

UNFIXING THE ROSEBUD IN *THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE*

UNFIXING THE ROSEBUD AS A FIXTURE OF THE FEMALE SEX IN
GUILLAUME DE LORRIS'S AND JEAN DE MEUN'S
THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

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ABSTRACT

The following work investigates the critical history, and offers a rereading, of the symbol of the rosebud in Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century *The Romance of the Rose*. An interpretation of the rosebud as the female beloved, while invoked on the basis of convention and context, is continually undermined by the literal details of the symbol itself. The phallic shape and male owner of the rosebud cast it as an indeterminately gendered symbol. In the absence of a secure female object-mirror in which to view himself as verifiably masculine, the subjectivity of the Narrator-Lover undergoes a radical fragmentation such that it comes to resemble the indeterminacy of the rosebud. The relation of sameness between the speaking voice and rosebud situates it as a subversive copy, rather than feminized reflection or Other, of the Narrator-Lover figure.

In addition to its imagery, a dynamic of sameness underwrites the structure of the poem, which progresses through a sophisticated interplay of repetition such that the distortions that accrue as a result of allusions and reiterated events stand as sites of irony and implication.

While an allegory, the poem is not necessarily interpretable as a conventional romance. Readings that posit it as such rely on a definition of allegory as a bilevel narrative in which a conventional, allegorical, message overrides the particularities of the literal text. Rather than beyond, however, the meaning of the poem's imagery inheres in the material construction of the figures themselves. As an allegory the *Rose* generates, not another level of meaning, but a complex set of interconnections that compels its readers to attend to and negotiate the text's surface dynamics. The subject matter of the *Rose* is not so much the politics of love as the politics of interpretation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1-7
Chapter	
1: How a Little Rosebud Upset the Greatest Tale of Courtly Romance Without So Much As Batting an Eyelash	8-52
i) An inquiry into the femininity of the rosebud	
ii) Dislodging the rosebud from the female sex: the complex symbology of the rosebud and its phallic resonances	
iii) The Lover and his classical counterparts: masculine self-love in the stories of Narcissus, Pygmalion and Hercules	
iv) Anthropomorphizing the rosebud: an investigation into readings of its “impregnation” and “loss of virginity”	
2: The Vagaries of Plucking: Gender and Subject Formation	53-92
i) Subjectivity in courtly love romance	
ii) Destabilizing the narrative voice: the God of Love introduces the Lover to his army of barons	
iii) Masculine self-sameness and the Fountain of Love	
iv) The subversion of difference: sameness, repetition and “seeming”	
3: Allegory and the <i>Rose</i>	93-131
i) The meaning of allegory	
ii) Reading horizontally: the vagaries of dismemberment	
iii) The conundrum of personification	
iv) The contrary, the contradictory and the somewhat distorted: wrapping up <i>The Romance of the Rose</i>	
Conclusion	132-35
Works Cited and Consulted	136-41

Introduction

The underlying interest of this not always congenial encounter with *The Romance of the Rose* is how and why the poem's dream portion is read as it is, namely an allegorical account of a young man's pursuit and capture of his beloved lady, "Rose." The Narrator's express purpose in recounting this dream is to impress his own beloved, and to provide instruction for other young gallants on how to hone their own rose-gathering skills. The popularity of this poem, it survives in over 250 manuscripts, and the scope of its influence prompts Simon Gaunt to proclaim it, arguably, "the single most significant text in the inculcation of what today we call 'compulsory heterosexuality' in the upper echelons of later medieval European society" (66).¹ My initial discomfort with the unquestioning assimilation of the rosebud to a female beloved and/or her beloved part has developed into a more general inquiry into the politics of interpretation. What makes the rosebud a young woman? How does this equation work? How might it, how might I make it, signify differently? To what extent is all signification a "making," either intentional or not? The symbolic import of the rosebud as *une jeune fille*, which Ernest Langlois professed it to be in 1891, is so entrenched that it crops up in Abram's *Glossary of Literary Terms* under its entry for "Symbol": "We readily recognize that the whole narrative is a sustained allegory about an elaborate courtship, in which most of the agents are personified abstractions and the rose itself functions as an allegorical emblem . . . which represents both the lady's love and her lovely body" (311-312). To "readily recognize" a symbol, however, suggests that its meaning has been concluded before the poem has been started. An unquestioned acceptance of this reflex inference means that the ways in which the rosebud works to undermine the "readily recognizable" narrative are either not noted, disregarded, or clarified such that they confirm the accustomed reading.

My attention in the upcoming pages to the literality of the text is not meant as an obtuse refusal to engage the figurality of language. Rather, it is the very issue of figurality as a medium of signification in allegory that I wish to explore. How is figurative language to be read? What is the nature of the link between the materiality of a figure and its allegorical meaning? I was asked at a conference in March 2002, alongside my two other panellists, who had also examined the object-status of a textual image, whether this attention to the literal had anything to do with our being women readers/critics. I have given this query some thought, and believe that part of my contention about the symbology of the rosebud arises from a suspicion of figurative discourse and what seems to be its perennial

¹ All references to Gaunt's work are taken from "Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*" unless otherwise noted.

endorsement of patriarchal patterns. It also stems from a desire to re-evaluate what has been feminized by a system of representation that aligns the inner, higher, and allegorical with truth, and the outer, lower, and literal with the profane. An association of the dross of content with the feminine is implied in the sense of the various Latin terms for allegory's literal level, such as *integumentum*, and *involucrum*, which situate it as a covering that houses some penetrating insight.² The sense of *volva* as "a shell" or "husk" casts the feminine/literal as the discardable container of what is esteemed a "kernel" of truth. Re-evaluating the words on the page in distrust of what is assumed to be the case provokes an other reading of the rosebud and the Lover's desire for it.

Editors and scholars have played a key role in forging the femininity of the rosebud by modifying the poem in translations and critical work in ways that institutionalize it as a courtly love romance. Because the femininity of the rosebud is a crucial factor in this allegorical interpretation of the dream as a somewhat unusual, yet nonetheless conventional, romance, it is necessary either to disregard or rationalize its unladylike aspects. As Paul Zumthor proposes, the rosebud is granted the fixed values of an emblem rather than accorded the scope of a symbol. The fact that a number of the rosebud's features can only be read as feminine on an allegorical level, however, calls into question both its being read as such and the authority of that level. A presumption that the rosebud represents the female beloved is, I realize, inevitable. It is also preliminary. Moving away from the already-known figurative message towards the glossed-over words on the page discloses the *Rose*'s disruption of the decorum of not only courtly love, but of the rapport between signification, meaning, and interpretation.

As may be conjectured from the above remarks, the thesis revolves around a critical reading of the *Rose*'s critics in which I question the predominant understanding of the romance as a standard, if somewhat lengthy, tale of courtship and seduction by arguing that the rosebud cannot be limited to a representation of the female beloved – her self, her love, or her genitals. The first chapter examines the criticism that fixes the rosebud as an emblem of the female sex and asserts that this reading is based on assumptions that the poem upsets more so than it affirms. While the imagery of an entire cultural lexicon epitomizes the rosebud as feminine, the authority of extratextual discourses must not be allowed to foreclose the signifiatory play of the symbol by discounting the numerous aspects that unsettle a reading of it as a female character, indeed either feminine or a character at all. Even speeches within the poem that contextualize the Lover's affair as heterosexual, and hence the bud as feminine, cannot so fix it. Instead, this discrepancy between the context and text of the Lover-rosebud relationship

² *Integumentum* is translated as "a covering" and *involucrum* as "a wrap, cover" with *involvere* signifying "to roll in, to envelop, wrap up, cover" (Cassell 318, 326).

constitutes the very play with and on cultural habits of interpretation that the *Rose* carries out. While the Narrator promises his readers an allegorical how-to of the art of love in its entirety, no such lesson emerges. Attempts to piece together an abstract, coherently allegorical, reading of the *Rose* are likewise self-defeating. Success at having done so is accomplished by commencing with an already allegorical meaning and moulding the literal text to it. Rather than sustain an other, abstract or allegorical, message, the *Rose* locates meaning at what Maureen Quilligan argues is the polysemantic surface of the text.³ This discussion of allegory I continue in the third chapter.

The rosebud does not figure one sex or the other, being too ambiguous an image to signify in so trouble-free a fashion. It is, rather, an indeterminate symbol and symbol of indeterminacy, both feminine and masculine, marginal and crucial, vacant and contradictory, fixed and indefinable. The bud's persistent object-status enables its assimilation to the greater part of both the poem's personifications and its other objects, such that the Lover's movements towards and/or within the castle, statue, sanctuary, relics, harbour, aperture, paling, path, and, finally, rosebud, are all read as figures of the same thing, namely heterosexual copulation. On a literal level, however, the Lover's encounters with these objects are not so easily integrated into, or interpreted as, accounts of vaginal penetration. An assumption that all objects in the poem are accoutrements of the feminine not only disregards the subtleties of the text, but is premised on a reading of the poem from a prescriptively masculine positionality that genders its surroundings into a series of self-reflecting surfaces meant to affirm the masculinity of the Narrator-Lover and reader both. Sympathy between the Lover and reader is an alliance that cannot be presumed. Since the phallic features of the rosebud indicate the extent to which the feminine is a fabrication that ultimately fails to waylay the anxieties of masculine subjectivity, to ignore them is to view the world through the eyes of the Narrator-Lover, which is not something one wants to do.

Natural resemblance is considered one of the most self-evident supports for the "always already" status of the rosebud as an emblem of the female sex.⁴ Not only are analogies based on morphological likeness suspect because of their participation in conceptual economies that are language-based, however, but the textual descriptions of the rosebud itself belie its exclusive affinity with the vagina. That the phallic attributes of the bud correspond not only to its male owner, but its male admirer, suggests that the Narrator-Lover's real interest is in the sensations of his own budding organ. Rereading the bud-plucking scene as one of masturbation rather than copulation is, perhaps not surprisingly, easy to do. I do not intend to argue that the rosebud symbolizes the masculine sex either,

³ All references to Quilligan's work are taken from *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* unless otherwise noted.

⁴ The idea of the "always already" derives from Irigaray. See *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

however. What I do intend to argue is that the imagery of the final scene is highly confused, and that the outpouring of figurative language that precedes the actual bud-cutting adds to rather than clarifies this confusion. Presented with too many images, the reader is unable to clearly picture what the Lover is doing. While the language is highly suggestive and draws on an assortment of aforementioned sexual euphemisms, the imagery is so jumbled that a construal of it as copulation, plain and simple, is debateable. Rather than another, the Lover fondles himself, which the phallic contours and auto-referential bearing of the rosebud mockingly insinuate.

The indeterminacy that characterizes the poem's central symbol and eventual climax permeates the entire poem through what is the radical incoherence of the speaking voice. The second chapter of the thesis explores the incongruities that underlie, and ultimately explode, the presumed unity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover persona. While the relationship between these three functions seems relatively uncomplicated, all being attributable to one subject, it is not. The ambiguity of the Narrator's relationship to himself as Dreamer and Lover with which Guillaume begins the romance, Jean exacerbates into a fracturing that resembles the indeterminacy of the rosebud itself. Like the rosebud, the speaking voice is an ultimately indeterminable construct. In its ascription to both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean, it is both double and vacant, and matches the plural yet empty symbol of the rosebud. It is the God of Love who is responsible for this dilemma, in the midst of which he assigns himself the role of narrator and re-titles the work. The status of the poem as a dream becomes difficult to credit at this point. It would seem that the dream is a derived piece of fiction – a version, not the source, of an art of love narrated by the admittedly more qualified God of Love himself.

The unintelligible and puppet-like quality of the Narrator-Lover voice subverts the authority accorded the speaking, predominantly masculine, subject of courtly love discourse. While the *Rose* sets itself up as a typical romance in which the feminine object of desire serves to mirror the protagonist back to himself as verifiably masculine, it also works to subvert this customary dynamic. The rosebud is not a mirror, I suggest, but a copy of the speaking voice. It does not reflect, but resembles. Rather than difference, the Lover-rosebud relationship is based on what Luce Irigaray argues is a fundamental sameness that derives from the power of philosophic discourse to “*reduce all others to the economy of the Same*” (74).⁵ The rosebud is not an Other to, but the Same as, the speaking voice. Organized around an ethic of oneness, fearing difference and anxious to assert itself, masculine logos exploits the feminine as a medium of self-representation. While Irigaray considers reflecting and copying to be analogous operations, I am

⁵ All references to Irigaray's work are taken from *This Sex Which Is Not One* unless otherwise noted.

interested in what seems to be a distinction between the feminine and the rosebud, between reflecting and copying, reflecting and resembling. In its similitude the rosebud is not a copy of an original, however; rather, it subverts the very notions of original and copy. The voice and bud are copies of each other. The question of whether the indeterminate symbology of the rosebud repeats the fractured identity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover, or whether the indeterminate subjectivity of Narrator-Dreamer-Lover repeats the fractured identity of the rosebud, cannot be resolved.⁶ Instead, then, of confirming, the Lover-rosebud relationship undoes a hierarchy of sexual difference in which, man embodying the ideal form and woman an inferior version, the “masculine” original precedes a “feminine” copy.

If the feminized status of the rosebud provides the poem’s speaker with a platform on which to stage himself as a masculine subject, any subversion of that object’s femininity will threaten the gender of the speaking voice. Judith Butler argues that gender is a performative enterprise, “a stylized repetition of acts” the sustained performance of which renders the subject coherent because recognizably gendered (139-40). It is these acts, this “corporeal style” (139), that provides the illusion of identity as a gendered core. In the *Rose* the Lover embodies by repeating the gestures of masculinity as laid out by the God of Love, Friend, and Genius, and it is the articulation of these acts that constitutes the subjectivity of the poem’s speaking voice. No copy is exact, however, and the excess of the Lover’s physical and Narrator’s linguistic efforts implies the artificiality of this “natural” transaction and the constructed-ness of this masculine self. Because the Narrator-Lover’s performance of his masculinity depends upon the feminine status of the bud, its indeterminacy impels him to enact masculinity all the more vigorously. The irony is that in so doing the Narrator-Lover renders the description of his own activities unintelligible, and his own status as properly masculine insecure: he overdoes it. The result is a ridicule of not only the Narrator-Lover but the discursive arena of masculine self-representation, medieval and modern.

The second chapter also argues that repetition, in addition to underlying the Lover-rosebud relationship, is a pervasive structuring principle that informs the entire romance. Rather than through difference, the story progresses and meaning accrues through a dynamic of repetition and sameness. Difference, in fact, and the hierarchies that accompany it, are favoured targets of subterfuge. The degree of distortion in the text’s acts of repetition comprises a host of discrepancies that emerge as sites of implication, the import of which it is left to the reader to decide. Sites of repetition and sameness in the *Rose* do not generate reassuring patterns, but inject an ambiguity into the text that makes interpretation

⁶ Butler points out that this exposure of the original as itself an imitation is one of the effects of gender parody that underlies performances of drag (137-38). All references to Butler’s work are taken from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* unless otherwise noted.

itself the work's primary theme. The appearance of a likewise paradoxical construct in the personification False Seeming immediately following the God of Love's devastation of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover persona accentuates a dynamic of what I have termed "seeming" in the work. The interplay of seeming and sameness works to subvert the determinants and distinctions upon which sexual difference and the subjectivity of the Narrator-Lover are based. The uncertainties to which seeming gives rise are epitomized by the phenomenon of False Seeming who, by discoursing on the habits of the deceitful religious especially, combines the falsity of his nature with a truthful exposure. This merger nullifies the opposition of falsity and truth that underwrites and authenticates signification. Seeming is a dynamic that generates meaning at the surface of things by signifying through a complex network of in-text interconnections. These connections always remain contingent, however, and, in the absence of a clear authorial perspective, subject to debate. The text's irony is likewise implicated in a mechanics of seeming since a discernible authorial intent cannot be firmly established.

The concerns of sameness, seeming, and surface carry over into a re-evaluation the poem as an allegory. Deeming it prudent to define the term before embarking on a discussion of it, I spend a great deal of the third chapter attempting to do so. The complications that arise from the dual nature of allegory as both a genre and a mode of reading make any assessment of it a constant negotiation between two distinct yet overlapping traditions. The definition of allegory as a bilevel construct in which a literal narrative encodes an allegorical message situates it as a hermeneutic method. Uncovering a hidden, or other, meaning behind the words on the page is not synonymous with reading allegory, however; it is the project of *allegoresis*, as Quilligan argues, and may be performed on any text ("Allegory" 164). If allegory is to be considered a genre, what are its particular features? When applied to the *Rose*, this vast question leads to a discussion of the extended presence of the poem's personifications and the interpretive puzzles that they pose. The requirement to interpret does not enjoin a division of the poem into separate levels of meaning, however. An approach to the allegory of the *Rose* as a bilevel narrative underlies interpretations of it as being really about the Lover's pursuit and capture of a young woman. I agree that the authors of the *Rose* provoke this reading of the poem, but contend that the complexities of the allegory subvert this initial response. Quilligan asserts that meaning in allegory accrues through a myriad of interconnections that stretches across the text's literal surface, and I believe that this is how the allegory of the *Rose* works. I attempt to demonstrate what such a horizontal reading might look like by tackling the paling episode, an analysis that diverges, rather predictably I fear, into a discussion of castration. Rather than encourage a disregard of the details of the text, the *Rose* brings them constantly to our attention. The figurative language of allegory does not veil meaning, it produces it. After repeatedly foiling a reading of the rosebud as "the lady," the *Rose* takes

leave of its readers by placing responsibility for interpreting the barrage of metaphors that it sends forth squarely with them. This may be taken as a sign of respect, I suppose, but feels more like a joke made at the reader's expense.

In the absence of a female beloved it is by default expedient to assume that the rosebud figures this necessary facet of courtly love. The result of such supposing is that this complicated symbol is read something like a personification. Rather than remain an object, the bud is transformed into a female character and read as an incarnation of the feminine. The poem's personifications, however, and Fair Welcoming especially, constitute one of the key upsets to a reading of the allegory as a courtly love romance. The poem's personifications are not stable structures, nor, arguably, is personification itself. How might this unruly bunch of personifications signify in the abstract? Is such a thing possible? While they are often read as representations of the thoughts and emotions of the Lover and/or "Rose," many of them do not make sense as such. The question of attribution is another problem. To whom does Jealousy or Foul Mouth or Nature or Genius, "belong"? Certain other personifications are not abstract at all, and even those that are are too vivid to signify in a purely conceptual register. This formal disruption of the abstract by the literal continues the destabilization of hierarchies that goes on within the text, such as those that order sexual (masculine/feminine) and temporal (original/copy) difference. The Narrator-Lover's statement on contraries as harbingers of understanding is thus a highly ironic statement in the face of what has been a persistent blurring of them.

The personifications do not provide a reliable guide to the maze of the *Rose*. A number of them actively breed confusion by defying their own meaning. Fair Welcoming is especially susceptible to this. He begins the romance on a note of proper reticence, and then, on the verge of surrender, reverts to an opposition more vehement than before. The vacillations of Fair Welcoming exceed an erotics of coyness; his "meaning," a point of contention throughout the poem, cannot be pinned down. Like the rosebud, Fair Welcoming encodes a radical indeterminacy that resembles the incoherence of the speaking voice. The dynamic of sameness that informs the Lover-Fair Welcoming-rosebud constellation extends to the final cutting scene and insinuates that the pleasure derived therefrom, rather than copulative and other-directed, is solitary and self-generated. Quilligan asserts that reading an allegory consists of a learning how to read it; readers who presume to know what the story means are taught that they do not (227). It may be that an attitude of not-knowing constitutes the most appropriate approach to the *Rose* – which does not translate into readers' not knowing what they mean, however. If *The Romance of the Rose* teaches its readers anything, and it certainly provides them with little insight into the art of love, it is at least that allegories are far from simplistic, and woe to any who so suppose.

Chapter 1
**How a Little Rosebud Upset the Greatest Tale of Courtly Romance Without
So Much As Batting an Eyelash**

i) An inquiry into the femininity of the rosebud

The history of the critical reception of Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose* has been one of playing with, yet ever fixing, the rosebud as an image of woman and/or her sex. While some critics nuance this equation of rosebud to young woman, most agree that the poem is an allegory of heterosexual love that culminates in the hero's deflowerment of his virgin beloved. The *Rose* is "ostensibly an allegory of an erotic dream concerning the seduction of a woman by a man," notes Gaunt, and appears to have been predominantly read as such (66). The Lover's desire for the rosebud is his desire for the woman or womanly part of her that it represents. Controversies stem firstly from an analysis of what exactly the rosebud, or "rose," or oftentimes "Rose," symbolizes; and secondly, the status of the various personifications as social pressures and/or psychological manifestations of the rosebud-lady and/or Lover. The nature of the Lover's desire for the rosebud is another matter of debate, being read as either fundamentally self-directed, or successfully other-directed. The equation in 1891 by Langlois, the poem's first modern editor, of the rosebud with "*la jeune fille*" (40) has, for the most part, been affirmed by the past century of *Rose* criticism.

Through her study of the manuscripts Sylvia Huot demonstrates that medieval receptions of the poem were not monolithic, but extremely diverse (*Romance* 37). The extant responses of later medieval readers reveal that consensus has never graced this poem. In the first years of the fifteenth-century a small group of correspondents engaged in a debate over the work's merits or lack thereof. This debate is now referred to as *la querelle de la rose*, and the participants were all, remark Joseph Baird and John Kane, "some of the most important personages of their day" (12). Christine de Pisan and Jean Gerson roundly condemned the work; Jean de Montreuil, Gontier Col, and his brother Pierre Col ardently defended it. Both sets of critics regarded the Lover as an utterly foolish and misguided youth, the question being how this foolishness was to be read. Opponents of the poem argued that no value accrues from a vulgar story about a foolish lover in which no remedy was offered, defenders that it provided a model for what not to do. While Christine de Pisan and Jean Gerson may have agreed that the poem was a satire that exposed the sordid underbelly of courtly love, they countered that it was not a very effective one. In a letter of response to Jean de Montreuil Christine comments: "there is no point in reminding human nature, which is inclined to evil, that it limps on one foot, in the hope that it will then walk straighter" (Baird and Kane 55).

A later, mid-twentieth century strand of criticism, expounded by Alan Gunn especially in his *The Mirror of Love*, an expansive reinterpretation of the *Rose* based on the God of Love's preferred title, interprets the work as an account of a typical young man's quest for self knowledge, his attainment of which is suggested by his acquisition of the rosebud. As for the rosebud itself in this later criticism, controversies stem from whether it symbolizes the lady herself or, as C.S. Lewis insisted in 1959, her love. Other critical readings abstract the rosebud and argue that, rather than figure "her" directly, it acts as a metaphor for the lady with whom the Narrator-Lover is really in love. Some critics locate the lady not only in the rosebud, but the crystals of the fountain as well. These, they argue, figure the eyes of the lady in which the Lover sees himself and his love reflected. D. W. Robertson concurs that the crystals are eyes, but those of the Lover rather than his beloved (95). This reading of the crystals is refuted by Larry Hillman who argues that because there is no direct link between the rose and the crystals, they cannot figure the lady (232). Hillman's methodology, which I follow here, is to "review past discussion in an effort to determine what their role in the allegory is, or perhaps more importantly, what it is not" (225). In revisiting ideas and assumptions about the symbolic value of the rose, I believe, as Hillman does about the crystals, that "we must question the traditional interpretations . . . while seeking an analysis in closer accordance with the text" (225).

Recently, critical attention has emerged contesting the prevailing conservative approach to the personification that is the rosebud's owner, the young man Fair Welcoming, by affirming and exploring the implications of his masculinity. The play of the allegory in general, and its homoerotic undercurrents in particular, form new areas of interest. Nonetheless, even within the homoerotic stream of *Rose* criticism there remains an underlying assumption that the rosebud signifies a woman and/or her sexual parts. Only Helen Friedrich, to my knowledge, argues that the rosebud is a symbol of the male genitals, those of Fair Welcoming specifically. For Marta Powell Harley the homoerotic undercurrents of the poem blur the sexual identity of a bud that remains feminine. The lady is still present, it is just that the Lover's self-absorption robs her of any independent existence. In considering the poem an ostensible endorsement of heterosexual love, Gaunt likewise retains the notion of rosebud as lady in his contention that the opposition between the "proper" heterosexual text and "improper" homosexual seam of the poem becomes thoroughly confused, thus breeding the allegory's repudiation of fixed meaning (91-93). While elements of the poem such as the masculinity of Fair Welcoming may complicate a reading of the femininity of the rosebud, they do not overturn its status as predominantly a signifier of the female sex for even the above critics. Albeit uncomfortably so, the rosebud remains feminine. The premise that it might consistently figure something other than the lady and/or a *pudendum*, *membrum pudendum*, *rosa*

pudoris, cunnus, mons Veneris, or whatever other Latinate term can be found for the female genitalia, is seldom topic for debate.

Disgruntled by and dissatisfied with the rosebud of critical discourse in light of its incongruous situation within the romance itself, I embark here on a critique of the axiom “rosebud = woman.” I question the predominant understanding of the *Rose* as a standard, if somewhat unusual, tale of courtship and seduction by arguing that the rosebud cannot be limited to a representation of the female beloved – her self, her love, or her genitals. This reading of the rosebud is based on assumptions that the poem upsets more so than it affirms. It is my contention that the rosebud is both too complex and too vacant an image to support this equation. The provoking non-compliance that permeates the romance not only generates a profound playing with and on the conventions of gendered representation, it correspondingly questions and defies the continued wholesale feminization of the rosebud by modern criticism. The following re-interpretation considers the *Rose* as not only an object of theoretical endeavour, but as a text that itself critiques the protracted twentieth-century fixing of the bud as an emblem of the female sex. The rosebud cannot be reduced to an anatomical or gendered emblem. Its correspondence to both masculine and feminine genitalia, alongside its simultaneous complexity and emptiness, renders it an indeterminately gendered symbol and symbol of indeterminacy. A resemblance between the figuration and positioning of the Lover, Fair Welcoming, and the rosebud throughout the course of the romance casts the Lover’s passions as not only entirely self-directed, but self-enacted. Rather than figure the Lover’s sweetheart, the rosebud figures the Narrator-Lover himself. It does not mirror the Narrator-Lover back to himself, but imitates him. While it has been noted that the Lover’s desire for the rosebud boils down to a love of himself, it nonetheless retains the symbolic status of an external, somewhat autonomous, female Other. It is my contention that the rosebud is neither female, external, autonomous, nor O/other. Rather, it is indeterminate, self-referential, ancillary, and intrinsically the same.

I would like to backtrack to Langlois and his legacy of having fixed the merger of rosebud and young woman for scholars of the *Rose*. He validates this analogy through a comparative study of the roses and rosebuds of medieval love lyrics and their status as signifiers of the female beloved. By basing his interpretation entirely on traditional symbology and extratextual material, he effectively dismisses the particulars of the rosebud as it appears in the text of Guillaume and Jean’s romance. As with those who have followed him, Langlois does not argue for, but rather assumes, that the poem features a young woman to whom the traits of the rosebud correspond. Langlois identifies “la beauté de la fleur, le parfume qu’elle exhale, les épines qui l’environnent, d’une part, et d’autre part, la beauté de sa dame, l’amour qu’elle inspire, les obstacles qui empêchent de l’approcher” as “les seules analogies que Guillaume de Lorris a mentionnées entre la rose et la jeune fille” (44: “the beauty of the flower, the perfume that it exhales,

the thorns that surround it, on the one hand, and on the other, the beauty of his lady, the love that she inspires, the obstacles that prevent approaching it” as “the only analogies that Guillaume de Lorris has mentioned between the rose and the young woman”).¹ Langlois cites numerous lyrics and romances to support his assertion that the rose in medieval literature signifies a female character or beloved, remarking that by the twelfth century the compliment had already become rather banal (41-42). May it not be precisely this banality upon which the writers of the romance play? Langlois does not argue that the beauty, fragrance, and thorns of the bud constitute its symbolic status as *la jeune fille*. Rather, his assertion is sufficient because underlying his list of the ideal flower’s qualities is the axiom that these botanical features betoken a female beloved. Not only is a referencing of extratextual material not sufficient to fix the rosebud of this extraordinary romance as the lady, love, femininity and/or the *membrum pudendum* et al., but that the rosebud signifies these things in all literature, medieval or otherwise, is an unexamined assumption in need of interrogation. At the same time that it invokes, the *Rose* transforms these analogies into questionable points of departure and arrival for readers of the romance.

Langlois also yokes together notions of femininity and the rosebud by privileging one appellation of it over the other. His use of *la fleur* rather than *le bouton* in his analysis ensures the feminization of the rosebud through a gendered correspondence of *la fleur* and *la dame*, which is reinforced by their conflation under the pronoun *elle*. The object of the Lover’s quest is as often as not a rosebud, *un bouton*, and Langlois’s above statement might just as accurately contain masculine as feminine pronouns. Another analogical schema emerges upon an engagement with the diversity of the text’s language and willingness to entertain *le bouton* instead of *la rose*. Langlois could be describing the God of Love, who is beautiful, inspires love, and places obstacles in the Lover’s way. These qualities provide an accurate summary of Fair Welcoming too who, although his name suggests a reception of the Lover’s advances, on occasion manifests a marked reticence. Rather than one thing, the rosebud may be read as signifying a number of things. I offer these cursory alternatives to the rosebud-lady paradigm as a way of introducing the upcoming contrary discussion of the *Rose* as a romance that features no female beloved, no female beloved part, and no distinctly feminine entity. Even if it is argued that the rosebud is not the lady herself but merely figures her, my contention remains that the image of the rosebud does not support the weight of this figuration. As it stands in the poem, the rosebud is too inconsistent a thing to serve as a site of monolithic associations.

