is mainly concerned with the way the relation between sensory perception and knowledge is framed and its consequences for the representation of gender in the text – this choice seemed the most appropriate. This is not to say that the versions of groups III and IV have been completely neglected; they have also been read and mentioned when deemed interesting or relevant for the sake of the discussion.

Not much is known about the Middle French translation of the Latin text, which seems the most neglected version of the whole French tradition of the *SSR*. Appearing in 1483, its massive spread is witnessed by the presence of many incunabula dating to the end of the 15th century.[33] To the best of my knowledge, the only study focusing on *HF* is a paper published by Brady B. Gilleland in the 1980s, where he provided more elements to support Campbell's idea that the text shows an "extravagant fondness for pointing the moral", and where the author proposed that this tendency makes it possible that the text was produced by a churchman.[34] Keeping in mind what has been said above with respect to *HL*, the absence of the *reductiones* in the 15th century prints might make the reader doubt what *kind of moral HF*'s author was seeking to point out. If, according to Gilleland, *HF*'s text has the tendency to "sermonise"[35]

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[32] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, pp.176-192.

[33] Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, and Anthony J. Farrell, *The Seven Sages of Rome, and the Book of Sindbad* (New York, London: Garland, 1984).

[34] Brady B. Gilleland, 'The French and Latin Versions of Historia Septem Sapientum', *Classica et mediaevalia* (1981/1982), pp. 229-37, pp. 229-230; the quote is directly from Killis Campbell's edition: *The Seven Sages of Rome*, ed. by Killis Campbell (Boston, New York: Ginn & Company, 1907), p. XXVI.
Our analysis will not provide positive or negative comments on Gilleland's claims. In fact, engaging with this philological question on *HF* exceeds the scope of this research. Such an enquiry could benefit of a careful study of the earliest *incunabula* produced in Geneve in 1483, which could shed some light on the socio-historical conditions of production – which could in turn validate or contradict Gilleland's rather rushed conclusions.

[35] Brady B. Gilleland, 'The French and Latin Versions of Historia Septem Sapientum', pp. 229-37, p. 231.

when amplifying the Latin source, Gilleland should have clarified what he exactly meant by "sermon" and how he thought the sermon was to be constructed and then received. It should be acknowledged, however, that Gilleland's use of the verb "sermonise" might also merely refer to *HF*'s tendence to comment on the tales with a moralising tone, without implying that the author is constructing a discourse which was indeed meant to result into a sermon intended for preaching. At any rate, considering how deeply concerned with sermons the Latin text is, one should be careful with the choice of words – in order to do justice to the complicated history of reception of this text. What is sure is that even in the Middle French translation the text maintains its character as educative and edifying reading.

After describing the corpus that will be at the centre of the analysis of this chapter, it is now time to go back to the way gender is represented across versions *K*, *A*, *HL* and HF and its relation to the problem of knowledge and perception.

Believe it or not. Gnoseological troubles in *K* and *A*.

The verse version of the *SSR*, *K*, seems particularly concerned with the problem of perception and its importance, particularly when one is after the truth – that is real knowledge. This is evident even when approaching the text from different angles. An in-depth reading of the text of *K* reveals the presence of narrative elements that are absent in other versions of the Old French *SSR*'s constellation, thereby making apparent *K*'s concern towards the problem of perception and knowledge. In this sense, two passages are of utmost importance for our reasoning: the baptism of the Prince and the explicit authorial comment on the deceitfulness of appearance.[36] In the first case, a startling and unexpected scene witnesses the Prince receiving his baptism at the age of thirteen, once he is an adolescent who is able to understand his religion ("Lors s'ert auques issus d'enfanche /et si entendoit sa creanche"),[37] and, especially, as he is able to reply to the officiant's ritual questions without a godfather speaking for him ("Si parin nee parloient pas / pour lui a cel jor, n'ert pas gas; / de sa bouche au prestre disoit / que saint batesme requeroit" – His godfathers did not speak for him that day; with his own mouth he

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[36] It is worth reminding the reader that while the first scene is a hapax of *K*, the second one is mentioned also in the derhymed version *D* – which is not surprising, considering its proximity to a verse text that, however indirectly, might be linked with *K*.

[37] *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), pp. 124-126, vv. 175-175.

asked the priest to receive the holy baptism).[38] In the second case, right at the middle of the text an authorial rant occurs on the deceitfulness of appearance: one should never trust what you see, for the truth is behind what can be observed with the eyes.[39]

Even as we turn our attention to the manuscript that preserves *K* the apprehension concerning senses and perception remains a central element. Indeed, all the texts appearing in the same codicological section as K show the same concern for the subject matter. The warning permeating the *Wistasse le Moine*, *K* and the *Roman de Mahon* deals with the ways in which these characters are able to mystify reality, mainly by pranking (in the case of the *Wistasse*) or deceiving people in order to get what they want (which applies to the Empress and Muhammad). Furthermore, despite how positive and virtuous the model of the *Roman de la Violette* might seem – especially towards the female protagonist –, it still fits perfectly in a series of texts that ultimately advice against deceitful people. Characters in these four texts play with their victims' senses in order to confuse and deceive them. In between the lines of these texts, deception itself becomes a sort of character that represents the evilness that is always looming over the heads of unprepared and unskilled people, those who are not able to immediately recognise a ruse and condemn the villains. In this sense, to be harshly attacked is not the wickedness of the deceiver as much as the gullibility of the deceived, who is not perspicacious enough to recognise the danger.[40]

Following the plots of the texts that accompany *K* in manuscript BnF fr. 1553, we can easily single out the site of deception: sight and hearing are the two main faculties of the body that are subject to it. However, it is exactly here that things become problematic from a philosophical stance. According to the medieval account on gnoseology, sight and hearing are also the places where knowledge occurs. To be even more precise, following the medieval Aristotelian tradition, sensory perception in general is necessary to achieve knowledge: indeed, there would be no knowledge without the senses – not even the knowledge of non-material things, for they can be grasped only by starting from the senses.[41] It goes without saying that amidst the non-material things that can be apprehended only by virtue of sensory perception there are not only mathematical objects, but especially God – which of course made the subject matter a topic of concern and heated debate in universities.[42] Perler demonstrates how the

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 126, vv. 179-182.
[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224, vv. 2021-2061.
[40] Victoria Turner, *Theorising Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Legenda, 2019), pp. 135-166.
[41] Dominik Perler, 'Perception in Medieval Philosophy', pp. 51-65, p. 51.
[42] The condemnation of Étienne Tempier in 1270 and 1277 have already been recalled above. See the introduction to this chapter.

scholastic debate of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century "closely examined the origin of perception, its structure, and its function in epistemic processes."[43] Perler identifies three different problems being debated by medieval thinkers regarding the statute of sensory perception: the first issue concerned the very object of perception, that is *what* we perceive; the second issue was about the act of perceiving *per se* and *how* it unfolds; the third issue dealt with the extent to which the perceptual process can be trusted.[44] It is clear that our interest rests particularly on the third problem. Indeed, in accordance with contemporary debates, *K* appears to be troubled by the same types of concerns: are sensory perceptions to be deemed reliable or not? Building on what we have said above regarding the interpolated passages and the position of *K* in the manuscript that ensured its transmission, we might think we can obtain a clear answer to this thorny question – i.e., sensory perception is to be rejected. However, the text does not provide us with a solution, and a close reading of *K* shows that the issue is far from being resolved.

The absolute contempt towards appearance and the suspicion that what we perceive might not be consistent with the external reality appears to be in striking contradiction with the tale *Inclusa* and the use that the Sages make of it. This story is told by the seventh Sage on the seventh day, which makes it particularly important in the structure of the *SSR* if we consider that *Inclusa* is the last *exemplum* before the final, decisive speech of the Prince. In *K*, Berous – the sage who tells *Inclusa* – concludes the narration by warning the Emperor against the words of the Empress:

> Cele femme forment t'argüe:
> Tu le crois miex que ta veüe[45]

[That woman is fooling you with her words: you are trusting her more than what you see]

Berous is therefore encouraging the Emperor to trust his sight, what he sees, in order to escape from the misconceptions caused by the Empress' words. A very similar line occurs in *C*:

> La roine tant vous argue
> Que vous a toloit la veue[46]

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[45] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 364, vv. 4601/2.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 486, vv. 1777/78.

[So much is the queen fooling you with her words, that she has taken sight away from you]

In *A*, after telling the story Meron warns the Emperor in just the same way:

Cele fame vous argue si que vous la creez mieulz que vostre veüe.[47]

[That woman is fooling you and that is why you trust her more than you trust your sight]

In these three texts, then, the Empress is deceiving the Emperor by means of words, and therefore the Sage invites him to use his sight to see clearly what the actual truth is. But if the Emperor really ought to trust his sight, what would he actually do? Would he believe the Empress or would he acknowledge his son's innocence? When the Emperor comes to rescue her from the Prince's alleged assault, the Empress shows the physical signs of the aggression, and indeed the Emperor believes in what is before his own eyes, accusing the Prince as a consequence. By contrast, the Sages can only resort to the persuasiveness of their words in order to convince the Emperor of the Prince's innocence. Moreover, the Prince himself does nothing more than narrating his tale *Vaticinium* in order to secure his and his Masters' salvation.

If we look more closely at *A*'s text, the picture becomes even more complicated. On the sixth night, just the day before Meros tells *Inclusa*, we find the Empress in her room telling her last tale, *Roma*, to the Emperor. After telling the story, the Empress reprimands the Emperor directly and accuses him of being too much fickle as well as of being too easily influenced by the *art* and *engin* of the Sages, who are plotting against him to achieve his destruction. The Empress concludes her rant thusly:

[…] Ja veistes vous bien la prouvance de vostre filz qui me fist toute sanglante et me descira ma robe, ce poistes vous bien oïr et vëoit. Et que attendez vus ne m'en venchiez?" "Dame, dist li emperieres, voir avez dit. La sanc vi je bien et vostre robe desciree. Or n'atendrai je plus, car je vueil qu'il soit orendroit desruitz." Or oëz de la desloial (Deix la confonde) qui tant set de barat et d'art qu'ele se desfen encontre les set sages et touz leur diz met a nëent.[48]

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[47] Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages' (2014) <https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021].
[48] *Ibid.*

["You [Emperor] have already seen evidence that your son made me bleed and ripped up my clothes. That you have blatantly seen and heard. What are you waiting for to avenge me?" "Lady", the Emperor said, "you spoke the truth. I saw the blood and your ripped clothes. I will not wait anymore, for I want him [the Prince] to be immediately destroyed". Hear about this disloyal lady – may God curse her! – who knew so much about ruses and *art* that she was able to defend herself from the seven sages and makes their words count for nothing.]

The Empress reminds the Emperor of what he has seen only six days earlier, her ensanguined body and the clothes ripped up – as she wants the Emperor to believe – by the Prince. For the Emperor this is tantamount to unmistakable evidence: he has actually witnessed what the Empress is saying and, therefore, his son must be guilty of the crime he is being accused of. Sight is indicated as the gateway to knowledge, the knowledge of the truth, by the Empress. Had not Meros intervened right away to stop the Emperor's soldiers from carrying out the Prince's execution, the story could have well closed its circle in that moment. Quite surprisingly, however, at the end of his narration, Meros invites the Emperor to do the same thing the Empress suggested at the end of *Roma*: the Emperor should trust his sight. However, while the Empress warns against the Sages's words, Meros, of course, invites the Emperor to mistrust what the Empress says.

What in *K* and *C* is left unsaid, becomes then a blatant contradiction in *A*. All the more so because the story that Meros is going to tell is about "celui qui mieulz croit sa fame que ce qu'il veoit" (the man who would believe his wife more than what he saw).[49] After Meros' intervention the Prince is safe; the plot can go on – but once again this thorny question recurs: should we trust our sight or should we not?

In the framework of a narrative that focuses mainly on cunning, deception and the duplicitous nature of knowledge, this incongruity generates a blatant "gnoseological short cut", as it were, which jeopardises the structural coherence of the *SSR*. Gnoseological troubles presents themselves directly in front of our eyes.

We shall see shortly what the implications of this contradiction are, and how – if at all – they were addressed by ensuing readaptation of the Old French *SSR*. But before commenting on these issues it is worth focusing on Meros' *exemplum*, *Inclusa*.[50]

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[49] *Ibid*.

[50] The story *Inclusa* is present in all the versions of the Old French and Latin SSR but L. For comments on the origins and history of this tale, see as usual Alexander Haggerty Krappe, 'Studies on the Seven Sages of Rome', *Archivium romanicum,* XVI (1935), 213-26. This story shares also similarities with the fascinating Occitan *Roman de Flamenca*.

"Celui qui mieulz croit sa fame que ce qu'il veoit": *Inclusa*.

In *Inclusa***,** a knight dreams of a lady with whom he falls deeply in love, so he decides to embark on a quest to find her, knowing that he will recognise her as soon as his eyes will fall on her. The exact same thing happens to the lady: she dreams about the knight and falls in love with him. She does not embark on a quest not only because in these types of plots women tend to wait to be found rather than to actively find the object of their love,[51] but also because she is locked up in a tower by her husband, a jealous man who does not allow anyone but himself in the tower. After a time that varies between three weeks and three months according to the different versions, the knight arrives in a town where a stunningly beautiful lady sits by one of the windows of a robust tower. It does not take long to the knight and the lady to spot and recognise each other, but they prefer not to speak to each other in order not to attract anyone's attention. Having understood that he has finally arrived in the right place, the knight goes to meet the lord of the town – who happens, of course, to be the beautiful lady's husband – to whom he offers his service in exchange of hospitality. The lord, tormented by a war that his neighbour is waging against him, happily accepts the proposition of the knight, who is so valiant and brave that he distinguishes himself on the battlefield. The knight soon becomes the lord's favourite and so, once the war is over, he is appointed seneschal. One day the knight is walking near the tower where the lady is kept, and they see each other again. This time, however, the lady decides to communicate with the knight, therefore she grabs a bulrush and throws it out of the window, making sure that the thinner side points up. The knight takes it as an invite to find a way to meet her, so he promptly goes to see his lord to ask for the permission to build a house next to the tower. The lord agrees and the knight hires construction workers to commence the works. Amongst them, however, there is a man from the knight's native country, to whom he commissions a secret job: he will build the secret passageway that will take the knight directly in the lady's room. Once the job is carried out, the knight kills the worker to eliminate a potential witness and immediately heads towards the lady's room. As they see each other, the lady and the knight are sure that they are in front of the person they dreamt of, and they are ravished by passion. Before parting, the lady gives a precious ring to the knight as a symbol of love. The next time the knight and the lord meet, it does not take long to the latter to spot the ring on the knight's finger. The lord has a sudden change of mood: he is struck by

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[51] An illustrious exception is represented by the *chatefable Aucassin et Nicolette*.

the similarity between the knight's ring and the one that his lady should be keeping in her room. Even though he does not say anything in order not to dishonour the knight with an unproved accusation, the lord heads immediately towards the tower to verify with his own eyes whether it is really his ring or not. While the lord is busy opening the many locked doors that lead to the lady's, the knight – having understood that the ring on his hand is the reason why the lord has left the meeting – climbs up the secret passageway, and throws the ring to the lady, who immediately puts it back to its place. Once the lord finally reaches the lady, he asks her about the ring and when he sees it in its usual place the lord tells himself that there are many rings that look similar and, reassured, goes to sleep with the lady. The next meeting between the lord and the knight is marked by some great, and fake, news. The knight tells the lord that a lady from his country came in order to call him back home, so he is willing to host the lord in his house to honour the lady's arrival and take his leave from him. The lord accepts and the knight rushes home to prepare the house to welcome… and ruse him! No lady had come to meet him: the knight's intention is to disguise the lord's lady with marvellous clothes that he brought from his country and make the two have dinner together. The stratagem works and the lord is astounded by the resemblance between the lady before his eyes and his wife – who he believes locked up in her room. Yet, the situation causes discomfort in the pranked lord, and his only thought is to go to check on his wife as soon as the dinner is over. Once again, while the lord is passing through all the locked doors leading to his wife, she has all the time to take her disguise off and put herself to bed, pretending to be asleep. When the lord finds the lady in her room, he is immediately reassured and, just like he did with the ring, he tells himself that many women look like each other. In the meantime, the knight prepares the last ruse. First, he finds a ship to sail away and then asks the lord to bless the union with the lady that he has seen at dinner and to give her away at the altar. After the ceremony is celebrated, the newlyweds are escorted to the port, where they sail away with the blessings of the lord. As soon as the lord goes to the tower to see the lady, he realises what has actually happened. With the variations specific to each version, this is how the plot of *Inclusa* unfolds.