The practice of crediting affiliations located with material outside the text over those generated from within it forms part of the critique conducted by Lee Patterson in his analysis of Chaucer studies, and his comments apply well to the

¹ All translations of critical work are my own unless otherwise noted.

privileging in *Rose* studies of conventional symbology over in-text dynamics. Patterson notes that historicist approaches to Chaucer's poems tend to regard them "as effects to be explained by reference to their extratextual causes" (*Negotiating* 16). Patterson's critique of historicism is congruent with Quilligan's revaluation of allegory. Quilligan argues against reading allegory as a set of "vertical 'layers' or 'levels'" (236) that translate "the story's events to a different (metaphorical) set of terms" (68). Allegory, she asserts, does not delineate some other meaning "hovering above the words of the text, but the possibility of an otherness, a polysemy, inherent in the very words on the page" (26). This coincides with Patterson's contention that interpreting "vertically, as it were, from the text back into the past" (16) leads to unexamined and monolithic assumptions about meaning. Patterson argues that explanation works laterally (16) and Quilligan that allegory works horizontally so that "meaning accretes serially, interconnecting and criss-crossing the verbal surface" (Quilligan 28). Meaning, argue Patterson and Quilligan, is generated by the dynamics of signification within rather than "without" the text.

I am not advocating a disregard for the impact of traditional symbology, but do contend that the signifiatory possibilities of a symbol must be allowed their full play by granting the manifold possibilities of that symbol's particular material construction and in-text relations. I do not mean by this that the text should be considered a free-floating, ahistorical entity, but neither should it be fixed to interpretations and agendas that have been deemed correctly medieval. As Huot notes in her study of medieval receptions of the poem, a spectrum of readings abounds. What some readers censor, others elaborate. While some read the *Rose* as social satire, others take it at face value as an art of love, and still others consider it a "vehicle for political, philosophical, and even theological discussion" (*Romance* 37). While any reading of anything is informed by official cultural systems of representation and interpretation, to privilege these without exception amounts to making all texts serve what has been decided were the social norms of the medieval era. A rejection of the subversive possibilities of medieval texts consigns the politics of both the Middle Ages and those of today to a narrow arena where meaning always affirms normative configurations of gender especially. Adhering to the "always already" known translates into the conformity of all textual production to official structures of discourse and power. Susan Stakel takes John Fleming to task for doing this very thing when he relies solely on an extratextual reading of *seigneurie* in marriage to determine the meaning of Friend's discussion of it. She criticizes Fleming's "simplistic assertion that since no medieval writer of any authority denied the necessity of *seigneurie* in marriage, the *Roman de la rose* could not possibly do so either. This is a false syllogism of the very type," she writes, "we are continually warned against by Jean de Meun" (71). I recognize that there is no such creature as the text itself, the text as an autonomous entity untouched by cultural forces of signification. It is unavoidable

to have a rosebud in a romance without associations of femininity hedging it in. The authors of the *Rose* must have counted on this, and it is precisely this tension between a set of conventional extratextual preconceptions, and the distinctive imagery of and personifications surrounding the rosebud itself, that Guillaume and Jean exploit in an allegory of extreme ambivalence. Nonetheless, while in-text meaning accrues from an array of associations operative in the larger cultural matrix of signification, the particular words, descriptions, and episodes of the text under discussion must have some bearing on how we configure the representative schema of its objects, events, and characters. While a reading of the rosebud as *la jeune fille* may work for a majority of the world's poems, the symbology that informs them cannot be the factor that determines the meaning of the rosebud in *this* poem.

The Romance of the Rose sustains both more and less than a reading of the rosebud as a young woman. It involves juxtapositions and possibilities that make fixing the rosebud as either the lady, her love, or her sex untenable. The less than feminine aspects of the rosebud have not been a focus of critical discourse until quite recently. In studies based on Harry Robbins's 1962 English translation of the poem this is understandable since he more or less blatantly converts the rosebud into a young woman. He frequently translates pronoun designations of the rosebud as "she," and gives Fair Welcoming's final lines to this "she." The statue above the aperture is a "maiden form" (441), and the branches of the rosebush "her limbs" (462). Robbins ends the poem by transforming the activities of the final scene from explicit bud shaking into explicit love making. Curiously, however, he does not always refer to the rosebud as "she." When understandable as a plant, and/or intimately associated with Fair Welcoming, it is an "it." Robbins switches to "she" when the rosebud is being spoken about by other characters, such as Friend, and not conspicuous as something belonging to Fair Welcoming.² This inconsistency regarding the rosebud's gender, which occurs not only in Robbins's translation but throughout *Rose* scholarship, reveals an underlying difficulty with the rose-lady equation that gets glossed over because the symbolic status of the rosebud is considered self-evident.

While the rosebud in Charles Dahlberg's 1971 translation of the romance is an "it" throughout,³ an identification of it as lady and embodiment of the iconic feminine has not changed. Douglas Kelly sums up the rosebud's representational history as one of being variously explained as "the lady, love, joy, virginity . . ."

² Before kissing the rosebud the Lover in Robbins's translation observes: "When I approached the Rose, I found it grown / A little larger than it was before" (73). Its plant status is here apparent. Later in the poem, when Friend and the Lover are discussing the rosebud, it becomes a "she." Friend reassures the Lover: "However strongly she's shut up, / You'll then be able to secure your Rose" (167).

³ Dahlberg's translation of this second set of lines reads: "then you will be able to cut the rose no matter how strongly they have enclosed it" (153).

(*Medieval Imagination* 93). In his own study of the romance he states: “The woman is a rose – or, more accurately, a rosebush in Jean” (*Internal Difference* 104).⁴ Vitz is more cautious than Kelly, calling the rose “a flower, symbolizing a woman” (“Inside/Outside” 159). David Hult states that “In other words, the present (but absent) Lady is figured by the rose in the poem” (*Self-Fulfilling* 136). As Hult’s discussion progresses, the rose’s status changes from a plant to “the Lady/rose” (231). The rose then drops out of the picture entirely when Hult argues that Fair Welcoming is a necessary substitute for it due to the “fragmentation of the Lady’s qualities” (239-40). Why the Lady is fragmented in the first place is a question to which no answers have been forthcoming. Paul Strohm paraphrases the exchanges between the Lover, Fair Welcoming, and the rosebud in Guillaume as “the sequence describing the relations of the Lover and his Lady” (4). According to Huot, Fair Welcoming, Resistance, and the Rose all represent the lady (*Romance* 176). The rose signifies woman, says Terrence Hipolito, because its mutability corresponds to her instability (69). Some critics attribute passions to the rosebud. Hipolito explains the blazing castle and flight of its defenders as the moment when “the lady (rose) is overcome by lust” (68). Hipolito’s placement of “rose” in parentheses contravenes the mechanics of the text by positioning it as a secondary term in a poem that features it as the “primary” term, that insists, as Sarah Kay points out, on presenting it as a literal flower (*Romance* 45). A literal “lady” replaces the literal rosebud. For Michel Zink this too is the order of representation as Fair Welcoming blends into “la jeune fille, la rose” (“Bel-Accueil” 33). Transforming a rose-lady into a lady-rose effectively restructures the figurative workings of the romance by making an abstract meaning the controlling term of the symbol rather than the literal object, the “lady” rather than the “rose.” The symbol is thus bound to signify conventionally. Once “lady” takes precedence over “rose,” the ambiguities of the rosebud symbol are reduced to a simple, standard, metaphoric equation.

The romance crystallizes into a normative tale of courtly love when “the lady” supersedes “the rosebud” as the target of the Lover’s affections and becomes a character in “her” own right. Thus Robertson speculates: “The lady seems simple, rather than prudent; she is courteous, she accepts his company, and she looks upon him sweetly. Fired with desire, the dreamer longs for the rose, or, that is, to obey the laws of love” (96). The behaviour that Robertson ascribes to the lady is really evinced by Fair Welcoming, whose widespread identification with “her” allows for the “character” of the lady to emerge. Hult notes that because the lady’s qualities are so fragmented, Fair Welcoming becomes the core of her character and “assumes the complex psychological ramifications of its human form” (*Self-Fulfilling* 239-40); he becomes what Eric Hicks calls “a metonymy for

⁴ All references to Kelly’s work are taken from *Internal Difference and Meaning in the Roman de la rose* unless otherwise noted.

the beloved” (75). The personifications that attend the rosebud are read as representing “the inner life of the Lady” (Strohm 8). Lewis considers the lady a significant character whose conflicted psyche provides the setting for the poem’s most interesting reading. He maintains that the Lover “is concerned not with a single ‘lady’, but with “a number of ‘moods’ or ‘aspects’ of that lady who alternately help and hinder his attempts to win her love, symbolized by the Rose” (118). The lady becomes a character with an inner life as complex as that of the Lover, which is not saying much I grant, but nevertheless more than the poem concedes. The autonomy that Lewis grants the lady ensures that the Lover’s desire is firmly and heterosexually other-directed rather than equivocally self-directed. The heteronormative, allegorical overlay of “the lady” alongside the assimilation of this lady to Fair Welcoming overrides the textual activity, or rather non-activity, of the rosebud. This, together with a tradition that relies on the reduction and objectification of a feminized function to institute male subject positions, allows for the unexamined reading of what Kay notes is an inanimate object with not an ounce of subjectivity (*Romance* 45), as a female character.

The status of the rosebud as woman is also implied through sentence structure and capitalization. For instance, Paul Zumthor accentuates the rosebud’s human status in his phrasing of the narrative action as “the quest of the bud of the Rose” (“Narrative” 196). His syntax suggests that the bud and the rose are two separate entities, and that the bud is something that “the Rose” possesses rather than is. The capitalization of “Rose” turns the name of a plant into that of a woman, and the bud into something that belongs to, or is part of, “her” rather than Fair Welcoming. Zumthor’s synopsis of the plot limits the symbolic role of the rosebud by fixing it as a sexually suggestive object. Strohm does a similar thing by rephrasing the Lover’s appeal to Fair Welcoming as “the appeal of the Lover for the ‘Bel Accueil’ of his rosebud” (8). By abstracting Fair Welcoming as a possession of the rosebud rather than engaging the dilemma of its being the other way around, the problem of Fair Welcoming’s masculinity may be avoided. Humanizing of the rosebud as a stand-in for the beloved “rose” of the Narrator makes Fair Welcoming’s maleness a non-issue. Inserting a lady into the narrative allows for the management of any incongruities in the imagery of, and the Lover’s relations with, the rosebud and its owner. By privileging the woman that the rosebud ostensibly represents over the image itself, discrepancies inherent in the rosebud symbol that may jeopardize its status as feminine are glossed over and assimilated into the psychic make-up of Fair Welcoming, “Rose,” or some combination of the two.

While some critics do engage the complex symbology of the rosebud, its status as a representation of feminine nonetheless informs these variant investigations into its meaning. When Zumthor expands on the rose as “Beauty and fugacity, femininity and the signs of love’s summons” (“Narrative” 186), it is understood that femininity underlies all of the items on the list. He goes on to

note that the rose also evokes, besides Paradise and the Garden of Eros, the female sexual organ (186). While Gunn lauds the rose as “the fountain of God’s bounty transformed into a flower” (303), he has already established the femininity of this flower by citing Langlois’s remark that the rose “is the traditional symbol for a maiden, *une jeune fille*” (277). The self-evidence of this association shines through in Gunn’s assurance that “It need hardly be argued that l’Amant’s beloved is also *une pucelle*, a maiden, and so remains until love’s consummation at the close of the perfected allegory” (266-67). While her terms are different, Huot’s reading of the rosebud as “at once holy relic and feminine genitalia” (*Romance* 297-98) corresponds to Gunn’s. Kelly glosses the rosebud as, among other things, “carnal delight” (40), and Eric Steinle as “a symbol of erotic desire” (191). Again, however, when informed by the heterosexual economy of courtly love, these “delights” and “desires” stand as manifestations of the feminine. Rosemond Tuve terms it “Love-the-rose” which, she quips, for the Lover remains more or less loveless (279), and considers the “Rose” properly ambiguous through the “shifting lights of first one character’s conception of her, then another” (239). Rather than in the workings of the symbol itself, Tuve locates ambiguity within the rosebud’s fixed status as woman. Frederick Goldin too sees the rosebud as two distinct but related things. It is both “another person, ideally beautiful, alive, and attainable” (58) and “an idealized image of what he [the knight of courtly romance] is to become” (59). When Goldin remarks that the idealized self-image of the knight and the image of the ideal lady are one and the same (238-39), he approaches Irigaray’s contention that the feminine operates as a Same to, and not an Other of, the masculine. While he articulates the foundational misogynist positioning of the lady as mirror, however, he does so without positing it as problematic to anybody but the knight. The fact that “she becomes crucial to his identity” and that “he requires another to contemplate him” (238) seems in no way to undermine for Goldin the notion of the lady as “another person.” Fleming seems to sound a contrary note when he announces: “The great Lady of the *Roman* is not, by the way, the rosebud; . . . All the ‘characters’ in the *Roman*, including Amant, are ideas, not people” (45). His insistence that the rosebud is not an idea but a thing, however, an object, a mere “*pudendum*” (126, 133), reduces rather than complicates its significance.

Rather than or in addition to the lady herself, the rosebud is read as her sexual parts. Michael Cherniss remarks the vulgarization of the rosebud image to “its final role as the mere receptacle for his [the Lover’s] pent-up sexual juices” (236). The regression of the rosebud from a revered object of innocent love in Guillaume to a reductive image of the female sex in Jean seems to be a common reading of its fate as it changes hands from one author to the other. It is not until about mid-way through his study of the allegory and iconography of the *Rose* that Fleming clearly states what he assumes we all know and agree with, namely that “the only identity the rose has in Jean’s poem is that of an entirely

unsentimentalized and anonymous pudendum” (133). Harley resorts to the same terminology as Fleming, calling Jean’s, “the more blatant representation of the *membrum pudendum*” (334). She agrees with Peter King’s observation that Jean “made a distinction between the womanly rose and the maiden bud” (61). While this distinction would seem to make sense in its suggestion of a growing desire on the part of “the lady,” is this how the image works? Does the “maiden bud” blossom into a “womanly rose”? While Guillaume’s section of the romance may be more delicate, and Jean’s more vulgar, this does not mean that the rosebud is correspondingly more “innocent” or more “experienced.” The difference between the two is not that the one comes across as “virginal” and the other as “womanly.” Rather, the distinction lies in how each is presented in the text. Guillaume’s rosebud usually appears in the narrative itself, while Jean’s is most often talked about. Only once before the final overthrow of the castle does the rosebud itself appear in Jean’s section of the narrative. This is when the Lover, with the help of the Old Woman, enters the rear door of the castle and is accepted by Fair Welcoming.⁵ It is rather the case that the rosebud is less present, less vivid, in Jean than in Guillaume; it exists at yet another remove from the reader. This results in an additional distancing that intensifies the degradation that critics note in Jean’s section of the poem.

While it is true that the rosebud is referred to more often as a “rose” than as a “bud” in Jean, does this necessarily make it “womanly”? For the most part, Jean’s rose is referred to merely as “the rose.” There are few instances in which it is described in any more sensuous way. One is when Friend calls the rose “vostre rose / Qui tant est precieuse chose” [9991-92: “your rose, which is such a precious thing” (178)] and advises the Lover to “gardez en tel maiere / Com l’en doit garder tel florete:” [9998-99: “take care of it in the way that one should take care of such a little flower” (178)].⁶ The other occurs when the Lover leaves Friend and makes his way to “une clere fontenele,” [10055: “a clear fountain” (179)] where he thinks on “la rose nouvele,” [10056: “the new rose” (179)]. If anything it is these two descriptions of the rose as “little” and “new” that are among the most “maidenly” in the poem! While it does not actually appear as such, it is true that the rosebud as signifier extraordinaire of the female sex, as a beautiful red rose, is evoked in Jean. Having outlined for the Lover what will be the course of the dream and his ensuing account of it, the God of Love relates that the Lover

⁵ “Lors m’avançai pour la main tendre / A la rose que tant desir, / Pour acomplir tout mon desir” [14812-14: Then I advanced to stretch out my hands toward the rose that I longed for so greatly, in order to fulfil my whole desire” (253)]. All English translations of the poem are taken from Dahlberg’s edition.

⁶ All quotations of the Old French *Roman de la Rose* derive from Strubel’s 1992 edition except for the concluding lines. Strubel’s edition ends at 21677, the last line of his base manuscript, BN fr. 378, which is missing one folio. All quotations after 21677 are thus taken from Poirion’s 1974 edition.

will “cueillie / Sor la branche vert et feuillie, / La tres belle rose vermeille,” [10603-05: “cut the most beautiful red rose on its green, leafy branch” (188)]. This is, of course, how the Narrator sums up the conclusion of his dream and poem: “Par grant joliveté cuelli / La flor du biau rosier fuelli. / Ensi oy la rose vermeille” [21777-79: I plucked, with great delight, the flower from the leaves of the rosebush, and thus I have my red rose” (354)]. The Narrator is obliged to conclude his work thus, since the God of Love has so prescribed it. Nonetheless, the God of Love’s inclusion of the “green leafy branch” in his description of the “red rose” concretizes it as part of a plant and draws attention away from the red flower as an entity unto itself and image of the female genitals. The Narrator’s own, prolonged, description of the cutting is more convoluted than the God of Love makes out, and to such an extent that it obscures any picture we may form in our minds as to the exact mechanics of the scene. What exactly does it mean to “cut the most beautiful red rose”? While the ostensibly homophobic God of Love casts the object of the Lover’s affections as the traditional symbol of the female sex in his public pre-scripting of the poem, Jean overrides the orthodoxy of this image through the Narrator’s own account of the cutting, only returning to it in the last lines of the poem, which the God of Love’s earlier revelation of the ending requires him to do. Instead of reifying the image of the rose as a signifier of the female sex, Jean subverts it by prefacing the Narrator’s trite summary that he has plucked his red rose with protracted and puzzling details of his fumbings with a bud. The Narrator’s own account of how he went about cutting Fair Welcoming’s rosebud upsets rather than upholds the normative reading implied by the God of Love’s evocation of the “beautiful red rose.”

A similar subversion in the form of a discrepancy between text and context is at work in Shame’s articulation of her fears for the rosebud’s well-being. Seeing Resistance about to falter under the attack of Pity, Shame lays out before him the horrible misfortune that will befall the rosebud if left in the sole care of Fair Welcoming. Shame seems to be making veiled references to intercourse and pregnancy in her panic that a seed will lodge in the rosebud and either kill it, or else mingle with the rosebud’s own seed; this may result in the flower’s becoming so weighed down that it will fall from its branch and, ripping off some leaves in its descent, disastrously expose the bud. While this sounds like an allusion to the course of impregnation, necessarily heterosexual, it does not jive with the Lover’s own relations with the bud. The rosebud remains red, it does not become “Blaismie ou pale ou mole ou flestre” [15428: blemished or pale, flabby or withered” (262)] after he takes it from Fair Welcoming. No wind blows in, moves, or showers any seeds anywhere. No seed falls back out of the bud, and it does not die. Like the wind, the Lover does cause the seeds to mingle, but the flower does not suffer; it does not become weighed down, no leaves are torn away, nor does it fall from its branch. The fears that plague Shame do not materialize as repercussions of the Lover’s activities with the bud. Her

elaboration on the rosebud as a signifier of something more than a flower serves to differentiate it from the bud that the Lover pursues in the dream. The two descriptions are precisely not analogous. Shame's "impregnated" flower is not the Lover's plucked bud.

If nowhere else, then, does the pudendum-rose take shape in the final scene of the poem? The Narrator relates:

En la parfin, tant vous en di,
Un poi de grene y expandi,
Quant j'oi le bouton eslochié.
Ce fut quant dedans l'oi tochié
Por les fueilletes reverchier,
Car je voloie tout cerchier
Jusques au fons du boutonnet,
Si cum moi semble que bon est.
Et fis lors si meller les grenes
Que se desmellassent a penes,
Si que tout le boutonnet tendre
En fis eslargir et estendre. (21719-30)

Finally, I scattered a little seed on the bud when I shook it, when I touched it within in order to pore over the petals. For the rosebud seemed so fair to me that I wanted to examine everything right down to the bottom. As a result, I so mixed the seeds that they could hardly be separated; and thus I made the whole tender rosebush widen and lengthen. (353)

Instead of a full-blown rose here, where we would most expect it, we encounter a bud. Although this bud "widens and lengthens," it does not necessarily become a "womanly rose." The array of sexually suggestive imagery that surrounds the bud places it in a less than innocent context, yes, but this is an indication of the Narrator-Lover's desire, not the state of the rosebud. The rosebud does not develop. Its occurrence in the romance is not one of a progression from "maidenly" to "womanly." In fact, the final scene recalls the rose's initial appearance as a "maiden bud." It is interesting to note that for the most part Jean retains the term "rose" until precisely the final plucking scene, at which point he restores the "bud." The last we hear of the "rose" is the admonishment of Courtesy to her son Fair Welcoming: "Otroiez li la rose en don!" [21343: "Grant him the kiss of the rose" (348)]. The "bud" reappears after the Lover's heroic battle against the paling. It was difficult, says the Narrator, but "d'autre entree n'i a point / Por le bouton cueillir a point" [21675-76: "there was no other place whatever where I might enter to gather the bud" (352)]. "rose" is mentioned once again, but only in a generic sense when the Narrator addresses his audience of

young lords and their future compulsions to “ailliés coillir les roses,” [21679: “go gathering roses,” (353)]. The Lover, on the other hand, devotes all of his energy to messing with, not a rose, but a bud. In fact, the term *bouton* or “bud,” is repeated five times in the final plucking scene, and “rose” not at all. Rather than the “rosiness,” Jean highlights the “budiness” of the object that the Lover seizes, shakes, and examines. The definite shift in language at this point in the poem from “rose” back to “bud” serves to link the Lover’s carnal activities to a bud specifically, and not a rose. It is only in a prescribed synopsis of what the Lover’s just done that the Narrator refers to “Rosier et rose, flor et fuelle” [21742: “rosebush and rose, flower and leaf” (353)]. In some editions “rose” is not returned to here at all. It is not a rose but the branches of the bush that the Lover takes, reveals, and plucks.

The claim that Guillaume’s bud is “maidenly” also demands further scrutiny. The bud to which Guillaume introduces us is not only not maidenly, but, as certain critics note, remarkably phallic: “La queue est droite comme jons / Et par desus iert li botons / Si qu’il ne cligne ne ne pent” [1662-64: “The stem was straight as a sapling, and the bud sat on the top, neither bent nor inclined” (53)]. In a 1992 article Karl Utti, remarking the shape of the rose in the above passage, calls it, “to put it mildly, odd” (40). He notes that “to my knowledge nobody has as yet examined the implications of the ‘phallic rose’ described in such detail by Guillaume de Lorris” (40), and conjectures that “Perhaps this is due to its not conforming with the scholarly or critical schemes to which Guillaume’s poem has variously been accommodated” (41). Utti, however, goes on to re-feminize the rosebud and secure it as the feminine principle in a cosmic schema of heterosexual love. While the rosebuds that attract the Lover may intimate virginity or maidenliness, the feminine connotations of this bud’s small and tight shape are supplanted by the Narrator-Lover’s admiration of its shapely erectness. For the most part in Guillaume the rosebud retains the appellation “bud” until the passage preceding the kiss, at which point the Narrator takes to calling it a “rose.” Before the Lover’s pre-kiss lamentations at the hedge the word “rose” appears mainly in a generic sense; only twice is the Lover’s own rosebud referred to as “rose.”⁷ As a generic term “roses” bears no immediate connection to the specific bud of the romance.⁸ The locus of the Lover’s desire in the first part of Guillaume is a bud,

⁷ These references to “rose” occur after his being struck by the second arrow, “simplicité,” whereupon his desire for “la rosete” [1752: “the little rose” (55)] grows; and after his repulsion by Resistance, whereupon his heart “ne me part / Quant de la rose me sovient / Que si esloignier me covient” [2966-68: “almost left me when I remembered the rose from which I had to be thus separated” (72)].

⁸ For example: “Et Venus l’avoit envaie / Qui nuit et jor sovant li amble / Roses et botons tout ensemble” [2848-50: “Venus often steals from her, night and day, both roses and buds” (70)]; “Qui se lairoient avant batre / Que nus boton ne rose emport” [2862-63: “these four will let themselves be soundly beaten before anyone carries off a bud or a rose” (70)].

not a rose. The bud makes its last appearance as the specific object of the Lover's desire after his departure from Friend: "que mout me tarde / Que le bouton se viaus ne voie / Des qu'avoir n'en puis autre joie" [3220-22: "for I could not wait at least to see the rosebud, since I might have no other joy of it" (76)]. To his dismay, however, Resistance remains intractable and: "je n'ose / Passer por aler vers la rose," [3235-36: "I dared not pass through to go to the rose" (77)]. Within the thirty lines of the Lover leaving Friend and returning to Resistance at the hedge, the language denoting the object of desire changes from "bud" to "rose." From here on the naming of the object undergoes a reversal; Guillaume calls it "the rose," and uses "bud" in a generic sense only.

Surprisingly, perhaps, it is in Guillaume that the rosebud is at its least "maidenly" in the entire poem. As the Lover approaches the rosebud, delighted by Fair Welcoming's receptivity, the Narrator imparts a vibrant, sensuous depiction of it:

Ainsi com j'oi la rose aprochie,
 Un po la trové engroissie,
 Et vi qu'ele fu plus creüe
 Que je ne l'oi devant veüe.
 La rose auques s'eslargissoit
 Par amont, ce m'abelissoit.
 Encor n'iere pas si overte,
 Que la graine fust descoverte,
 Ençois estoit encore enclose
 Dedenz las feuilles de la rose
 Qui amont droites s'en aloient
 Et les places dedenz emploient.
 Si ne pooit paroir la graine,
 Por la rose qui ere plaine.
 Ele fu, dieus la beneie!
 Asez plus bele espenoie
 Que n'iere avant, et plus vermoille: (3355-71)

As I approached the rose, I found it somewhat enlarged, and I saw that it had grown since the time when I had seen it from close up. It was a little enlarged at the top; and I was pleased that it was not so open that the seed was revealed. It was still enclosed within the rose leaves, which raised it straight up and filled the space within, so that the seed, with which the rose was full, could not appear. God bless it, it was much more beautifully open and redder than it had been before. (78)

Nowhere in Jean is the rose more “womanly” than it is here – if I am interpreting “womanly” correctly, that is, which begs the question of what is meant by “womanly.” If “womanly” connotes a voluptuousness that is as yet unexpressed in the maidenly, I can think of no more womanly description than this. If the rosebud is more womanly not because it comes across as more sexually open and vibrant, but because it becomes subject to a more brutal objectification, making it harder to anthropomorphize and easier to anatomize, then it may be that Jean’s bud is more “womanly.” Utti envisions this about-to-be-kissed rosebud as progressing as well, not from maidenly to womanly, however, but from masculine-like to “womanlike”:

This process of growth coincides, I believe, with the rose’s slow transformation and feminization. His growing into maturity as the Lover accompanies the flower’s becoming increasingly womanlike. This evolution, of course, is a pre-requisite for the “happy ending” announced at the start of the poem and for the metamorphosis of the Lover-protagonist into the Lover-poet, as well as for his eventually “seeing” his Lady as worthy of being proclaimed “Rose.” (56)

The transformation Utti speaks of here is that from the initial phallicism of the bud to its final, obligatory, feminine state. Since Utti concentrates on Guillaume’s section of the romance he does not go on to account for what happens to the rosebud in Jean. Nonetheless, his analysis repeats the desire for linear progression that informs the “maidenly-womanly” set-up of King, except that Utti charts a passage from odd masculine to appropriate feminine. It is my contention, however, that the revisions Jean effects destroy any progression that Guillaume may have initiated and, along with it, suppositions that the rosebud develops in terms of either sexual desire or gender identity.

**ii) Dislodging the rosebud from the female sex:
the complex symbology of the rosebud and its phallic resonances**

I would like to suggest that the passage under discussion, in which Utti considers the rose to be gaining in womanliness is, however, as odd as the first. In both, the femininity of the rosebud is rebutted by a certain phallicism. The language of enlargement, specifically at the top, implies that the Lover’s beloved rose has as much to do with penises and erections as with vaginas and openings. Since the rosebud remains an inanimate object throughout the poem, the idea of its being responsive in any way to the Lover’s advances is doubtful. It is merely the Lover himself who is excited by them. While this description of the rose as more “open and redder” than before evokes notions of feminine receptivity to the upcoming kiss, it may be read in another way. Phallicly speaking, the rose’s not

yet being open enough for the seed to be revealed may be an allusion to the penis, the head of which has not yet emerged beyond the foreskin that encloses it like leaves. Not yet enlarged to the point of full disclosure, the rose's leaves/foreskin "amont droites s'en aloient / Et les places dedenz emploient" [3365-36: "raised it straight up and filled the space within" (78)]. The Lover here encounters an erecting, as opposed to fully erect, penis. What I would like to suggest is not that the rose aptly figures male genitalia, but that reading it as male is no more or less farfetched than reading it as female genitalia. As with all descriptions of the rosebud in the poem, this one cannot be fixed as feminine. Rather, the indeterminacy of the rosebud as a sexual signifier permeates the poem to generate various and divergent readings not only of its own significance, or of the nature of the dynamics between the Lover and the other figures in the garden, Fair Welcoming in particular, but of the subject position articulated by the Narrator and embodied by the Lover. Rather than secure the symbolic import of the rosebud as an emblem of the female sex, Guillaume's erotic description of it undermines this easy correspondence. To address practicalities for a moment, it may be objected that it is impossible for the Lover to kiss his own penis. I am not suggesting that the poem's status as a dream makes this triumph of dexterity possible. Rather, the fact that the rosebud occurs in a dream, a fantasy, means that the exact nature of what the Narrator fantasizes about remains amorphous. The phallic overtones of the Narrator's descriptions of the rosebud, alongside the manipulations that it endures at the hands of the Lover, suggest, however, that what he is really interested in recounting are the activities and sensations of his own private parts. That the rosebud serves as a mere platform for the speaker's masturbatory activities, the phallic traits of its portrayal imply.

Reading the rosebud as progressing from "maidenly" to "womanly" positions it as an entity with agency and desire, and consolidates it as a representation of the female beloved. It is only by overlooking significant portions of the text, however, that this representation may be sustained, for the symbol of the rosebud subverts an overlay of steady growth and character development. The size of the rosebud has nothing to do with it as an object even, let alone a subject. Modifications in the rosebud's proportions occur, not in the flower as an Other, but in the Narrator-Lover's own head. The rosebud is not its own thing; it belongs to the young man Fair Welcoming, and merely affirms the impulses of the Narrator-Lover's desire. Having kissed the rose and been forcibly separated from it, the Lover – in dialogue with Friend, who refers to it as a "florete" [9999: "little flower" (178)], and no longer in close proximity to it – remembers it as "nouvele" [10056: "new" (179)], not big, open, and red. In the course of the Narrator's thoughts the size of the rosebud fluctuates, while following a more general narrative trend in which it starts off as a bud, grows to a rose, and shrinks back to a bud. The extent to which the rosebud can be said to exist as a representation of an Other, even an Other as mirror, forms the basis of

my inquiry here. Rather than the love/psyche/vagina of a female other, the variously enlarging and shrinking rosebud signifies the rise and fall of the Narrator-Lover's own desires/penis.

Fleming's statement that *con* is "the literal signification of the rose" (186), is questionable.⁹ The rose is literally a flower, not a cunt. As Kay notes: "In fact the rose remains disconcertingly rose-like, and the dreamer's objective is to pick it (2902-04 [2886-88]), or kiss it (3386-94 [3368-76])" (*Romance* 19), adding that the garden setting of the poem serves to augment its literal status. Dahlberg's identification of the object of the Lover's pursuit as the "rose-sanctuary-*con*" (*Romance* 10) is another suspect equation. By amalgamating the literal content and what has been determined to be its figurative counterpart, Dahlberg makes these levels, i.e. literal and figurative, indistinguishable. This leads to misleading and reductive summaries of both the symbolic possibilities of the rosebud and the

⁹ In the Introduction of his translation of *The Romance of the Rose* Dahlberg notes that in terms of its status as an art of love, "the clear sexual symbolism of the rose has its place as one of the kinds of love" (4). He proceeds to specify this "sexual symbolism" as "*pudendum*" (5). Fleming resorts to similar terminology, minus the italics, calling the rose "an entirely unsentimentalized and anonymous pudendum" (133), thereby suggesting the crudity of the Lover's desires and Jean's mockery of them. Both critics also equate the rosebud to, not its English equivalent, but "*con*." Fleming gets out of the dilemma of having to say it in English by couching his mention of it in an explanation of the "specific pun in Old French between *connin* and *con*, the literal signification of the rose" (186). Dahlberg calls the Lover's pursuit a "*con*-game" (19), and labels its object the "rose-sanctuary-*con*" (10). He not only relies on the French "*con*" when discussing the poem, but in his translation of it as well. He does not render *con*, which occurs in the Old Woman's speech, "Jadis avant Elene furent / Batailles que les cons esmurent" (13927-28), into its English equivalent: "Formerly, before the time of Helen, there were battles spurred by *con*, in which those who fought for it perished with great suffering" (239). Nor does Horgan: "In the times before Helen, the lust for women was the cause of battles in which those who fought perished in great suffering . . ." (214). Robbins is even more cautious: "Before the time of Helen many fights / Broke out because of women" (290). Talk about not wanting to name the dishonest member. A few more euphemistic designations that I have encountered are: *membrum pudendum*, *rosa pudoris*, "pudendal sanctuary," *cunnus* and *mons Veneris*, which lends a certain fastidious to a discussion that names male genitalia without hesitation. The prudery of the English language perhaps, for being unable to pronounce, without gloss, what is really the most apt term for all of the above, is remarkable. It is striking that when discussing a poem, one of whose explicit satiric targets is propriety in language, we are little better than the Lover with his squirmy coyness about calling balls "balls." Recognizing that I am in danger of meriting Christine de Pisan's rebuke to Pierre Col about his hypocrisy in sanctioning Lady Reason's frankness yet not naming the secret members himself (Baird and Kane 123), let me say that I refer here to the English word "cunt." I am hard pressed to come up with a better word to cover "female genitalia" besides "female genitalia," which sounds, as Eve Ensler says of "vagina" in *The Vagina Monologues*, "like an infection at best, maybe a medical instrument" (5). It seems to me that "cunt" covers everything – vagina, labia, clitoris. At the same time I know how distressing this word is as a staple of the lexicon of misogyny. Believing, however, that the only way to wrench "cunt" from the discourteous mouth of antifeminism is to resignify it, I hope I may cheerfully include the occasional "cunt" without offence to anyone.

dynamic of the allegory. The poem does feature a rose and a sanctuary, but it does not feature a cunt. Not to differentiate between what is in the poem and what may be suggested by what is in the poem leads to interpretations that limit the playful and subversive character of the work. Casting all of the Lover's activities around openings as the pursuit of cunt effaces the ambiguities of the Lover's activities. Hult, too, articulates the prevalent assumption that an object under attack serves to represent woman and/or her sex when he locates the "obscenity of the final scene" as "the scarcely disguised allegorical 'penetration' of the woman/castle" ("Words and Deeds" 352). Cherniss does the same by referring to the "complex, extended image of the Rose-lady as a female idol whose genitalia form 'un saintuaire' for the Lover's devotion" (236). Rendering continuous, coherent, and feminine the images of rose, idol, and sanctuary presumes and consolidates the character of "the lady." The effect of such analogization is to conflate the diversity of the Lover's obscure activities into exertions directed at a female body in order to clarify the final scene as one of heterosexual intercourse.

The equation of the rosebud with the sanctuary is another reading that is open to debate. Once inside the sanctuary, the Lover reaches for the rosebud and probes it with his fingers. The rosebud is located inside the sanctuary – it *is* not the sanctuary. Equating the two renders the Lover's struggles to enter the sanctuary analogous to his fingering of the bud. I do not take issue with the notion that the Narrator may configure the object of his desire in a variety of ways, but am interested in examining how we assimilate these configurations in an effort to make sense of the dream rather than to engage the symbolic play of the poem's imagery. Are the sanctuary and rosebud analogous? If so, how does the analogy work? Is analogy the only means of reading this assembly of images? If the rosebud can be equated with any other image here it would be the relics, not the sanctuary, both of which are the explicit and ultimate objects of the Lover's quest. The relics in fact disappear from the signifying economy of the poem once the Lover pokes his way into the sanctuary, to be replaced by the bud as the object that he struggles to touch. While the correspondence of "rosebud" and "relics" may augment the femininity of the rosebud – *reliques* being a euphemism for *con* – the analogy also works to subvert this sexual coding. The status of "relics" as a signifier of the female sex has already been rendered equivocal by Lady Reason, who earlier in the poem outlines the consequences of substituting "relics" for "balls" in an effort to explain to the Lover how it is that words themselves are neither improper nor offensive. Building on Hult's comment that Reason's linkage of "relics" and "balls" hints at "sexual transposition" ("Language" 117), Gaunt observes that while critics have always assumed that the relics the Lover yearns to touch stand for the female genitals, Reason's explication of language "calls into question, amongst other things, the gender of the object of Amant's

erotic quest” (74).¹⁰ If “relics” may stand for “balls,” so too may that which stands for the relics, namely the rosebud. Nuanced by its association with “balls,” “relics” serves to unhinge, rather than fix, an easy correspondence between itself and the female genitals. Through its earlier linguistic attachment to “balls,” “relics” insinuates the phallic nature of the rosebud towards which the Lover directs his hallowed steps.

The phallic aspect of “relics” gets a further boost when Venus commences her attack of the castle, whereupon she and her son the God of Love pledge, instead of relics:

Leur cuiries et leur saietes,
Lor ars, lor dars et lor brandons
Et dient: “nous n’i demandons
Meilleures reliques a ce faire
Ne qui tant nous peüssent plaie. (15884-88)

their quivers and arrows, their bows, darts, and torches, and they said, “We do not ask for better relics for this purpose, no matter how much some could please us.” (268-69)

The quivers, arrows, bows, and darts of the mother-son duo are phallicly suggestive as both the hunting implements that kill the feminized rabbit of the erotic chase and the weaponry that penetrates fortified castles. The fact that Venus is a goddess in no way reduces the phallic overtones of her equipment. As Lady Reason’s reference to her birth in the much contested *coille* passage informs us, Venus originates from the severed penis of Saturn. As such, she figures male as much as female sexual desire, being a human variant of both a phallus and the phallic machinery by which she makes her pledge. The *brandons*, or torches, of Venus and her son augment the phallic nature of this exchange on more than a visual level. *Brandoner*, as Friedrich notes, appears in Larousse’s *Dictionnaire de l’ancien français*, as “être en érection,” which means that *brandon* may be read as penis (33). The nature of the relics upon which the two vow in support of their cause insinuates a reading of “relics” as male genitalia. The upcoming erotic battle is both spurred on and contextualized by phallic accoutrements and

¹⁰ Both Gaunt and Hult discuss a passage, possibly interpolated, that further links the relics of the Lover’s quest with the testicles of Reason’s speech: “Et quant pour reliques m’oïsses / Coilles nommer, le mot prisses / Pour si bel et tant le prissasses / Que partout coilles aorasses / Et les baisasses en eglises / En or et en argent assises” [7115-20: “And when you heard me call relics balls you would consider the word so beautiful and worthy that you would worship balls everywhere and kiss them in churches, set in gold and silver” (Gaunt 73)]. The Lover, upon reaching it, desires to worship the sanctuary with its relics. While he does not kiss them, he does kiss the image.

masculine relations. “Relics” cannot be said to signify either female or male genitalia exclusively in the poem because the usual correspondences of its signifying practice are redirected by an undercurrent of language about, and imagery of, male sexual organs. If “relics” can stand for “balls,” the bud that replaces the relics takes on the euphemistic baggage of the male genitals. That this relic-worshipping, bud-gathering finale takes place between two beautiful young men underscores the homoerotics – and if we reckon on the sameness of Fair Welcoming and the Lover, the autoerotics – of not only the final scene, but the entire dream.

Alternative interpretations of the rosebud are proscribed because the linkages of rose to female sex are supported by the conceptual citadels of Tradition and Nature. This foreclosure of the representative capacity of the rosebud results in an unexamined simplification of its signifiatory possibilities. For instance, Zumthor dismisses the symbolic potential of the rosebud altogether by reducing it to an emblem. An emblem, declares Zumthor, is: “la désignation d’une réalité qui en évoque une autre par métonymie ou synecdoche, spécialement, lorsque la seconde d’entre elles est d’ordre conceptuel; du moins, les contours de l’une et de l’autre sont-ils assez précis pour que rien, dans le rapport qui les unit, ne soit indéchiffrable ou abandonné au rêve” (*Essai* 122: “the designation of a reality which evokes another by metonymy or synecdoche, especially when the second of the two is of a conceptual order; the contours of one and of the other are at least precise enough so that nothing, in the relation which unites them, is indecipherable.”)¹¹ Zumthor summarizes the emblematic workings of the rose as: “Beauty and fugacity, femininity and the signs of love’s summons, on the one hand; the mystical center, the source of all regeneration, on the other; at the crossing of these two semantic axes, the Garden of Eros, Paradise, and the female sexual organ” (“Narrative” 186). The rosebud is itself the designation of a reality that evokes another, that being the Garden of Eros, Paradise, and the female sexual organ, by metonymy or synecdoche. The contours of the rosebud and its metonymic counterparts are “at least precise enough so that nothing, in the relation which unites them, is indecipherable” (186). Zumthor continues:

The signifying relation refers the Rose to a small number of “realities” which may, from a narrow point of view, seem hardly reconcilable, if not contradictory, but which are, in fact, connected in experience. A complex emblem, then, but one whose profound unequivocalness comes from its designating both a vital dynamism and many of its manifestations. We are at the borders of symbolism here; but outside of it. The signified, however rich in connotations, does not really surpass the contours of the signifier.

¹¹ This translation is taken from “Narrative and Anti-Narrative: *Le Roman de la Rose*,” 186.

The interpretation will be able to unfold itself across a broad spectrum, which will retain its coherence as an evident plausibility. (“Narrative” 186)

If Paradise, the Garden of Eros, and the female sexual organ are the “realities” to which Zumthor is referring, how are they contradictory yet connected? Is this where the notion of “crossing” fits in? As I understand Zumthor these “realities” form the intersection of, and so serve to connect, the two abovementioned semantic axes, namely “Beauty and fugacity, femininity and the signs of love’s summons, on the one hand” and “the mystical center, the source of all regeneration, on the other,” which are themselves seemingly irreconcilable. So, for instance, fugacity and the source of all regeneration, two supposedly “irreconcilable realities,” intersect at the female sexual organ, Paradise, and the Garden of Eros, in other words, at the rosebud. What does it mean to be connected in experience? How is the female sexual organ the “experience” that connects two theoretically contradictory things? How is the female sexual organ an “experience”? For whom is it an “experience”? Does the rosebud serve to bridge extremes and thus mediate the threat of one semantic axis via the other? I would suggest that rather than mediate, the rosebud serves to blur extremes and generate a whole new set of anxieties. Or, rather than managing the threat of femininity, etc., does the rose, by uniting the temporal and the spiritual, provide a justification for the tangible motives and violences of masculine desire, i.e. is the rape of the rosebud, if that is what it is, excusable because of the impregnation, if that is what it is, that occurs? Zumthor’s formulaic reading of the rosebud forwards a conservative view of it as object of the phallic eye. Rather than a “mystical center,” is the rosebud/female sexual organ a mystified centre? If so, to what end? An aura of mystification may serve to obscure the actual object of desire. Perhaps the object of desire cannot be pinned down. In a heterosexist economy founded on the primacy of the male gaze, however, this “mystical center” does get pinned down and coded feminine. The rosebud only “retains its coherence as an evident plausibility” if the conventions of its femininity are assumed, the signs of its masculinity ignored, and the subject positions of the normative masculine agent/reader confirmed.

According to Zumthor, the rose can be deciphered and its meanings fixed; while complex, its signifiatory universe remains entirely explainable. The hierarchy that Zumthor implies between an emblem and a symbol prefaces his dismissal of the rosebud and concentration on the more meaningful image of the fountain of love. Hult also considers the fountain episode a site of primary symbolic importance and focuses not only on it, but on Narcissus as a symbol, the allusive values of which forestall a reading of the Lover’s actions as a mere repetition of Narcissus’s fate. As such, Hult rejects the argument that the confluence of Narcissus, the fountain, and the Lover constitutes an explicit

exploration of masculine self-love. He argues that through the figure of Echo, another case of “self-destructive passion” (“Allegorical” 146), the Narcissus episode takes on universal significance. The parallelism of her story and that of Narcissus “alerts us to the additional fact that the message of Narcissism is of universal and not strictly masculine application” (146). The ascription of universal to tales that feature men as their central consciousness has been one of the principle targets of feminist critique. That “universal” masks a masculine bias, and surreptitiously privileges male authority while dismissing and devaluing the experiences of women, thoroughly undermines any argument that forwards it as an answer to the gendered dynamics of this text. Are we to read Hult’s references to the reader as “him,” and to the text as something that “purports to seduce or to tempt” (147), as not problematically gendered but of universal application as well?

While Hult attempts to level the gendered imbalances of the Narcissus episode, he explicitly hierarchizes the poem into narrative and poetic, surface and figurative, levels. This allows him to argue that Echo is “not to be understood narratively (as the surface story would indicate) as the cause of Narcissus’s death, but rather poetically or figuratively as one of the many examples of a self-destructive passion” (“Allegorical” 146). Hult’s division of the text into superior and subordinate levels of meaning allows him to devalue the “surface” dynamics of the romance for a more viable “figurative” understanding. His approach to allegory demands that this be so: “Allegorical expression maintains within itself a curious tension between a doctrinal message and a clear fictional excess. Does allegory exist *only* for the sake of its message, or does the fictional ‘covering’ maintain an importance of its own?” (147). He asserts that the “figurative modes” and “dislocations” of the poem, such as the “ultimate humanization of Bel Acueil and Dangier, point to the desire of the fiction to remain fiction and not reduce itself to mere content” (147). Words such as “excess” and “covering” attribute a crudeness to the literal narrative; its status as “mere content” suggests that the play of its dynamics are not sophisticated enough to be meaningful in any significant, allegorical way. The result of this disregard is an inattention to both the limitations and possibilities that inhere in the literal text. The assertion that the key to reading the *Rose* as allegory resides not in its language but in certain tendencies allows readers to get around any difficulties that the words on the page may pose for their preferred poetic reading. Hult argues that because “the figurative mode” informs the work, we are to read the entire work in a figurative vein. I agree, but does “figurative mode” lead to “doctrinal message”? He ends this discussion of allegory by suggesting that it is the text that desires to be understood according to, not its content, but its message: “it is the desire of the fiction to remain fiction.” Justifying one’s reading practices according to what one has identified as the informing principles of the text rests on a number of assumptions: first, that these *are* its informing principles; second, these are its

informing principles; and third, that one is not meant either to question the premises of the text or read them ironically. It may be precisely this desire for and persistent adherence to the notion of a “doctrinal message” that the *Rose* ridicules through the excesses of its figurative language.

That the fiction is at odds with the content is a claim that diminishes the worth of the literal narrative. Fiction is equated with figuration and content with plain, trifling plot. Figuration, then, does not depend on content; the “surface story” does not generate meaning. That allegory should be read at the level of doctrinal message rather than narrative content is, however, not universally agreed upon, but Hult engages Quilligan only to refute her:

In a recent book on allegorical theory, Maureen Quilligan suggests that we eliminate the traditional notion of levels in our treatment of allegorical fictions, since it usually leads to a hierarchy of interpretations whose eventual result is a privileging of the doctrinal message. The pleasure of the text, fully acknowledged by Augustine, is thereby eliminated. (“Allegorical” 147)

Why a rejection of “the traditional notion of levels” translates into an elimination of the “pleasure of the text” Hult does not go on to explain. It is assumed that the “pleasure of the text” springs from the reader’s exposures of its tricky figurative manoeuvres. According to Hult, this is a pleasure experienced by the Lover as well:

The poet . . . face-to-face with the image-making poetic faculty figured by the dream/fountain, becomes the reader of his own experience. As such, the Lover presents through his own endeavors an analogue to the medieval (or modern) reader who must seek to decipher his experience. We need not wonder at the distinct reader preoccupation expressed at the outset of the poem: The pleasure is in the reading. (145-46)

To argue that the endeavours of the Lover are analogous to those of the reader situates the pleasures of both desiring the rosebud and reading one’s own experiences as specifically masculine pursuits.¹² Just as the Lover seeks to

¹² Gregory adds to this alignment of reader and Lover that of the text and lady. He couches the relationship of these two pairings, Lover-lady, and reader-text in a language of courtship and “unconsummated wooing” (39, 42) that accentuates the maleness of the reader “him.” Like other critics Gregory refers to the rosebud explicitly as “she.” He also alters the language of Dahlberg’s translation to support his analogy between the rose-lady and the text by replacing an “it” with a “she”: “Referring to his copulation with the rose/*Roman de la Rose*, he [Jean] says he found her/it pure/without commentary: . . . ‘I don’t know, if, since then she has done as much for others as it

decipher his experiences, so the reader seeks to decipher his own (analogous?) experiences too. While Hult may mean to include non-men here, the context of his references to the reader as “him” relies on tropes that are highly gendered. The paradigm of pleasure as a man’s experience of woman (and other objects) is so ingrained in a misogynist economy of gender relations that to suppose this reader, “him,” is not specifically male is difficult. To assume that all readers will participate with the Lover in a self-referential reading of the text is problematic since not all readers may have selves in the way that the Lover does, and may feel precisely excluded from, degraded by, and resistant to the self that the Lover epitomizes. If the pleasure of reading springs from a self-gratifying identification with the Lover and his various endeavours, it might be argued that, as Tuve says of the rosebud, this notion of pleasure is very narrow indeed. Might pleasure not also accrue from the discovery of what Quilligan argues is the text’s horizontal play (28)? Grappling with “the often problematical process of meaning multiple things simultaneously with one word” (Quilligan 26) may be as pleasurable as identifying and evaluating its two semantic levels.

Choosing to understand Echo along narrative lines, she triggers a story that centres on an exploration of the masculine psyche through the fate of Narcissus. Again, I do not agree with Hult that the cross-gendered identifications of the Lover with Echo and the courtly ladies with Narcissus serve to universalize the tale. Stories about men that finish by upbraiding woman do not complicate or efface misogynist gender differentials, but rely on and exacerbate them. Zumthor, not noting this transposition of gender roles, relegates the moral, although not the significance of the story, to “humble, daily reality” (“Narrative” 187). The smallness of the moral in no way traduces the grandeur of the fountain symbol, with its accumulation of details and its “limitless signification” (187). According to Zumthor: “One would not be able to exhaust the significance of the Fountain: it develops itself infinitely, fills the text, overflows, finds its way into all the other impressions of meaning produced by the *Roman* (187). The image of the fountain, unlike that of the rosebud, is not reducible to “a small number of ‘realities’”; it exceeds its image and remains ineffable, indecipherable, ultimately indeterminable. The boundlessness of the signification to which this accumulation leads is not, states Zumthor, subject to circumscription by either the author or the reader (187). It is my contention that the rosebud is not circumscribable either. It has rather been made so by readings of it that neglect the “surface story” in order to forward figurative correspondences, which in the case of the rosebud amount to its always denoting some aspect of the lady and/or her sex. This interpretation of the rosebud is informed by an unquestioned reliance on conventional systems of representation that figure it as “always

did for me’ (352)” (46). Dahlberg’s translation, which Gregory quotes, reads: “I don’t know if, since then, it has done as much for others as it did for me” (352).

already” feminine, and thus limit its potential to signify differently before it so much as enters the story.¹³ I do not take issue with Zumthor’s reading of the fountain as a symbol, but do believe the significance of the rosebud to be likewise inexhaustible. In his analysis Zumthor relies on cultural commonplaces that already position the rosebud as an emblem to position it as an emblem; he does not inquire into the singularities of the *Rose*’s particular bud. This results in an effacement of its potential to unsettle models of heterosexual, other-based desire because a recognition of the relations between the Lover who wants it, the God of Love who knows all about it, and Fair Welcoming who has it, never takes root.

Part of what allows Zumthor to limit the rosebud’s inventory of signifiatory possibilities is the metonymic/synecdochal nature of the relationship that he establishes between it and the three “realities” of Garden of Eros, Paradise, and the female sexual organ. According to his notion of emblem, the contours of the rose and the contours of the above “realities” are “precise enough so that nothing, in the relationship that unites them, is indecipherable” (“Narrative” 186). How is it that the contours of the rosebud and the contours of the female sexual organ are related in such a way that nothing remains open to question? What is the connection between metonymy/synecdoche and decipherability? The rose evokes the reality of the female sexual organ because it is thought to physically resemble it, and to a certain extent this natural(ized) likeness underlies and validates the metonymic relation. That the rosebud metonymically signifies the female genitals and synecdochally the lady herself is considered to be apparent, at times embarrassingly so, and in no need of further explanation. As Stakel and Patterson argue, however, justifying the signifiatory possibilities of an object or event by means of extratextual or historical materials is inadequate because it fails to engage the particular dynamics of the text under discussion and its potentially divergent or oppositional politics. Fixed as the female sexual organ, the rosebud and its romance stand as icons of a conservative economy founded on normalizing paradigms of heterosexual desire. Fleming states that “The rose quest is a sexual metaphor, slightly less blatant with Guillaume de Lorris than with Jean de Meun but always obvious” (6). The extent to which Fleming assumes a heteronormative reading of the poem is revealed by his not bothering to specify the nature of this “sexual metaphor.”

I sense that examination of these self-evident metonymies is deemed both unnecessary and indelicate, but to my mind the acquiescence urges rather than dissuades the inquiry. In *The Symbolic Rose* Barbara Seward articulates what is always inferred, that “the particular shape of the rose associates it most directly

¹³ Irigaray’s point about the “always already” coincides with the interpretational history of the rosebud. She states that before woman even intervenes in the sexual economy, the place of the feminine has already been decided and naturalized as a matter of biology. See *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

with the shape of the vulva” (7). Since they stem from what is posited as a physical likeness, the vaginal associations of the rosebud seem irrefutable. Besides shape, other features of the flower are linked to certain aspects and movements of the female sexual organ. The petals of the rose evoke labial layers; its growth from bud to flower intimates the maturation of the closed vagina of a girl to the open one of a woman, or else the opening of the vagina and swelling of the vulva during sex; its redness suggests that of the aroused genitalia. It is naturalized associations such as these that constitute the metonymic relationship of rose to female sexual organ, and inform most readings of the bud in the *Rose*. And while it may be that the rose and cunt are believed to share the same “contours,” the contours of the rosebud that catches the Lover’s eye are far from feminine.

Zumthor’s classification of the rose as an emblem makes its assimilation to the female sex incontestable. It would seem that what distinguishes an emblem from a symbol is the either presence or absence of a bevy of cultural accompaniments. The particularities of the rosebud image are not explored, but rather subsumed by a set of pre-existing identifications. Zumthor draws upon a powerful cultural lexicon to determine the meaning of the rosebud, recourse to which positions it as an “always already” emblem. The complexities that would, according to Zumthor, render the rosebud symbolic are either discounted or relegated to emblematic status; its irreducibilities are reduced to the orthodoxy of the image and its obvious significance. Thus the phallic potential of the rosebud has been steadily overlooked, and the masculinity of Fair Welcoming been theorized as anything but a manifestation of homo- or autoerotic desire. The dismissal of any but a traditional man-desires-vagina reading of the *Rose* is premised on the immediate and tenacious assumption that roses and buds signify the feminine because they always do, and look and act like the female genitals too. Morphological resemblances are, however, language not nature based. Aspects of the rosebud that are presented as naturally evocative of the female sex may be reviewed as “naturally” evocative of the male. The growth of bud to flower may signify the maturation of a boy’s penis into that of a man. It may also allude to the swelling of the penis when aroused, at which time it likewise reddens. And certainly the cutting of the rosebud is as suggestive of the loss of erection as of virginity. While a penis does not have the analogous labial petals, neither does a bud, which is what we often deal with in the *Rose*, and what the Lover specifically deals with in the end. Rather, the bud with its closed petals conspicuously evokes the shape of the penis. Guillaume introduces us to a remarkably phallic bud to begin with, and its occurrence throughout the poem is such that the sex it may be said to represent becomes impossible to fix as either masculine or feminine. It represents both. As such, the rosebud enters the realm of the symbolic as Zumthor defines it, by signifying excessively:

Je proposerais de parler ici de symbole quand et seulement quand une image, profondément et de façon immédiate motivée dans l'esprit de l'auteur et de l'auditeur du message, permet de pressentir quelque chose qui, de toute autre manière, demeurerait ineffable. Le symbolisé déborde toujours le symbolisant. Le symbole comporte une part d'indécryptable, échappant aux gloses que l'on en fait: il n'y a pas en effet de code symbolique à proprement parler; le verbe *être*, quand on l'utilise pour exprimer une relation symbolique, ne signifie pas exactement identité. (*Essai* 121-22)

I would propose to speak here of a symbol when and only when an image, motivated deeply and in an immediate fashion in the minds of both author and receptor of the message, permits one to have a grasp of something which in any other manner would remain ineffable. The signified always overflows the signifier. The symbol includes an indecipherable portion, escaping the glosses that one produces: there is not, in effect, a symbolic code to properly speak of. The verb *to be*, when one uses it to express a symbolic relation, does not signify identity exactly.¹⁴

From its first to its final appearance the rosebud functions according to Zumthor's definition of a symbol; its significance exceeds its "contours." The rosebud is not a transparent signifier of the lady, any aspect of her, or of the feminine. It cannot be identified exactly, but retains an "indecipherable portion," making it, as Kay states, "a mysterious and eroticised object" (*Romance* 18). Quilligan suggests that this is because deducing the meaning of the rosebud is not the point of the romance (243). The rosebud, far from signifying a pudendum, encodes an indeterminacy that colours the entirety of the Narrator's tale. It cannot be contained by one, or a few, discrete correspondences. It does not adhere to any code, any iconography of the female sex. Once dislodged from the female body, however, the rosebud does not become reducible to the male sexual organ either. It shimmers between masculine and feminine figurations, embodying both simultaneously; it is, as Harley notes, "an ingenious superimposition of the feminine and masculine" (334). Interestingly, the most vivid and sensual description of the rosebud occurs at its most indeterminable. When the Lover approaches it for a kiss, the rosebud is enlarged, erect, red, and open, more so than ever before (and than it ever will be).