A paradox resolved. *Inclusa* in *HL* and *HF*.

Two things are to be highlighted for the scope of the present discussion: first, the cuckold lord is fooled because he does not trust what he sees, and when he does, he ends up being misled by his wrong reasoning; second, the role of *Inclusa*'s lady is utterly passive – in version *A* and

K she speaks only to complain about her condition as a jealously guarded wife. What the first point entails has already been noted above: if the Emperor followed Meros's advice and believed what he saw, then he would have had to proceed with the execution, thereby failing to discover the truth. As for the second point, in *Inclusa* the Lord is humiliated and swindled by his favourite man, while the lady appears to be only the means through which the deception happens. To some extent, we can then say that *Inclusa* is closer to an Empress' tale such as *Senescalcus* – where a seneschal tricks a king to sleep with his own wife to obtain money from the king – than it is to other tales of the Sages.

The fact that the presence of *Inclusa* amidst the Sages' *exempla* poses thorny interpretative problems has already been noticed by Runte, who argues that *Inclusa* "cannot be constructed as an *exemplum* of feminine wickedness without unduly twisting the tale's motivational mechanics".[52] Thus, Runte maintains that the lack of an explicit anti-feminist attack in *A*'s *Inclusa* is the reason why the "redactor-translator" – as he calls its author – of the Latin Version *HL* moves it in the set of *exempla* of the Empress – in a rather relevant position, as it substitutes *Roma* as her last *exemplum*.

So – as it shows in the table below – the redactor-translator of *HL* takes *Inclusa* from the set of tales of the Sages and replaces it with *Amatores*, which is told by Cleophas on the sixth day.[53]

K	C	D	A	L	HL / HF	M
Empress: ARBOR	X	Empress: ARBOR	Empress: ARBOR	Empress: ARBOR	Empress: ARBOR	Empress: ARBOR
Baucillas: CANIS	X	Bencillas: CANIS	Bancillas: CANIS	Baucillas: CANIS	Pancillas: CANIS	Bancillas: CANIS
Empress: SENESCALCUS	X	Empress: SENESCALCUS	Empress: APER	Empress: APER	Empress: APER	Empress: APER
Ausire: MEDICUS	X	Ancille: MEDICUS	Augustes: MEDICUS	MEDICUS	Lentulus: PUTEUS	Anxilles: MEDICUS
Empress: APER	X	Empress: APER	Empress: GAZA	Empress: GAZA	Empress: GAZA	Empress: GAZA

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[52] Hans R. Runte, 'From the Vernacular to Latin and Back: The Case of the Seven Sages of Rome', in *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. by Jeanette Beer (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1989), pp. 93-133, p. 95.

[53] Of course, this movement leaves the Empress with a spare tale, a situation that is resolved by merging the tale *Senescalcus* with the tale *Roma*. Even though the tale *Amatores* does not appear in any other version of the *SSR*, it is a widely known tale: in order to steal their money, a woman manages to have three knights killed and their corpses thrown in the sea by her brother.

Malquidas: PUTEUS	X	Mauquidas: PUTEUS	Lentillus: PUTEUS	Lantules: PUTEUS	Craton: AVIS	Cathons: AVIS
Empress: ROMA	X	Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: SENESCALCUS	Empress: SENESCALCUS	Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: FILIUS
Gentullus: TENTAMINA	? TENTAMINA	Lentulus: TENTAMINA	Malquidaz: TENTAMINA	Malquidaz: TENTAMINA	Malquiedrac: TENTAMINA	Lentulum: VIDUA
Empress: GAZA	Empress: ROMA	Empress: ROMA	Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: NUTRIX
Caton: AVIS	Caton: AVIS	Cathon: AVIS	Caton: AVIS	Caton: AVIS	Josephus: MEDICUS	Jesse: ANTHENOR
Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: GAZA	Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: SAPIENTES	Empress: SENESCALCUS/ ROMA	Empress: SPURIUS
Jesse: VIDUA	Jesse: VIDUA	Jesse: VIDUA	Jesse: VIDUA	Jesse: FILIUS	Cleophas: AMATORES	Lentulus [sic]: CARDAMUM
Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: VIRGILIUS	Empress: ROMA	Empress: NOVERCA	Empress: INCLUSA	Empress: ASSASSINUS
Beroul: INCLUSA	Merol: INCLUSA	Meras: INCLUSA	Meros: INCLUSA	Merons: No tale	Joachim: VIDUA	Markes: INCLUSA
Prince: VATICINIUM	Prince: VATICINIUM	Prince: VATICINIUM	Prince: VATICINIUm	TRIAL	Prince: VATICINIUM	Prince: VATICINIUM

Table 2 *The Old French and Latin SSR. List and disposition of the exempla*

Runte brings this switch as evidence for the active approach of the redactor-translator of *HL* to its Old French source *A*: "He was clearly not 'just' translating blindly one tale after another, but [he] had a full and detailed understanding of the structure and meaning of his source."[54]

While the attitude of the Latin version's composer towards the Old French text is indisputably active, I maintain that the gnoseological short-cut that has been depicted above plays the most important part in the migration of *Inclusa* from the Sages' to the Empress' set of tales. The redactor-translator of *HL* operated consciously and attentively to the point that they noticed and amended this flaw, which in fact compromises the narrative structure as well as its very coherence.

This becomes particularly clear when we read the Empress' conclusion to the tale in both *HL* and *HF*, which is here reported at length:

HL:

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[54] Hans R. Runte, 'From the Vernacular to Latin and Back: The Case of the Seven Sages of Rome', pp. 93-133, p. 95-96.

> "Tunc ait imperatrix: "Domine, intellexisti, que dixi?" At ille: "Eciam, peroptime!" Que ait: "Ecce, quomodo in militem confidebat, et tamen vxorem suam decepit et abstulit. Eodem modo et tantum in septem sapientibus confidis, quod ad hoc laborabunt, ut me, que sum vxor tua, confundant. Item tu plus credis dictis illorum, quam quod propriis occulis vidisti ac vides. Vidisti, quomodo me dilacerauit, quia certa signa vidisti. Iam tu vides, quomodo illum maledictum defendant et fouent, cum tamen timendum sit tibi sicut illi regi, de quo dixi".[55]

["So the Empress said: Lord, did you understand what I said?" And the Emperor: "Yes, I do very well" She replied: "You see how the lord of the tale believed in his soldier, and yet he fooled and ravished his wife. In the same way you trust more the seven sages who are aiming at this: to destroy me, your wife. You saw how he scratched me; you saw evidence of that. Now you see how the Sages defend and endorse that vile [Prince], but also that you need to be afraid just as that king of whom I have just told you about]

HF:

> "Ainsy mist fin en sa narracion l'emperiére, et puis dit a l'empereur: "Mon signeur, avés vous bien ouy et retenus ce que j'ay dit?" "Ouy, entiérement", fit l'empereur. Ele respond: "Advises comment celluy roy se confioit du chevalier, et touteffoyz il le depceut et luy emmena sa femme que tant aymoit: semblablement sera de vous qui vous confiés de ces sept sages qui travaillent pour moy confondre et destruyre, qui je suis vosatre femme, et vous creés plus en leurs paroles ques vous ne faites en ce que vous aves veu de vous propres yeulx; car je vous monstray comme vostre filz me dessira mes habiliemens par grant violence: cecy l'aves veu et bien entendu. Et aussy semblablement vous deves bien entendre que ces sages travaillent de preserver vostre

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[55] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, p. 404. The versions of group III and IV of *HL* are much more concise, but they share the same amendment and also the same narrative conclusions. Group III: "Ait imperatrix imperatori: 'Intellexistis, quomodo in militem confidebat, qui uxorem secum deduxit? Eodem modo et tu in septem sapientes tantum confidis, quod laborant, vt me, que sum vxor tua, confundant. Et tamen plus credis eorum dictis quam oculis propriis. Vidisti me filium maledictum lacerare." [The Empress addressed the Emperor: "Did you understand how he [the jealous husband] trusted the knight who took the wife with him? In the same way you believe the Seven Sages who operate to destroy me, your wife. Yet, you trust their sayings more than your eyes. You saw your cursed child ripping me"] *Ibid*., vol. 2, p. 523. The text of group IV is even more succinct than the one of group III: "Tunc dixit imperatrix: 'Domine, intellexisti, qu dixi?' At ille: 'Optime!' Ait illa: 'Ita et tu magis credis magistris tuis quam oculis proprijs'" [So the Empress said: 'Lord, did you understand what I said' He replied: 'Very well indeed' and she said: 'Yet, you believe more your Masters that your own eyes'"]. *Ibid*., vol. 2, p.627.

filz mauldit en sa malice. Pour quoy vous aves bien a redoubter qu'il ne vous en preigne comme au roy don't je vous ay raconte l'ystoire."[56]

[So the Empress ended her story and then addressed the Emperor: "My lord, have you understood and retained what I said?" "Yes, completely!" said the Emperor. She replied: "See how that king trusted the knight, and yet the knight fooled him and ravished his wife, whom the king loved so much. The same thing will occur to you, because you trust these seven sages who plot to destroy and kill me, your wife, and you believe more in their words than in what you have seen with your own eyes; for I showed you how your son ripped up my clothes with great violence: that you have heard and seen. So, you have to understand that those sages plot to keep your vile son in his vices. Therefore, you would better be afraid that it might happen to you the same thing that happened to the king about whom I have told you about]

In *HL* as well as in its vernacular translation *HF*, we found a convincing solution to the gnoseological contradiction at the centre of our discussion. In these two versions, the Empress ends up accusing the Sages of what she personally was accused of in *K* and *A*: the Sages are deceiving the Emperor with their charming words, thus preventing him from recognising the truth of what he witnessed with his own eyes – which, because seen, must be true. The Empress has clearly all the interests in suggesting the Emperor follows the evidence he saw, while the same recommendation would backfire in case it is put forward by one of the Sages. Indeed, if sight was the only reliable way to access truth, that is knowledge, then the Prince would have to be condemned.

The transfer of *Inclusa* from the set of tales of the Sages to that of the Empress comes of course with implications regarding the way the character of the reclused wife is portrayed. In this respect two main changes seem to acquire importance: first, the Empress justifies the fact that the lady of *Inclusa* eventually surrenders to the knight; second, the way the cuckhold husband concludes that what he sees is not actually what he thinks is framed differently.

As for the first point, how can the Empress admit that the Lord's wife seconds the knight without questioning it – as it is the case in almost all the versions of the *SSR*? The redactor-translator of *HL* justifies the actions of the lady by saying that the knight threatens her. After killing the construction worker who built the secret passageway, the knight arrives in the lady's room and when she refuses his advances in the name of her beloved husband, he threatens her with a sword. However, the knight's threats are not the only reason why she considers herself forced to surrender to the knight. Indeed, once she has sexual intercourse with the knight, she

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[56] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, pp. 148-149.

is doomed no matter what she does. We are witness to an inner monologue where the lady ponders the situation: if she denounces the knight, then she and her husband will be dishonoured forever, while the knight will be murdered.

> Deinde ad reginam intrauit et eam satis graciose salutatuit. Regina ammirabatur, cum eum vidisset, et ait: "Quomodo huc intrasti, et maxime, cum sola sim?" At ille: "Nimius amor fecit me intrare per quoddam foramen, quod in castro feci fieri. Et ideo tecum dormiam, quia tu es illa, de qua sompnium videram". At illa: "Absit a me, ut sub rege, domino meo, tale peccatum committam" Et ille: "Si michi voluntarie non consenseris, gladio meo te percuciam." Illa vero mortem timens cum eo dormiuit. Hoc facto recessit. Regina instar se cogitabat: "Si regi hoc denunciauero, tria mala poterunt contingere, scilicet me ipsam scandalizare, dominum meum graviter offendere et militem confundere, quia mortem non euaderet. Ab hac stulticia quiescam."[57]

[Then the knight entered the queen's chambers and greeted her rather kindly. As she saw him, the queen was astonished, and asked: "How did you enter, especially now that I am alone?" And he replied: "A great love let me in through a hole, that I had to be made in the castle. And now I will sleep with you, for you are the one who I saw in my dream". And she said: "May this never happen to me, that I commit such a sin while the king, my lord, is alive". And he said: "If you do not surrender to me, I will strike you with my sword". As she was actually afraid of dying, she slept with him. After this, the knight left. The queen was thinking more or less this: "If I denounced this to the king, three bad things might happen: I could dishonour myself, inflict an even worse shame on my lord and let the soldier be murdered, for he will not escape death. I will refrain from this stupidity]

Thus, the Latin version highlights the difficult position of the lady, while also displaying the knight's overt violence. By contrast, the Middle French translator does not dwell on this at all. The text mitigates the harshness of the knight's threats – which become generic *manieres et paroles* – and reduces the Queen's refusal to a euphemistic *deffences gracieuses*, as if behind the lady's resistance to the sexual advances of the knight there was the actual desire of indulging in the intercourse. Therefore, the blatant scene of violence and prevarication portrayed in *HL* is framed as a consensual sexual intercourse in the Middle French translation: with her gentle refusal (*deffenses gracieuses*) the Lady is only pretending not to want to have sex with the knight, who in turn is able to rightfully interpret her inner desire. He knows best what she wants. It is not surprising at all that in the Later Middle Ages women's consent to

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[57] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 395-396.

sexual intercourse was not a concern – and Kathryn Gravdal has even suggested an attempt to aestheticize rape in French medieval literature.[58]

The Middle French version *HF* translates the Latin as follows:

> Puis apres entra ver la royne et la salua en reverence et raconta ses visions, et apres pluseurs manieres et paroles il luy parla d'amours charnel pour en avoir son plaisir, laquelle fit ce qu'iI demandoit apres aucunes deffenses gracieuses. Cecy estre, [sic] fait la royne cogita entre soy et disoit: "Se cecy dure, tant plus ferons de pechiez et offenses: se je le denounce au roy, il faira morir le chevalier de male mort, et a l'aventure qu'iI me demagera ou refusera sa compagnie, pour quoy mieulx vaut que je me abstiegne de ceste folie".[59]

[Soon after he heads towards the queen and greets her kindly and tells her his dreams, and then he talks to her about carnal love in order to have intercourse. The lady agrees to what the knight asked after having refused him nicely. After that, the queen thinks and says to herself: "If it lasts, we will commit many sins and do many offenses: if I denounce him to the king, he will murder the knight, and it might happen that he will destroy me or will refuse me his company – and for this reason it is better if I refrain from doing such a stupidity]

The difference between the Latin text and its Middle French translation is startling, and once again corroborates the idea that a close and synoptic reading across these texts is key to understanding the different ways in which the misogynistic discourse can be articulated. It should not surprise us, however, to find this type of representation of rape in a text such as *HF*. Indeed, as we have already seen when presenting *HF* in the introduction, Gilleland puts forward the idea that this text has a marked tendency to pointing the moral when amplifying the Latin source. However, the Middle French text often expands the Latin source in passages where the mischievousness of women, their unreliability, and their ability to pretend and deceive are emphasised.[60] The passage mentioned above fits perfectly in this picture.

Leaving aside the way *HF*'s redactor-translator frames the encounter between the knight and the lady, it has been showed how the migration of the tale *Inclusa* from the Sages to the

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[58] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of Pennsylvania, 1991).

[59] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome* (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Françaises, 1876), pp. 141-142.

[60] Brady B. Gilleland, 'The French and Latin Versions of Historia Septem Sapientum', pp. 229-37, pp. 231-32.

Empress has consequences on the way Inclusa's lady's consent to the knight's advances is represented in *HL* – the lady has basically no choice but to give in to the knight's desire. Another difference between *HL* and the Old French versions has been highlighted, however, with respect to the way in which the husband concludes that what he sees is not actually what he thinks. Indeed, while in the Old French versions, both in verse and prose, the cuckold husband deduces with his own reasoning that what he sees is not actually his ring or his wife, depending on the situation, in *HL* and of course *HF* he reaches the same conclusions aided by his wife. For the sake of the argument (and *brevitas*), let us focus only on what happens in the ring scene.

In *K*, the lord does not share his fears with the lady (i.e., thinking that the ring he has seen on the knight's finger is actually his own). He enters the room furiously and after asking the lady to see his ring, he reflects on his own that there are many rings which look quite similar:

> Quant il le vit, lors se pensa
> que il se son aniaus asses
> d'une maniere manouvres.[61]

[As he saw the ring, he thought with himself that there are many rings crafted in the same way]

A's text follows *K* closely:

> Quant li sires le vit, si se merveilla moult que ce pooit estre, car celui que li chevaliers avoit en son doi sambloit celui qui riens du monde. Lors dist en son cuer que assez sont anneaus qui s'entressamblent.[62]

[As the Lord saw the ring he could not believe that this could be the case, because the one the knight has resembled his more than anything in the world. So, he told to himself that there are many rings which look similar]

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[61] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 354, vv. 4430/32.
[62] Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages' (2014)
<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021].

In *HL* the husband shares his anxieties directly with the lady, who can then comment on what has happened. In this case, it is the lady herself who suggests to the husband that many rings look similar one to the other, so what the husband has experienced is nothing to be surprised about:

> Rex cum anulum vidisses, ait: "O quam similis est anulus iste anulo militis, quem in digito eius vidi. Credebam, quod iste esset anulus, vnde commotus fui contra te. De mala suspicione mea reddo me culpabilem" Fortitudo turris decepit eum; non credebat, quo aliquis homo sine eo intrare posset. Ait regina: "Domine, mirum non est, quod vnus anulus alteri assimiletur, sicut anulus tuus anulo militis. Sed sicut malam suspicionem de me habuisti, deus parcat tibi".[63]

[As the King saw the ring, he said: "O how similar this ring is to the knight's, which I have seen on his finger! I thought that this was the same ring, hence I was upset with you. I acknowledge my guilt of suspicion". The sturdiness of the tower deceived him; he did not think that anyone could enter the tower without him. The Queen replied: "Sir, it is not surprising that a ring looks similar to another – just as it is the case with your ring and the knight's. But may God forgive you, for you suspected me!"]

In this case the lady's remark closes with a veil of irony: not only does she accept the husband's apologies, but she also prays for God to forgive him too! This ironic element is maintained in the Middle French translation too:

> "O saint Marie, que l'aneaul du chevalier ressemlbe cestuy, que j'ay vu en son doy n'a gueres! Car en verité je pensoie que ce fut cestuy, pour quoy je t'ay demandé sy subitement mon aneaul et sy furieusement. Pour quoy de ceste male suspicion je me rens culpable." Car la force de la tour ou elle estoi enclose l'avoit depceu, car jamais il n'eut creu que homme fut entré leans senon luy. A cecy la royne respond ainsy: "O mon seigneur, car n'est pas merveilles que ung aneaulx ressemble ung l'aultre, car les ouvriers font peu de ouvrages qu'i n'en facent pluseaurs semblables. Touttefoyz Dieu le vous perdoint qu'avés heu sus moy male suspicions, consideré que vous sçavés la force de ceste tour ou je suis enclose et de laquelle nul ne porte les clés senon vous".[64]

["Holy Mary, the knight's ring looks similar to this one, which I have seen on his finger not long ago! In truth, I thought that that was in fact this one, this is why I immediately asked you for my ring so

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[63] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 398.
[64] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, p. 143.

angrily. So this is why I am guilty of being suspicious". The sturdiness of the tower where she was locked deceived him, as he would not ever have thought that another man entered it but him. The Queens responded thusly: "My Lord, it is not surprising that a ring looks similar to another, as the workers hardly ever make something that does not resembles another. At any rate, may God forgive you for having had suspicions about me, especially considering that you know how study this tower where I am locked is, to which nobody has the keys but you]

Therefore, in *HL* as well as in *HF* the reclused lady is granted a certain relevance in the plot. However, her space of agency remains utterly limited. She can hardly choose or decide for herself, as she is sought after by two men who in one way or another oppress her: the husband keeps her locked in a tower due to the extreme fondness he feels for her,[65] and the knight threatens and rapes her. In this context, where men are entitled to dispose of women any way they please, the lady is portrayed as a deceiver and once again, it is she who deceives her husband, and she provides a solid justification to explain what he has experienced – i.e., the similarity between the rings.

The fact that the Latin text shows some awareness of the gnoseological problem raised by the position of *Inclusa* and by the Sage's conclusion is hardly surprising when considering its context of production and reception. It has already been noted in the introduction to this chapter that the text of Group I, which is here scrutinised, was likely to be used as an edifying reading, particularly considering its character as a theological lesson, as Roth would have it.[66] Considering this context, the reader might justly wonder what is actually made of the discourse around appearance and perception in *Inclusa*'s *reductio*.

As is often the case with *HL*, there are two religious interpretations provided here, both arguing that by opening himself to Satan's seductions men conduct a mundane life that eventually results in their eternal damnation. The first *reductio* proposes a parallel between *Inclusa*'s lord and Adam, who allows Satan to pierce his soul by eating the apple, thereby condemning himself to infernal pain until Jesus Christ's holy Passion, which rescued his soul[67]. More than for the

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[65] "Erat quidem rex, qui miro modo vxorem suam dilexit, in tantum, quo eam in castro fortissimo inclusit, et claues castri rex ipse portauit" [Once there was a king who loved his wife extraordinarily, to the point that he had her locked in a sturdy tower, of which only the king would carry the keys] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 392. "Au temps passé estoit ung roy lequel ayma sa femme merveillieusement et tellement qu'I la fit logier en ung chastiaul moult fort, ou i la guardoit enclose et portoit tousjour avec soy les clés du dit chastaul" [Once there was a king who loved his wife so extraordinarily that he made her live in a very sturdy castle, where he would keep her locked, and he only would have the keys to the castle] Gaston Paris, *Deux rédactions du Roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, p. 139.

[66] Detlef Roth, 'A Consideration on the Original Structure and the Transformation of the *Historia Septem Sapientum* throughout its Manuscript Tradition', pp. 87-107, p. 101.

[67] See also canticle IV of Dante's Inferno, where Adam (*il primo parente*), together with other biblical and historical figures of the classic world, such as Plato, Socrates and Virgil himself, who is Dante's guide through

discussion about perception and false appearance, this *reductio* is interesting because while it considers and condemns Adam's actions, there is no mention of Eve – whose silent absence strikes as a loud element in a text that is deemed imbued with misogynistic tropes. This tantalising trace will be followed later, for now our main concern is still represented by the way in which the redactor-translator articulated the gnoseological potential of *Inclusa*'s narrative in the *reductio*. To better understand this, we should look at the second religious interpretation proposed, which considers the *exemplum*'s lord to be every worldly man whose flesh – personified by the lord's wife – is weak (*Rex iste potest dici homo mundanus, qui habet uxorem, id est carnem suam nimis delicatam*).[68] The knight who comes in the lady's dream is of course the Devil, who initially pushes men to sin by confusing them almost as in a dream (*quasi sompniando*), to the point that men's soul – which is again represented by the lady of the story (*regina, id est anima*) – consents to Satan's seductions, thus enabling him to pierce his heart and, by way of it, to reach and corrupt the soul. Once the soul is corrupted, the flesh gives away the ring of love received through baptism and, when the man realises that he has lost it, Satan is quick to return the ring of love when the man receives the confession. At this point, the *reductio* moves on to a tirade against those who look mortified and receive confession during Lent but return to commit their sins straight after. According to the *reductio*, this is the demonstration that sinners will be sinners and thus will always go back to their sinning, for they better trust Satan and their flesh than what their conscience recommends: *Vnde miser homo sepius plus credit dyabolo et carni quam illud, quod consciencia suam in contrarium dicat*.[69]

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the afterworld. Virgil also describes to Dante the moment of Christ's descent in the underworld, which rescued Adam and other biblical figures:

> [...] «Io era nuovo in questo stato,
> quando ci vidi venire un possente,
> con segno di vittoria coronato.
>
> Trasseci l'ombra del primo parente,
> d'Abèl suo figlio e quella di Noè,
> di Moïsè legista e ubidente;
>
> Abraàm patrïarca e Davìd re,
> Israèl con lo padre e co' suoi nati
> e con Rachele, per cui tanto fé,
>
> e altri molti, e feceli beati.
> E vo' che sappi che, dinanzi ad essi,
> spiriti umani non eran salvati».

[68] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 408.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 408.

The *reductio* confirms the idea that the religious and theological concerns that permeates the Latin text certainly play a role in the re-organization of the tales. Indeed, the *reductio* invites the reader/audience to mistrust their flesh, that is their senses and perceptions, which so easily fall for Satan's deceitful attempts to corrupt the human soul. The only way one can preserve oneself from eternal damnation is by relying on conscience, an inner faculty that directs men towards the good. *Inclusa*'s lord, we may conclude, is therefore reprimanded for trusting external input more than his inner conscience.

Even this leads us to claiming that *HL*'s redactor-translator, probably a cleric,[70] was aware of the problems at stake with the position of *Inclusa* in the collection. Indeed, he took advantage of the relocation of the *exemplum* in order to make his point concerning the duplicitous nature of appearances and sensorial inputs, which, following the *reductiones*, ought to be mistrusted. Thus, we may argue, whoever composed the Latin text displays an excellent background knowledge of the philosophical and theological language and metaphors concerning the gnoseological discourse. To better appreciate this, we need to look at the *reductiones* appearing at the end of the tales. Just as it is the case for the one at the end of *Inclusa*, the *reductiones* provide the reader/audience with a recipe for salvation. They all are in fact concerned with recommending a virtuous and moral behaviour to the believers, who ought to do what possible in order to prevent themselves from indulging in sin, which enables Satan to pierce the walls of their heart, condemning them to everlasting infernal pains.

The next section will focus on another *exemplum*, Virgilius, and its *reductio*. Our aim is twofold: while, on the one hand more elements will be provided to support our thesis in favour of the redactor-translator's familiarity with the philosophical and theological discourse on gnoseology – of which they mastered language, metaphors and concepts –, on the other we will try to better understand the way in which *HL* fits in the cultural climate of the 13th century.

Eternal salvation and the five senses: *Virgilius*

Another interesting reference to the way the Sages deceiving the Emperor's senses can be found in the fifth *exemplum* of the Empress, *Virgilius*, and its *reductio*.[71] *Virgilius* focuses on the *mirabilia* allegedly built by the celebrated Latin poet to testify to the greatness of Rome.

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[70] See the introductory section to Chapter 3, particularly the section on *HL*.
[71] On the origin and fortune of the story *Virgilius*, see of course Alexander Haggerty Krappe, 'Studies on the Seven Sages of Rome', *Archivium romanicum,* XI, 163, (1927), pp. 271-279.

However, they all are destroyed due to the foolishness of characters who are supposed to be wise – namely a cleric and the Roman Emperor protagonist of the tale. It is worth dwelling a bit on the plot of *Virgilius*.

The tale is set in the times of Octavian and the Roman empire, at the peak of its expansion, was oppressing several populations. In order to maintain their influence, the Romans ask Virgil, the wisest and most educated man in Rome, to come up with an invention that could protect them from their many foes. The important particular in this case is that Virgil – as it happens in many of his medieval descriptions – is not only a poet or a man of science: he is in fact portrayed as a sort of magician: "In illo tempore erat in civitate magister Virgilius, qui omnes in sciencia excellebat et *precipue* in arte magica" [In that time lived in the city Virgilius, who would stand out for his knowledge of science but especially of magical arts].[72] Thus not only is Virgil presented as a man learned in *sciencia* but mainly (*precipue*) in magical arts. It is exactly thanks to his magical abilities that he is able to fabricate an engine that can warn the Romans every time one of their provinces tries to revolt. This mysterious device consists of a tower on whose top Virgil places in circle as many "ymagines" – that, as we shall see below, can probably be translated as "statues" – as there are Roman provinces around the world; they all hold a bell, and their face is turned towards the province that they represent. At the centre of the circle a statue stands out holding a golden pome in its hands. Every time a province tries to revolt against Rome, the statue corresponding to the province rings the bell, and so do the others. When the Romans hear the bells ringing, they arm themselves and immediately wage war against the rebellious province. This makes it impossible for the provinces to revolt against the centralised power of Rome.