¹⁴ Parts of this translation derive from "Narrative and Anti-Narrative," 186.

iii) The Lover and his classical counterparts: masculine self-love in the stories of Narcissus, Pygmalion and Hercules

From its first to its final appearance the rosebud and the relations in which it is embroiled are too ambiguous to sustain an exclusive and unwavering identification of it as the lady and her sex. Its introduction as a reflection of the Lover in the Fountain of Love resists its easy assimilation to a female beloved from the start. Harley argues that “The homoerotic relationship Guillaume establishes between Amant and Bel Accueil helps to blur the sexual identity of Amant’s desired rosebud” (334). By comparing the Lover to the Ovidian lovers Narcissus, Hermaphrodites, and Attis, all of whom are alluded to in Guillaume’s description of the fountain, Harley argues that “Guillaume does not write *about* homosexuality but rather allows the nuances to blur the identity of that which ‘should be called Rose’” (333). The description of the bud is one of these nuances which, Harley notes, “suggests a phallic image” (334). Ultimately, however, Harley’s conclusion that the Lover’s seeing himself in the fountain means that his is “a passion that has its origin in self-love” (335), relies on and retains the rosebud-lady equation. Harley’s reading coincides with Fleming’s, who notes “the auto-erotic origins of his [the Lover’s] passion” (96) and its status as “the projection of self-love” (95). In the midst of all this self-love the lady remains amorphous; her insubstantiality permits a questioning of the gender of the beloved, and the play of what Harley terms a “homoerotic undercurrent” (333).

Like Harley and Gaunt, Friedrich considers the romance to be overtly about heterosexual love, “all the while suggesting homoeroticism and homosexual love” (31). Friedrich asks:

If the Rose/bud can signify *pars pro toto* – the Lady’s red parts, her sexuality, in the place of the Lady herself – then might not the Rose/bud symbolize the obverse of female genitalia, the homologous male sex organs, parts which then stand for the whole man, Bel Accueil, the masculine allegorical figure whose absence is so lamented by the Lover? The true object of the Lover’s desire would then be Bel Accueil, symbolized by the “parts” he guards and to which he controls access – the Rose/bud. In such a reading the Rose and Rosebud would therefore be recognized as symbols of male homoeroticism. (26)

Friedrich’s reading of the rosebud parallels that of Zumthor, the difference being that she regards it as an emblem of the male, rather than female, sexual organ. While Zumthor situates the rose as an emblem of femininity, Friedrich adheres to its designation as a bud and the masculine gender of its owner, and reads it as a synecdochal signifier of Fair Welcoming himself. As Friedrich notes, the rose is not “in any way described as a physical woman or as possessing feminine

attributes" (22). To justify a reading of it as the female sexual organ, femininity, or the lady requires that conventional, extratextual symbology be forwarded at the expense of correspondences that the poem itself does or does not set up. Friedrich extends her argument on the homosexual implications of the masculine countenance and society of the rosebud with an investigation into the phallic connotations of *bouton*, along with words such as *coe/tige* and *jons* that accompany it. Even the name "Fair Welcoming" incorporates sexually suggestive anal and phallic readings.¹⁵ According to Friedrich, the "clear reflection of homosexual love" in the poem has been "muddied" by "the murky waters of time and the oppression of same-sex love" (37). I am not certain that there is a clear reflection of any kind of love in the poem at all, however. Unlike Friedrich I do not think that the *Rose* can support a reading of the rosebud as Fair Welcoming and his penis, as it cannot support a reading of it as the lady and her vagina. Rather than either, the rosebud signifies both. Gaunt alleges that the capacity of the allegory to sustain a diversity of readings springs from its insistence on the literal plot of the poem and the conflicts generated therein (68-69). Compelled by the literal details of the narrative, we engage the complexities of the *Rose* at its crucial, playful, meaningful surface. The characters, images, and words of the allegory resist conformity to rigid figurative designations. Affirming rather than negating the range of its textual affiliations widens the associative expanse of the rosebud image and grants it a multiplicity that need not be configured into distinct levels of meaning. If we ignore the lesson offered by the Narrator-Lover and not approach the *Rose*/rosebud as he does, fixed agenda in hand, but rather engage its peculiarities, we will see that the poem provokes us with a diversity of prospects. What can be said of the rosebud? The Lover desires it; Fair Welcoming owns it; it is erect and open; it is kissed, seized, shaken, probed, and cut, all to the accompaniment of a myriad of mythical and classical allusions that serves to continually re-contextualize its sexual character and the erotics to which it gives rise.

Even Utti, who is committed to the femininity of the rosebud, comments on the phallic overtones of its initial description:

Gender-specificity is strikingly absent from this early description of the "rose." What is emphasized here is hardly the rose as flower; it is, rather, the straight, stiff stem on the top of which the *bouton* is seated; and the

¹⁵ She suggests a number of translations for "Fair Welcoming": "Good Meeting," "Fine Encounter," "Fine Impact/Shock/Crash;" if *Acuel* is read as the first person singular of *acueillir*, then Fair Welcoming may mean "well I catch, collect, gather up, attack, assail, take, or undertake"; she points out that Fair Welcoming may be read as "'bel a co(u)il(le)', i.e. Nice Ball(s) He Has, or Fine Dick He Has." She also suggests "'nice ass he has' or 'nice in the ass'" if read "bel a cul" (34-35).

protagonist desires first and foremost to reach out and hold it (*le prendre*) in his hand. . . . One cannot conceive of a more phallic, masculine sort of rose, in my judgement, than the rose described here as it reposes, closed in its budlike shape, on its long and stiffly upright stem . . . (40)

Why Utti concludes that gender-specificity is “strikingly absent” from the rose here is puzzling. If it is described in phallic terms, its gender is not unspecified. In combination with other, feminized, descriptions, the image of the rosebud does unsettle the fixities of gender, but here it quite clearly evokes a vision of the penis. Utti further dodges the consequences of a phallic rose by calling it a “masculine sort of rose” (emphasis added). Why, if described phallicly, is the rose only “sort of” masculine? Informing the difference between a masculine and a “masculine sort of” rose seems to be Utti’s need to recuperate it as a figure for the female beloved, which he does during the scene of the kiss. For Utti’s reading of the poem as a cosmic celebration of heterosexual union to work, it is imperative that the rosebud always retain a modicum of femininity, which “sort of” ensures.

As well as explicitly, the rosebud is more suggestively aligned with woman and her sexual parts through an interpretation of the Lover’s boast that he inextricably mingles the seeds as his impregnation of the rosebud-lady. Charles Dunn states the case most vigorously: “Thus the Rose becomes the first important pregnant heroine in European literature” (xxv). The criteria for heroines in European literature must reach its lowest point in the image of the inert rosebud. The argument that the rosebud is impregnated by the Lover through some combination of staff/harness/hands implicitly fixes it as the uterus, and many critics agree that the swelling of the bud is to be read as insemination. Thomas Hill notes the strong affinities between the stories of Pygmalion and the Lover in order to further such a reading: “the fact that the *exemplum* of Pygmalion is related to the narrative of the *Roman*, and that Pygmalion is a figure comparable to the lover, is clear and has never to my knowledge, been questioned. And Pygmalion, like the lover, begets a child” (416-17). While the Lover may be like Pygmalion, the rosebud is not like the statue. Pygmalion’s statue comes to life. The rosebud remains a plant. It is not Pygmalion’s statue-wife, but his human wife that is impregnated; the rosebud’s changeless status as an object makes its impregnation a problematic event. As well as similarities, one of the effects of embedding the Pygmalion story within that of the Lover’s conquest is to highlight the striking differences between them. While the self-referentiality of Pygmalion’s creation is mitigated somewhat by its transformation into a human woman, the immutability of the Lover’s rosebud stands as a testimony to the entirety of his self-absorption. As with the disparities between Shame’s dire predictions about the rose and the state of Fair Welcoming’s plucked bud, the fates of Pygmalion’s statue-wife and the Lover’s statue/rosebud are not the same.

If the sudden appearance of an image perched on two pillars is part of what links the love stories of the Lover and Pygmalion, the fact that it, unlike Pygmalion's statue, remains inanimate undermines the link. While Venus is instrumental in securing the union between Pygmalion and his beloved by bringing the statue to life, when she shoots her flaming arrow into the little slot below the image on the castle wall she does not succeed in vivifying it, she merely routs the inhabitants of the castle. Huot articulates what is immediately inferred about the image when she envisions it as the explicit concretization and feminization of the beloved: "At this highly charged moment – the lady represented by Bel Accueil, Dangier and the Rose has just assumed feminine form for the first time, and the Lover is about to gain access to her hidden sanctuary" (*Romance* 176). These affiliations of the rosebud with the statue surmounting the aperture of the sanctuary enact a further consolidation of the disparate objects of the Lover's desire under the sign of woman, yet nowhere in the text is the statue specified as being that of a woman. Although compared to the one fashioned by Pygmalion, it is not explicitly identified as female itself. And the Narrator's description of it, in which he focuses on the perfect size of the statue along with its arms, shoulders, and hands, bears no resemblance to the typical catalogue of feminine attributes. The image is:

... n'ert trop haute ne trop basse,
Trop grosse ne trop graisle, non pas,
Mais toute taillie a compas
De braz, d'espaules et de mains,
Qu'il n'i failloit ne plus ne mains.
Mout erent gent li autre mambre, (20804-09)

neither too tall nor too short, neither too fat nor too thin in any respect, but constructed, in measure, of arms, shoulders, and hands that erred in neither excess nor defect. The other parts were also very fine. (340)

The anatomization of the beloved into the individual facial features, body parts, skin tone, hair, and clothing that constitutes the descriptions of the garden's female beauties is missing here. In fact, it would seem that the Narrator's interest in the measure of its shoulders and arms rather coincides with his early description of Diversion:

Par espaules fu auques lez
Et greiles par mi la ceinture.
Il ressembloit une pointure
Tant iere biaux et acemez
Et de touz membres bien manbrez. (809-13)

Somewhat broad in the shoulders and narrow in the waist, he was so elegant and full of grace, so well formed in all his limbs, that he looked like a painting. (41)

Diversion's painting-like status casts him as a work of art, foreshadowing both Pygmalion's statue and that of the Lover. While a comparison to Pygmalion's work contextualizes the image on the castle wall as female, a comparison that I have suggested is problematic, the portrait of Diversion contextualizes it as masculine. This masculinity is not definitive, however. Jean Batany notes that the description of Diversion contains certain feminine elements: "face vermeille et blanche, yeux 'vairs', cheveux blonds, beau nez" (9: a red and white face, blue-grey eyes, blond hair, fine nose). The statue on the castle wall, like the portrait of Diversion, is comparable to the Lover and rosebud in being a somewhat ambiguously gendered image. While it is true that Jean is not prone to the detailed physical descriptions of Guillaume, it is nonetheless also true that the non-feminine orientation of the few attributes and body parts that the Narrator does touch on renders the sexual status of the image decidedly vague.

Huot's equation of "the lady" with the image and the "hidden sanctuary" with her vagina fixes the Lover's reunion with Fair Welcoming and the rosebud as a blatant heterosexual encounter. Since the gender of the image is dubious, however, could not the "hidden sanctuary" stand for an orifice attributable to the male, as well as female, body? That the sanctuary below the statue does figure the genital region is suggested by the Narrator's report of the perfections of its upper body only. Why, then, are the facial features of the image not described? Perhaps the Lover is too busy gawking at the aperture to study its face, or perhaps he is viewing it from behind. In light of Lady Reason's earlier linguistic transposition of *coilles* and *reliques*, the representative potential of the sanctuary cannot be limited to the vagina. If "relics" may be "balls," then the sanctuary that houses them corresponds to regions of the male as well as the female body. If the pillars stand for legs, what prevents them from being masculine legs? The Lover's longing to enter the sanctuary and touch the relics with his harness may be read as a desire for anal intercourse and sexual contact with the genitalia of the young man Fair Welcoming. What I am attempting to do here is not so much re-locate the statue, relics, and sanctuary as signifiers of the male sex, but to interrogate their monolithic status as signifiers of the female.

The status of the image is also obscured by its being both less and more supreme than Pygmalion's. The Narrator prefaces his account of the animation of Pygmalion's statue with this comparison:

Et se nus, usanz de raison,
Voloit faire comparaison
D'ymage a autre bien portraite,

Autel la puet faire de ceste
A l'ymage Pymalyon
Comme de soriz a lyon. (20815-20)

If anyone, using reason, were to draw a comparison between this and any other image, he could say that this image was to Pygmalion's as a mouse is to a lion. (340)

That this comparison does not favour the image adored by the Lover is revealed at the end of the story by the mouse's explicit subordination to the lion:

Qui voudroit donques comparer
De ces deus ymages ensamble
Les biautez, si com il me samble,
Tel similitude i puet prendre:
K'autant com la soriz est mendre
Que li lyons et mains cremue
De cors, de force et de value,
Autant, sachiez en leauté,
Ot cele ymage mains beauté
Que n'a cele que tant ce pris. (21222-31)

Whoever, then, would wish to compare the beauties of these two images could, it seems to me, compare them by saying that as much as the mouse is smaller than the lion in body, strength, and worth, and less to be feared, so much was the one image less beautiful than that which I esteem here so greatly. (346)

After the fluster of excitement brought on by his vision of the pillars, image, and sanctuary, it seems that the Narrator recollects himself and is able to get the comparison right: his image is more beautiful than was that of Pygmalion. The Narrator's contradictory statements about the relative beauty of the images, together with what I have argued are the dissimilarities between them, unsettle a reading of the Lover's relations with the rosebud as a smooth reflection of Pygmalion's with his statue-wife. This mix up of a simple parallel construction kicks off the jumble of non-sequential metaphors that constitutes the account of the Lover's ultimate triumph. Might Jean be poking fun at the Narrator, whose agitation belies a much-touted authority?

Intimations of masculinity continue when the Narrator compares his difficulties with the piling to the exertions of Hercules as he mercilessly, tirelessly, batters at Cacus's cave door. This analogy casts the sexual exchange of the final scene as one between two men. If the statue is assumed to be feminine by analogy, then the aperture and piling, contextualized as a boundary between

men, must likewise retain its gendered correspondences and be accounted masculine. I recognize that the figure of the paling does not as conveniently figure the male genitals as the female hymen, but in a poem where “relics” are “balls” such a transfer is feasible. Besides, anatomical fidelity is not what is at stake here. Rather, the paling serves as another image upon which the Narrator vents his desire. Rosebuds do not possess hymenesque barriers, and the one that the Narrator invents springs from a storehouse of arousing sexual images. Coupled with the actual presence of Fair Welcoming who, like Cacus, waits on the other side of the barrier, the homoerotic tones of the scene are hard to ignore. The classical metaphor, which the Narrator inserts precisely at this moment of sexual advancement, is, considering the repulsive character and physique of Cacus, both incongruous and satiric.¹⁶

iv) Anthropomorphizing the rosebud: an investigation into readings of its “impregnation” and “loss of virginity”

Fleming, whose scepticism Hill specifically counters, is one of the few critics to deny that the poem ends on a note of impregnation. His contention is not that the Narrator-Lover does not imply that he has impregnated the rose, but that we are not to believe his “casual claim” for “he speaks of this feat not as a mighty triumph of generation, but as ‘tout quanque j’i forfis!’ Such is Amant’s only moral scruple after twenty thousand lines of an idolatrous *passio* which led him to swear total allegiance to the god of *fol amour*, abjure Reason, offer his soul to an idol, and fornicate with a carved grotesque” (244). In this refutation of what he considers an inaccurate reading of the poem, however, Fleming may be said to insert his own. Does kissing the image translate into “fornicat[ing] with a carved grotesque”? The effect of amalgamating the figurative assemblage of this final scene is to pin down an ambiguous set of events. If the Lover “fornicates” with anything it is with the sanctuary/bud. Kelly joins Fleming in his scepticism; procreation seems to be of no concern whatsoever. Sexual climax, not conception, occupies the Lover and “Rose,” whose arousal the description of the bud’s swelling portrays (145). Cherniss concurs with Kelly’s reading of the swelling bud as indicative of sexual stimulation while stressing the inconclusiveness of its impregnation: “First, it must be noted that the passage describing the conception is not without a degree of ambiguity: it is not altogether clear that the mingling of seeds signifies successful insemination or that the enlargement of the bud is anything more than the normal distending of the female genitalia” (231). The counter-arguments of Fleming, Kelly, and Cherniss are valuable in that they introduce a note of contention into what is assumed to be the

¹⁶ He is described in Virgil as “a bestial form, half man,” the son of Vulcan, “Who as he moved about in mammoth bulk / Belched out the poisonous fires of the father” (VIII 197, 202-03).

case. Again, I do not think that any reading can be alleged as definitive for the text both intimates and unsettles the interpretative possibility of impregnation. Jean ensures that this reference to swelling cannot be fixed as signifying one thing, either arousal or conception. While it may signify both, the presence of Fair Welcoming as owner of the enlarged bud problematizes a reading of impregnation. The question of the bud's swelling may be broached by an inquiry into how swelling signifies in the rest of the poem. If we refer back into the text itself, as Patterson suggests, and read horizontally within rather than vertically "without" it, Shame's speech becomes an integral component of any discussion of inception. The fact that Shame's account of what will happen to the rose if its seed mingles with another neither mentions swelling, nor befalls the bud, unsettles an insistence on its impregnation.

Certain discussions of the scene that approach it as one of copulation and inception rely on summaries that, I think, need to be questioned for the accuracy of the interpretations that they simultaneously forward. For instance, when Kay recounts, "The seeds mingle; the rose begins to swell" (*Romance* 110), the abridgement is not precise in that it skews the narration to insinuate an outcome of further growth. The rose does not *begin* to swell; the little bud swells. *Beginning* to swell suggests that the rose will *continue* to swell, a progression that implies that of gestation. Whether or not anything remains swollen after the seeds have mingled is not clear. Since the rosebud is not weighed down or ruined, as Shame fears it may be if blown too hard by the wind, it would seem that it does not remain burdened by, or inseminated with, anything. Huot describes the episode as follows: "Jean exploits this image of procreative sowing at the end of the *Rose*, when the Lover, after hearing Genius' exhortations to 'plow,' eagerly parts the petals to find the Rose's seed, mingling with it his own" (*Romance* 210). Is this what occurs?

En la parfin, tant vous en di,
Un poi de grene y espandi,
Quant j'oi le bouton eslochié.
Ce fut quant dedens l'oi tochié
Por les fueilletes reverchier,
Car je voloie tout cerchier
Jusques au fons du boutonet,
Si cum moi semble que bon est.
Et fis lors si meller les grenes
Que se desmellassent a penes, (21719-26)

Finally, I scattered a little seed on the bud when I shook it, when I touched it within in order to pore over the petals. For the rosebud seemed so fair to me that I

wanted to examine everything right down to the bottom. As a result, I so mixed the seeds that they could hardly be separated; (353)

Huot places the Lover's actions in the context of reproduction, when his intentions are not to find the seed, but to examine the rosebud. As Kelly notes, procreation is in the thoughts of neither the Lover nor Genius even, whose only stipulation is that the sex be heterosexual. And does the Lover "eagerly part the petals"? According to Dahlberg, he "pores" over the petals, and Strubel translates "reverchier" as "passer en revue" (1120: to review). Huot's reading of the Lover's actions as the eager parting of petals is born out by neither the language nor imagery of the text. Coupled with his shaking of the bud, the Lover's "touching it within" and "poring over its petals" do not necessarily translate into the suggestive petal parting of heterosexual intercourse. No petals are parted and no seed is found; the bud is merely touched inside and its petals looked over.

It is also assumed the Lover comes equipped with seed – he "find[s] the Rose's seed, mingling with it his own." From where does the Lover's seed come? Does he pull it out of his sack? His sack contains only hammers. There is only one seed bearing entity here, that being the rosebud itself. When the Narrator recounts: "En la parfin, tant vous en di, / Un poi de grene y espandi, / Quant j'oi le bouton eslochié" [21719-21: "Finally, I scattered a little seed on the bud when I shook it" (353)], are we to imagine the Lover shaking the rosebud with one hand and scattering some seed on it with the other? Or, might the Lover's shaking of the rosebud cause some seed that emerges from the rosebud itself to be scattered on it? The image of seed being scattered over a shaken bud insinuates masturbation as much as copulation. Huot also privileges the "plowing" metaphor which, in the bud plucking scene, the Narrator does not. After completing his recital of the Pygmalion story and returning to his own, "K'autre champ me couvient arer" [21221: "since I must plow another field" (346)], the Narrator drops the plowing innuendo altogether and moves on to that of the pilgrim's staff and sack. The sheer volume and variance of figurative language, the masculine gender of the romance's main players, and relentless object status of the rosebud render the Lover's pilgrimage susceptible to a diversity of interpretations. If allegory works through the potential of its words to signify many things simultaneously, as Quilligan argues (26), this scene cannot be fixed as either vaginal sex, or anal sex, or masturbation, although all are possible readings of whatever it is that the Narrator so proudly describes. The Lover fiddles with a rosebud, and any attempt to insist that this corresponds to vaginal intercourse exclusively is going to be problematic; the literal format and unintelligibility of the Narrator's description, coupled with the polysemantic dynamic of allegory itself, hinder ascriptions of meaning that are offered as "real" and otherwise conclusive.

Readings of impregnation are further substantiated by a transformation of the “rose” into the “Rose.” The consequences of capitalizing “rose” are immense for, as Gaunt notes, this serves to “designate the object of Amant’s love-quest a woman, rather than a rose” (68). Capitalizing “rose” impairs the dynamic of the allegory by violating one of its basic tenets, which is to adhere to the letter of the text. It strikes me as a serious inconsistency to abstract the rose as “Rose” while maintaining the literal integrity of the other personifications. It is puzzling that Dahlberg, who does not capitalize “rose” in his translation of the dream should do so once in his Introduction: “Through the Old Woman, the Lover gains access to Fair Welcoming, but is again repulsed by Resistance when he stretches his hand toward the Rose” (*Romance* 18). In summarizing Guillaume’s progress with the rosebud, which he describes as “the relations of the Lover and his Lady” (4), Strohm also intersperses a capitalized rose with non-capitalized rosebuds. While the Lover encounters and desires a rosebud, he “succeeded in kissing the Rose” (4). Later in the same article Strohm refers again to the kissing episode; this time, “the Lover succeeds in kissing the rosebud” (6). The logic behind this discrepancy is, it seems, rhetorical. By this point in his argument Strohm has equated the Lover’s rosebud with the Narrator’s “Rose,” thus requiring the dream beloved to be designated by lower-case letters and called “rosebud” rather than “Rose” as it was earlier. Kelly predominantly uses “Rose,” but nonetheless “the rose” or “the rosebud” does appear in his study of the poem. For example, he writes: “Before Faux Semblant joins Love’s ranks, Amant is prepared to die in possessing the rose; . . . The rose(bush) itself has no doubt been returned to by others, despite Amant’s fatuous trust in Rose’s fidelity” (43). It seems that the Lover desires Rose’s rose(bush). He later specifies, however, that the rosebush signifies the young woman Rose herself. “Rose” and “the rose” are interchangeable in Kelly’s theorization of a complex represented by “the female Rose” (115), and “a female complex deployed around the rose” (115). Tuve admires the ambiguity of “Jean de Meun’s own Rose” (239), alongside the schemes of the author to suggest “his own more sophisticated interpretations of the rose” (254). This inconsistent capitalization of “rose” serves to crystallize the connection between rosebud and lady; it also serves to posit, validate, and harmonize literal and abstract levels of meaning. Such postulations and selective mergings of allegorical levels leads to a serious manipulation of the signficatory trajectories, and hence sexual configurations, of the rosebud. Tuve remarks: “I suppose it is not necessary to underline the fact that the images do not equate with the concepts spoken of (if this were so, no image would be needed)” (21), yet this seems to be what has occurred. The ambiguity of Jean’s “own Rose” that Tuve admires derives not from the inherently complex mechanism of the symbol itself but from “the shifting lights of first one character’s conception of her, then another” (239). Critics do theorize the rosebud as signifying more than one thing yet invariably curtail its incongruities by equating it with “Rose,” the

indispensable female beloved who, in “her” capacity as an overarching principle, resolves the signifying anomalies of the variable bud.

This abstraction “Rose” is then merged with the lady to whom the Narrator dedicates his poem. The Narrator’s intended recipient is not, however, named Rose; rather, “C’est celle qui tant a de pris / Et tant est digne d’estre amee / Qu’elle doit estre rose clamee” [42-44: “It is she who is so precious and so worthy to be loved that she should be called Rose” (31)]. While, like Dahlberg does in his English translation, some editors of the Old French poem capitalize “Rose” here, some do not. The early editors Langlois and Lecoy do, while the later ones Poirion and Strubel do not. Nor does Strubel transform “rose” to “Rose” in his modern French translation of the poem. He does, however, place the word in quotation marks: “C’est celle qui a tant de prix et qui est à ce point digne d’être aimée, qu’on doit l’appeler ‘rose’” (45). What does this imply? Might the quotation marks signify that “rose” operates here as a generic term for the object of the Narrator’s affections, rather than as a direct reference? Or is Strubel forcing a connection between the Lover’s dream rose and the Narrator’s beloved? About “rose” Strubel declares:

Le dédicace des vers 40 à 44 pose la comparaison, banale, qui sert de matrice au texte tout entier (la femme aimée et pleine de qualités = la rose) mais cette assimilation simpliste ne peut pas expliquer le jeu complexe des métaphores dont elle est le prétexte et le support (l’objet du désir se fragmentera en objets et en figures de toutes sortes: rosiers, boutons, personnifications de dispositions de la dame . . .). (Introduction 45)

The dedication of lines 40 to 44 poses the banal comparison that serves as the matrix of the entire text (the woman loved and full of qualities = the rose) but this simplistic assimilation cannot explain the complex play of metaphors of which it is the pretext and support (the object of desire will fragment itself into objects and figures of all types: rosebushes, buds, personifications of the dispositions of the lady . . .).

Strubel asserts that the dedication of the poem to a lady “worthy to be called rose” establishes a correlation that determines the meaning of the rosebud in the dream that follows. Strubel’s “rose” highlights an association between the Narrator’s beloved and the rosebud of the dream. Strohm also links the two roses (5), and hence the characters of the Lover and the Narrator (7). Utti places a great deal of emphasis on the dynamic of the relationship in Guillaume between the female dedicatee of the poem and the rose. While Utti insists that “The rose is no Lady, no woman” (53), merely the object upon which the Lover vents his passion, the Lady is nonetheless an integral component of the dream and “understandable to us

(in part) thanks to her metaphorical association with the flower” (53). The Narrator’s Rose cannot be reduced to the Lover’s rose, although the dream “predicts and informs” (45) her. While Utti distinguishes between the extra-dream and the dream rose, the point of his doing so is not to upset the gendered ethos of the poem, but to consolidate it as a celebration of heterosexual love by extrapolating on the significance of the dream from the framing, and ultimately successful, romance of the Narrator and Rose.

It must be noted, however, that the correspondence between the extra-dream and dream rose is not a direct one. The Narrator says that his beloved “should be” called rose, which means that she is not called “Rose.” The dedication presents us with “rose” as a feminized love-object, not a woman. While critics attempt to fix the dream rosebud as the Lover’s lady by casting the “rose” to which the romance is directed as a proper name, the text circumvents this totalizing association by precisely not *equating* “rose” with the Narrator’s beloved. The rose figures the beloved; it *is* not the beloved. Because the relation between rose and beloved is one of likeness and not equation, it is not absolute. Other correspondences may emerge. Since “rose” designates a concept in the dedication and not a specific person, the signficatory potential of the word changes as it changes context. Kelly notes this when he insists that “the Rose obviously cannot have the same signification when it is plucked, sniffed, kissed, or walled up” (*Medieval Imagination* 25). A single interpretation of the rosebud is neither required nor sensible. He notes that “semantic adaptation in conformity with usage, context, or intention” should inform our explanations of it (*Medieval Imagination* 25). It strikes me, however, that it is the meaning of the rosebud that remains the same in spite of “usage,” and in conformity to a fixed exegetical schema. It is not the semantics of the rosebud that undergo adaptation, but its “usage, context, or intention.” When solicited by the Narrator in the pre-dream introduction, “rose” figures the female beloved to whom he specifically refers as “she.” However, once inside the dream, the status of the word “rose” shifts. Consequently, its pronoun designations also change. In the English language “rose” goes from being “she” to “it,” and in the French it is both *elle* or *il* in accordance with its referring to either *la rose* or *le bouton*. The object is indeterminately gendered both grammatically and figuratively in a way that the female recipient of the poem is not. As a native English speaker I do realize, as Fleming notes with exasperation, that “Grammatical gender . . . need predicate no psychological implications” (45). However, I also think that the equation and substitution of “she” with “it” demands investigation. If it is to be argued that the sex of what are considered manifestations of the lady in terms of the poem’s personifications are not determining factors of her sex, how can it be argued that a plant be decisively female or feminine? How does the “it” become a “she”? It is my contention that the figure of the rosebud does not lend itself to “=”; this is

because it repeatedly transgresses the conventions of the femininity to which it is automatically relegated.

Part of how and why the rosebud is feminized springs from its association with the “actual” lady whose favour the Narrator hopes to win. The reality of this lady is, however, suspect. With even less substantiality than the rosebud itself, consigned to one half of the framing narrative in a dedication for which she is not even present, this lady serves as the merest pretence for the Narrator to display himself as both writer and celebrity of the romance. That the Narrator’s beloved is little more than a fiction herself is suggested by her both physical and conceptual absence. Her function as a flimsy pretext becomes apparent when she is not alluded to again at the end of the romance, or indeed by Jean at all. Both “roses” in the poem represent women only in so far as each is what Roberta Krueger terms a “construct of masculine thought that generates *male* discourse” (131). Neither the rose-worthy lady nor the desired bud serves as solid ground on which to base a reading of the other. The poem’s intended recipient cannot secure the representational status of the bud as feminine because her questionable reality undermines her authority to do so. While this extra-dream reference may serve to feminize the rose, it is only one tangential aspect of the rosebud’s make up. Comparing one’s beloved to a rose does not endorse the distortion of the allegory that “Rose” enacts.

Strubel’s grammar also presents the equation of rosebud and woman as a done deal, unquestionably the case before the narration of the dream begins. Rather than attend to how the rosebud is represented within the dream, Strubel bases his reading of it on a reference by the Narrator to a female beloved who exists outside the dream, and takes her as the founding term for an object replete with situational incongruities and symbolic indeterminacies. Is it entirely irrelevant that two of the central personifications that Strubel considers “dispositions de la dame” are male? And does this not inaugurate a different dynamic of gender, desire, and subjectivity than that based on the usual paradigm of male subject/female object? He assumes that the personifications of the allegory serve to reveal the character of the lady, yet ignores the implications of the masculinity and variability of those personifications most closely associated with her, namely Fair Welcoming and Resistance. They constitute the interpretative matrix of the rosebud and, as much as any extra-dream rose, determine how it is to be read. Although the object of desire within and the desired recipient beyond the dream are designated by the same word, the uneasy correspondence between the rosebud and the feminine produces a discrepancy that unsettles this totalizing assimilation of rosebud to “rose”/recipient.

Most critics who do make a given name of the rose in English by capitalizing it retain the “the.” This wavering between female name and flower name enables critics to insinuate a reading of the poem that it does not sanction, namely that the rose is an emblem, to use Zumthor’s term, of the lady and her sex.

A few critics drop the “the” and more blatantly present the rose as a character in “her” own right. Discussions of “Rose” often lead to readings that extend beyond the text and overdetermine what goes on within it. For instance, Utti forecasts the outcome of the affair: “If God grants that she accept his gift to her of his poem-dream-experience, they, in consequence, as conjoined couple, will achieve completeness as themselves *in their relationship to, and with, one another*” (45). While not to the same extent, Kelly too is interested in the future of the young lovers. He suggests that the stories of love gone wrong in the speeches of Reason, Friend, the Old Woman, and Nature are to be read as foreboding prefigurations of “Amant’s and Rose’s post-coital life” (124). Throughout his argument Kelly attempts to negotiate the masculinist ethos of the poem by animating the rosebud and providing it with a subjectivity as “Rose.” In effect what Kelly does is create a character called “Rose,” and then adapt the romance to accommodate “her.” The primacy of Rose as a character over the rosebud as a symbol appears early in his summary of the plot: “The Lover asks for Rose, that is, the rose, but she rebuffs him” (33). Kelly flips the process of interpretation around. Rather than begin with a rosebud and explore its representative capabilities, Kelly starts off with a female character, Rose, and finds representations of “her” self and body in a multitude of textual images, of which the rosebud is only one. Unlike many other critics, Kelly does not consider Jean’s treatment of the rose to be a crude diminishment; the rose becomes something more than a mere botanical entity “subject to various implicit allegorical readings” (106), and Rose more than a passive complex:

In Jean, however, the rose quickly reduces to a single, more or less obvious object and meaning, female genitalia as stimulus for male orgasm. Rose herself in the end is likened to a rosebush, suggesting that rose in the sense of virginity no longer obtains (Rose’s virginity, signalled by the hymen, is represented allegorically by a defensive barrier, v. 21577-612). And the rose allegory proliferates. Each rose on the rosebush is a potential source of carnal pleasure. But Rose also gathers about herself a “fictional person,” thus offering a suitable image for Amant’s own person in the literal plot. Her body emerges as the great statue surmounting Jealousy’s castle just after the Pygmalion digression. And like Pygmalion’s statue, it comes to life, that is, it is aroused by Venus. The final scene shows Amant and Rose talking, touching, kissing, and having intercourse. (106)

There are many details in this description of “Rose” and “the rose” that rely on an assumption of a definitive allegorical meaning behind the literal narrative. It sounds as though Kelly begins with the figurative level more or less worked out,

and embellishes the literal to confirm it. That an explicit idea overrides Kelly's reading of the narrative content is perceptible in his use of "Rose" as a means to assemble the diversity of images that constitute "her." For Kelly, Rose and the rose are at the same time separable, interchangeable, and complimentary phenomena, with Rose becoming more human as the object-rose reduces to her sex. Kelly's Rose serves to make sense of a whole complex of imagery: she is the rosebush, the featured rose her vagina, the other roses other carnal delights, Fair Welcoming her receptive mode, masculine personifications her masculine attributes, and feminine ones her feminine ones. The above is rendered problematic in my mind by there being only one rosebud to which the Lover attends, there being no "Rose" in the dream at all, the predominance of "her" masculine attributes, and the confounding profusion of metaphoric language that constitutes the final scene.

Kelly anthropomorphizes the "rose allegory" in ways that surpass the bounds of the text. Gathering up the bud, the rose, Fair Welcoming, the statue, the relics, the sanctuary, the castle, and the female dedicatee of the poem all under the auspices of "Rose" or "the Rose" simplifies the complexities of the polymorphous rosebud image and the disruptive configurations to which it gives rise. Fabricating a character called Rose is one method of standardizing the text. As a representative of the female beloved, "she" serves to feminize, embody, and arrange the abundant perplexities of the romance into understandable features of the Lover's quest. "Rose's" existence enables the confusing accounts of the Lover's behaviour towards a plant to be rendered heterosexual and hence intelligible. Kelly's reading of the final scene in which the Lover inserts his staff into the aperture, seizes the rosebud in his hands, shakes and examines it, scatters and mingles some seeds on it, and finally cuts it, as the Lover and Rose "talking, touching, kissing, and having intercourse" is too tidy an interpretation of what are highly suggestive, it is true, but nonetheless highly obscure, gestures.

Kelly validates this procedure of assimilating rose to Rose via the allegorical outgrowth of the tale of Renart: "The *Renart* cycle conflated the irascible human named Renart with the fox, or *goupil* in Old French, so that the proper noun became synonymous with the deceitful fox. Similarly, we may refer to Amant and Rose, each with his and her attributes, attendant personifications, and plot" (36). Kelly argues that over time the term "Renart" has come to signify the deceitful fox. Just so, the rosebud has come to signify the young woman. I do not disagree with this, but wonder if a non-deceitful fox would still be labelled a Renart. Kelly notes that the extension of the name Renart to all deceitful fox-like individuals does not transpire through a simple shifting between human and animal terminology, but the connection of each to the notion of deception. The image does not work through mere substitution. Rather, the "subordination of both to the abstract *senefiance* of what is going on keeps order in the Image; reference is not from human to animal, and vice versa, but from both to their

common abstract correlative” (*Medieval* 41). Renart substitutes for the fox and vice versa because both “emanate” from the idea of deceit (*Medieval* 40). What “common abstract correlative” informs both young women and roses? Does it, whatever it is – beauty, transience, love, femininity, shape, heterosexual desire, perhaps – inform the rose of the *Rose*? Might the poem not skew this very connection of the rosebud to the “abstract correlative,” and hence to woman by, among other things, attributing non-feminine traits to it? My argument is that the story itself has to support a characterization of the fox as deceitful for its appellation as Renart to signify in the usual way, just as the *Rose* has to construct the rosebud as iconic feminine and female beloved for it to be fixed as such.

Kelly relies on an example of transference from another text to support his conflation of rose/Rose/woman in this one. Such a privileging of extratextual material leads to a subversion of the allegory’s integrity by enabling a conceptualization of the rosebud as, or as a feature of, “Rose” rather than a symbol with extensive signifying power in its own right. It parcels up the polysemantic play of the allegory into distinct levels of meaning. I have already cited Patterson but would like to recall his critique of interpretations which allowed “lines of explanatory force to run vertically, as it were, from the text back into the past that was to account for it,” the effect of which is to devalue the “possibility of lateral explanation in terms of function within the text itself” (*Negotiating* 16). In the case of Chaucer studies this has led to his poems being “seen as effects to be explained by reference to their extratextual causes” (16). Patterson points out that the resulting explanations were then considered “all the more powerful just because the causes *were* extratextual and therefore thought to be particularly objective in comparison to internal or subjective interpretations” (16). The logic that supports the designation of the rosebud as femininity, a young woman, or her genitalia is validated through recourse to tradition and the designs of other literary works. Whether the rosebud figures a woman, or some piece of her, whether it is more complicatedly a feminized object of desire, or an entirely ambiguous one, is an irrelevant question because the dynamics and discrepancies of the rosebud as it appears in the text of the *Rose* itself play no significant part in the designation of its meaning. Because the rose is customarily read as woman/vagina/femininity, its being read as such here is deemed objective and incontestable. Discordances in the rosebud-woman equation within the romance are disregarded since the textual elements of the rosebud’s constitution have little to do with how it signifies or what it means.

Although critics refer to a deflowered and potentially impregnated “rose,” the Narrator has gone back to calling it a “bud” for this bewildering final scene. Not taking account of this deliberate switch in terminology and continuing to refer to it as a “rose” here endorses a reading of the object that the Lover finally attains as something more maturely feminine. At one point Dahlberg calls the rosebud a “rosebush”: “As a result, I so mixed the seeds that they could hardly be separated;

and thus I made the whole tender rosebush widen and lengthen” (353). The line in Langlois’s Old French edition reads:

Si fis lors si meller les graines
 Qu’eus se desmellassent a peines,
 Si que tout le boutonnet tendre
 En fis eslargir e estendre. (21727-30)

It is *boutonnet* (21729), or “little bud,” in Poirion’s 1974 edition as well. In his recent, 1992, modern French edition of the poem Strubel translates Lecoy’s *boutonnet* (21699) as *petit bouton* (1120).¹⁷ What is the effect of Dahlberg’s “rosebush”? As with “rose,” translating *boutonnet* as “rosebush” overrides its ambivalent status as a bud. While “rosebush” is still a masculine noun, it does not carry the same phallic weight as “bud.” “Rosebush” may be more easily envisioned as the pubic area of the woman the rose has been made to represent. Substituting “rosebush” or “rose” for “bud” also effaces its littleness, and consequently its fluctuating size. It is significant that the rosebud does not “progress” along with the poem, does not “mature” from “maiden bud” to “womanly rose.” Rather, it goes from being a “bud” (*boton* 1684), to a “little rose” (*rosete* 1752), a “rose” (*rose* 2967), a slightly “enlarged” rose (*engroissie* 3355-56), a “little flower” (*florete* 9999), a “new rose” (*rose nouvele* 10056), back to a “bud” (*bouton* 21676), and back to a little bud (*boutonnet* 21729).¹⁸ By the final scene it has contracted to the point of being reinstated as the virginal, phallic bud.

This fluctuation in the size of the rosebud is nonetheless bounded by a more general movement from bud to rose to bud. If we read its re-articulation as a “rose” in the final lines of the romance as nothing more than a token repetition of the God of Love’s prescriptive guidelines, it becomes apparent that Jean has arranged the figure of the rosebud such that its end recalls its beginning. When beheld schematically, the structuration of the rosebud image emerges as a very simple form of *emboîtement*. Poirion was the first to identify and map this rhetorical structure of interlocking boxes in the discourse of Friend (*Le Roman* 125). Patterson, taking up Poirion’s suggestion that the discourse of Nature is configured in the same way, constructs a similar map for it, then outlines the pattern as it unfolds in the speech of the Old Woman (“For the Wyves love” 670-73). He expands upon Poirion’s conclusions that Jean employs this rhetorical structure in an attempt to organize his disparate materials, to suggest why Jean chooses this particular form:

¹⁷ The manuscript from which Strubel is working, BN fr. 378, ends at 21677, before the passage in question. He bases the remainder of his translation on Lecoy’s edition.

¹⁸ These lines are taken from Strubel’s edition, except the final one, which is from Poirion’s.

As well as its subordinating function, this *emboîtement* structure has a figurative intention. It imitates the poem's climactic action, the gradual exfoliation of the rose that the final lines of the poem so graphically and embarrassingly describe. La Vieille's verbal dilation upon her themes, in other words, is organized so as to match the rose's floral dilation. This means that her discourse is erotic in the perhaps the most immediate way possible. . . . it reminds him of his rose at the very moment that it defers the rose. . . . In a larger sense he manages to translate the central Ovidian principle of amorous delay into stylistic terms, and to show with impressive specificity how rhetorical structure can bear erotic value. (671)

Patterson's argument here rests on a view of the final scene as a portrayal of the rose's dilation. The diagram of interlocking boxes with which Patterson accompanies his argument illustrates this notion of floral expansion. He pictures the discourse of the Old Woman as a flower by having the boxes cup one another such that they convey a form that gradually widens and opens. Jean, however, has very deliberately reintroduced the bud for this final scene, and the image that comes to mind of a swelling bud may be quite different from that suggested by the successive openings of Patterson's diagram. The figurative impact of the *emboîtement* structure is not as straightforward as Patterson makes it out to be, for the action of the final scene does not imitate the mechanics of the Old Woman's speech. Not only does the Lover's climactic encounter not feature a rose, but the image of the object of desire has reverted from flower back to bud, and hence traced a path from dilation to closure rather than the other way around. If by "exfoliation" Patterson means the Lover's plucking of the rose and its leaf, his choice to label it thus is somewhat misleading. "Exfoliation" suggests a systematic removal of the leaves and petals of the rose; it evokes labial layers. The Narrator has no interest in exfoliation, and his statement that Fair Welcoming "did not forbid me to pluck the rosebush and branches, the flower and the leaf" (353) is mere synopsis. The *emboîtement* structure of the rosebud itself conveys a sense of smallness, and the corresponding meanness of the Narrator's desires. As Tuve says of the "exceedingly narrow" image of the rosebud, "there is very little 'love' in it" (279). A return to the rosebud recalls the phallic semblance and narcissistic context of its first appearance, and rather than a dilation of an Other/lady/rose, we are presented in the final scene with a return to the same/self/bud. While an image of floral dilation may be apt for the erotic function and expansive character of the Old Woman, it does not fit that of the Narrator-Lover. The smallness of the bud alongside the mere physicality of his interest in it suggests both the self-serving nature of his desire and the miserliness of its fulfilment.

Chapter 2

The Vagaries of Plucking: Gender and Subject Formation

i) Subjectivity in courtly love romance

The extent of Jean's figurative description of a metaphoric act, namely the Lover's plucking of the rosebud, is unquestionably unique, a fitting finale to an exceedingly anomalous work. In terms of its construction, however, the poem progresses through a dynamic of repetition. Repetition is a significant structuring principle both between and within the work of Guillaume and Jean whereby the resultant interplay of sameness and difference generates meaning around reiterated episodes or discourses. Per Nykrog accounts for Jean's delay in announcing his take-over as writer of the *Rose* in terms of the sameness between his work and that of Guillaume up to this point. Nykrog observes that from the discourse of Lady Reason to the God of Love's speech, Jean basically retells part of Guillaume's tale:

au niveau de l'action, de l'histoire racontée, ces 6500 premiers vers par Jean constituent essentiellement une répétition et une expansion de ce que Guillaume avait déjà raconté en 80 vers (2955-3134), l'Amant écoutant les avis de Raison et ensuite, après avoir refusé la résignation qu'elle recommande, les encouragements donnés par Ami. (9)

at the level of action, of the recounted story, these first 6500 lines by Jean constitute essentially a repetition and an expansion of that which Guillaume had already recounted in 80 verses (2955-3134), the Lover listening to the advice of Reason and afterwards, after having refused the resignation that she recommends, the encouragements given by Friend.

Jean does not further the Lover's progress by bringing him any closer to the rosebud. The Lover's meeting with Wealth merely corroborates the hardships of Friend on the path of Give-Too-Much, while his run-in with the God of Love begins with a reiteration of his responses to Lady Reason and ends with a recitation of the God of Love's commands. Lewis notes this also, but attributes it to his "perfunctory and confused" treatment of the text: "Thus three of his episodes – the descent of Reason, the reassurances of Friend, and the coming of Venus – merely repeat episodes in his original" (140).¹ Jean launches into his

¹ Regalado also observes Jean's repetition of Guillaume's work up to the point of the God of Love's speech, noting that he also "recapitulates it in a highly reduced form in Genius's discourse" (101-02). She alleges that by doing so "Jean practices the reading to which he aims to lead the future reader" (101).

continuation of the *Rose* with a retelling of previous events that amounts to more than mere repetition, however. The manner of his beginning forecasts the nature of the linkage between his work and that of Guillaume. A dynamic of repetition permeates Jean's text. It not only shapes a number of the text's speeches through the structural ingenuity of *emboîtement*, but also intimates resemblances that contravene a politics of opposition. The most radical resemblance in the romance stems from the play of repetition that underlies the Lover's attachment to the rosebud. Rather than difference, the mechanism that ostensibly determines gender identity and relations, the relationship between the Lover and the bud is premised upon what Irigaray argues is an economy of sameness. The Lover-rosebud affinity upsets the dynamic of gender difference upon which the formation of the Lover as hero and subject depends. Rather than a process of moral and social development, the identity of the Narrator-Lover undergoes a course of dissolution and marginalization. By the end of the romance his status as a subject is as indeterminate as the rosebud's purport as an object.

Accompanying this subversion of the conceptual systems of gender and identity is a confusion of temporal ones. What repeats what? Repetition is neither exact in the *Rose*, nor its order clear. While the discourses of misogyny and sexual aggression that inform masculine identity in the poem precede the Narrator's articulation and the Lover's imitation of them, the order of repetition that generates the resemblance between the Lover and the rosebud cannot be so sequentially arranged. I do not wish to suggest that the formation of gender identity is a simplistic imitation of appropriate acts and discourses, a misconception of her argument that Butler has striven to correct, but that while models sanctioned as ideal and originary enjoin a performance of gender identity that the Narrator-Lover attempts to reproduce, the Lover-rosebud relationship undermines a hierarchy of temporal ordering upon which the oppositionality and essentializing of gender depends. An order of repetition cannot be fixed for the Lover-rosebud bond. It is unclear whether the rosebud resembles the Lover, or the Lover the rosebud. Is the insignificance of the rosebud an illustration of the Lover's own irrelevance, or might the marginalization of the Lover be a foregone conclusion traceable to the object-status of the bud? I posit that puzzling this out is an exercise in futility. The determination of original and copy, of what repeats what in the *Rose*, is irresolvable. Repetition in Jean is not exact, but covert and askew. Rather than precise copies, his continuation deals in distortions by proffering versions of already-narrated events, or variants of the same images. The Lover and the rosebud are not only versions of one another, each is a distortion of the gender that he and it ostensibly embodies. At the same time that they represent exaggerations of masculinity and femininity, the Lover and the bud subvert tenets of gender difference through an underlying resemblance. On the one hand the Lover enacts a version of masculinity his over-dramatization of which serves to deride both his particular efforts and the collective discourses that

inform them. On the other, the increasing marginalization of the Lover throughout Jean renders him as silent, passive, and as much a pretext for the self-articulations of superior others, as the bud.

This chapter is devoted to an examination of how repetition in the *Rose* both orders and disorders the ideals of masculine subjectivity embodied by the Lover and articulated by the Narrator. Since the upcoming discussion draws on the work of Irigaray and Butler especially, I would like to consider a criticism about the continued presence of psychoanalytic theory in medieval studies raised recently by Patterson.² Patterson takes issue with medievalists who theorize fictional characters according to what he considers outdated, erroneous, and inappropriate Freudian models of human behaviour. Underlying his critique is a mistrust of the universalist and absolutist claims of psychoanalysis, including Lacanian and post-Lacanian revisions of Freud. He also rejects literary engagements with psychoanalytic criticism on a hermeneutic level since fictional characters cannot add their own input as a corrective to the analyst's interpretation. I do not disagree with Patterson's criticisms, but would like to position myself in relation to them. By invoking the theories of Irigaray and Butler I do not seek to provide a reasoning for the Lover's behaviour. Rather, I wish to investigate two things: how a character that many argue is representative of masculine subjectivity is shaped by, and shapes himself in, language; and how the interaction of two voices that ostensibly represent the same subject complicates to the point of jeopardizing its articulation of masculinity. Nor do I wish to make totalizing claims about this bewildering voice. The subjectivity that the Narrator-Lover represents is neither inevitable nor exhaustive, as the romance's mockery of it reveals. My aim is not to psychoanalyze the Narrator-Lover, but to examine the impact of the Narrator's increased reliance on sexually figurative language to represent himself as the Lover, and to interrogate the text's attitude towards this representation.

By focusing on the text I do not seek to displace the authors, but to indicate that deducing authorial intent is not my express purpose; nor is reading the romance according to its courtly context, which seems to mean according to the general expectations of an audience posited as uniform and monolithic. As we possess only more or less official readings of the *Rose* as captured in the marginalia and illustrations of surviving manuscripts, who is to say how "uncourtly" readers construed the tale. Who is to say that the dissenting voices of the twentieth-century were not raised in the thirteenth? It may be that they were

²Patterson's discussion of the use of psychoanalytic theory in medieval literary studies may be found in his article "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies." Huot responds to Patterson's objections by agreeing with him and cautioning prudence, but asserts that "psychoanalytic theory offers a conceptual framework and a discourse about identity and subjectivity, desire and trauma, signification and interpretation: as such it can shed light on many aspects of both medieval and modern texts" ("Dangerous Embodiments" 407).

raised elsewhere than in the privileged arenas of manuscript production and ownership, and have thus left no record of their sounding. It may be that traces of irreverence occur in the marginalia of less refined manuscripts. For instance, what are we to make of the doodle of a reading monkey that accompanies Nature's discussion of mirrors and Aristotle in BNfr.12592? Or, as Gaunt points out, with a depiction of the Lover's kissing the rosebud as two youths in a close embrace (83)? It may be that since even twentieth-century audiences have not, for the most part, read the *Rose* along the lines that I propose, it is too much to envision a medieval audience doing so. Nevertheless, the reading that I offer is, if not entirely convincing to, at least intelligible to, a twentieth-century audience. The question is: would it have been at all intelligible to a medieval one. Would any medieval readers have engaged the text differently than recorded receptions of it lead us to believe? Are there any indications of a social and literary context interested in interrogating conventions of gender and identity? While a second romance featuring a like assembly of the *Rose*'s discursive irreconcilabilities is too much to expect, the existence of the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence* reveals that anxious and irresolvable uncertainties did infiltrate rigid categories of gender identity.³ According to Joan Cadden, medieval discourses on sex, even those that enjoyed some authority as medical and philosophical doctrines, were "neither monolithic nor all-encompassing" (163). She remarks that in fact one of the effects of the strictly binaric system of sex difference in the middle ages was a preclusion of clear distinctions surrounding behaviours that did not qualify as either masculine or feminine (212). The indeterminacy that proceeds from academic discourses suggests that resistance is not the distinct province of less official narratives. While I sympathize with Fleming's project of countering readings of the *Rose* as uncomplicatedly celebratory of heterosexual intercourse and male desire, I question his assertion that Jean's views on sex and love were "predictably medieval" (167). Where else might critical, atypical writings on any topic emerge except from thinkers associated with the conservative institutions of university and church? I do not wish to equate education with subversion here, not at all, but to suggest that it is as likely that medieval intellectuals criticized as endorsed the predictable ideas of their age.

I begin my investigation of repetition as it pertains to the Lover and the rosebud with a discussion of subjectivity before moving onto the somewhat frustrating contemplation of the identity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover protagonist as presented first by Guillaume and again by Jean. I will then detour

³ *Le Roman de Silence* is the story of a girl named Silence who is raised as a boy. Upon turning twelve Nature and Nurture battle for power over her. Nurture wins and Silence grows up to be a model knight and courtier. Silence is eventually exposed as female. References throughout the text to Silence as predominantly "he," yet as "it" or "she" on occasion, make Silence's gender a matter of uncertainty and contention.

into a consideration of the rosebud as a mirroring surface, for reading the bud as a reflection of the Lover is, I think, useful for rethinking the relationship between the two as one of repetition. I will conclude with an investigation of the dynamic of repetition as it works to structure, and de-structure, processes of gender and identity formation. While the Narrator attempts to reinforce his status as an embodiment of masculine subjectivity through the actions of his dream-self, his overemphatic description of the Lover's triumph jeopardizes his standing as an exemplary masculine subject. Since the authority of gender stems from its status as natural, the great effort it requires to substantiate the Lover's masculinity in fact undermines it. An ambiguity pervades, not only the speaking voice as it combines the perspectives of the Narrator and Lover, but the very performance of masculinity that the Narrator has the Lover deliver.

While the specifics of the discourse have changed, Western culture has and continues to consecrate the masculine subject as an embodiment of the values that constitute its morality. The ideals of coherence, stability, and unity that inform Western notions of subjectivity are inherently masculine traits. In its reliance on the familiar pattern of courtly romance in which a male hero falls in love with and pursues a peripheral female beloved, the *Rose* may appear to validate the most rudimentary conventions of gender identity and sexual relations. The rosebud seems to be little more than a typical feminine Other, the point of whose minuscule presence is to facilitate the self-representation of the poem's speaking subject. The *Rose* may be read, has predominantly been read, as a fulfilment of this patriarchal set-up that informs the discursive economy of the West. Courtly romance features predominantly male protagonists whose encounters with female characters provoke an emergence of the self-referential masculine anxieties and desires that drive the narrative. While there are some notable exceptions, medieval romance is chiefly interested in the moral dilemmas of its central male characters. As stimulants for performances of masculine misconduct and gallantry, the women of courtly romance are what Krueger calls a "pretext" (188) or "catalyst" (192), and Kathryn Gravdal an "empty sign that can be filled with the reflection of a masculine hegemony on itself" (12). These reviews of the feminine provoke further questions when asked of the *Rose*. Does the rosebud simply reflect masculine hegemony? Might rethinking reflection as copy explain the Lover's diminishment as a character? Does the Lover himself become the needed "empty sign" and "reflection of a masculine hegemony" in the *Rose*? If so, how reassuring is this "sign"?

The move to theorize notions of subjectivity in a medieval work raises a number of issues. While we cannot assume that identity was conceptualized in the thirteenth century as it is in the twentieth, the durability of many of the features of medieval romance attests to a continuity between the stories of then and now. For instance, the continued predominance of masculinity as the standard mode of subjectivity with its commensurate reduction of the feminine into an

instrument of phallic self-representation accords with prevalent medieval convictions of gender and identity. Likewise, while thirteenth-century notions of identity may rest on different assumptions than twentieth-century ones, interest in the subject, in the occurrence of the self in the world, permeates medieval romance. Patterson, for one, takes issue with those who ascribe the problematics of identity to the sophistication of the Renaissance. He counters that: “In fact, the antagonism between the desires of the individual and the demands of society provided one of the great topics for literary exploration throughout the Middle Ages” (*Chaucer* 8). Patterson argues that medieval notions of selfhood comprise a dialectic between an inner sense of self, separated from both itself and its divine source, and an exterior world responsible for this alienation, and cites medieval anthropology as locating this idea of selfhood in desire (8). While the terms may be different, and the framework more secular than religious, a belief in an inner sense of self, or the self as a pre-discursive interiority, often compromised by its engagements with the outside world, premises much current thinking on identity. Zink asserts that a concern with the subject characterizes medieval romance. Indeed, “le Moyen Age est l’époque de la subjectivité” (10: the Middle Ages is the epoch of subjectivity). He defines this subjectivity as “ce qui marque le texte comme le point de vue d’une conscience,” (8: that which marks the text as the point of view of a consciousness), and identifies language as constitutive of it. In her study of the *Rose* itself Kay locates subjectivity in the first-person speaker, defining it as “the position of the first person in language, or in a particular discourse, and the perspective which it offers” (*Romance* 44). Perspective in the *Rose* undergoes two radical shifts that confound the subject position of the speaking voice. While it is often the case that the perspective of the hero changes as he struggles, learns, and matures, the basics of his subjectivity remain intact. His outlook may fluctuate, but the subject position of the protagonist is generally continuous and consistent throughout the course of his moral development. I am not suggesting that the heroes of medieval romance are uncomplicated formations. They, too, are full of fissures that problematize the desired wholeness of the masculine subject. What I am suggesting is that the composite Narrator-Dreamer-Lover protagonist of the *Rose* represents these fissures to an extraordinary, and ultimately irresolvable, degree. As the *Rose* explores the moral vicissitudes of the Lover, the voices of him and the Narrator – whose relationship is a tricky business from the get-go – become increasingly difficult to differentiate. An unanticipated textual take-over then obfuscates the identities of the two altogether, after which point a highly detached and disembodied Narrator seems to bully the Lover out of the way for the remainder of the romance.