In *HL* this is not but the first of the *mirabilia* attributed to the genius of Virgil. The incredible poet contributed to the maintenance of the power and wealth of Rome by building at least two other engines, each bearing a significant political meaning for they have an important role in the citizens' wellbeing, especially for those belonging to the lower class. He made an inextinguishable fire for the relief of the poor (*ad consolacionem pauperum*), so that they could warm up by it, and, next to the fire he made a source of hot water where the poor would bathe. Next to the bath and the fire, however, Virgil built also a statue on whose forehead a warning

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[72] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 345. On the medieval reception of Virgil see the unchallenged studies of Domenico Comparetti and John Webster Spargo: Domenico Comparetti, *Virgilio Nel Medio Evo* (Livorno: Coi tipi di Francesco Vigo, 1872); John Webster Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer: Studies in Virgilian Legends* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1980).

appeared: "Qui me percusserit, vindictam incontinenti accipiam" ("Whoever hits me, I will take revenge immediately"). The complex of the fire, the source of hot water and the statue guarding them provided relief to the poor for a long time, until a cleric (*clericus*) came and decided to challenge the warning, believing that by giving a blow on the statue's foot, he would find a treasure underneath it. However, things do not go as the cleric expected: after his blow, the statue falls on the fire extinguishing it forever and without revealing any treasure. The Empress attacks immediately the cleric's greed: due to his longing for the treasure, he stole the sole possibility of relief from the poor people of Rome, who in fact are reported to curse the cleric. After this lengthy introduction, serving as a clear attack to the stupidity of the Sages as well as their greed for wealth, the main plot of *Virgilius* starts.

Three kings of populations oppressed by the Romans meet to discuss a way in which they can possibly take revenge. Three soldiers (*milites*) take the floor declaring that they have a plan to accomplish the destruction of Rome, but they need four barrels (*quattuor dolia*) of gold. Their plan is to dig holes in strategic points of the city and bury the gold; they will then be received by the Emperor and pretend to have a marvellous gift: they can dream where gold is hidden. Moreover, they will put themselves at the service of the renowned Octavian. The Emperor, known for his avidity, welcomes the three knights with opens arms, accepting them at court, but will decide their destiny once they have proven that they are telling the truth. Very early in the morning, the soldiers present themselves before the Emperor, pretending that the eldest had a dream: the vision indicated the presence of a treasure buried next to one of the gates of the city. They all hasten there and, before the amazed eyes of the Emperor, they dig up a barrel of gold… the one that the three soldiers had previously buried right there! The scene repeats for the following days, and once the four barrels of gold are all dug up, the soldiers declare that they are going to dream together, and that the vision will reveal the location of another, bigger amount of gold. The following morning, the soldiers inform the Emperor that their vision revealed the treasure to be hidden underneath the tower made by Virgil. After showing some reluctancy, the Emperor seconds the soldier's proposal of going to the tower over night and digging up the gold while being careful at preserving the structure. Once the night falls, the three soldiers go there, destroy the tower, set it on fire and run away. Octavian is harshly punished by the nobles of the city: his avidity for gold destroyed Rome, and, in a similar way, he has to die by gold - which is melted and poured into his mouth and then he is buried.

Such is the *exemplum Virgilius* in *HL*, which is not too dissimilar from the other Old French versions, both in verse and prose. However, *HL* generally presents two specific traits

that are not shared by any other version of the Old French *SSR*. On the one hand, the Empress often dwells on the interpretation of her tales, illustrating the analogies between the tale and the situation of the *SSR*'s Emperor, as we have seen in relation to the cleric. On the other, as already mentioned in the section introducing *HL*, more than half of its manuscripts preserve a portion of text that often goes under the (usually red in the manuscripts) rubric of *reductio* or *moralitas* and which can be considered as an interpretation in a religious sense of the *exempla* appearing in the collection.

What is particularly interesting when looking at the explanations proposed by the Empress and the *reductiones* is that they both follow a scheme that can be reconducted to the Augustinian mode of Scriptural exegesis: the *exempla*'s characters and even their actions are interpreted in such a way that they represent an aspect, an action or even a feature of the *SSR*'s frame narrative, in the case of the Empress, and of Christian religion, for the author of the *reductiones*.[73]

Looking at the interpretations of *Virgilius* provided by the Empress and the corresponding *reductio* will allow us to explore two main important aspects strictly connected to our discussion so far. Firstly, the parallel reading of the story and the *reductio* will clarify what a scriptural interpretation of the text entails in practical terms – especially when applied to a text that is not sacred at all; secondly, the *reductiones* offer an invaluable possibility for us to retrieve the cultural and intellectual background against which *HL* was composed, thereby making it possible for us to understand the theoretical presuppositions with which its author-translator approached the narrative matter, clarifying its intended audience and ultimate scope.

In order to elucidate the meaning of *Virgilius* to the Emperor, the Empress declares that the tower represents his body, while the statues on top of it stand for his five senses:

Tunc ait imperatrix imperatori: "Domine, intellexisti, que dixit?" At ille: "Eciam, peroptime!" Que ait: "Turris cum ymaginibus est corpus tuum cum quinque sensibus. Quamdiu tu manes, nullus aduersarius audet populum molestare. Hec videns filius tuus maledictus cum magistris tuis conuenit, quomodo per falsas narraciones suas possint te

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[73] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 192-199. On the subject of scriptural exegesis see the studies on figural interpretation in Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953) and for a more general discussion see Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale : les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 2 vols.(Paris: Aubier, 1959). See also the important studies by Beryl Smalley: Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and Beryl Smalley, 'Medieval Exegesis of Wisdom Literature', ed. by Roland E. Murphy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

destrueure, quas tu cupis nimis audire, in tantum, quod turrem corporis tui suffodiunt te eis inclinando et ymagines, id est sensus tuos, corrumpendo. Et tunc, cum te infatuatum totaliter viderint, destruent te ac occident, ut filius tuus poteris regnum optinere[74]

[The Empress said to the Emperor: "Sir, did you understand what I said?" the Emperor replies: "Very well indeed!" She said: "The tower with the statues is your body with the five senses. Until you live, no foe dares to attack your subjects. Now, see your cursed son convening with your masters in order to find a way in which they may destroy you with their fake narrations, which you are too eager to listen to, in the meantime they dig underneath the tower of your body, tilting you towards them and corrupting the statues, that is your senses. Therefore, once they will have seen you utterly misled, they will destroy and kill you, in order for your son to obtain your realm]

According to the Empress' interpretation, the Sages would be operating in a way that affects the Emperor in physical terms: his body is being attacked and his five senses are under siege (*Turris cum ymaginibus est corpus tuum cum quinque sensibus*). However, material this assault sounds to be, though, the Sages are obviously not harming the Emperor physically, by injuring or wounding him, they seem rather to be operating virtually, confusing the Emperor's right perception of reality with their "false narrations" (*falsas narraciones*) – which are what is actually corrupting his *ymagines*, which for the Empress represent the five senses (*ymagines, id est sensus tuos, corrumpendo*). This leads the Empress to conclude that if the Sages continue their activity of confusing the Emperor's *ymagines*, then he will be destroyed just as the Roman Emperor and his empire were. But how can the Sages go so far? By corrupting the Emperor's *ymagines*, it would seem. But how are we exactly to interpret these "*ymagines*"? It is therefore imperative to get a better sense of what exactly these *ymagines* are.

It would be impossible to find an answer to these questions without resorting to the medieval philosophical language – especially the language animating the epistemological and gnoseological debates from Antiquity to the Early Modern period. Even a slight familiarity with that discourse allows us to recognise that saying that by digging under the tower (i.e. the Emperor's body), the Sages are acting upon the Emperor's *ymagines* is tantamount to saying that by confusing the senses of the Emperor they are affecting his "mental representations". In the philosophical system, the mental representations are the sensible species (also called mental images) generated by the action of external objects on the senses, thanks to which, according

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[74] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 353.

to the Aristotelian gnoseology, we are able to achieve knowledge. Considering the close causal proximity between the two elements, the senses and the sensible species (i.e. the stimulation of the senses produces sensible images), the Empress is here interpreting *ymages* as the Emperor's senses metonymically – another sign of her rhetoric mastery. We shall see shortly what exactly this means and what it entails in the bigger picture of our discussion. But first, in order to complete the analysis on the interpretations *Virgilius* receives, let us move to its *reductio*. What is most striking when approaching *Virgilius' reductio* is that its writer did not have any problems in drawing on the interpretation that is put in the Empress' mouth in order to establish a reading of the *exemplum* in Christian sense.[75] Following the logic of the Empress, the translator takes the tower to represent something physical, the heart, while the *ymagines* continue to metonymically represent the five senses. However, in the *reductio* all these elements are not paralleled to the experience of the frame-story's Emperor, for in this case the addressee becomes the public receiving the text – hard to tell if in written or oral form – that is every Christian (*quilibet homo per baptizmum lotus*). As has been already noted by Roth, the *reductiones* become a sort of *vademecum* for Christians to obtain eternal salvation, which is indeed what a good Christians should aspire to. The *reductio* suggests they offer God the tower of their contrite heart as well as prepare their senses (= *ymagines*) to serve Him.

> Karissimi! Iste imperator potest dici quilibet homo per baptizmum lotus, qui debet super omnia concupiscere salutem anime et turrem, id est cor contritum, deo erigere et ymagines, id est sensus, ad dei seruicium preparare.[76]

[Dearest! This Emperor can be considered as every man purified by baptism, who must desire above all the salvation of their soul and construct a tower for God – which means having a contrite heart – and prepare their *ymages* – that is their senses – for the service of God.]

If we had any doubts on the validity of the Empress' tales, they should now be all clarified, at least for what concerns *HL*. Indeed, if we had been thinking that her *exempla* were deemed not suitable for edification purposes – as she is essentially the villain in this story – we can now conclude in all certainty that things are more complicated and nuanced than that. In the context of the *SSR*, we would expect the Empress' tales to be faulty, or just to represent a

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[75] This probably brings another argument in support of Roth's opinion about the simultaneity between the redaction of *HL* and the *reductiones*. However, this is an avenue we shall not undertake in the present work.

[76] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 356.

negative model of behaviour, but not only are the Empress' tales considered valuable, they even end up being provided with an interpretation in a Christian sense, which offers the believers wherewithal in order to overcome Satan's everyday attempts to destroy their soul. This is all the more noteworthy if it is true that the tales and their *reductiones* were also used as edifying readings or for preaching purposes. In this sense, a space for speculation on the reception of the controversial character of the Empress opens up. Assuming that *HL* was actually used for preaching, we can then wonder how the act of predication itself would unfold: would the single tale be told on its own? Or would it rather been put in the bigger context of the *SSR*'s frame-story? In the second case, how would the preacher justify the religious interpretation of a tale told by this wicked, selfish and duplicitous woman? To put it in scholastic terms: if the premise is wrong, would not the conclusion be equally erroneous? What are the limits of Scriptural interpretations on a secular text?

As much as it is fascinating to dwell on the possibility of a performance behind the Latin text, we have to work with facts, and what the facts suggest is that the redactor of *HL* was more concerned with the religious interpretation of various segments of the *SSR*, than they were with the overall narrative itself. In order to support this argument Roth suggests that the many new elements, even some minor details added to the tales, serve the ensuing religious interpretation more than the narrative itself:

> Da sich jedoch nicht alle Erzählungen der >Historia< gleich gut für eine Übertragung auf eine geistliche Ebene eignen, mußte der Verfasser in jeweils unterschiedlicher Weise in die Erzählungen eingreifen. […] Gerade weil die geistlichen Auslegungen sich eng an die Struktur der Erzählungen anlehnen bzw. diese Struktur so gestaltet wird, daß sie sich für eine geistliche Auslegung eignet, sind sie der Erzählungen keineswegs willkürlich aufgepfropft; ebenso wenig ist die Übertragung des Erzählpersonals auf die geistliche Ebene völlig beliebig.[77]

[However, since not all the tales of the Historia are suitable for a transposition into spiritual terms, the author had to intervene on the stories in different ways. Precisely because the spiritual interpretations are closely related to the structure of the narrative or, to be precise, this structure is designed in such a way that it is suitable for a spiritual interpretation, they are by no means arbitrarily grafted onto the narratives; nor is the transposition of the tale's narrators to the spiritual level completely arbitrary.]

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[77] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 192.

Therefore, Roth is suggesting that all the elements – no matter how minimal – introduced in the stories acquire a significance in the context of the *reductiones* or even in the explanations given by the Empress or the Sages.

To give but one example, we can look at the tale *Aper*, one of the Empress' *exempla*. Here a young shepherd climbs on the favourite tree of a wild boar after collecting its fruits. The boy manages to climb down by throwing fruits at the animal, who in turn falls asleep while being caressed by the shepherd. Amidst others, which unfortunately cannot be considered here, the interesting detail that *HL* adds is the fact that the young shepherd holds a stick in his hand, with which he strokes the wild boar, thus managing to make it fall asleep. In the explanation given by the Empress, the Prince is associated with the shepherd, who is said to be figuratively beating the Emperor with the stick of his knowledge. This image is not at all casual, especially when we think about medieval iconography, where wise men are usually portrayed with a stick symbolising knowledge – and we should also bear in mind that we have seen a cleric hitting Virgil's statue with a stick in the *exemplum Virgilius*, a detail that in this case is shared by the Old French *K* version too.[78]

These reflections enable us to go back to *HL*'s *Virgilius* with a different understanding of the text and of the changes that we can identify when comparing *HL* and *HF* with the other Old French versions that include *Virgilius*. The observation of the changes across the versions in Latin, Old and Middle French, has so far brought to our attention important details that aided us with the textual interpretation, while also improving our understanding of the reception(s) that the *SSR* has experienced across centuries, languages and cultures.

In this case, the *mouvance*, that is the variance of a detail such as the engine that in *Virgilius* the homonymous poet built in order to warn the Romans against the rebellious provinces, flags the presence of particular concerns related to the way in which the gnoseological problems raised by the *SSR* are articulated and handled.

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[78] *K*: "Uns vesques I vin de Cartaige / ki molt fu de grant linaige […] En sa main tenoit .i. baston / si l'en [the statue] feri ens el chaon"*Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer (Paris: Champion, 2017), p. 330, vv. 3951/52-3957/58. The detail does not appear in *A*. Even though this detail of *Aper* seems to have gone unnoticed, critics have often dwelled on the alterations and additions that *HL* shows when compared with the Old French source – see for example the work of Detlef Roth, 'A Consideration on the Original Structure and the Transformation of the *Historia Septem Sapientum* throughout its manuscript tradition', pp. 87-107 and Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*; for observations on *Canis* and *Aper*, Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, 'Traducción, reescitura y cambio de género: del *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* a la *Historia Septem Sapientum Romae'*, pp. 65-91; on *Canis* see also Csilla Gábor, 'The Seven Sages as Reading for Edification: Medieval Narratives of the Seven Sages of Rome', pp. 15-33.

We have seen that in *HL* and in *HF*, *Virgil*'s engine is a tower on whose top some *ymagines* are installed in circle. This is quite different from the other versions, where the engine is actually described as a mirror.