Inseparable from a critical study of subjectivity is a theory of gender. The centrality of language to subjectivity conjoins with an authority to speak that is decidedly masculine, making subjectivity, in courtly romance as elsewhere, an overwhelmingly masculine construct. Thus Kay outlines the gendered mind/body

divide that epitomizes the *Rose*'s central love relationship in Guillaume; the male speaker distinguishes himself from the muteness of bud which "just smells and grows a little fatter" ("Women's Body" 213). While masculinity parades as the voice of subjectivity in the Lover and Narrator, it may be argued that Jean's Old Woman is the one embodiment of feminine subjectivity in the *Rose* that, as Kay points out, dispels "the easy assumption that women are *not* knowing and desiring subjects" (*Romance* 47). By both verifying and undermining misogynist vilifications of women the Old Woman counters a prevailing neglect of the female voice, which the Narrator endeavours to reinstate by immediately disparaging both it and her. Besides being a desiring female, the Old Woman also disturbs patriarchal authority by offsetting conventions of sexual difference. The stormy details of her last affair suggest that gendered behaviour is not a matter of sex so much as desire and economics. While she refutes ideologies that derive from and legislate an opposition of masculine and feminine, the efficacy of her voice suffers from her status as a peripheral figure whose discounted words come to us second-hand, through Fair Welcoming and then the Narrator-Lover. The other potential representative of female desire, Venus, is severely compromised by not only what Kay observes is her marginality and status as a force of nature rather than language (45-46), but, as I have argued above, her potent links to male, which far outweigh her cursory associations with female, desire. The integrity of these two female characters is further displaced by what both Kay and Patterson observe is the subtle, yet sound, dismissal of their words.⁴ It does not necessarily follow that readers will so readily ignore what the Old Woman and Venus have to say, but it is certain that the Narrator does. The question then arises of how we are to conceive of and how much credit we are willing to grant the narrative voice.

Accompanying a marginal and problematic feminine subjectivity is a grandiose, and no less problematic, masculine one. While extensive, this narrative of the masculine subject is neither as straightforward nor as masterful as it would have us believe. Identities, be they masculine or feminine, are "unstable, shifting sites" because, as Krueger notes, identity is the locale where "multiple forces of class, race, and individual psychosexual history converge" (15). While it is not possible to determine these "multiple forces" in the case of the Narrator-Lover, the identity of the speaking voice emerges as radically unstable nonetheless because it figures on too many planes the masculinity it is meant to repeat. If we regard performativity as the underlying mechanism of gender identity, the Lover may be

⁴ Kay observes that "the more Venus talks to Adonis, the less he wants to hear" ("Sexual knowledge" 84-85), while Patterson remarks the textual mechanics responsible for a discrediting of the Old Woman's words: "her words of feminine wisdom are mediated to the lover by a masculine Bel Acueil, who himself listens to her only after first deciding not to hear" ("For the Wyves love" 674).

said to over-perform his part. Butler's argument that gender is a regulatory practice comprised of a recognizable repetition of bodily codes (140) is played out by the Narrator in his laborious description of his journey to and plucking of the rosebud. As with Cadden's remarks on the indeterminacy that underlies academic discourses, a subversion of the signifying chain of gender results from the performative mandate of gender itself; the law that enjoins a correct performance of gender "spawns," says Butler, "unexpected permutations of itself" (93). Because gender is not a natural attribute but a set of acts, its artificiality renders it discontinuous and produces gaps that permit the emergence of alternative gender identities (*Bodies* 10). It is not my contention that the Lover performs masculinity any differently than he is required to do. This is precisely the point. It is by overdoing his gendered part that the Lover slips into a parody of it. The hyperbolic metaphoricity that constitutes the Narrator's description of his final triumph disrupts a smooth reception of it as copulation. In her work on the courtly lyric Kay argues that the irony coincident upon textual manifestations of hyperbole springs from its creation of "uncertainty about the degree to which its claims might or might not be upheld" (*Subjectivity* 17). The overly emphatic tenor of the Narrator's claims causes us to doubt their veracity, while the excessive figurality of his language leaves us unsure as to the exact nature of the activities that he describes. Both the Lover and the Narrator emerge as parodic instances of masculine self-representation. While critics have noted the insignificance of the Lover throughout Jean's continuation, the extent and implications of his displacement by not only the garrulous garden dwellers but the Narrator himself are yet to be considered.

ii) Destabilizing the narrative voice: the God of Love introduces the Lover to his army of barons

If another principle of subjectivity is its unity across both time and space, the Narrator-Lover does not get off to a good start. Guillaume complicates both the status of the Narrator and the Narrator's correspondence to his fictional dream self within the first fifty lines of the poem. The romance is an account of a dream that prefigures a similar and subsequent series of events, as well as being an anticipated venue for future conquest. As both a recollection of a dream and of succeeding events, and a hopeful forecasting of another affair, the romance situates the Narrator somewhat ambiguously in relation to itself and his own beloved. Has he finally won the favours of his lady and is he now recounting the dream he had about doing so in order to assist other young lovers with their various conquests? Is he still pursuing the same ungenerous woman after five years' time? Or is he between *amours*? Having concluded an affair five years ago that replicated the course of the dream, is he now hoping to succeed again by recounting that dream in the form of a romance, as Hult suggests when he argues the completeness of Guillaume's poem (*Self-Fulfilling* 136)? This uncertainty

surrounding the temporal situation of the Narrator permits Jean to undermine the status of the poem as a love token and dream by ending it with a seedy account of how the Lover possesses the rosebud, a scandalous disclosure which certainly spoils any hopes of the Narrator's doing the same.

The uncertain status of the narration as dream, gift, and romance accompanies an ambiguous positioning of the Narrator in relation to himself as Dreamer and Lover. Midway through the poem Jean will radically reproduce in the arena of subjectivity the fracturing that underwrites the temporal relationship of the Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover in Guillaume. Initially, however, the identity of the protagonist is confused by the Narrator's explanation of when the dream occurred relative to now, the moment of composition. The poem begins by outlining the linkage between the Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover in such a way that two configurations of it are possible:

Au vuintieme an de mon aage,
Ou point qu'amors prent le peage
Des joenes genz, couchier m'aloie
Une nuit si com je soloie,
Et me dormoie mout forment.
Si vi un songe en mon dormant
Qui mout fu biaux et mout me plot.
...
Avis m'estoit qu'il iere may
Il a ja bien .v. anz ou mais.
Qu'en may estoie ce sonjoie, (21-27, 45-47)

In the twentieth year of my life, at the time when Love exacts his tribute from young people, I lay down one night, as usual, and slept very soundly. During my sleep I saw a very beautiful and pleasing dream; . . .

I became aware that it was May, five years or more ago; I dreamed that I was filled with joy in May . . . (31)

It seems most logical to postulate that the Narrator is now twenty-five recalling a dream he had five years earlier at the age of twenty. As Zink points out, however, an ambiguity underlies the flow of these introductory lines that permits another calculation of the Narrator's age; it may be that he is now twenty years old and dreaming of a time five years or more ago, when he would have been about fifteen. Zink lays out the paradox thus: "Soit: j'avais l'impression que c'était le mois de mai d'il y a cinq ans ou davantage, si bien que, dans mon rêve, j'étais au mois de mai. Soit: j'avais l'impression (il y a bien de cela cinq ans ou davantage) que c'était le mois de mai, si bien que, dans mon rêve, j'étais en mai" (*La subjectivité* 128-29: Suppose: I had the impression that it was the month of May

five years or more ago, so that, in my dream, I was in the month of May. Suppose: I had the impression (that was a good five years or more ago) that it was the month of May, so that, in my dream, I was in May). In the first instance, the twenty-year old *I* dreams of himself in the month of May as he would have been five years or more ago, making him fifteen in the dream. In the second, which Zink notes is more plausible, the twenty-five year old *I* dreamed – oh, it was about five years or more ago now – about himself in the month of May, making him twenty in the dream (129). The ambiguity arises from the equivocal status of the *I* who becomes “aware that it was May, five years or more ago.” This is because the originary moment of the dream is unclear. Do the words, “I became aware that it was May, five years or more ago;” (31), mark the start of the dream? Or has the dream already started, having begun twenty lines earlier when the Narrator writes that he lies down to sleep? Does this *I* who “became aware” (31) speak from outside or inside the dream? Is the *I* here the Narrator or the Dreamer? If the *I* is the Narrator, situated outside of the dream, then the twenty-five year-old Narrator, five years ago now, when twenty, had a dream the action of which occurred in May. If the *I* is the twenty-year old Dreamer, then within the dream he becomes aware that it is May, five years or more ago (making him fifteen), and thus has a dream that takes place in May. The implication here is that no significant span of time separates the Narrator from the Dreamer, in which case it is five years that separates the Dreamer from the Lover. Despite the logic that deduces the Narrator to be twenty-five, another possibility always intervenes to create two feasible readings of the same passage. One cannot be entirely discounted in favour of the other. The poem also unsettles the situational fixities of inside/outside by muddling the Narrator’s relation to his dream. As the narrative passes from the introduction of the dream to the dream itself it becomes impossible to locate the speaking voice as being either inside or outside of it because there are two possible origins of the dream’s recital. It may begin with “During my sleep I saw a very beautiful and pleasing dream,” (31) or with the later line’s “I dreamed” (31). Of course, the prospect of two origins problematizes the notion of origin altogether by undermining the basis of its authority as unquestionably anterior. By blurring the dividing line between inside/outside and obscuring the originary moment of the dream narration, Guillaume inaugurates the *Rose* as an unfixable text.

Most readings of the poem place the Lover’s age at twenty and assume the five year gap that, as Emmanuèle Baumgartner notes, casts the Narrator’s voice as doubled (23). This doubling creates moments of ambiguity that Strubel observes is especially marked when the knowledgeable voice of the Narrator intrudes on the dream (*Le Roman* 30-31). Evelyn Vitz proceeds to complicate the protagonist even further by identifying another component of its persona. As well as Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover, the romance also encompasses a Real-life Hero (RH), he to whom all the events afterwards occurs (“The *I*” 54). This fourth facet of the *I*

further convolutes the identity of the speaking voice since “for any given event N has three sources of recall” (54). As well as these four perspectives, Vitz asks, is there a fifth? Is there an “implicit author”? (66) Vitz raises the issue of irony here, which he attributes to the author since the Narrator espouses the views of the Lover (66). While the voices of the Narrator and Lover do seem to combine in Guillaume, I wonder to what extent the Lover can be said to have any views discernible from those of the Narrator, or indeed any voice at all by the end of Jean, at which point the youthful deference of the Lover seems to have been entirely occluded by the coarse aggression of the Narrator.

The question of the authors’ detachment from their material determines the compass of the *Rose*’s irony. The ambiguity with which Guillaume surrounds the Narrator and his dream relies on a slight authorial distance that Jean magnifies to the point of radical separation. Midway through the *Rose* Jean introduces a fundamental incongruity into the identity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover protagonist. He emphasizes what in Guillaume were complicating quandaries into chaotic discontinuities by utterly confounding the customary relationship between the Narrator, his fictional self, and his material that we as readers have assumed all along. Nykrog’s observation that Jean basically repeats Guillaume in the first 6500 lines of his continuation leads us to a consideration of Jean’s first “original” scene, namely that of the God of Love’s speech to the barons. Rather than anything new, however, this passage is a pivotal instance of the both sameness and innovation that characterize Jean’s relationship to the work of his predecessor. Jean’s presentation of fresh material is not “original” in that it also recalls the beginning of the poem; just as Guillaume commences the romance with an explanation of the identity of and relationship between its narrator and central character, Jean makes his first contribution to the plot by returning to the same issues of narrator and character. The result is an exacerbation of an already unstable configuration. When Jean fractures the identity of the speaking voice he both repeats and distorts Guillaume’s initial division of it. Throughout the *Rose* Jean repeats numerous episodes that in their distortion capitalize on the possibilities inherent in Guillaume to satirize the Narrator and Lover. Jean also retells several classical myths, as does Guillaume, although each writer approaches the variation of repetition differently. Guillaume subtly modifies, while Jean more radically skews, the episodes and discourses to which he returns. Rather than an increased understanding of the Lover’s identity, Jean’s God of Love offers up a conundrum: the Narrator-Lover is both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean. This contradiction incorporates an irony that underlies Jean’s use of repetition in his treatment of the Narrator-Lover. The destabilization of the speaking voice reaches its most explicit, exacerbated, and exasperating point in a speech that is supposed to make things clearer. A further irony stems from the speech’s double manoeuvre of glorifying Jean as the romance’s new narrator while undermining the narrator’s authority. The God of Love’s efforts to account

for the Lover as both the hero and narrator of the dream-romance amount to a grand paradox. Building on the ambiguity of an already multireferential speaking voice, Jean proceeds to demolish the coherence of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover identity altogether by making it an untenable configuration. He both doubles an already doubled voice, and empties it of substance. The God of Love's speech introduces more dilemmas than it resolves: How does Jean's take-over of Guillaume work? As Narrator does he appropriate the functions of Dreamer and Lover too? How can he? How can he not? And who is narrating *this* right *now*?

Approximately midway through the course of the poem the God of Love delivers a speech to his army of barons explaining his reasons for calling them together. He desires "Pour jalousie desconfire" [10499: "to vanquish Jealousy" (186)] for having erected the fortress "Dont j'ai griement le cuer blecié" [10504: "and caused my heart a grievous wound" (186)], and goes on to lament the deaths of four of the most accomplished writers of love, any of whom would have been a great help, not in rescuing Fair Welcoming, which for him is only a secondary concern, but in restoring what is in danger of becoming a tarnished reputation due to Fair Welcoming's prolonged imprisonment. The God of Love's lack of concern for the Lover's trials is evinced by the disparity between his hasty mention of Guillaume's sad plight, and lavish commentary on the romance. Because the romance is consequential not as an account of a dream but as a record of love's precepts, the God of Love prefers to focus on Guillaume's role as the work's inaugurator rather than hero. Guillaume, not very wise as the God of Love regrets but all that is currently available, will receive, in addition to his martial assistance, the honour of beginning the romance, which task he appears to have the authority to bestow. The God of Love's prioritization of the narrative function over the lover function shines through in the latter part of his speech and its eulogistic preoccupation with the work's new narrator. Although Jean will be the one to finally cut the bud, the God of Love is more interested in Jean's writing than his plucking.

Because the romance's real concern is with the rule of the God of Love, not the rosebud, he renames it *The Mirror for Lovers*:

Car quant Guillaumes cessera,
 Jehans le continuera
 Après sa mort, que je ne mente,
 Anz trespassez plus de .xl.
 Et dira, pour la mescheance,
 Pour paour de desesperance
 Qu'il n'ait de bel acueill perdue
 Le bienvoillance avant eüe:
 "Et si l'ai je perdue, espoir,
 A poi que je ne desespoir!"

Et toutes les autres paroles
Queles qu'eles soient, sages ou foles,
Jusqu'a tant qu'il avra cueillie
Sor la branche vert et fueillie,
La tres belle rose vermeille,
Et qu'il soit jours et qu'il s'esveille.
Puis voudra si la chose espondre
Que riens ne s'i porra repondre.
Se cil conseil mettre i peüssent,
Tantost conseillié m'en eüssent!
Mais par cestui ne puet ore estre,
Ne par celui qui est a nestre,
Car il n'est mie ci presanz. (10591-613)

For when Guillaume shall cease, more than forty years after his death – may I not lie – Jean will continue it, and because of Fair Welcoming's misfortune, and through the despairing fear that he may have lost the good will that Fair Welcoming had shown him before, he will say, 'And perhaps I have lost it. At least I do not despair of it.' And he will set down all the other speeches, whatever they may be, wise or foolish, up to the time when he will have cut the most beautiful red rose on its green, leafy branch, to the time when it is day and he awakes. Then he will want to explicate the affair in such a way that nothing can remain hidden. If they could have given their counsel in this matter, they would have given it to me immediately; but that cannot now take place through Guillaume nor through Jean, who is yet to be born, for he is not here present. (188)

The extent to which the split effected by the God of Love disorders the voice of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover, who we assume to be, if not inhabiting the same moment in time at least representing the same identity, is addressed by critics in such a way that its radicalness is downplayed by an affirmation of ultimate unity, or a freeing of the Narrator from his previous moorings as Dreamer and Lover. Hult calls this passage "peculiar" in light of "the fact that no apparent narrative transformation has occurred such that the reader might expect an alteration in the fictional perspective of the 'I'-narrator, even though the change of authors is situated some 6000 lines previous to this point in the poem" ("Closed Quotations" 249-50). In a later work Hult returns to the Narrator and declares the speaking voice a site of disruption. The God of Love's speech confuses what is, as he notes, "The normally systematic relationship between author, narrator, and fictional hero" (*Self-Fulfilling* 24), and leaves the reader in something of a quandary: "Not only does Amor prophesy the future death of the author of the poem that we are reading, while standing *in front of* that author's fictional

persona, but he also articulates the paradox of the reader having proceeded farther than the alleged end of the Poet's fragmented work" (12). This paradox, however, extends only to the author: "Lest the maintenance of the quasi-autobiographical 'I' narration in Jean de Meun's continuation lead us astray, we should keep in mind that while the author has changed, the Lover-persona has not – that is, Jean de Meun maintains the 'I' narrational voice, not in order to tell his own story, but that of someone else" (14). An insistence on the basic unity of the speaking voice accords with Huot's statement on the consistency of the Lover's identity: "the *je* of the poem, rather than being identified with either Guillaume or Jean, embodies two distinct fictional personae, narrator and protagonist, whose voices could be appropriated as easily by Jean as by Guillaume" (*Romance* 332). Zumthor asserts that the "multiform *I*" is likewise unified. It is a "universal designator, a shifter that *you*, *him*, *we* fill with our personal presence as soon as the discourse becomes ours" ("Narrative" 197); the fact that all of this happens to *me* unifies the shifting and complex *I* of the romance (197). And if the discourse does not become ours? The "we" of whom Zumthor speaks is implicitly masculine, and the unity that he forecasts takes no account of the resistant reader who may choose not to integrate the disjunctions of the speaking voice. The assumption that readers will sympathize with the masculine subject position articulated by the Narrator and represented by the Lover is by no means certain.

In part, the unity of the speaking voice rests on the narrative's status as a dream. The dream premise confers a unity on the narrative through its organization as a self-contained unit that unfolds in the single psyche of a dreamer. It follows that the analogous dream-self must be a like self-contained unit, or consistent identity. The anomaly of an already accomplished and yet-to-occur narrative/character transfer, however, problematizes the unity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover subject. Kay pinpoints the changeover in authors as the incident that subverts the self-designation of the romance as dream and autobiography. The God of Love's assignment of the author's task to a future that has already occurred, alongside the "highjacking" of both dream and text by a different Dreamer and author, undermines the Narrator's insistence that what we are reading is an autobiography or a dream (*Romance* 40-41). For the terms "autobiography" or "dream" to work they must be the property of one subject, one teller. The demands of the dream-structure discredit the text's status as a dream. The subject may be split in time and fulfil different roles such as those of Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover, but when the subject becomes the site of two distinct personae the dynamic of its self-representation exceeds the containing capacity of the dream form and subverts the work's self-fashioning as such. Is the romance a dream above all else, however? Or does the God of Love's narratorial authority and insistence on the primacy of its textual disposition undermine the work's integrity as a dream?

The God of Love compromises the dream structure of the romance by subordinating the outcome of the dream to the narrative's potential as a missive for his commands. Genius, too, characterizes his surroundings as specifically textual when he directs his audience to *The Romance of the Rose* for information on the twenty-six vices repugnant to Nature which, he says, "Assez briement les vous expose" [19885: "explains them to you quite briefly" (327)]. The self-stylization of the God of Love and Genius as authorities who desire to publicize their messages suggests that the narrative is more of a didactic text than a dream. Attention to the romance's name also casts it as a self-conscious piece of fiction. Jean's reversion to Guillaume's title in Genius's speech after the God of Love's modification of it is another instance of ironic and distorting repetition that undermines the innocence of the romance as a dream by infiltrating it with self-referential textual play. The restoration of the original title mocks the authority and agenda of the God of Love by invalidating his self-serving premises. It also recalls the initial context of the romance, and the difference in tone between its opening and final portions. While the Narrator introduces the *Rose* as an art of love and means of pleasing his beloved, he finishes it as an ostensible yet crass art of seduction that disregards the premise of the beloved altogether.

The text-based features of the poem are at odds with its self-proclaimed status as a dream. Attending to the place of autobiography and dream amidst the textual dynamism of the poem leads to difficulties in reconciling the multiple and conflicting aspects of the speaking voice. The dream frame poses the question that continually problematizes the work's coherence: how can the identity of the Dreamer vary if the romance recounts a single dream? The significance of the Dreamer as connective tissue is often elided, which enables a disassociation of the Narrator from the Lover, and hence a sensible explanation of the Guillaume-Jean switchover. The problematic status of the Dreamer as a shifty linchpin between the Narrator and Lover coincides with the initially ambiguous relationship between these three functions that positioned the Dreamer as the age of either the Lover or the Narrator. My analysis builds on those above in its attempts to engage the tension that arises from the joint cohesion and disruption of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover persona. What happens when the switchover from Guillaume to Jean must include the figures of the Dreamer and Lover as well as that of the Narrator? I argue that the result of this continuity of function is a radical discontinuity of subjectivity: the splitting of the Narrator, Dreamer, and dream-self may be a matter of subjectivity rather than function. As well as questioning the unity of the voice we have been reading all along, as Hult notes (*Self-Fulfilling* 12), we question the very identity of the disunified speaking voice.

It is impossible that Jean take over the function of Narrator only. The Narrator and Lover are interdependent entities, and the God of Love refers to Jean as both. While it is clear that Jean becomes the romance's new author, it is not clear how he becomes the new Narrator-Dreamer-Lover persona. An

amalgamation of the functions of author and Narrator through a dissolution of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover bond permits the identity of the Narrator to change while that of the Lover stays the same, yet the autobiographical framework of the poem demands that the character of the Narrator remain indissolubly linked to that of the Lover; the identity of the Narrator cannot change with that of the author. Jean can author a romance about a character who narrates a dream about himself, but he cannot narrate that dream without also being that character. If Jean is the Narrator, he must also be the Lover. The narratorial “I” cannot be adopted by him to tell someone else’s story, since the God of Love makes clear that the functions of Narrator and Lover are performed by the same subject. In his speech the God of Love conflates the functions of lover and narrator. Jean does not merely relate the words of the Lover, he says them; he not only records the others’ speeches, he cuts the rose; he not only narrates, but wakes from the dream. Rather than preserve the identity of the Lover as a self-contained unit, the narrative’s status as autobiography and dream undermines it. Because the structure of the romance necessitates the conjoining of Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover, and any change in the identity of one affects the others, the subjectivity of this composite voice undergoes a radical fragmentation upon Jean’s takeover from Guillaume. This midway revelation of a both earlier and upcoming transferral of the speaking voice raises some fundamental questions about the nature of the subject position that the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover exemplifies. Rather than consolidate, Jean’s affirmation of the Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover as functions performed by a single subject destabilizes the identity that they represent. How to explain the fact that while the God of Love introduces the Lover as Guillaume at line 10526, he states that Jean utters the Lover’s lines at 4059? The Lover is called “Guillaume,” yet his speech of 6000 lines ago is spoken by “Jean.” The God of Love’s central speech leaves us with the paradox of a speaker who has already died and is yet to be born.

The Lover embodies an identity that not only cannot be fixed as either Guillaume or Jean, but that is at the same time utterly vacant: the Lover is both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean. While at the beginning of his speech the God of Love doubles the identity of the Lover by aligning him with both Guillaume and Jean, he later divests him of the agencies of both:

Se cil conseil mettrent i peüssent,
 Tantost conseillié m’en eüssent!
 Mais par cestui ne puet ore estre,
 Ne par celui qui est a nestre,
 Car il n’est mie ci presanz. (10609-13)

If they could have given their counsel in this matter, they would have given it to me immediately; but that cannot now take place through Guillaume nor through Jean, who is yet to be born, for he is not here present. (188)

Because the God of Love speaks from within the dream, Guillaume and Jean must be meant to fulfil their advisory role as the Lover, not the Narrator, yet the Narrator seems more qualified to offer advice. The God of Love's references to Guillaume and Jean as narrative voices outside the dream frame further destabilize that frame and obscure the relationships between Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover. If neither Guillaume nor Jean is now present to aid the God of Love, who is the Lover? Who is the Narrator? At what point does Jean take over from Guillaume as the Narrator of the romance? He takes over as author at line 4059; is this when he takes over as Narrator too? Or is the God of Love prophesying the course of future extra-dream events? If so, to whom is he prophesying them? It must be Guillaume since Jean is not yet born. How can a character in a romance prophecy the death of its author? How can the prophecy be recorded after the author's death, especially if the author does not compose that part of the romance in which the prophecy is written? Jean, already the new author, presumably takes over the functions of Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover at some unspecified, later, point while already having done so; the narrative and character transfer has occurred and is yet to be accomplished. The aggravation attendant upon puzzling out the conjunctions and disjunctions between Guillaume and Jean as Narrator, Dreamer, and Lover suggests that the effort to harmonize the associations of two figures and three functions that overlap in time and space across a forty year gap is a futile one, for it is not that these associations have been merely disrupted – they have been entirely disordered. This impasse is the identity of the speaking voice. Jean makes what in Guillaume is an already ambiguous voice paradoxical; he doubles the identity of an already doubled voice while simultaneously vacating it of identity. The simultaneous concurrence and divergence of the functions of Narrator and Lover as both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean undermines the speaking voice as an articulation of subjectivity as it is customarily understood. This occurrence of the speaking voice both doubled and vacant suggests that the ideals of order and coherence that found a masculine subject position produce speakers that subvert them. Since the support for these ideals is not attributable to an inherent masculine subjectivity but a fiction of feminine Otherness, if the feminized object is absent, as the rosebud and Fair Welcoming are for this scene, or its femininity shown to be precarious, the masculine psyche that relies on it as a means of self-confirmation yields to both over-assertion and disarray. It is an engrossment in Fair Welcoming and the rosebud as Others that conceals the excess and incoherence of the subjectivity articulated by the Narrator and played out by the Lover throughout the romance.

The paradoxical dual/vacant subjectivity of the protagonist raises questions of narrative authority. If the Narrator-Lover is a discontinuous identity both crowded with and emptied of being, whose dream and story is this? If Jean has not yet been born by the time of the God of Love's mid-dream remarks, he cannot

be having the dream, and cannot be narrating the speech. If Guillaume as Narrator is dead long before the God of Love's speech, he can be neither narrating nor dreaming it. Who is dreaming the God of Love's speech? Who is narrating it? The answer to this last question, at least, seems to be none other than the God of Love himself. Hult notes the authoritative stance of the God of Love in his baronial address: "Amor seemingly steps outside of the fictional space, replacing even the Narrator in the hierarchy of narrative authority through his omniscient evaluation of the poem's very conditions of existence" (*Self-Fulfilling* 14). Even before this explicit narratorial posturing, the God of Love intimates his control of the romance in a private speech to the Lover. He orders the Lover to recite his injunctions, "Car .x. en tendra ces romman / Entre deffenses et commanz" [10403: "for your romance will contain ten of them, counting prohibitions and commandments" (185)]. Not only does the God of Love determine the contents of the romance by stipulating its motive and selecting Guillaume to begin it, he dictates Guillaume's final words, Jean's initial words and, implicitly, the last lines of the poem. By formulating the text of the romance the God of Love controls the course of the dream. This leads to a reversal of the usual subordination of a copy to its original. While the Narrator in Guillaume situates the romance as a textual copy of his dream, the God of Love's speech dismantles this ordering of events altogether: the dream is not the source, but a copy of the romance.

Upon the exposure of the *Rose* as a text that the God of Love narrates and the Narrator merely records, "Narrator" becomes a misappellation. Jean ridicules the speaking voice when he demotes to stenographer this self-proclaimed authority on courtly love by thoroughly dislocating the Narrator's identity in a speech meant to elucidate and elevate it. This sidelining of the Narrator starts, however, with the God of Love's influence over him in Guillaume. Vitz suggests that the entry of the Narrator into his own dream reveals his lack of autonomy and his loss of control over his own story. The Narrator cannot help but be "caught up in it, brought back into it": "Even in the telling of his story, he is not the master of his verb or of Love's Garden, but Love's servant" ("Inside/Outside" 161). The authority of the God of Love underlies, and at times overtakes, that of the Narrator. The fact that the God of Love thoroughly compromises himself by making False Seeming the captain of his army and calling in his mother Venus to conquer the castle makes the art of love a thoroughly ironic proposition. The God of Love accompanies this subversion of the Narrator's proprietorship of the romance by providing a biography for his dream-self that entirely deranges the identity of the speaking voice, fracturing it to the point of unintelligibility. As is the rosebud throughout the romance, the Lover is silent and passive during the God of Love's explanation to the barons of who the Lover is and why he, and they, are there. This marginalization of the lover-protagonist alongside the simultaneous doubling and vacating of his identity coincides with the indeterminate symbology of the bud.

A continuous referencing of the rosebud throughout the romance by the Narrator, Lover, and figures in the garden ostensibly fulfils the gendered subject-building needs of the Lover in the way that the God of Love's introduction of the Lover to the barons fulfils the deity's needs of self-presentation and perpetuation: the God of Love reduces the Narrator-Lover to a function in order to present himself as an authority. The God of Love's use of the Narrator-Lover to authorize and articulate himself into a position of primary importance parallels the Narrator-Lover's use of the rosebud as a pretext for his own self-speaking. And just as the rosebud is rendered silent, passive, and fragmented through the contradictions of its attendant voices, the Narrator-Lover is rendered silent, passive, and fragmented through a contradictory situating of two author-characters named "Guillaume" and "Jean" in relation to one another. Lacking the discursive presence of the rosebud and the fiction of its femininity to assure his status as masculine, the Narrator-Lover goes from being a relatively stable subject to an utterly incoherent Other. In his speech the God of Love takes little account of the bud, and his portrayal of the Lover makes no sense in the bud's physical and discursive absence. In the almost two hundred lines that constitute the God of Love's discussion of the Lover and his dilemma, the rose is mentioned only once, as that which Jean will pick before he wakes. The rosebud's absence institutes the Lover's replacement and resemblance of it as he becomes the means through which a discursive authority articulates his own self-promoting agenda. Rather than via the bud, the God of Love attempts to pinpoint the Lover's identity in relation to two figures named Guillaume and Jean who serve as neither mirrors nor copies, platforms nor pretexts, for an articulation of the Lover's identity. Instead, as subjects in their own right they upset the oppositional economy of masculine self-representation for which a feminized object proves indispensable. Minus the rosebud the Narrator-Lover no longer embodies the ideals of unity and coherence that organize the masculine subject. It is in order to recuperate from this emasculation and reinvest himself as the primary and steadfast *I* of the piece that he so vigorously asserts himself as a knowledgeable plucker of rosebuds. The Narrator-Lover's subjugation to discursive agendas that exceed his jurisdiction translates into a resemblance between the self of the poem and its object, between the speaking voice and the speechless bud, that recalls the Lover's experience at the fountain and his submission to the power of the God of Love.

The Lover's status as representative of masculine subjectivity springs from the Narrator's characterization of him as typically masculine. The Narrator generalizes his experiences by presenting them as an art of love and himself as a model lover. There is nothing particular about the Lover. He is a highly usual lovesick youth, to which his designation in manuscript rubrics and critical discourse as the function "the lover," rather than the individual character "Guillaume," attests. When Strubel links this universality of the *I* with the right to speak (*Le Roman* 28), the gendered configuration of male speaker and silent

rosebud that undergirds the poem reveals this universality of selfhood to be categorically masculine. The Narrator also secures the gender of his dream-self by inserting it into a recognizable masculine tradition. His Lover is a questing hero who fights to rescue a helpless captive beloved. He falls in love, pursues the object of his desire, and displays the phallic aggressiveness that Friend recommends once in possession of it. Because the substance of the Lover's identity rests on his success as a lover, the most crucial feature of his character is its masculinity. Alastair Minnis, who argues that the *Rose* is about this very "process of 'becoming male'" (201) according to heterosexual norms, believes that fears brought on by the threat of castration are "quelled," and "the crisis of masculinity resolved, at the end of the *Rose*" (173). Minnis's conclusion that the Lover's sexual performance conforms to normative models of masculinity (173) depends upon an interpretation of the metaphoric jumble that constitutes the cutting of the rosebud as heterosexual copulation, which, as I have suggested, is a reading of the final scene that suppresses the disconcerting details of its description. The medley of figurative language that obscures the Narrator's hyperbolic report of the Lover's relations with the bud renders his performance of masculinity highly problematic. Just as and in part because the rosebud cannot be fixed as feminine, neither can the Lover nor his handling of it be secured as conclusively masculine. Rather than quell, the *Rose* exposes and exacerbates the crisis of masculinity that comprises the Lover's desire for the bud.

iii) Masculine self-sameness and the Fountain of Love

Irigaray argues that language itself, the very "syntax of discourse," sanctions the being of the masculine subject. It is a "means of masculine self-affection, or masculine self-production or reproduction, or self-generation or self-representation – himself as the self-same, as the only standard of sameness" (132). If masculine self-sameness is the real stuff of feminine Otherness, to what extent is the femininity of the rosebud not only a construct but a reproduction of the masculinity of the Lover? I argue that an economy of sameness comprises the Lover's desire for the bud, which requires a feminized image to cast it as other-directed and conceal its ultimate auto-referentiality. Irigaray contends that woman serves as "the foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back 'his' image and repeating it as the 'same'" (*Speculum* 54); that a politics of masculine sameness informs the mechanics of sexual difference because the opposition masculine/feminine "has always operated 'within' systems that are representative, self-representative, of the (masculine) subject" (159). Stories such as those of Narcissus and the *Rose* that utilize mirrors to inaugurate the desire of the hero concretize this aspect of the feminine, but the feminine mirror may be an object or discourse, the important thing being its functionality as a reflecting surface. After discussing how the rosebud may be read as a mirror and why it might be more aptly conceptualized as a copy, I will return to some of the concerns of the first

chapter and question the extent to which the rosebud may be read as Irigaray's "woman."

The feminized Otherness of the rosebud does not render it the Lover's sexual opposite. Not only do the bud's phallic attributes problematize its designation as feminine, its "feminine" attributes liken it to, rather than differentiate it from, the Lover. The sameness that Irigaray theorizes as the enabling premise of masculine subjectivity discloses itself in the resemblances between the Lover and the bud. How is a representation of masculine subjectivity affected by a recasting of its foundational feminine Other as a masculine self-same? Butler argues that identity cannot be dissociated from or discussed prior to gender "for the simple reason that 'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (16). Building on Butler's observation, I would like to add another question to the perilous flow of queries that streams from the *Rose*: how intelligible is the gender, and hence identity, that the Lover figures forth? Rather than embody the intelligibility of masculinity, does the Lover expose its many contradictions, its status as a series of anomalies that the institution of a feminine Other serves to conceal? Does the *Rose* satirize or elide these paradoxes of masculine self-representation? If masculine subjectivity is rooted in engagements with a self-sameness that it does not recognize as such, perhaps the most conspicuous place to begin this inquiry is at the hazardously reflective fountain of Narcissus.

To get off to an unpromising start, it is not universally agreed that the Lover's experience at the fountain translates into his reliving Narcissus's fate. In fact, it is not universally agreed that the Narcissus episode has anything to do with self-love at all. Vitz and Hult argue that self-love is not the context in which the members of a medieval audience would have read the tale, while Fleming, whose object is to read the romance within its courtly parameters, considers the fountain episode to be a clear indication of self-love (96). Hult contends that a medieval audience was more likely to have understood Narcissus as a courtly lover unable to gain the affections of his beloved lady ("Allegorical" 127), and finds a comparison between the Lover and Narcissus too "narrowly mimetic" (142). He insists that their experiences are not alike in typological terms; the correspondence between them is one of allusion, not repetition (142). He downplays the sexual meaning of the myth and argues that its significance issues from concerns with subjective judgement and perception, not the nature of the object perceived (143-45). The "renewed perception" afforded the Lover by a fresh awareness of "his exterior, his society," is the most consequential feature of the fountain episode (144). While this may be so, the fact that it is the rosebushes of which the Lover is most intently aware cannot be ignored. Whatever else of "his exterior" he sees is meaningful only so far as it relates to the bushes and bud.

Hult continues to dispute a comparative reading of the Lover and Narcissus on the grounds of their not seeing the same thing in the fountain. I would argue that they do, not in a way that is directly imitative but, as Hult himself suggests, allusive. The Lover's vision of the rosebushes repeats Narcissus's vision of himself in that the reflection of the rosebushes over which the Lover hovers is a metaphorical image of his reflected self. At the fountain both Narcissus and the Lover are confronted with visions of themselves as Others. While Narcissus sees an actual image of himself, the self that the Lover sees is figured not by his own likeness but a heap of rosebushes:

Ades me plot a demorer,
 A la fontaine remirer
 Et es cristaus qui me mostroient
 .C. mile choses qui paroient.
 Mes de fort eure me miré:
 Las, tant en ai puis soupiré!
 Cil mireors m'a deceü:
 Se j'eusse avant queneü
 Quel la force ere et sa vertu,
 Ne m'i fusse ja embatu,
 Car maintenant es laz chaî
 Qui maint home a pris et traï.
 Ou mireor entre mil choses
 Quenui rosiers chargez de roses (1600-13)

I wanted to remain there forever, gazing at the fountain and the crystals, which showed me the hundred thousand things that appeared there; but it was a painful hour when I admired myself there. Alas! How I have sighed since then because of that deceiving mirror. If I had known its powers and qualities, I would never have approached it, for now I have fallen into the snare that has captured and betrayed many a man.

Among a thousand things in the mirror, I saw rosebushes loaded with roses;
 (52)

The coincidence of the Lover's view of himself with his vision of the rosebushes suggests that the Lover's view of himself is his vision of the rosebushes. It is not clear that the Lover even sees himself – he admires himself, but the wording of the description suggests that this self-admiration consists of his view of the reflected image of the rosebushes. If repetition is a significant structuring principle of the romance, the Narrator's account of the Lover's first glimpse of the rosebushes is a repeat description of his self-admiration. The Narrator's portrayal of the Lover's vision of the rosebushes does not follow that of his vision of himself, but is rather

a return to and repetition of it: the Lover's activity of glancing into the pool is described twice.

The Narrator's reiteration of the Lover's vision at the fountain follows another retelling, namely that of Narcissus's death. In his account of the myth the Narrator refers twice to the youth's decease, once before and once after the Lover approaches the fountain; the second Narcissus, Hult argues, "is actually a reified version of the punishment deserved by the first" ("Allegorical" 144). The Narrator's re-relation of Narcissus's death is not a verbatim repetition of the earlier recital. The retelling elucidates and concretizes his demise. The first account abstracts Narcissus's death as a loss of reason brought on by extreme distress, while the second specifies that after gazing at "sa face et ses yauz vers" [1570: "his face and his gray eyes" (52)], Narcissus lay "morz toz envers" [1571: "dead, flat on his back" (52)]. The reiteration of self-admiration that is the Lover's vision of the rosebushes is a like specification, namely of the image that the Lover sees. In addition, the very description of the fountain itself recalls that of a previous body of water. The clear water of the river that flows to the walls of the garden allows the Lover a view of its bottom, covered, like that of the fountain, with gravel. The fountain is not an exact repetition of the river, which foreshadows the Lover's arrival at the fountain, for the rosebushes that he spies in the fountain do not appear in the river. The context is all wrong: he is not yet inside the garden, where love, it seems, cannot but flourish. The discursive arena in which the Lover finds himself is one of constant variation; he is never in an identical situation or instance of time. Repetition is not a mere verbatim copying in the *Rose*, and the differences that inflect recounted episodes cast its dynamic of repetition as one of distortion in which the ensuing discrepancies become sites of implication, indeterminacy, and satire.

The Narrator also models his dream-self on Narcissus through a comparison of their experiences at the perilous locale. Like Narcissus, the Lover gazes into the fountain, mistakes himself for an Other, loses his reason, and, while he does not die, is metaphorically transformed into a flower, as Narcissus was after his death. Hult's assertion that "literary creation" forms the link between self-reflectedness and an engagement with the outside world ("Allegorical" 145) downplays the gendered dynamic of this exteriorization by adjudging the nature of the objects that constitute it to be of no consequence. While looking into the fountain may alert the Lover to the existence of an external and social world, which Hult argues comprises the significance of the Lover's experience there, the question of what, specifically, it is that facilitates the Lover's engagement with that world, and the form that this engagement takes, are crucial to an understanding of the subjectivity that he represents. The fact that this exteriorization appears to consist of a fixation on a highly conventional symbol of femininity, and this engagement of an extravagant self-absorption, implies that the visibility of the exterior world hinges on the materialization of a feminized Other-

object and its capacity to sustain an economy of masculine self-representation. The gendered nature of this dynamic makes its depiction contentious. The Lover's experience at the fountain is not the universal occurrence that Hult declares the self-destructiveness of Echo renders it. While Echo may have "reflective vocal properties" (Hult 146), they are diametrically opposed to those of Narcissus. Echo "reflects" another while Narcissus "reflects" himself. As Kay argues, with Echo it is the disjunction of subject and object that is insuperable, while with Narcissus it is their conjunction (*Subjectivity* 178). Rather than forcing us to "reconsider" (146), as Hult proposes, an economy of sexual difference, the moral seems to reinforce it. Kay's comment that the warning seems to privilege masculine subjectivity and desire by insisting that women accommodate themselves to it (178) accords with the self-interested character of the Narrator and the masculinist ethos of his text. The success of the moral in advancing the pretensions of masculine subjectivity is, however, debatable.

Hult's assertion that "Neither do the Lover and Narcissus see the same objects in the fountain, nor do the ensuing actions even resemble each other" ("Allegorical" 142) is likewise open to question. As I have suggested above, the Lover, like Narcissus, does see a reflection of himself in the image of the reflected rosebushes. While the Narrator does not include Narcissus's transformation into a flower in his relation of the myth, it nevertheless underlies our reading of the story and we appraise the Lover's vision of the rosebushes in light of the youth's metamorphosis. Fleming states that "after a time, he no longer sees those ocular crystals, but a rose. Like Narcissus, he becomes a flower" (95). This synopsis is not quite accurate in that the Lover does not see a rose in the crystals but a bunch of fully-laden rosebushes. Rather than a flower, he becomes at this point a heap of flowers. Baumgartner, too, notes the omission in Guillaume of Narcissus's metamorphosis, but surmises that "It is as though a sort of transfer or displacement were taking place in the medieval text: the pale flower of the narcissus is replaced by the crimson splendour of the rosebud, which suddenly appears to the dreamer's eyes" (32-33). Again, this reading is somewhat imprecise. While the rosebushes may appear of a sudden to the Dreamer as he gazes into the crystals, it is only after leaving the fountain that he, and quite calculatedly at that, selects a bud. Harley's reading of the scene is more to the point: "the experiences of Narcissus, Attis, and even Hermaphroditus are symbolized in transformations into flowers – changes that suggest the product of Amant's own admiration of himself, the rosebud" (335). Both Narcissus and the Lover turn into flowers after having fallen in love with their own reflections, the one literally and the other metaphorically. Despite this difference, the flower that the one becomes and the other resembles stand as symbols of masculine self-affection. As the later speech of the God of Love makes clear, the Lover, as much as Narcissus, is a plaything of the gods; it is just that the Lover is the comic plaything of a minor and ineffectual god, while Narcissus suffers under the harsh

judgement of a Christianized God. The Lover's experience at the fountain parodies that of Narcissus. Critical readings that consider the Lover to have escaped the fate of Narcissus aver that his knowledge of the myth saves him. This is Goldin's reading of the episode (54-55), and Kay concludes that the Lover strikes a more successful balance between self and other (*Subjectivity* 178-79). While it is true that the Lover does not die, this does not mean he succeeds in avoiding the straits of Narcissus. The fountain episode reveals Guillaume's quieter mode of satire. The greater seriousness of Narcissus's fate differentiates the episodes only so far as it points up the comedy of the Lover's. That the Lover does not recognize the rosebushes as an image of himself suggests that he knows less, not more, than Narcissus. It is his ignorance that "saves" him, not his greater knowledge.

The relationship between the stories of Narcissus and the Lover is not merely allusive, not exactly repetitive, but somewhere in-between. Strubel makes the valuable suggestion that a distortion of the Narcissus myth as it pertains to the Lover urges a diversity of interpretation. The discrepancy to which he refers concerns the two planes of reflection: in the myth the reflection appears on the surface of the fountain, in the water itself, while in the romance it appears on the bottom of the fountain, in the two crystals (*Le Roman* 65). Strubel argues that this lack of correspondence makes the Narcissus episode a site of ambiguous signification, "le carrefour du sens" (67: the cross-roads of meaning). He notes that while the incident carries its usual implications as regards the Narrator and Lover – for instance that love begins with the sense of sight, which is also a source of danger – it also contains indirect suggestions about the darker side of love and desire, such as: "les perversions du désir, narcissisme et homosexualité, la présence du mort au sein du désir, la stérilité de la contemplation de soi comme principal risque de cette société fermée dont Oiseuse est l'introductrice et le symbole" (67: the perversions of desire, narcissism and homosexuality, the presence of death in that of desire, the sterility of self-contemplation as the principle risk of that closed society of which Idleness is the introducer and the symbol). This, alongside the inadequacy of the episode's moral as a warning for cruel ladies ensures, according to Strubel, "une certaine disponibilité de signification" (67: a certain availability of signification). This, too, is Hult's alternate reading of the moral; it "calls attention to our interpretative powers and defies our use of them" ("Allegorical" 146). If the significance of the fountain cannot be reduced to a single or sensible meaning, it follows that neither can the images reflected in it. The indeterminacy that issues from the fountain as a generator of images is part of the playfulness that permeates the *Rose* and arises from what Kay alleges is an "uncertainty about the capacity of the image to convey useful or truthful information" (*Romance* 73). Just as the signification of the fountain episode is complicated by both an uncertainty as to the extent of the affinity between Narcissus and the Lover, and the inanity of the appended moral,

the rosebud's status as a representation of the female sex is continually compromised by its phallic flair and underlying resemblance to the Lover.

As a source of madness, it is perhaps no surprise that the symbology of the fountain involves a subversion of interpretative practices based on a rationale of conformity and coherence. The grand scale of the fountain's reason-depriving powers indicates its significance as a site of collective experience. It is therefore fitting that the Lover sees a mass of bushes reflected in the fountain rather than a distinct bud. What is the nature of the relationship between the rosebud and rosebushes? The most noteworthy thing about the Lover's bud is, predictably, its beauty: "envers celui / Nus des autres riens ne prisié," [1653-54: "none of the others was worth anything beside it" (53)]. Nothing distinguishes this particular bud from its fellows. The singularity of the rosebud consists of nothing more than its status as an exceptional specimen of the Other through which the Lover articulates himself; it is merely the representative of a collective of roses, the vacant ideal of an undifferentiated feminized mass. Both the Lover and the rosebud appear as generic types at the fountain; the Lover joins the ranks of those driven mad by love, and the rosebud appears amidst a mass of bushes.

As well as the object of his quest, the rosebud may be read as a surface that mirrors the Lover back to himself. It seems that the point of selecting an object to quest after is to see oneself reflected in it, questing. Although I argue that the bud's relation to the Lover is as copy not mirror, I consider these to be complimentary rather than mutually exclusive readings of it. In what follows I refer to arguments that position the rosebud as mirror both to investigate the implications of this gendered configuration for the subjectivity of the protagonist, and to provide a basis for my shifting of the discussion to a study of how the rosebud-Lover dynamic unsettles an original to copy hierarchy. Although it is the crystals that actually mirror the Lover back to himself, the bud takes over this function by providing him with the necessary support to sustain a vision of himself as lover. The rosebud replaces the crystals as a means of self-reflection, which the Lover's immediate move from the fountain to the rosebushes suggests. As the locus of the Lover's desire, the rosebud secures his identity as reliably male by enabling him to articulate himself as such. Because the trajectory of his desire is ostensibly other-directed, the Narrator's self-speaking appears to be that of a properly desiring subject. According to Goldin, who considers the courtly lover a Narcissus because each "requires a mirror in order to know himself" (51), the Lover knows that he must love "a mirror that is alive and attainable" (55), a living rather than lifeless reflection of himself (58). The Lover accomplishes this by "turn[ing] his love upon another person, ideally beautiful, alive, and attainable" (58). Aside from disagreeing that the Lover escapes Narcissus's fate, I question the extent to which a human "mirror" may be considered alive. For while the rosebud is alive, I expect that Goldin means it in a different sense than brute biology when referring to the rosebud/lady. In courtly love romance the lady

seems to accomplish living stasis by embodying a set of ideals that provides the knight with a reflection of his future identity, which he requires as a verification of his existence (Goldin 59). The lady achieves this through what is construed as her approval, and Goldin's statement that "Her look realizes him, her smile justifies him" (239) positions her as an agent. It is the lady's look and her smile, however, not her looking and her smiling, that matter. Even statues look and smile, as Pygmalion's did at him. Her features, not her actions, are of consequence. While an Other-object may be technically alive, relegating a character to the non-status of mirror effectively erases her subjectivity. It becomes clear from Goldin's statements on the function of the lady/mirror that she is precisely not a subject, not "another person." The fact that in order to make the lady his mirror the knight "suppresses every accidental quality – her name, her thoughts, her humanity" (Goldin 253) suggests that a recognition of her subjectivity would destroy the lady's capacity to be a reflecting surface. Goldin's lady fits Gaunt's description of femininity as "a metaphor" that male authors "use to construct their own subjectivity" (*Gender* 71). Like the lady of courtly romance, the rosebud may be beautiful and attainable, but it is not alive in the sense of being a living Other. The rosebud is the lifeless, as all reflections are, reflection of the Lover. I am aware that by equating the figures of the rosebud and courtly lady here I seem to be undermining my larger project. The purpose of so doing is to summarize a heterosexually-oriented reading of the rosebud-Lover bond in order to veer into a discussion of how the explicit object-status of the bud alters a conventionally gendered relationship between it and the hero. Rather than sexual difference, the narrative of the Lover's desire is based on a dynamic of sexual and self-sameness. Unlike the lady, the bud cannot even look and smile, unless we read its enlargement as a similarly demonstrative justification of the Lover's existence. The fact that this, what may be construed as the rosebud's one inclination, occurs when the Lover is most aroused seriously undermines its standing as a token of agency. The rosebud operates as a measure of the Lover's own passions, not its own.

The Pygmalion anecdote is significant in that it is a further repetition of the Narcissus story that makes explicit the ostensible feminine status of the reflecting object as the Lover experiences it. While the Narcissus story suggests that the image the Lover sees in the crystals is a reflection of himself, the Pygmalion story reveals the feminized form that this self-image takes. Even though the Lover does not actually sculpt the rosebud, the dynamic of repetition that links him to the Pygmalion story suggests that the rosebud is nonetheless a masculine creation, albeit of the speaking voice. The Narrator does not fashion the bud with his hands, but his fashioning of it in discourse enacts a similar desire for self-representation. As with the Narcissus episode, the repetition linking the stories of Pygmalion and the Lover is distorted, which makes the differences between them as worthy of note as their similarities. While the statue comes to

life as a human woman, the rosebud does not. The complete lack of transformational potential in the rosebud presents us with two options for conceptualizing the feminine in courtly discourse. If on the one hand we maintain a comparison between the rosebud and statue rendered to life, the continued plant-status of the rosebud suggests that even living ladies as exemplified by Pygmalion's beloved are primarily objects of masculine self-affection; if on the other we distinguish the fates of statue and rosebud, that feminized objects cannot be fixed as representations of living women. The first reading situates the Lover's story as a comparable repetition of Pygmalion's; the second, as a distortion that differentiates them. It is this second reading that I argue in Chapter 1 underlies the relationship between the stories of Pygmalion and the Lover; the differences between them inject an ambiguity into the romance that serves to satirize the Narrator-Lover and his pretence to love.

iv) The subversion of difference: sameness, repetition and "seeming"

Certain characteristics of the rosebud correspond to the feminine as it occurs in a masculine economy of (self) representation, but as a figure for woman, which includes the woman behind this specularized image – the rosebud does not correspond to this. Predominantly read as woman or some aspect of the feminine, the rosebud amounts to little more than a glorification of the Narrator-Lover's own lust. And while this may be the lot of the feminine in much of courtly romance, for the most part the feminine Other is at least a character to whom we may attribute a sense of self even if destined to be erased by masculine self-affection. To what extent does the rosebud correspond to the woman Irigaray theorizes as overlain by but still there beyond masculine auto-referentiality? Irigaray contends that woman possesses neither gaze nor language. Rather, she provides the "basis of (re)production – particularly of discourse" (*Speculum* 227). The principles of unity and coherence that constitute the intelligibility of the masculine subject are foreign to her. Although sentenced to experience herself as fragments in a signifying economy devoted to masculine self-representation, Irigaray recuperates her multiplicity as a being "several" (30-31). While the rosebud cannot be salvaged as woman, it does correspond to Irigaray's definitions of the feminine as prescribed by masculine discourse. It is the necessary pretext for the hero's movement from the periphery of the story/garden to its centre. In accordance with the demands of masculine aggression, it is not only entirely passive, but sense-less. It is without speech, but the personifications attributed to it generate a cacophony that renders it characteristically feminine, fragmented and incoherent. While the scene of the battle may epitomize the inconsistencies of feminine speech, these begin and persist with Resistance's sudden interruptions of Fair Welcoming. It is a manifestation of this typically feminine trait of self-contradiction that prolongs the Narrator's account of his ultimate success by providing the Lover with a dilemma.

Not only is the bud silent, its owner Fair Welcoming is silenced. Throughout the romance the bud is, unsurprisingly, mute, while Fair Welcoming, whenever he is present, does speak, a little. It is therefore striking that the voice of Fair Welcoming is entirely effaced with the loss of his rosebud. It is not that he is silent, but that his words come to us through the Lover. Rather than record his speech, the Narrator has the Lover relay the protestations that Fair Welcoming makes. This “speaking for” is an insidious form of silencing that reveals the self-referentiality of the Narrator’s desire. The Narrator’s appropriation of Fair Welcoming’s voice casts the youth as, ultimately, a “voice” that emerges from within the Narrator himself. While it may be the case that all of the voices in the romance are traceable to the subjectivity of the Narrator, his take-over of Fair Welcoming’s utterances here occurs in a context that exposes his use of sexual discourse as a means of violent self-assertion.

Behind her erasure stands a subject that Irigaray is at pains to recover, to discover. That which patriarchal discourse terms fragmentation, Irigaray redefines as plurality, multiplicity, simultaneity, as being several (28-31). That which patriarchal discourse terms incoherence, Irigaray theorizes as the epitomization of woman’s position outside of, or beyond, language. Woman’s speech cannot be fixed because it is not identical to itself; it disrupts the entire economy of self-identity and self-sameness that informs a masculine veneration of oneness, systematicity, and the Phallus (*Speculum* 21-26). While the feminine erases woman, she nevertheless exists beyond this designation and the representational parameters that fix her as a masculine self-same. While woman is reduced to the function of mirroring, she may inhabit some other signifying space, although this other space cannot be predicted. And as mirror, she does possess the capacity to upset an economy of self-reflection by not providing a faithful likeness. It must be said that the rosebud, however, possesses none of these potentialities. Do we get a glimmer of a woman behind or beyond the rosebud? Can we read the contradictory positionalities of the various personifications that are said to comprise the rosebud-lady as indications of an underlying, yet inaccessible, plenitude? No, for the rosebud masks nothing. It works as a site of indeterminacy to parody the voice of the Narrator-Lover and expose the conceptual contradictions that underlie fantasies of masculine self-representation. It cannot be a case of the “lady’s” self being effaced by a masculine desire for the self-same because the rosebud does not possess a self to be overlain. An even obliterated female imaginary cannot be imputed to it.

The *Rose* features no lady beloved whatsoever, not even the fiction of a female subject who might be said to possess an even erasable autonomy. The contradictory voices of the personifications that attend the bud do not transform it into an embodiment of the simultaneity of woman. The speeches of these figures are simplistically contrary rather than a being several. They engage the Lover on a social plane that reveals the complexities of his relations with an exterior world,

not the psychic turmoil of the “lady.” As there is no woman behind the bud, it cannot be deemed a subject denuded of subjectivity. The rosebud starts and ends with the Narrator-Lover. Its femininity is a necessary myth promulgated by a host of surrounding extratextual and contextual discourses dedicated to reinforcing the heterosexual other-directed nature of the Lover’s desire, and masculine desire in general. The bud is not feminine, but feminized. While femininity is itself a construct, I make this distinction here to emphasize the artificiality of the gender identity attributed to the rosebud. The discourse that naturalizes femininity as masculinity’s Other and opposite cannot maintain its authority as genuine once its basis as a rhetorical and political strategy is discovered. The rosebud, even, or especially, as feminized is not an Other to, but the Same as, the Lover. One of the idiosyncrasies of the rosebud is that its feminization arises from discourses wholly exterior to it. It neither articulates nor performs anything, and the indeterminacies that result from its being spoken about only, undermine the gender fixity that seems to condition both its representation and the masculinity of the Lover.