K:

> Virgilles fist .i. mireor
>
> ki molt par fu de grant valor.
>
> Molt fu cil mireours prisiés:
>
> de hauteche avoit bien .c. pies.
>
> Molt l'ot tresbien enluminé:
>
> l'en en veoit par la cité.[79]

[Virgil made a mirror of great value. That mirror was highly regarded: it was 100 feet tall. Virgil lit it up very well: one could do see everything from every point of the city]

C:

> Oncor i fist .i. mireour
>
> qui mout estoit de grant valor.
>
> Il avoit de hautor .m. piez;
>
> le miröer ert mout prisiez.
>
> Par nuit donoit si grant claret
>
> que ceus virent de la cité.[80]

[Virgil made also a mirror of great value. It was 1000 feet tall, and it was highly regarded. Overnight it would give so much light that the people in the city could see clearly]

A:

> "Sire, encore fist il plus. Car il fist par nigromance seur un grant piler de marbre un mireoir par coi cil de ceste vile vëoient ceuls qui voloient venir a Rome pour mal fere, et tantost conme il vëoient que aucune terre se voloit reveler contre Rome, si mandoient les quemunes des viles environ si s'armoient, puis aloient sus cele terre si la destruioient."[81]

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[79] *Le roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Mary Speer, p. 3302 vv. 3979-3984.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 458, vv. 1239-1244.
[81] Hans R. Runte, 'Portal, Society of the Seven Sages (2014)

[Sir, he did even more! Cause thanks to necromancy on a marble pillar he put a mirror thanks to which they [the Romans] could see those who wanted to come to Rome for evil reasons, and as they saw that a land wanted to revolt against Rome, they would send the commons of the cities nearby if they [the rebels] took up arms, then they would go to that land and destroy it]

Reading *A*'s text, we can notice how the engine there described is closer to the one of *HL*: a sturdy and tall structure supports the mysterious mirror – which respectively become the tower and the installation with the *ymagines* under the pen of the Latin translator. As suggested by Cañizares Ferriz, it is likely that this variation does not come solely from the redactor-translator's imagination, for *HL*'s description of Virgil's engine is also present in the *Salvationis Romae*, a text widely disseminated during the Middle Ages.[82] The latter offered a description that must have been deemed more suitable for the author-translator's purposes, considering that: "cada elemento de la torre maravillosa encuentra su interpretación teológica".[83] This is a very interesting point, as we are led to wonder what the passage from the mirror to the *ymagines* tells us. Indeed, here the focus must be shifted on the complicated – because polysemic – word *ymago*, and its use in the intellectual discourse of the Middle Ages.

Bedos-Rezak highlights how the term *imago* had specific and particular meanings in different fields of medieval knowledge. In theology, for example, the *imago* "articulated the essential relationship of man to his maker, God"; in a much dissimilar field such as linguistics it was used to describe textual metaphors; while in theories of cognition it would refer to sensible perception.[84] What brings together all these different uses of the term *imago*, according to Bedos-Rezak, is that it "was first and foremost an agent for the conceptualization of referentiality" – and in this sense its most influential use was made by eleventh- and twelfth-century theologians who were seeking to explain in which sense man and Christ were made after God's image. Conversely, however, Incarnation and human Creation were used to articulate the relationship between image and referent, leading to a marked interdependence between these two theological and philosophical discourses. While analysing the ways in which pre-scholastic thinkers articulate those relations (God/man – referent/image), Bedos-Rezak

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<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/49107> [Accessed December 2021].
[82] Patricia Cañizares Ferriz, 'Traducción, reescitura y cambio de género: del *Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* a la *Historia Septem Sapientum Romae*', pp. 65-91, p. 90.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 90. "Every element of the magnific tower has its theological interpretation".
[84] Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, 'Replica: Images of Identity and the Identity of Images', in *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Medieval West*, ed. by Jeffrey and Bouché Hamburger, Anne-Marie (Princeton: 2006), pp. 46-64, p. 47.

identifies a significant shift in the interpretation of the word *imago*, which from its original meaning as mirror ends up taking on that of imprint – until it takes that of replica under the influence (and this is the crux of Bedos-Rezak's argument) of the development and spread of the practice of sealing documents.[85]

Here we find not only an interesting explanation for what concerns the passage from the mirror to the *ymagines* on top of Virgil's engine, but also a confirmation of the significance and epistemic value of a word such as *ymago* during the Middle Ages. In this sense, we are able to better articulate – and also give evidence for – the accurate choice that lies behind the Latin description of Virgil's engine: the author-translator, probably a cleric of one of the main fourteenth-century orders, was familiar with the language and metaphors related to medieval theories of cognition – and this is true to the extent that the discourse on knowledge and sensory perception became an important organising and operative factor in the Latin rendition of the *SSR*. In other words, it is not by chance that the position of *Inclusa* ends up being reconsidered in the context of *HL*.

On the other hand, that a text produced in a religious and learned environment – with educative, edifying and possibly preaching purposes – is concerned with medieval theories of perception and knowledge is hardly surprising. The pervasive impact and influence of those philosophical theories on the development of sacramental theology has been explored in the ground-breaking work of Palazzo.[86] Their relevance is to be located particularly in the sacrament of the Eucharist, especially in the development of its liturgy. In this sense, the sole gesture of raising the host in front of the crowd of believers is particularly significant because at least two levels of "seeing" are involved. First, the idea of the transubstantiation of the consecrated host – according to which it becomes the actual body of Christ (the wine becoming his blood) – had to be explained with theological arguments: how is it possible that the host becomes the body of Christ, yet it preserves its circular, non-human-like shape? Second, the introduction of the elevation ritual during the mass put theologians in the situation of having to discuss the value and power of sight. Indeed, the elevation seems to have caused proper misunderstandings in the crowd of believers, for some of them granted sacramental efficacy to the sole act of contemplation: beholding the host was thought to be equal to receiving the sacrament.[87] It is

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[85] Indeed, Bedos-Rezak's intriguing article aims to provide proof of the influence of material culture on the way thoughts are articulated and thus delivered.

[86] See Éric Palazzo, *L'invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Âge*; see also Éric Palazzo, 'Les Cinq Sens, Le Corps Et L'esprit', in *Body and Spirit in the Middle Ages. Literature, Philosophy, Medicine*, ed. by Gaia Gubbini (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 59-78.

[87] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 63 talks about "'sacramental viewing', which like communion was thought to affect one markedly".

because of this tendency to merge the actual communion with the "spiritual communion" that Alexander of Hales, in his comment on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, draws a distinction between "manducare per gustum" – i.e. the actual ingestion of the consecrated host – to be considered sacramental, and "manducare per visum" – i.e. the sole contemplation of the host during the elevation – deemed to be non-sacramental.[88] Building on the work of the historian of medieval art Hans Belting, Suzannah Biernoff argues:

> It is often observed that from the thirteenth century, visual experience of the sacred played an increasingly central role in both private devotion ad communal religious life. A proliferation of public and devotional images; dramatic re-enactments of Biblical stories; the exhibition of relics and other cultic objects; the elevation of the host within the mass and its extra liturgical display in the monstrance; all of these developments, as Hans Belting points out, speak of a 'need to see'. If previously God's ultimate invisibility and unrepresentability were proof of his transcendent divinity, Belting contends that the daily possibility of beholding Christ, the Virgin and saints came increasingly to 'fulfil the postulate that reality attained to full existence and is proved only in visibility".[89]

All these elements together seem sufficient for us to recognise an actual interest – if not concern or anxiety – towards the matter of vision during the later Middle Ages, particularly for what concerns the religious milieu.

Two elements brought us to formulate this argument: on the one hand, Roth's intuition in granting structural importance to *HL*'s *reductiones*, i.e. they are to be considered part of the text of the Latin *SSR;* on the other, the *variance* across the Old French and Latin texts of the *SSR* in the description of *Virgil*'s engine: where in the Old French tradition we find a mirror that reflects light and reveals which are the rebellious provinces, in the Latin text we encounter *ymagines* standing on top of a tower and ringing bells to warn the Romans against the riots. In the ample spectrum of meaning of the Latin word *imago*, however, how are we to interpret it in *HL*? It is now necessary for us to proceed as medieval hermeneutics recommends: we need to distinguish between the literal and the allegorical sense.

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[88] *Ibid*., p. 64; but see also Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 141, where Biernoff talks about "ocular communion".
[89] *Ibid*., p. 133. The quotes are taken from Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1990), p. 82.

On the first level, the literal, it might be appropriate to think of the term *ymago* as referring to statue or automata: the *ymagines* are said to be holding bells in their hand and to play them when necessary. This would be of course more complicated if we interpreted it with its more straightforward translation of "painting". It is also worth noticing that in *Virgilius* there is another *ymago*: the one that the avid cleric tears down destroying the perpetual bonfire. Even though a Latin term exists for statue, *statua*, it is important to highlight that, according to the *DMF*, the Old French term *image* was already used to indicate any kind of representation realised with any kind of technique (sculpture or painting)[90] – which resonates in *HF* too, where we find the French word *ymage* maintained.

As for the understanding of the second level, which brings us beyond the literal meaning of *ymago*, we are of course facilitated by the *reductiones* offered by the Empress and the translator: for them the term metonymically refers to the five senses, which suggests that in order to understand the reason for this interpretation we would better turn our attention towards the medieval account on the senses and perception.

As Marenbon points out, in his most important treatise, *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas replies to the question if intellectual knowledge is possible without sensible cognition.[91] Even though Aquinas subscribes to the Platonist distinction between the intellect and the senses, accepting that the intellect does not need a corporeal organ for its activity, he challenges Plato's view according to which the intellect cannot be acted upon by corporeal objects and that intellectual knowledge is achieved because the intellect is able to grasp separate intelligible forms to which it participates (i.e., Platonist *ideas*). What is even more unacceptable from a Thomist perspective, though, is that Plato does not admit that the senses are significantly affected by corporeal objects: following Plato, the sensorial world only functions as a sort of trigger for the intellect to set off and retrieve the intellectual forms that it already knows by participation.[92] Conversely, Aquinas contends – relying on Aristotle – that intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses (*intellectualis operatio a sensu causatur*),[93] as there is no possible knowledge without the *phantasmata* that are formed by the action of the senses. The role of the *phantasmata* in the knowing process is so crucial that the ensuing

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[90] 'DMF : Dictionnaire Du Moyen Français, Version 2020 (Dmf 2020). Atilf - Cnrs & Université De Lorraine', <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf > [Accessed December 2021].

[91] John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy*, p. 128. "Videtur quod intellectiva cognitio non accipiatur a rebus sensibilibus" *Summa Theologiae*, 1 84.6, consulted on Aquinas Institute, 'Summa Theologiae' (2020) <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I> [Accessed December 2021].

[92] "Sic igitur secundum Platonis opinionem, neque intellectualis cognitio a sensibili procedit, neque etiam sensibilis totaliter a sensibilibus rebus; sed sensibilia excitant animam sensibilem ad sentiendum, et similiter sensus excitant animam intellectivam ad intelligendum", *Ibid. Summa Theologiae* 1 84, 6.

[93] *Ibid.*

quaestio Aquinas replies is whether the intellect can understand only relying on intelligible species without turning them into *phantasmata*. His answer, once again, could not be any clearer: the intellect is not able to operate and obtain knowledge unless it turns to the *phantasmata*.[94] What are these *phantasmata*, though? As its morphology suggests, Aquinas is resorting to a Greek term, φάντασμα (= "image", "representation", "vision"), which Aristotle uses in order to refer to the sensible images that the intellect is able to form through the senses. According to Aristotle, when the senses are activated by an external corporeal object, the intellect is able to produce a sensible image (the *phantasma*) of the given object, and from this image it will be able to extract its intelligible form – which will eventually be stored in the memory, thanks to which it can be recalled when needed. These ensuing series of steps towards knowledge is possible only thanks to the presence of two different intellects: the possible intellect and the agent intellect. The first is the intellect that "can become all things" – the famous *tabula rasa* on which the corporeal objects, through the mediation of the senses, leave their imprint; the status of the other intellect, the agent, is more uncertain due to the bad state of the passage in which Aristotle explains its meaning and operation.[95] Given the parallel that Aristotle makes between the agent intellect and the light, however, critics usually agree in describing it as the faculty that makes it possible to extract the intelligible species from the sensible images – thus the agent intellect is what makes it ultimately possible for humans to achieve knowledge. Aquinas benefits strongly from the Aristotelian theory of knowledge – whose mechanics remains almost unvaried in the Thomist argumentation.

Whether the Thomist account on knowledge was what the redactor-transator of *HL* had in mind or not, it is clear that the link between the *ymagines* on top of the tower and the five senses must derive from the knowing process as described by the Aristotelian tradition. This reveals a clear understanding of the philosophical discourse on gnoseology; this idea is further corroborated by the fact that the final part of *Virgilius' reductio* mentions at least three other words that equally and unequivocally belong to the semantic field of gnoseology: *racio*, *intellectus*, *ymaginacio* and *fantasia*:

> Hec videns dyabolus incipit sic hominem deludere ac decipere, ut eum alliciat ad
> fodiendam turrem cum ymaginibus, id est cor per peccatum mortale, donec cadat in

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[94] "[…] impossibile est intellectum nostrum […] aliquid intelligere in actu, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata", *Ibid*. *Summa Theologiae* 1 84, 7.
[95] John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 99-100.

desperacionem. Et tunc ciues, id est racio, intellectus, ymaginacio, fantasya, multum dolebunt.[96]

[Seeing this, the devil starts to trick and deceive the man in order to persuade him to destroy the tower with images, which means to destroy the soul through mortal sin, until he falls into despair. And thus citizens, which are reason, intellect, imagination and fantasia, will suffer very much]

However here we are actually witnessing the merging of two different discourses on sensory perception, the philosophical and the theological. Indeed, if terms such as *racio*, *intellectus*, *ymaginacio* and *fantasia* describe elements and/or functions belonging to the gnoseological discourse in philosophy, the metaphor that is used in order to describe the connection between the senses and sin comes from the theological tradition.

Describing the origin and development of Christian anthropology, Palazzo argues that Lactantius (active in the 4th century) was one of the first Fathers of the Church to compare the man's head to a citadel that is the site of the soul – and thus of all the senses that are there placed, except for the touch, which is located elsewhere.[97] The metaphor of the man-citadel was one to become particularly influential throughout the Middle Ages and it became extremely influential in the theological discourse of the 12th century. Even though slightly earlier, the use that Peter Damian makes of it proves to be particularly interesting for our discussion. The Benedictine monk describes the man as a citadel surrounded by the senses, which make it prone to the continuous stimulations of the vices and worldly fascinations. In order to prevent vices from breaching and corrupting our soul, men must put under lock the open doors of their senses.

"Nam velut in quinque portarum civitate consistimus, dum in corpore, quod quinque sensibus cingitur, habitamus. His ergo portis seras apponimus, his repagula, vectes ac pessulos adhibemus, cum sensum nostrorum aditus a vitiis irruventibus ac mundi vanitatibus sollicite custodimus".[98]

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[96] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 358-359.
[97] Éric Palazzo, 'Les cinq sens, le corps et l'esprit', pp. 59-78, p. 61
[98] Petrus Damianus, (PL 144 0325C) Epistola XV. ad V. Episcopum: Philipp Roelli, and et al., 'Corpus Corporum 2021' http://www.mlat.uzh.ch/MLS/ [December 2021]. Éric Palazzo, *L'invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Âge*, pp. 79-80. The idea that the senses are like windows that allow vices to pierce their way to our soul was already present in Saint Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*. See also Éric Palazzo, 'Les cinq sens, le corps et l'esprit', pp. 59-78, p. 63.

[We consist of a city with five doors, for we inhabit the body, which is surrounded by the five senses. So, we must put locks to its doors, we must use bolts, bars and latches, every time we have to protect the access to our senses from the shameful vices and the mundane vanities].

The concern with maintaining the purity of the senses is justified by the fact that, according to Christian theology, the contemplation of God passes through inner cognitive faculties. As it is noticed by Christian Trottman, in his IV Sermon Isaac of Stella (12th century) talks about the beatitude of God's contemplation as the ultimate goal for a good Christian and frames it as an achievement that cannot but require an enormous effort. Indeed, not only the external senses are to be purified, but also the internal ones. To put it as Isaac does, after the leprous, one has to heal the blind ("Sanavimus quidem claudum, sed illuminandus est caecus").[99] If the senses are contaminated, they cannot be dignified with the vision of God and thus the truth of His revelation:

> Dominus itaque dum oculos mentis ad videndam veritatem purgat, quasi caecum illuminat. Unde et de munditia cordis sermo sequens texitur, non ut mundetur a vitiis, quae perversi amoris, sive inordinati affectus nomine censentur, sed a phantasiis, quae per corporeos sensus imbibuntur, et intus in imaginatione versantur, et tamquam nubeculae interpositae claritatem nobis solis occulunt, vel per ipsum solare corpus totius luminis fontem, ab ipso omnino remotae, nobis intercludunt, vel ad minus acumen obtundunt.[100]

[Because the Lord purifies the eyes of the mind in order to see the truth, it is almost as if He enlightens the blind. So, the ensuing sermon on the heart's purity is composed not in order for the heart [?] to be purified from vices, which are called by the name of perverted love and immoderate affection, but from the *phantasmata*, which are drenched in the corporal senses, and are thought in the imagination, and just like small clouds they shade for us the brightness of the sun, or, they obstruct it for us because they are far remote from that solar corps, source of every light, or at least they make it weaker.]

In Isaac of Stella's sermon, then, we find a term that is familiar to us: *phantasiis* (= *phantasmata*). This sermon could hardly be clearer – in order to reach a state of contemplation

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[99] Christian Trottmann, 'Isaac de l'Étoile: les cinq sens et la conversion du sens', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale,* 55 (2012), pp. 433-42, p. 436.
[100] *Ibid*., p. 436.

and, thereby, receive God's revelation not only do our senses have to be purified, but also the mental images that the senses generate after the contact with the external reality.

All things considered, the concern with senses and perception fits the concern in the *reductiones* is that of eternal salvation – which can be obtained only by leading a Christian life consisting of continence, penitence and contrition.[101] *Si secundum carnem vixeritis, moriemini*[102] is the expression underlaying and animating the *reductiones*; they warn against the constant danger represented by the devil, who is always on the heels of all Christians and waits for them to give themselves up to the pleasures of flesh: that is when the devil will be able to penetrate their soul, thereby condemning them to eternal damnation.

This concern is already introduced in the first *reductio* after the frame-story, right before the first tale of the Empress:

> Karissimi! Per istum imperatorem debemus intelligere quemlibet Christianum, qui habet unicum filium, id est animam, quam debet septem operibus misericordie ad nutriendum, doctrinandum tradere, per que possit salutem eternam addiscere.[103]

[Dearest! For this Emperor we need to understand every Christian, who has an only child, which is the soul, whom he needs to send to learn and master the seven works of mercy – through which he may aspire to eternal salvation]

This passage inscribes the *reductiones* in the specific context of their scope and aim, while it also helps us understand the way the *SSR* was received and seen in its Latin *milieu*. The story of the unlucky Prince, his stubborn father and his seductive stepmother is ultimately interpreted as the never-ending struggle against the devil and his temptations, to which a good Christian can resist only if their soul is educated with Christians precepts and strengthened through the practice of its virtues.

Such Christian views on the *SSR* cannot lead but to an incisive refusal of the senses, which should never be a hindrance to those inner human faculties that can evidently help a good Christian to keep on the right path to salvation. This can be explained by looking at the reductio of the tale *Inclusa* itself:

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[101] See also Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung und textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 191-199.

[102] See *Avis' reductio*: *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

> Vnde miser homo sepius plus credit dyablo et carni quam illud, quod consciencia sua in contrarium dictat.[104]

[So, the miserable man often believes more in the devil and flesh than to what his conscience says]

The jealous husband is deemed guilty of choosing to trust his senses (not only his sight, but also the reassuring words of his wife) over what his *conscience* is recommending. From an Augustinian perspective, the answer to his doubts is already inside him, but unfortunately he is not able to follow through due to his lack of grace. Indeed, the *reductiones* are permeated by Augustine's teachings on the limits of reason – reason alone cannot secure eternal salvation, which requires God's *grace*. *Canis*, the story of the knight who kills his favourite greyhound, mistakenly thought responsible of his son's death, shall aide us to understand the importance granted to reason and grace in the *reductiones*.[105] Of particular interest is the scene of the fight between the greyhound and the serpent that attempts to assault the baby in the cradle. The serpent enters through the window while the dog is asleep. Suddenly awaken by the hawk, the greyhound sees the serpent and attacks it, starting a relentless fight that finishes only when the serpent is destroyed. In the *reductio* the greyhound represents reason, the serpent of course stands for evil, while the hawk symbolises the conscience. However, there is another element playing in favour of the dog's victory, God's *grace*:

> Sepe in talibus hominibus leporarius, id est racio, dormit, hoc est, extinguitur per malam uoluntatem. Hec videns falco, id est consciencia, statim percutit se ipsam cum alis. Ale iste sunt timor dei ex vna parte et pena infernalis ex alia parte. Propter quas alas consciencia semper contra peccatum murmurat, vnde propter hoc dicit Apostolus: "Omen, quod fit contra conscienciam, edificat ad gehennam". Racio cum percipit, excitatur et contra dyabolum, id est serpentem, viriliter pugnat, eo quod diabolus dicit: "Bonum est splendide comedere, suauiter dormire". Racio dicit: "Si homo ho fecerit caro ad malum excitabitur". Et sic ambo adinuicem pugnant. Sed sepe vulnerabitur leporarius, id est racio, quociens uoluntas superatur et racio subpediatur. Deinde leporarius, id est racio, toto conamine per dei graciam in dyabolum pugnat et sic sepe

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[104] See *Inclusa*'s *reductio*, *Ibid*., p.408
[105] *Canis* is one of the tales analysed in Chapter 1.

in pugnando cunabulum cordis euertitur, hoc est, cor per malas cogitaciones et peccata venalia contra deum delinquit.[106]

[Often in some men the greyhound, i.e., reason, sleeps, which means that it is blown out by ill will. As the hawk, i.e., conscience, sees this, immediately it strikes with its wings. These wings are the fear for God, on one side, and infernal punishments on the other. Thanks to these wings conscience always whispers against sin, because of this the Apostle says: "Everything you do against conscience, is good for Hell". As reason perceives it, it awakens and starts to fight vigorously against the serpent, i.e., the devil, that says: "It is good to eat well, it is even better to sleep". Reason replies: "If man did what you say, then s/he would entice her/his flesh towards evil". Thus, they fight one another. However, often the greyhound, i.e., reason, is wounded, every time the will is overcome and reason suppressed. So, the greyhound, i.e., reason, fights with all its strength against the devil aided by the grace of God, and so often, while fighting, the cradle of the heart is overturned, which means that the heart fails God due to evil thought and venial sins.]

In this passage, then, the fight between the greyhound and the serpent is translated into a dialogue between the devil and reason. Reason is indeed what protects from sin, but it is never enough, for sometimes it is asleep, other times it is wounded by the devil's attacks: God's grace is indispensable in order for men to win the never-ending fight against evil.[107]

From a religious perspective, reason can never be enough because it is a human faculty, and as such it is subject to error.

In one of the many places where HF's translator amplifies the Latin source, the text draws a distinction between the *entendement* of the lord and his *raison*: the former is to be intended as perception; the latter stands for the rational interpretation that is given to the perception itself. We are again in the context of the tale *Inclusa*, in the scene where the lord is invited to the

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[106] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 267.

[107] The motive of reason and sleep is particularly important in Augustinian thought. In the Book X of his *Confessiones*, where the bishop of Hippo comments on memory, he admits that while sleeping he is visited by lustful mental images which have the better of him. Indeed, Augustine confesses his inability to control these impulses when sleeping, while he is able to dominate them when wide-awake. The solution, Agustine comments, is to purify oneself from these lustful images, which can be done only with the grace of God.
Sed adhuc vivunt in memoria mea, de qua multa locutus sum, talium rerum imagines, quas ibi consuetudo mea fixit; et occursant mihi vigilanti quidem carentes viribus, in somnis autem non solum usque ad delectationem, sed etiam usque ad consensionem factumque simillimum. Et tantum valet imaginis illusio in anima mea et in carne mea, ut dormienti falsa visa persuadeant quod vigilanti vera non possunt [But in my memory of which I have spoken at length, there still live images of acts which were fixed there by my sexual habit. These images attack me. While I am awake they have no force, but in sleep they not only arouse pleasure but even elicit consent, and are very like the actual act. The illusory image within the soul has such force upon my flesh that false dreams have an effect on me when asleep, which the reality could not have when I am awake]. Translation from: Saint Augustine, 'Confessions', translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 203.

knight's house to celebrate the arrival of his mysterious friend and their forthcoming departure from the Lord's land. The more the Lord looks at his commensal, the more he thinks she is his wife:

> Les esperist du roy furent commus et son entendement luy raportoit que c'estoit la royne; mais la raison luy estoit contraire, qu'il estoit impossible que la royne peut la venir, consideré la force de la tour ou iI l'avoit laisse enclose, de laquelle il portoit les cles. Touttefoy il disoit ainsy en soy meisme: "O sainte Marie, que ceste femme resemble la royne ma femme!".[108]

[His impressions[109] were confusing, and his visual perception suggested that it was the queen; but his reason[110] would go against it, suggesting that it was impossible that the queen could be there, considering the sturdiness of the tower where he locked her up, the tower of which he had the keys with him. However, he was repeating to himself: "Holy Mary, this woman looks exactly like my wife!"]

In order to understand the philosophical value and implications of this passage, we can resort again to the work of Aquinas. For the Dominican monk there is an enormous difference between the mode of cognising of God and separated substances (such as angels) and the human mode of cognising: while the first know intellectually, the latter know rationally. This difference is ultimately due to the mode of being of God and the angels as opposed to that of man. Because disembodied souls do not rely on the matter (to exist or to know), they enjoy and immediate access to the immaterial forms – which constitute the ultimate source for intellectual knowledge. By contrast, the process of knowing is less immediate for humans who, in order to know, have to go through a series of steps that go from sensory perception to rational knowledge. Once the senses capture an external object, the possible intellect produces a mental image, the *phantasma*, from which the active intellect extracts the *quidditas*. The *quidditas* of a thing is what could be called its whatness – "that by which a thing is what it is"[111] – and coincides with the definition of the thing itself. The *quidditas* is not to be confused with what

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[108] Gaston Paris, *Deux Rédactions Du Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome* (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Françaises, 1876), p. 144.
[109] For the plural form of *esprit* DMF gives a medical translation: "Principe de la vie psychique, intellectuelle ou affective, or "Ensemble de composantes déterminant la vie intérieure d'un être humain". It seem appropriate here to translate it as "impressions". See 'DMF : Dictionnaire Du Moyen Français, Version 2020 (Dmf 2020). Atilf - Cnrs & Université De Lorraine', 2021) <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf > [Accessed December 2021].
[110] The term *entendement* can mean of course "intelligence" "ability to understand" but the DMF gives also the meaning of: "Perception par le sens de l'ouïe", which is probably worth maintaining. *Ibid*.
[111] John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy*, p. 118.

we call the form of a thing[112]: in defining the form of an object we do not include matter, but the definition of the same object would be only partial or imprecise unless we consider its matter too. Once the *quidditas* is retrieved and stored by the faculty of memory together with the sensible image, the second moment of knowledge – which regards only the inner faculties – occurs. Activated by the grasping of the *quidditas*, the intellect starts to form propositions by dividing and combining – and in so doing we start to associate or distinguish the object we are cognising from those we have already cognised. In this sense, human cognition is rational: in order to achieve knowledge, humans have to reflect about what they know or have known, that is coming back to the mental images in order to combine and compare – thereby managing to make predicaments about things. This is what ultimately makes the intellectual knowledge of separated substances so different: when God, the angels or disembodied soul cognise an intellectual form, it means that they acquire knowledge of all the propositions that can be made about them all at once. By contrast, by resorting to their intellectual faculties, humans have to generate those propositions by themselves – and it is in the moment in which the intellect forms proposition that falsehood can occur.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas believes that while there is no falsehood in sensible cognition (i.e., what we see is always true) the intellect can err in the moment it starts to form propositions about the thing that has been cognised by the senses.

Interestingly an example for this can be found in the *reductio* of *Vaticinium*, the final *exemplum* told by the Prince in person. In a similar fashion to the biblical story of Joseph, *Vaticinium* talks about a father who abandons his son because, according to a prophecy, the son was to become more powerful than the father. After a series of adventures, the son manages to become the king of a vast and prosperous land, while his parents are ruined. After identifying them, the son manages to finally have a meeting with his parents, where, after demonstrating that the prophecy became true, he forgives his father and accepts his parents at his court. In the *reductio*, the father is said to be Adam, while the son is paralleled to Jesus Christ, who, according to the text: *in scolis regni celestis erat optime instructus, quia est deus, cui sapiencia apropriatur in tantum, quod omnia in celo ac in terra intellexit et omnia, antequam facta sunt, presciunt* [who, as God, was educated in the school of heaven and received knowledge because he understood everything related to heaven and earth and knew everything, even before it happened]. Thus, Jesus shared the same intellect of God and other separated substances, all holding knowledge of everything worldly and heavenly.

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[112] Aquinas follows Aristotle in thinking the reality of the sublunar world as made up of matter and form.

This is also what we find in the comment on the situation of the cuckold husband of *Inclusa*. While what the lord sees is no doubt a fact and – it being a fact – true, the problem is with what the lord does with what he sees. As *HF* suggests, while the *entendement* (visual perception) suggests he is in front of his wife, his *raison* (his reasoning, that is the proposition he forms in order to make sense of the visual perception) suggest that she is not his wife.

This lengthy discussion on *Virgilius* and its *reductio* should have convinced the reader that the awareness on the contemporary philosophical and theological implications on gnoseology that the text displays was certainly key in designing and organising the narrative matter of the Latin *SSR*.

The significant anxiety concerning the senses and perceptions that characterises *HL*, however, raises interesting questions about the way the misogynistic discourse is tackled in this text, especially in the *reductiones*. Almost every historical account on the European history of women and, more in general, gender tends to start from the idea that in the Middle Ages the feminine was related to the senses, while the masculine was linked to the mind and reason. As contemporary scholars have repeatedly pointed out, ancient and medieval thinkers would motivate this distinction by resorting to the Genesis Yahwist account of the Creation (Genesis II:7), where Eve is said to be created after Adam, from the man's rib. While this passage was deemed to stand for the natural submission of women to men, it also produced a series of binary oppositions in which the negative element was usually associated with the female counterpart: body/soul; irrational/rational; senses/mind; truth/falsehood.

In this sense, it is possible to wonder how women are framed in the context of a text that was deeply concerned with the senses, perception and the way to protect them in order to avoid eternal damnation. Indeed, what is the example women can provide to aid us in the continuous effort to escape the eternal punishment?

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". Almost everyone.

"Omnis enim, quicumque invocaverit nomen Domini, salvus erit". In his Epistle to the Romans (10:13) Saint Paul seems not to have doubts that every Christian who relies on God will be granted salvation. In this section we will see to what extent this holds true for HL's *reductiones*. During the analysis of the first *reductio* of the tale *Inclusa* something struck us as unexpected, that is the absence of any reference whatsoever to Eve and her inviting Adam to bite the

forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. Indeed, on this occasion only Adam's actions are singled out and condemned: Adam alone is held responsible for having indulged in sinning and, consequently, for letting Satan get the better of his soul. Just as *Inclusa*'s Lord gave away his wife to the knight, Adam gave away his soul to Satan by eating the forbidden fruit/apple. Both the knight and Adam are accused of having done so willingly, with their consent that is. Indeed, while the latter had all the elements to perceive that the woman whom he was accompanying to the altar was actually his own wife but preferred to trust his senses and wrong reasoning rather than his conscience, Adam tasted the fruit/apple following his free will:

> Rex vero tradidit sponte vxorem militi, sic Adam animam suam dyabolo per esum pomi, et sic in mari istius mundi navigabat animam eius habendo, donec eam Christus redemit sua passione.[113]

[As a matter of fact, the king gave away [his] wife to the knight willingly. In the same way Adam gave his soul to the Devil by eating the fruit. This way Adam found himself navigating this world while the Devil had his soul, which was then redeemed by Jesus Christ's passion]

In the framework of a text that is deeply imbued with misogynistic tropes the absence of Eve in this passage comes as a surprise. Indeed, if the *reductiones* were interested in warning against the threat that women represent, this would have been the perfect place for attacking Eve and, through her, women and their wicked ways.

However, this is not the only passage which attributes the guilt for Original Sin to Adam leaving Eve behind. Adam's sin is addressed at least in other five *reductiones*, namely *Arbor*, *Gaza*, *Vidua*, *Virgilius* and *Vaticinium*, where he is paralleled to men from the relative *exempla* and he is attacked for spoiling the privilege of being admitted to paradise by following his free will, thus provoking God's wrath. Eve's name does not even come up where the reference is more generic, as is the case for the *reductio* of Vaticinium, where mention is made of the *peccatum primi parentis*, leaving the *parens* in the singular, suggesting that the text is referring exclusively to Adam. While Eve may not be considered as the *parens* who passed down Original Sin because of the passive role that women were deemed to have in reproduction, it is striking to notice that no mentions is made of Eve pushing Adam towards sin.[114]

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[113] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 407-08.
[114] On women's role in reproduction according to medieval medicine see Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 117-30.

If there is no mention of Eve and the way she pushed Adam to sin, then what is made of all the cultural attributes gravitating around Eve's character? Indeed, what is made of women characters if not even the most wicked ones, as *Inclusa*'s lady, are linked to the figure of Eve? In the *reductiones*, the women from the *exempla* are associated either to the flesh or to the soul of men, who have the duty to guard them in order not to fall into sinful behaviour and, hence, risk eternal damnation. This happens also in the space of a single text: in Inclusa the jealously guarded wife is said to represent at once the flesh, which surrenders to Satan's seductions, and the soul, which is cursed when evil pierces men's heart. The same happens in the *reductio* of Puteus, where the young lady who locks her husband out of the house is said at once to stand for the wife of the latter as well as his miserable flesh, which does not want to lie in the bed of penitence:

> Miles iste potest dici homo, qui desponsauit iuuenculam pulchram, id est animam ad dei similitudinem creatam, quam miro modo tenetur diligere […]. Sed sepe vxor, id est caro misera, quia non ei placet in lecto penitencie iacere, surgit per malam cogitacionem hostium aperuit per consensum, ad amasium, id est peccatum mortale […][115]

[This man can be said to be the man, who married a beautiful maid, that is the soul, created by God's image, whom he must treat incredibly well. However, often the wife, that is the miserable flesh, because she does not like to lie in the bed of penitence, gets up and, holding bad intentions, consents to open the door to the lover, that is mortal sin]

Two complementary aspects are of interest here: on the one hand, the fact that, besides the flesh, women can also be the personification of the soul; on the other, women have always the role of something that has to be controlled, guarded and tamed to avoid sin. In the context of the *reductiones* these two points mutually explain each other. Indeed, for women to be associated with something else than matter or the senses, it took a man to be represented as the sinner who must take care of his soul in order not to fall into Satan's clutches.

While in the *exempla* women play a part in the development of the plot, in the *reductiones* they are only considered as a sort of extension of men's attributes, that is the soul or the body. Men, therefore, seem to become the only individuals populating the history of salvation as well as its only addressees. Bestowed with its universal marker, the masculine ends up phagocytising

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[115] Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition*, vol. 1, p. 286.

any other manifestation of alterity. It is in this context, I believe, that the absence of any reference to Eve ought to be interpreted. While men, who presumably were the composers as well as the intended audience of HL, had no problems in recognising themselves in the sin committed by Adam, they would have found it much more difficult to recognise themselves in a woman such as Eve. The absence of tirades against Eve and her pushing Adam towards sin is mirrored by a lack of interest in simply attacking women, thereby suggesting that the ultimate interest of the text is man's salvation – once again, misogyny proves to be the *a priori* and underlaying background against which the text is constructed. On the other hand, however, the lack of any attempt to provide examples that engage the feminine counterpart is proof of the *reductiones*' lack of consideration for women as the addressee of the discourse on salvation. Thus, women prove to be more of a tool with which to think about salvation, than the object or subject of that thinking. According to Ruth Mazo-Karras, women would receive the same type of treatment, or rather indifference, in another – highly masculine – setting, that is the university *disputationes* on theology. Indeed, analysing a series of *disputationes* in which the starting *quaestio* regarded women somewhat (i.e., marriage, virginity etc.), Mazo-Karras points out how the discussion would turn towards other theoretical and very much generic issues, without at all focusing on women *qua* women, not even to replicate widespread misogynistic tropes under the authority of Aristotle. She comments:

> When we think of scholasticism's attitude to women, misogyny may come immediately to mind, but this connection is somewhat misleading. It was not misogyny in the sense of attacks on women as much as misogyny in the sense of ignoring women or making them irrelevant that characterized the theological disputations.[116]

While the absence of women can be justified by their not having access to the scholastic world, it is also theologians' *forma mentis* that tended to exclude from their thinking range any kind of alterity that would not fall back into their masculinity, according to Mazo-Karras. So, while they would use the generic term of *homo* to talk about questions regarding human beings in general, it was in fact men that they had in mind. Women "were not part of their intellectual

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[116] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Using Women to Think with in the Medieval University', in *Seeing and Knowing Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200 – 1550*, ed. by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 21-34, p. 26.

world. The masculine stood as the norm for all. They used women to think with only when necessary, and they did not really matter as women".[117]

As it has been demonstrated at length in the former two section, HL's text flags a remarkable philosophical as well as theological preparation of its redactor/translator, whose mastery not only of the relative language and metaphor but also of Latin itself suggests that he received adequate academic training. Building on Mazo-Karras' argument that ultimately medieval "theological education did not so much transmit misogynist teaching as it used women as symbols to discuss other issues",[118] I argue that the *reductiones* of the *SSR*'s and *HL* overall are characterised by the same spirit. Far from wanting to simply replicate misogynistic stereotypes or warning men against the danger that they represent, the *reductiones* take women as a symbol in order to show men the way towards eternal salvation. While the latter should be available to every good Christian, including of course women, nonetheless the pathway for salvation seems to be revealed only to men.

Some Conclusions

Animated by the Baktinian concept of dialogism, this chapter has followed a comparative approach to achieve a better understanding of the several manifestations of the *SSR*'s narrative that gravitate around its Old French tradition, this time including the Latin and Middle French transpositions. It has been shown that the gnoseological troubles concerning the position of the tale *Inclusa* and the Sage's advice to trust sight better than words did not go unnoticed to the author/translator of *HL*, who readjusted and reorganised the narrative structure of the *SSR* accordingly. Such a blatant contradiction could not be accepted by someone who may well have received academic training in philosophy as well as theology, both subjects in which gnoseology and epistemology were a matter of heated debate in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century universities. Indeed, particularly in *Virgilius' reductio*, the text displays the remarkable use and mastery of the language and metaphors usually employed to talk about these topics, such as the citadel under siege by external, evil, inputs. The latter image leads us straight to discussing the main interest of *HL*'s *reductiones*, that is human salvation from eternal damnation. The complete erasure of women's individualities from the religious interpretations

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[117] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[118] *Ibid*., p. 28.

of the *SSR*'s narrative suggests that whoever wrote the *reductiones* was not at all concerned with women – not because they do not deserve to be redeemed or to access the eternal life of the heavens, but because they are utterly absent from the intellectual horizon of the writer and, it might be argued, of the intended audience of *HL*. Hence the text proves to be misogynistic not because it attacks women by diminishing their mental abilities or because it warns men against the threat that women represent, but rather because it completely forgets to include women in the *vade mecum* that is supposed to show every Christian, women included, the pathway towards eternal salvation.

Conclusions

Texts are malleable entities, and so are the narratives they convey. This is certainly the observation bringing together the three chapters constituting this doctoral thesis. The journey taken across the various versions of the Old French and Latin *Seven Sages of Rome* reiterated the importance of regarding the changeability of medieval texts more as a possibility to retrieve different historic interpretations than as a limit to a faithful reconstruction of the text. After the pivotal studies of Zumthor and Cerquiglini this is hardly a novelty in the field of Romance studies; yet this approach has seldom been used to study the complexity of the *SSR*'s textual changes across the versions. For too long specialists have been dowelling on broader philological issues (i.e., versions' kinships), unfortunately neglecting the immense hermeneutic value of its textual variation.

The study of its *mouvance* puts under the spotlight the reception of the text, which is key to anchor it in the socio-historical context of its users and therefore of its producer(s). As Hans Robert Jauss explains, the intended audience(s) affects the text and their "horizon of expectation" can be found right there, in between the lines.[1] The close readings carried out across the chapters has made it possible for us to track down a history of the Old French and Latin transmission of the *SSR* across the centuries. Ultimately this resulted in a constant attention to the medieval reception of the *SSR*, which has been the premise to all the answers that we have sought for our main over-arching question: how does the representation of gender change across the different versions of the *SSR*? What affects this change and in what terms? What does this entail?

The choice to look at gender in the *SSR* was motivated by the repeated claims put forward by scholars about the misogyny of the text without however engaging in further studies on the nature and articulation of the misogynistic discourse across the different versions of the Old French and Latin *SSR*. From the very beginning of this research, looking at gender and misogyny has immediately prompted us to look at another aspect which is also often brought up when talking about this narrative, that is perception. Indeed, the *SSR* and its *exempla* focus greatly on deception, or better the way our sensory perception could produce false knowledge. By acknowledging the persistent connection between women and the senses in Western culture,

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[1] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

my study has sought to understand how misogyny and perception interact across the Old French and Latin *SSR* – but especially how they are framed and readjusted to different (sociological, ideological, cultural, historical) contexts of production and reception.

While observing the several shapes and forms that the *Sept Sages* has taken on across the centuries, we have noticed two main facts. First, when activated, the *SSR*'s narrative pattern takes the shape and form that better suits the communication interests of whoever is using it. Second, the text does not bear a fixed meaning: quite the contrary, meaning is subject to change according to the specific circumstances surrounding its transmission. These two points have been highlighted and substantiated by shifting the attention to the text's reception, which has been studied on the one hand by comparing the versions of the *SSR* between them, on the other by adopting the approach of Material Philology. The latter has certainly informed Chapter 1 but its potential as a methodology that is key to improving our understanding of a text has been explored more in Chapter 2. In both chapters, looking at the manuscript context has enabled us to see how certain features of the narrative – especially those related to the representation of women characters – tend to be emphasised or mitigated in particular and specific contexts. This made us conclude that the misogynistic discourse has more than one way of being framed. Indeed, women do not have necessarily to fulfil the stereotypes of being garrulous, lascivious and fickle in order for misogyny to be at play.

Different types of misogynistic discourses were identified and investigated in Chapter 1 and have also been linked to the cultural landscape surrounding the text's production and circulation. For example, the manuscript tradition of *M* deeply reflects the way the Empress and female characters are represented. The four manuscripts transmitting *M* all contain texts with apparent didactic purposes, which resonates with the exacerbation of the Empress' dangerous sexuality. Indeed, beside fashioning the usual misogynistic tropes reproduced by other versions – women's maliciousness, evil cleverness, wicked eloquence – great attention is placed on the sexualisation of the Empress' body and her voracious sexuality. This happens through the "embodiment" of the Empress, intending this word in both its figurative and literal senses. Not only is the Empresses a twelve-year old maiden when she is given away to the Emperor, but her body is also heavily sexualised: the Empress's tempting gestures, her seductive moves, her hands and firm breasts are under the spotlight; with clever awareness the Empress uses her body in order to obtain what she desires. Therefore, in *M* the Empress' agency is inscribed in her body and her ability to elicit men's senses in order to obfuscate their judgements. The uncontrollable sexuality of the Empress is consistent with the idea of "castigating" women in order to educate and restrain them, which in turn is the same principle

underpinning many medieval *specula* – that is, educational treaties, which usually aim at containing and controlling women's fickleness, irrationality and sexuality. Only men are worthy of an education that may teach them how to properly occupy the public space – which is instead precluded to women. Like other educational treaties, then, *M* replicates the idea that men are to be instructed and prepared to life, while women are instead to be controlled and guarded.

Public space is an important element defining another way we have seen the misogynistic discourse unfold in a different moment of the Old French *SSR*'s tradition. The most striking feature of the verse version *K* was indeed the Empress approaching the Emperor and narrating her *exempla* in a public setting. Here the Empress does not wait for the doors of the castle to be closed in order to approach the Emperor in his room and tell her story. Quite the contrary, the Empress generally reaches the Emperor right in front of the monastery where he has just attended Mass. In this same setting, the Sage of the day arrives and tells his own story. The public context of the Empress' speech prevents the narrative from repeatedly activating other misogynistic stereotypes, that is the dangerous sexuality represented by the erotic gestures with which she tries to seduce the Emperor at the end of her tales, so prominent in *M*, for example. Indeed, except for the scene where she attempts to seduce the Prince, *K*'s Empress does not use her sexuality or her body to finally convince the Emperor to execute the Prince – she only uses rhetoric, that is the same *art* available to the Sages. Moreover, the Empress ends up mastering it even better than the Sages as, besides being the only one to speak "par auctorité", she is also said to be the one who eventually wins the seven-days long argument. At first glance, such a representation seems to challenge the most common anti-feminist stereotypes. One might even be tempted to suggest that *K* challenges the misogynistic by empowering women. However, it is the exact opposite: *K* finishes with the execution of the Empress, thereby re-establishing the former patriarchal order. She does not ask for confession, nor does she ask God for forgiveness – there is no rest for the wicked, especially for a woman who has attempted to sabotage relationships between men by appropriating means that are deemed to be masculine, which are also important to reproduce the patriarchal order. In fact, the Empress in *K* is the one taking the lead, the one using the rhetorical tools with which clerics are educated. By doing so the Empress ends up reversing traditionally accepted gender roles, becoming a lady and a lord at the same time:

Li rois n'a pas la dame prise,
Mais ceste lui, par tal devise

> Qu'ele devins dame et signor
>
> Ele a souspris l'empereor![2]

[The king did not seize the lady, but it is she who took him. This way, she becomes lady and lord. She subjugated the emperor!]

This representation of *K*'s Empress is deeply misogynistic not only because she is empowered with traits that were considered "masculine" – that is intelligence, rationality and eloquence – to the point that she is considered to be more of a man but also because she will be harshly punished for doing so.

It can be argued that in the Middle Ages the idea that some characteristics were intrinsically linked to biological sex was so entrenched in the culture that thinking of men as more capable than women was the rule rather than the exception. In this sense, this passage of *K* might even be understood to be recognising women for their intellectual abilities, which make them equal and even better than man. However, the Empress ends up murdered for showing more eloquence and skills than the Sages, a punishment that ultimately discourages women from undermining the patriarchal order.

Even Christine de Pizan talks about herself as a "man" when describing her condition as an orphan and widow needing to look after and provide for her entire family; but we would be wrong if we were to describe her as a misogynist.[3] Christine's engagement in the well-known *Querelle des femmes* discourages us from thinking about her in that way, and so does her *Livre de la cité des dames*, where she imagines a city made up of and run by exemplary historic or fictional women.[4] Yet, even Christine is led to think of herself as a man – rather than an ingenious woman – when she describes herself as the strong captain of the vessel that represents her life.

K's misogynistic discourse rests on the fact that the Empress' appropriation of male characteristics leads to her death. The final goal of the narrative is to elicit men to repress women, punishing those who act differently from the norm, getting rid of the devious ones who try to take over male roles or spheres. The Empress is condemned to death.

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[2] Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, and Mary Speer, eds., *Le Roman Des Sept Sages De Rome*, *Champion Classiques. Moyen Âge / 44* (Paris: Champion, 2017), pp. 138-40, vv. 431-34.

[3] Christine de Pisan, *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, ed. by Suzanne Solente (Paris: Éditions A. & J. Picard, 1959-1966), pp. 46-53, vv. 1159-1416.

[4] Christine de Pizan, *La Città delle Dame*, ed. by Patrizia Caraffi and Earl Jeffrey Richards (Milano: Luni Editrice, 1997).

Analysing current British and American culture, Kate Manne suggests a distinction between sexism and misogyny.[5] She argues that while sexism is the belief that there are actual biological differences between men and women that make the latter naturally inferior to a man, misogyny is to be "understood primarily as the 'law enforcement' branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing norms and expectations."[6] This means that misogyny is the set of concepts and behaviours through which patriarchy reinforces and reaffirms itself continuously – and of course misogyny sees its main enemy in women who do not fulfil the stereotype and do not do willingly and gladly the emotional and social labour they are supposed to do.

Investigating *K*'s, possibly surprising, misogynistic discourse in the context of the only manuscript that ensured its transmission, BnF fr. 1553, led us to further nuance the picture. Here *K* is encompassed by other texts – the *Wistasse le Moine* and the *Mahon* – whose aim is to warn against intelligence and knowledge, which are seen as dangerous weapons when fallen into the wrong hands. In this section of the codex, we find a monk who pranks his feudal lord, thereby jeopardising the feudal order; an Empress who seeks the death of her stepson, thus threatening the father-son bond, also crucial to the maintenance of the feudal order; finally, we have Muhammad, who, thanks to his wit, is able to convince his community of his heavenly mission, thus creating a new religion opposing Christendom – to the point that the prophet declares war against the whole Christian world, whose values and culture are thus considered in danger. The sequence of these three texts has its culmination in the ultimate punishment and restauration of the order – represented by Vespasian's crusade against the Jews in the *Vengeance Nostre Seigneur*.

Building on Turner's argument that *Mahomet* is not interested in islamophobia as much as it is in reproaching the gullibility of the masses and in providing an example on how to recognise and protect oneself from deceivers, Chapter 2 put forward the idea that misogyny is not *K*'s only or primary concern. Indeed, misogyny proves to be the premise introducing a broader discussion on the duplicitous nature of knowledge and false appearance; in turn, however, the latter discussion replicates a deeply misogynistic discourse, creating a spiral in which each element is reinforced by the other.

This clearly represent a rupture with previous scholarship on the *SSR*, which has usually limited itself to dismiss the text just a yet another account on the threat that women represent. Indeed,

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[5] Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York, NY: University Press, 2017). See in particular Chapter 3 "Discriminating Sexism", pp. 77-105.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

more than merely demonstrating anxiety about women, in *K* the threat is constituted by the deceitful nature of appearances, by the fact that they can lead to a knowledge that is in fact imbued with falsehood. Falsehood, is in turn embodied by suspicious "others", in *K* a woman who is undermining the reproduction of the patriarchal order.

By looking at *K* through the lenses of Material Philology, Chapter 2 has not only provided a contribution to the study of the *SSR* per se, but also to another intriguing strain of research, that is the study of manuscript BnF fr. 1553. Indeed, our analysis brought another argument in favour of the hypothesis that this manuscript ought not to be considered as a random collection of texts, but rather as a complex yet organic unity, which is arranged according to criteria that are possible for philologists, palaeographers and codicologists to understand. As for the third codicological section, where *K* appears, a case has been made for it to be organised according to a thematic criterion. It has been suggested that such different texts as the ones collected here testify to the compiler' or commissioner's interest in bringing to the fore a concern with the duplicitous nature of knowledge, and the dangers thereof when used to deceive people – and overthrow the symbolic order. The idea that this section functions as a coherent whole has been further proven by the analysis on the *Roman de la Violette*, whose presence is not justified only by its concern with deception, but also by its link with the *Wistasse* as well as its dialectic opposition to *K* itself. It has been argued that the *Violette* entertains a historical proximity with the *Wistasse*. The *Violette'*s dedicatee is Marie of Ponthieu, wife of Simon de Dammartin, brother of the Renaud de Dammartin tormented by Eustache Busket. As for *K*, the link here is dialectic, as while the *Violette* revolves around the story of a woman who is unjustly accused of something she did not do, *K* portrays the inverse situation – thus while the *Violette* provides a good model of woman, one to follow, *K* proposes one who ought to be rejected.

The conclusions of a thesis should certainly celebrate the findings of three years of research; however it is also the proper place to reflect on its limits and, sometimes, to express some regrets. It has not been possible to substantiate the intuition according to which meaning is not only produced by the way we look at a single text, but also by the way in which we interpret it as a part of a coherent whole. This is to say that *K*'s meaning is affected and at the same time constructed by the other texts gravitating around it in the section of its manuscript. It might be interesting to look at this aspect through the lenses of linguistics, particularly the theories of syntax-semantics interface. The latter investigates to what extent syntax and semantics interact at the level of meaning, by showing how syntactic structures and elements are functions of the production of meaning. It was only after spending some months imagining

manuscripts as a long sentences whose components are texts disposed according to flexible yet coherent syntactic criteria that affect and produce meaning that I found a similar intuition in the edited volume *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts*.[7] In the preface to the work the editors evoke André Martinet's concept of "double articulation" (also known as "duality of patters") to explain how meaning comes about in the context of a multi-text manuscripts. According to Martinet language is articulated by the interactions of two levels: the first level of articulation is constituted by the morphemes, the verbs and adjectives and other part of the discourse that bear actual meaning; the second level concerns phonemes, that is the single sounds which make up words and which are meaningless if considered on their own. The parallel proposed by *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts* suggests the single texts are elements belonging to the second level of articulation that, when and if combined, create the meaningful elements belonging to the second level – thereby constructing a meaningful expression. "In this double articulation, the first level is represented by the semantics deployed by MTMs [multi-text manuscripts], that is, the new meaning and new features MTMs acquire after single texts are grouped in one volume".[8] This tantalising avenue has unfortunately not been further explored in *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts* – however it remains an interesting and promising line of inquiry that might well be worth following in future research endeavours, of course by expanding the manuscript corpus. Indeed, this research could well produce a general theoretical framework embracing the complexity of multiple-text manuscripts coming from different cultures.

Returning to this thesis' accomplishments, the concern with knowledge and perception identified in the Old French versions of the *SSR*, has been further proven by studying the text's reception into Latin. Including the Latin text into our analysis was crucial to really demonstrate how plastic and flexible the *SSR*'s narrative is. From verse to prose, from Old French to Latin and then Middle French, these different versions have entertained and instructed different audiences, who have conceptualised them in as many different ways. The religious interpretations (*reductiones* or *moralitates*) integrated into the Latin text suggest the *SSR* was taken as an instrument to educate the believers through preaching and/or edifying reading. The *reductiones* display concerns with eternal salvation, which is attainable only by preventing Satan from piercing the windows of our senses and corrupting our soul. In this sense, the Latin *HL* establishes an additional layer of narrative in which the *SSR*'s story is mirrored by the

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[7] Alessandro Bausi, Michael Friedrich, and Marilena Maniaci, eds., *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts* (Berlin Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).
[8] *Idem.*, p. XI.

history of human salvation from infernal pains. This *mise en abyme* of fictions brings to the fore two main traits. One deals with the theological and philosophic discourse on gnoseology. The *reductiones*' insistence on the necessity for men to have control on their corporal senses so as to protect their inner sense, that is the Augustinian sense of the heart, demonstrate the author/translator's anxieties about the senses and the threat that they represent. This suggests the Latin re-writing was produced by paying attention to the questions on knowledge and perception that the *SSR*'s narrative raises – as suggested by the reorganisation of the tale Inclusa in the broader context of the collection. The second trait to be highlighted was the lack of anti-feminist comments in the *reductiones*. After all, they provide a recipe for salvation, which is virtually available to every individual animated by good Christian values, including men and women. At first glance, then, this might suggest that the *reductiones* lack anti-feminist attacks because their spiritual vocation makes them immune to the reproduction of misogynistic discourses. However, as it has been argued across this thesis, the misogynistic discourse is not made up only of the most widespread commonplaces and, just like the *SSR*'s narrative, can assume different forms. The *reductiones*' misogyny is testified to by the complete erasure of women from the history of human salvation. Indeed, they are either absent or they become men's appendices – either the soul or the flesh, which must be guarded and protected, just like a woman. Hence, women become a sort of symbolic tool through which one can think about salvation, rather than the actual addressees of its message, thereby recalling modes of thinking already familiar to the scholastic environment.

HL's *reductiones* proved to be a fascinating and fertile ground of research on many levels. They are an invaluable tool for speculating about the purposes and limits of scriptural hermeneutics. Indeed, to what extend can the Augustinian modes of interpretations be applicable on a text that does not belong to the Holy Scriptures? Is there the possibility that the validity of this mode of reading ends up being undermined by this kind of use? Certainly, the jointed analysis of the *Gesta Romanorum* and *HL* might shade some light on this issue, which is been addressed only marginally so far.[9]

Speaking of the links between the *Gesta Romanorum* and our *HL*, it has been mentioned that Weiske claims that the frequent presence of more than one *reductiones* in *HL* would prove that they were added to the text only later, differently from what happens in the *Gesta*.[10] Weiske's

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[9] See Detlef Roth, *'Historia Septem Sapientum'. Überlieferung Und Textgeschichtliche Edition.* 2 vols, *Münchener Texte Und Untersuchungen Zur Deutschen Literatur Des Mittelalters* (Tübingen: 2004), in particular the section titled "Die geistlichen Auslegunged der >Historia<", from p. 192.

[10] See the discussion in the introductory section of Chapter 3.

opinion has been repeatedly dismissed by scholars who argued in favour of the simultaneous production of both the *reductiones* and the *SSR*'s re-writing – a reassessment that this doctoral thesis has subscribed to.[11] Clarifying their origins, though, does not provide answers to a wide range of other questions, especially those relating to the *reductiones*' functions, which definitely demand and deserve further attention.

It has been argued that the *reductiones* were meant to unravel the edifying religious moral behind the *exempla*; however, the presence of more than one interpretation for some *exempla* makes us wonder why their writer deemed it necessary to provide more than one reading. In other words, why was a double or even triple possibility of interpretation preferred over one, unitarian description of the pathway leading to salvation? A possible answer to this might be that they were intended for a diverse audience, thus they had to prove relatable for different people. This is in line with what is known about the so-called *sermones ad status*, that is model sermons conceived for specific social classes.[12] In *HL*, any alternative *reductiones*, often introduced by the formula *vel alio modo potest reduci*, change not only the parallels between the relevant *exemplum* and the Christian concepts or elements, but also their addressees. Indeed, they can be alternatively directed to every Christian (*quilibet homo per baptizmum lotus*), other times to the powerful lot of the earth (*mundi potentes*), other times the ecclesiastics (*prelati*) who relentlessly fight against heretics (*heretici*) are addressed. This might testify to *HL*'s attempt to reach out to a diverse and broad audience. However, *HL* was probably conceived for the use of ecclesiastics, that is those who were to perform the preaching, those who were to achieve the same satisfying religious interpretations appearing in the text. Therefore, the elements are all there to argue that *HL*, at least for what concerns Group I, might have served also as an example on how to structure and achieve religious interpretation of non-religious texts. Thus, besides training the reader towards the achievement of salvation, *HL* would also provide a practical example on how to build a religious interpretation that might come handy to ecclesiastics in order to fulfil their preaching duties. This, however, is another strain of research that was left aside, and that certainly needs another space to be undertaken.

Ultimately, looking at misogyny and perception across the Old French and Latin *SSR* has enabled us to reaffirm the changeability and adaptability of the misogynistic discourse, which is not one. Indeed, the affirmation around the monolithic character of the misogynistic discourse permeating the narrative has been questioned and its validity has been re-assessed in

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[11] Again, see the relevant discussion in Chapter 3.

[12] See D. L. D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) on the matter of *sermons ad status*.

the course of the research. The misogynistic discourse has instead been framed as a mutable and malleable entity, which is always dependant on and influenced by the socio-cultural environment reproducing it. While different representations are produced by a given reception of the text, in turn textual reception is determined by those representations. Textual transmission never happens in a vacuum but is rather the focal point where different ideological lines intersect, thereby affecting the way in which a text is received in terms of genre and use.

Appendix

Figure 1 *Manuscript BnF français 1553, Frontispiece, f. 1v*

Figure 2 Manuscript BnF français 1553, incipit of the eulogy for the death of bishop Enguerrand de Créquy, f. 161v

Figure 3 Manuscript BnF français 1553, explicit of the Roman de la Violette and incipit of the Wistasse le Moine, f. 325

Figure 4 Manuscript français 1553, incipit of the Roman des Sept Sages, f. 338v

Figure 5 *Manuscript français 1553, explicit of the Roman des Sept Sages, f. 367v*

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