While Irigaray talks of “to copy” and “to reflect” in the same breath,⁵ I am interested in how copying and reflecting differ. A reflection requires a mirror; two terms are involved, the mirror and its reflection. A copy, meanwhile, consists of a single term that has no being outside of its instituting one, the “original.” As an object that is separable from that which it reflects, the mirror admits a certain, although minute, measure of autonomy, while the copy, always derivative, does not. Irigaray notes that the mirror may cast a reflection that is exaggerated or blurred (*Speculum* 345). While anxieties over such distortions spring from a masculine dread of marring the purity of virginity rather than the exigencies of feminine resistance, the feminine activity of mimicry may also blur or exaggerate the image of desire that woman is meant to reflect. Mimicry, the deliberate assumption of the feminine role, is in itself a distortion of that role (76). The mirror does retain some minuscule means: its reflection may be a mimicking. The question of what goes on on the other side of the mirror cannot be asked of the copy, for it has no “other side.” Whereas the mirror still exists in the absence of the self-admirer’s gaze, the copy cannot be thought without its original. “Copy” only makes sense in terms of “original”; the relationship between them is one of total contingency. Of course, copies are not as straightforward as their appellation suggests, for difference and distortion “contaminate” their exactitude. This is Butler’s point about repetition as both a forming and de-forming mechanism of gender: “The injunction to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent figurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated” (145). It is through the discrepancies that result

⁵ Irigaray speaks of woman as “what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) ‘subject’ to reflect himself, to copy himself” (30).

from a charge to repeat appropriate gendered codes correctly that the text's ridicule of the Narrator and Lover emerges, for it is the excess of the Lover's performance of masculinity that jeopardizes his embodiment of it.

Theorizing the relationship between the Lover and the rosebud as one of copying involves a querying of the difference that ostensibly structures their sexual attributes. Rather than consolidate an hierarchical relationship between original and copy, the gendered performance of the Lover destabilizes the orders of both temporality, i.e., the "originality" of the "original," and gender difference. Butler's argument that gender is neither a pre-discursive interiority nor a voluntary exhibition but a regulatory practice that works through a sustained repetition of acts coded either masculine or feminine (140), highlights the artificiality of gender as it pertains to the Lover. The excess of the Lover's performance of masculinity casts his repetition of its ideals as a parody of them. The comedy of the Lover's bud-plucking finale is not limited to his particular performance, but touches the idiom of masculine self-representation itself. The Lover's enactment of the masculinity celebrated by Genius, Friend, and a figurative discourse of phallic aggression comprises a jumble of metaphoric positionalities that in their confusion mock the poles of masculine/feminine, and self/Other. While the *Rose* does not explore gender as a divergent performance, it certainly undermines its integrity as normative by both rendering the God of Love's commands ineffective or inapplicable, and ridiculing the Narrator-Lover through the ironic mayhem of the former's celebration, and the latter's dramatization, of masculinity. This is not to say that the politics of sexual difference are inconsequential, they are extremely efficacious, but rather that what are construed as masculine and feminine positionalities are not natural attributes, but discursive categories.

If it is the lot of female characters to serve as objects for the self-figuring of masculine desire, how much more so a blatant object? This, perhaps, is the distinction between theorizing the rosebud as mirror and theorizing it as copy. The rosebud does not, ultimately, function as a feminine Other that reflects a discourse of masculine self-representation, or as the resistant and multitudinous feminine, but as a site of indeterminacy the subversiveness of which is concealed by a process of feminization instituted by affiliations that both appear within and encompass the text. A tension arises between these contextual associations and the portrayal of the bud itself, for on its own the rosebud is an insufficient signifier of the female beloved and/or her sex. Its status as an object, its phallic features, and its resemblance to the Lover problematize the femininity attributed to it by discourses located both inside and outside the text. The rosebud does not reflect, but reproduces the Lover's own desires, while the Lover himself comes to reproduce the passivity, marginality, and incoherence of the bud. Dahlberg, too, notes a similarity between the Narrator-Lover and rosebud but attributes it to form only: "The ambiguity of the first-person voice parallels in form the ambiguous content of the rose-symbolism" ("First Person" 39). I argue that this parallel

exceeds the ambiguous structure, and extends to the very identity, of the speaking voice. Just as the rosebud is too complex an image to support its designation as iconic female beloved, so the speaker is too unstable a construct to articulate the ideals of masculinity epitomized by the hero-subject of romance. The speaking voice not only comprises the Narrator and the Lover, it is both doubled and vacant, central and marginal; it originates from a dream that is both the source and a repetition of the romance that it relates. As copies of one another, the bud and the Lover conjoin to undermine hierarchical orders of origin and gender: neither one nor the other comes first, and neither one nor the other properly embodies the gender it is ostensibly meant to.

The similarities between the rosebud and the Lover are striking. Aside from its phallic features, the rosebud is more particularly like the Lover. It is, we know, beautiful, red, and fragrant. And the Lover? According to Venus:

Si a en lui assez biauté
 Por qu'il est dignes d'estre amez.
 Veez com il est acesmez,
 Com il est biaux, com il est genz
 Et douz et frans sor toutes genz
 (Et avec ce il n'est pas vieus)
 Ainz est enfes, dont il vaut mieus.
 . . .
 Se le baisier li otroiez
 Mout est en lui bien emploiez,
 Qu'il a, ce cuit, mout douce alaine,
 Et sa bouche n'est pas vilaine,
 Ainz semble estre faite a estuire
 Por solacier et por deduire,
 Car les levres sont vermeilles,
 Et les denz blanches et si netes,
 Qu'il n'i a teigne ne ordure. (3446-52, 3457-65)

he is beautiful enough to be worthy of being loved in return. See how graceful he is, how handsome, how pleasant, sweet, and open toward all men. Moreover, he is not old but rather a child, and therefore worth more. . . . A kiss would be very well used on him, since, believe it, he has very sweet breath; his mouth is not ugly but seems to be made on purpose for solace and diversion, for the lips are red and the teeth white and so clean that there is neither tartar nor filth on them. (80)

Both the bud and the Lover are, above all, beautiful. The bud's sweet perfume matches the sweetness of the Lover's breath which issues from lips red, "vermeille," like the rose. Venus's explicit focus on the favourability of his youth

recalls the Lover's own preference for the small, tight buds over the broad, open ones. Like the rosebud, the Lover is here viewed as an object of desire such that the details of his physical description repeat those of the flower. While it may be argued that the descriptions of both the rosebud and the Lover are mere accolades of conventional beauty, a comparison of Venus's description of the Lover with that of another male character, such as Diversion, indicates the predominant femininity of the Lover's appearance. Whereas Diversion is outstanding for the shape of his body, comportment, and dress, the Lover is notable for his youth, sweet temper, lips, and mouth. Venus's focus on his mouth may not be surprising since her intention is to prompt a kiss from Fair Welcoming, yet this minute examination of a facial feature is usually reserved for female characters. The Lover's depiction as pleasant, sweet, open, and childlike aligns him with Joy, Youth, and Fair Welcoming rather than the, although equivocal, still more masculine portraits of Diversion and the God of Love. The feminized aspects of the Lover's physical appearance are underlined by his passivity. Rather than conducting, he undergoes a sexual scrutiny. The Lover's situation as viewed object corresponds to that of the bud, as do the details of his physical description. Rather than providing a model for the bud, might the Lover's portrayal as passive, marginal, and incoherent be a foregone conclusion because these are the very properties of the bud?

The question of where the figures in the garden are to be psychically located in terms of the multifold Narrator-Dreamer-Lover identity is another ambiguity that underlies the relationship between the Lover and the rosebud. Kay asserts that the garden and all of its images relate only to the subjectivity of the Lover (*Romance* 45). As well as being inside the garden, the garden is inside of him (*Subjectivity* 181): it not so much contains the Lover as is contained within him (181). I wonder, however, if the garden and all of its voices, including that of the Lover, are not rather inside the Narrator. Might the Lover be the affirmed identity, and the rosebud a repudiated image, of the Narrator himself? Does the Narrator deny his masculine deficiencies by embodying them in the rosebud which he then locates outside of and after himself, his opposite and creation? If so, the Lover's semblance to the bud undermines the Narrator's attempt to masculinize himself through a discourse of opposition. With no securely opposite Other to construct himself against, the identity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover configuration lapses into uncertainty and incoherence: the Lover is an objectified subject, a marginalized protagonist, an inactivated actor, and silenced speaker. Although this portrait of him as a series of contradictions recalls Lady Reason's definition of secular love, the Lover does not embody a meeting of contraries; he delivers a distorted performance of masculine subjectivity. He is not a marginal protagonist, but a marginalized one – introduced, pushed aside, and then violently, if precariously, reasserted. The hyperbole of his final performance as a successful

rose-plucker is an attempt on the part of the Narrator to resurrect his dream-self as a lover-subject and reclaim a lost centrality.

The Lover's transition into a feminized rose-object is one of a number of gender reversals that infiltrate the romance and upset its ostensible politics of sexual difference. Kay discerns a number of conventional polarities that both organize and destabilize the *Rose*, and argues that "the impetus which sexual difference imparts to the text is deconstructive: it both presents a model of hierarchised difference and undoes it" ("Sexual knowledge" 84); rather than cohesion, sexual difference is "an agent of textual instability" (84). Gaunt notes that this instability is characteristic of medieval romance in general because the texts appear to both endorse and deconstruct the "sex/gender system they mediate" (*Gender* 72). One of the most seriously playful voices in the *Rose* is that of the Old Woman, whose story of herself and her exploits fulfils while upsetting conventions of sexual difference. The disturbance she effects begins with her audience. She directs her advice on the ins and outs of woman's sexual survival to Fair Welcoming, whose masculinity, rather than being overlooked, is, as Gaunt observes, constantly invoked by her frequent and "ostentatiously masculine" endearments (68). She then finishes her speech with an account of her efforts to retain the favours of a much desired male beloved in the affair that ended her career. Not only does the Old Woman actively pursue the "rascal," she showers gifts on him, and it is he who follows her own advice to "plume / Jusqu'a la darreniere plume," [13701-02: "pluck . . . down to the last feather" (235)]. That his impoverishment of her takes the same form as that she counsels women to inflict on men reveals the plucking of feathers to be a strategy employed by both sexes. Instead of saving, the Old Woman's man spends the riches she gives to him on other women without bothering to provide for the future. In other words, he acts just as she had when young and adored. The story of the Old Woman and her lover suggests that sexual behaviour is a matter of positioning along axes of economics and desire as well as gender.

The story of the Old Woman makes it clear that women as well as men are liable to give chase. While the Narrator figures the Lover as a hunter, the fact that the Lover is chased himself inverts the gendered configuration of this metaphor. The discourse of ventry that depicts courtship as a rabbit hunt, to which the Narrator resorts, heralding his audience of "loial amant" to "oïr / Les chiens glatir, . . . / Au counin prendre" [15139, 15142-44: "hear . . . the dogs barking in chase of the rabbit" (258)], pertains likewise to the God of Love's pursuit of the Lover, who becomes a target when, upon leaving the couples in the garden to take a tour of the grounds, he is stalked by the fully-armed god:

Et li dieus d'amors m'a seü
Endementiers, en aguetant
Com li vanerres qui atant

Que la beste en bon leu se mete
Por laissier aler le saiete. (1417-21)

And the God of Love followed me, watching me all the time, as does the hunter who waits until the animal is in good position before he lets fly his arrow. (50)

Although the Narrator-Lover refers to himself here as an “animal” and not a “rabbit,” which, with its evocation of female genitalia through the word-play on *con* feminizes the hunted object, he is nonetheless the prey of the hunter Love. Throughout the *Rose* both the Lover and the rosebud occupy the feminine term of a gendered metaphor.

In the above address to the lovers of his audience the Narrator couples the metaphor of the hunt with that of the battle, and assimilates both to a once-again projected art of love, any confusions about which he promises to clear up with an explanation of the dream and interpretation of the text. This will result in the audience’s understanding everything that has been and will be written. The promise of clarification is never kept, as many critics note, and the duration and extent of debates over the *Rose* thoroughly ironizes the Narrator’s assurances of our understanding it. The Narrator’s promise here recalls his earlier one in Guillaume; those who listen to the romance will learn about love for he will explain the dream and make its truth known. Jean’s repetition of Guillaume’s reassurance mocks that reassurance. That Jean repeats it while amassing classical stories, personal anecdotes, and incessant metaphors of copulation that thoroughly ambiguate the final moments of the romance suggests that his aspiration is not to clarify. It is not merely to obscure either, however, for Jean’s repetitions of Guillaume and the structure of his continuation are scrupulous. Jean’s play with and on the text consists of a return to and repetition of certain discourses in Guillaume so as to emphasize, equivocate, or ironize their ostensible meaning. While the God of Love may hope to transform the youth into a model lover, the profusion of images, metaphors, and intratextual discourses with which Jean surrounds the Narrator and the Lover prevents a resolution of not only the ethics of the Lover’s final performance, but its status as a straightforward enactment of masculinity.

As well as Guillaume’s use of it, Jean repetition of the metaphor of the hunt recalls his own. Although the Lover listens to Lady Reason’s condemnation of the practice of loving *par amour*, the Narrator-Lover reassures us of his loyalty to the God of Love: “Car amours si forment m’atire, / Que par trestouz mes penses chace / Com cil qui partout a sa chace,” [4630-32: “for Love drew me strongly and hunted through all my thoughts like a hunter whose course lies everywhere” (99)]. The Narrator-Lover represents his devotion to the God of Love through an erotically charged metaphor in which he figures himself as the invaded body. The suggestiveness of penetration here evokes Guillaume’s

portrayal of the ceremony in which the God of Love, to secure the Lover's loyalty, demands a kiss on the mouth and then locks up the youth's heart by inserting a key that he retrieves from his purse into the Lover's side. The sexual insinuation of the God of Love's purse and key eroticizes a relationship in which the Lover acts the part of the beloved.⁶ The erotics of pervasiveness in the God of Love's mastery over the Lover recalls another earlier use of the motif, again in Guillaume, to describe the Lover's exploration of the garden. The Narrator-Lover recounts that the God of Love "en nul leu ne m'aresté / Tant que j'oi par trestot esté" [1318-19: "did not stop me in any place until I had been everywhere" (48)]. As well as to the garden, the Lover gains widespread admission to the rosebushes. Taking advantage of the indulgence urged on Resistance by Openness and Pity he rejoices: "Or ai d'aler partout congié," [3350: "Now I had leave to go everywhere" (78)]. Jean turns around and sensualizes the rather benign privilege of admittance to everywhere accorded to the Lover in Guillaume by repositioning the Lover as the one whose "everywhere" is relentlessly accessed by the God of Love. The everywhere through which the Lover wanders Jean reconfigures as the psyche of the Lover himself. Keeping in mind that the garden the Lover explores is, as Kay says, inside of him, Jean recasts this dream space as the Lover's mind. The God of Love no longer pursues the Lover through the garden, but through his very thoughts. The Lover's transformation into an object of masculine pursuit likens him to the rosebud, which occupies the same position in relation to him. The Lover's status as hunted object accomplishes for the God of Love what the rosebud does as desired object for the Narrator-Lover. Just as the bud occasions the self-speaking of the Narrator-Lover, the Narrator-Lover occasions that of the God of Love, for as an art of love the *Rose* is an articulation of the God of Love, a discursive version of the character himself.

An engagement with the speaking voice of the *Rose* is further complicated by the matter of its source. Is the romance a recreation of the voice of the Lover, a recollection of the Narrator, or some combination of the two? Vitz notes that the hitherto quite distinct voices of the Lover and Narrator overlap at the closing of Guillaume in the Lover's plaint to Fair Welcoming ("The *P*" 63). In a discussion of the same passage Hult argues that the effect of the "specious transitions and the tense confusion of the last passage are all failed attempts to assure the distinctness of voices" ("Closed Quotations" 265). It is the change of verb tenses in this closing passage of Guillaume that prevents its restriction to one voice, to either

⁶ Many critics do not consider a sexual innuendo to underlie the ritual binding the Lover to the God of Love. Harley points out, however, that the language of the ceremony exceeds that usually reserved for such transactions. She notes the sexual connotations of the purse and jewels as they occur in Lady Reason's list of euphemisms and Genuis's speech, and of the lock and key riddle in *The Exeter Book* (333).

that of the Lover or the Narrator, yet even in the absence of such visible markers an equivocation complicates the singularity of the speaking voice. In Jean as in Guillaume this voice is multireferential. In Jean, however, its duality is underscored by a change in tone rather than tense that results in a widening rather than closing of the gap between the Narrator and the Lover. As the romance nears its end, a cynical and harsh voice intrudes with lewd comments and obscene metaphors of the type that the Lover had formerly cringed even to hear.

According to Kay, “The lover ceases to be a noble, courtly youth and becomes instead a dissembling sensualist” (*Romance* 42). While it is true that the Lover’s motives become less than noble upon his attempt to enter the path of Give-Too-Much, which is where Kay locates the first setting in of “the rot” that spoils the Lover’s integrity (42), the speaking voice is not nearly as violent here as it later becomes. Once he embarks on his pilgrimage, staff in hand, the deference that induced him to follow Fair Welcoming’s lead is gone. The Narrator’s account of the Lover’s journey to and enjoyment of the rosebud is a coarse celebration of misogynist iconography and masculine aggression. The brutal intonation of the speaking voice hinges on a glorification of the Lover’s penile staff that corroborates the prop of masculine self-aggrandizement to be a degradation of the feminine. The reductive figuration of the female sex as a variety of ditches, toll roads, and repasts that culminates in the Lover’s grappling with the rosebud is delivered in a voice far removed from the humbler one of the earlier work.

If the Narrator began the romance with a desire to reproduce the innocence of his past self, it is as though he gets so caught up in the telling of it that his current voice takes over, transforming the narrative from a romantic reverie into an obscene fantasy. While still the ostensible speaker of the romance, the Lover, even here in his moment of glory, is marshalled to the verbal sidelines. Throughout the romance his voice is increasingly supplanted by that of the Narrator, who relishes the terms and telling of the tale more, it seems, than the Lover does the bud. It is not a matter of the Lover’s voice remaining unchanged, for romance is precisely about the moral evolvment of its hero, but of the extent and nature of the change, both of which suggest that it is no longer the character of the Lover who commands the speaking voice, but the Narrator. Narratorial intrusions in the form of excuses, learned speechifying, and what are obviously editorial and, indeed, paradoxical manoeuvres, such as the inclusion of the Old Woman’s speech which is relayed to the Narrator at what must be some later, in fact post-dream, and hence impossible, date, distinguish the account as more the property of the Narrator than the Lover. The Lover, once the central voice of the romance, ends it a mere vessel for the self-speaking of the Narrator. This erasure of the Lover’s voice clinches his growing bud-like status. Jean finishes the romance on a note of high irony when he has the Lover radically resemble the bud in a representation of copulation the success of which rests on his essential difference from it. During the scene in which the bud most graphically figures as

a conduit for the Lover's pleasure, the Lover is himself infiltrated by the Narrator as a medium for his linguistic self-gratification. The Narrator is not content to merely frame the story of the Lover, and his usurpation of the speaking voice thrusts him into centre stage where he over-exhibits his discursive handling of the bud, for the irony that manages to unnerve all authoritative endeavours in Jean extends here to the Narrator such that his oral display works to undermine rather than confirm his masculinity. Rather than a conclusive account of sexual consummation, the final scene relates the Narrator's handling of a figurative discourse the reins of which escape him.

The irony that informs the Narrator's account of the Lover's acquisition of the bud is linked to both the indeterminacy of the speaking voice and the subversive manoeuvring of, not false seeming, but seeming itself. While the speech that so disorders the identity of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover may follow upon the God of Love's acceptance of False Seeming as a leader into his ranks, and the hero's methodology display a certain disingenuousness, the identity of the speaking voice is not a matter of false seeming, but the more destabilizing play of seeming. "False Seeming" evokes "fair seeming," the fifth of the God of Love's arrows, and while the prefix of each is the other's opposite, the question arises: what is the difference between a seeming that is false and a seeming that is fair? The fair arrow that pierces the Lover is razor sharp, and the relief it provides contingent upon the great pain it causes. False Seeming presents himself as humble and pious when he is really a greedy hypocrite. Seemings both fair and false couch themselves in a network of interdependently deceitful self-representations: both cloak their falsities with a fair seeming. The doubleness of fair seeming is, however, immediately detectable in a way that the disguise of False Seeming is not. A difference in the dynamic of fair and false seemings renders false seeming an opportunistic distortion of fair seeming. Guillaume's fair seeming entails the co-existence of two palpable terms: the arrow is both sweet and painful. Rather than a duality, the illusoriness of False Seeming comprises a distinct contradiction between appearance and intent. With characteristic audacity Jean cites Guillaume such that he echoes his predecessor's duality as contradiction and simultaneity as confusion. Rather than contrary, "fair" and "false" have similar meanings when affixed to "seeming." Fair seeming seems and is, arguably, fair in spite of its dangers, and false seeming seems fair but is really false. Is it not, then, somewhat redundant to name a deceptive character *False Seeming* since *seeming* itself denotes falsity? Or does it? It would appear that seeming annuls the distinction between false and fair: "seeming" renders all seeming and cannot be false of its own accord. This is not how False Seeming works, however, for although his mission is to undermine it, truth founds the notion of his being. False Seeming's not being the real thing presupposes the existence of the real thing, the truthful rendition. All of this is complicated, however, by the fact that False Seeming delivers a truthful account of religious

hypocrisy. While False Seeming does not destroy the being of truth, he situates it as entirely unidentifiable.

While false seeming may inform the Lover's conduct, it is the more tricky business of seeming that underlies the speaker's identity. Whereas false seeming endangers truth through a subversion of its aspect, seeming infers no such trustworthy opposite. Seeming abrogates the existence of a truth that the deceptions of false seeming in fact sustain. Seeming precludes the presence of a discourse exterior to itself from which its representational integrity may be verified. It undoes a truth-bearing ethics devoted to ascertaining the correspondence of two terms, the expression and the being of a thing. Seeming, meanwhile, comprises one term; it exists as surface. The God of Love's speech involves a spectacular play of such seeming: while no falsity appends the identity of the Narrator-Lover, no certainty may be attached to it either. It is not that the Narrator-Lover is really Jean and not Guillaume, or really Guillaume and not Jean, or was Guillaume before and will be Jean later, or will remain Guillaume and never be Jean at all. While seeming to be both Guillaume and Jean, the Narrator-Lover seems at the same time to be neither. While seeming to be neither, he seems to be both. The indeterminacy of the speaking voice renders it an embodiment not of false seeming, but seeming itself. The Narrator-Dreamer-Lover persona both is and is not a stable configuration. The continuousness of the three perspectives articulates an identity that is entirely discontinuous.

The play of seeming in Jean accords with the character of his irony. Just as seeming precludes the space of an outside from which to ascertain its veracity, so Jean's irony is not secured by a verifiable alternate politics. His text provides no platform, no discourse on which to found a "proper" ironic reading of it. Irony depends upon the reader's comprehension of a larger authorial perspective and intent. If this cannot be determined, neither can a conclusive ironic commentary. Jean's irony takes that "most alarming form" as Kay says of Gaunt's discussion of it in the troubadour lyric, "in which the dissolution of the surface meaning is not compensated for by the reassuring emergences of an alternative reading," (Kay *Subjectivity* 18), the result of which, states Gaunt, is that "There is no absolute truth: there are only questions and uncertainty" (*Troubadours* 28). Jean does not provide the reader with a path to follow in the stead of that which he satirizes. The difficulty in establishing a solid ironic foundation stems in part from the ambiguity that permeates the speaking voice. To whom do we attribute it, the Lover or the Narrator? While I have argued that by the end of the *Rose* the voice we hear is that of the Narrator, it nevertheless remains attributable to the Lover. Through whom does the voice of the author sound, then? No discourse or image is granted sufficient moral clout to secure a definitive or authorial reading of the romance, and hence its irony. An inability to apprehend the truth of the *Rose*, a truth that would check the indeterminacy of its irony and seemingness, coincides with its subversion of the difference between original and copy. The duality of the

speaking voice forces us to wonder whether we are getting a direct account of the Lover's speeches and impressions, or a version, a copy of them not only affected by the disposition of the Narrator but at times more blatantly constructed by him. The uncertainty that permeates the image of the rosebud is a destabilizing force that matches that of the speaking voice. In a final ironic union, the rosebud and speaking voice resemble each other as sites of indeterminacy; they undermine a politics of opposition that has ostensibly provided the basis for our understanding of the text all along.

Chapter 3

Allegory and the *Rose*

i) The meaning of allegory

The status of the dream portion of *The Romance of the Rose* as an allegory has been one of the main determining factors in its being read as a young man's pursuit and seduction of a virginal young lady. This traditional courtly love plot comprises the dream's allegorical level, while the rather illogical scenario of the Lover falling in love with and cutting a rosebud constitutes the literal story. My initial, unformulated yet intense, resistance to this understanding of the poem has crystallized into the question of what, besides the conventionality of the association, permits the rosebud to be read as a young woman? It is the impulsiveness of this attribution that interests me, and the validity of such immediate and well-sanctioned impressions. Is my first impulse always more correct than a studied reading? What happens if I attend to portions of the text that are, by and large, overlooked? To what extent is interpretation a matter of choice rather than discovery? While I realize that a text cannot be forced into just any interpretive mould, the way in which one approaches a text, and the type of questions that of consequence arise, are a matter of choice. I may choose the terms of inquiry, but that does not mean that I may fabricate the answers. Jonathan Culler in the, as he observes, "uncomfortable" task of defending "overinterpretation" against Umberto Eco, argues that a text "can challenge the conceptual frame with which one attempts to interpret it" (109). Even were this not the case and one believed that the *Rose* was intended to be read as a conventional tale of courtly love, the practice of "pursuing questions that the text does not pose to its model reader," and asking "questions that the text does *not* encourage one to ask about it" (114) are, argues Culler, valuable means for discovering "connections and implications" (110) that may otherwise remain hidden. While it may seem that I am doing the latter and putting questions to the text that it does not invite, I believe otherwise. The *Rose* delights in baffling its audience by presenting it with unexpected and irresolvable scenarios. It encourages questions that subvert its audience's immediate assumptions, and sets out to challenge conventional "conceptual frameworks" by featuring a symbol that solicits the most traditional of interpretations only to disrupt them. The femininity of the rosebud, the homoerotic and self-involved nature of the Narrator-Lover's desire, the incoherence of the narrative voice, and the fundamental instability of signification, are some of the contentions that arise from an engagement with the poem's vexatious play with and on prevailing reflexes of interpretation. After arguing in the first chapter that the rosebud is too ambiguous an image to support its assimilation to a female character, I set out in the second to explore the repercussions of rereading the bud as a symbol of indeterminacy, particularly on the subject position articulated by the Narrator and embodied by the Lover. In this

next chapter I discuss how a refusal to grant a figurative authority to the rosebud impacts allegorical readings of other elements of the poem, the personifications especially. I begin with a discussion of allegory generally, suggest how the *Rose* does not conform to conventional definitions of it as a bilevel narrative, and finish by offering “other” readings of the dream as allegory.

The first step into this thicket of what allegory means is deceptively easy: define the term. Delving further into the matter proves increasingly thorny. As with any genre, the question of definition is highly contentious. Van Dyke summarizes the meaning of allegory thus:

First, allegory is extended, usually the basis for an entire narrative; second, the words and meaning in allegory correspond not antithetically, as in irony, but on parallel planes. . . . Having said that much, the student of allegory can then go on to define the relationship between levels. The first is explicit, the second implicit; the first is always concrete but the second is often abstract; the first is a fiction, while the second is “real” or in some way more important. . . . There may in fact be more than two of these levels, but the first is always the “literal level” while the others are collectively termed “allegorical” and function together as secondary. The greater importance of the second level or levels . . . immediately suggests the way in which allegories ought to be read.
(26)

The literal level of the narrative points beyond itself to another, allegorical, level. It is the predominance of this other level that makes allegory allegory. The diverse labelling of this other level as “implicit,” “abstract,” “real,” “more important,” “secondary,” and, as Poirion asserts, “plus vraisemblable,” (Preface 11: more plausible) attests to the controversies surrounding the meaning of allegory and its relation to the dynamic of interpretation. The basic understanding of allegory as saying one thing while meaning another is a definition that Stephen Russell notes modern criticism has “incarcerated . . . by associating it only with the stable sustained figurative narrative, wherein an abstract proposition is figured or realized as an image” (xi). The implicit critique in Russell’s words suggests that allegory deserves to be freed from a reduction to its abstract, or allegorical, level. Rather than the “decoded messages,” the “‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ processes” (xi) are, he asserts, of greater interest and worth; this positions a study of allegory as being primarily concerned with the process of interpretation. The notion that allegory is “incarcerated” by a limited and limiting figurality evokes Michel Foucault’s striking reversal of the soul/body hierarchy. His declaration that “the soul is the prison of the body” (30) affords an apt model for a revaluation of the hierarchical assumptions that underlie a literal/allegorical divide. Of

allegory it may be said that “the allegorical is the prison of the literal”: a more significant allegorical meaning, the “soul” of the work, constrains the movements of the literal which, like the body, receives numerous complaints about its faulty construction. A simple reversal, while provocative and illuminating, does not set things to rights, however. It is the whole notion of levels, of “allegorical” and “literal,” that needs to be interrogated for the assumptions that it forwards, and reformulated to enable the release other ideas latent in the work’s language and structure. The “otherness” of allegory may be envisaged as springing from the rich play of its figurative language rather than the substitution of concrete image for abstract meaning.

How obscure is the view from the ditch of literal plot to the horizon of allegorical meaning? The nature of the relationship between these two levels of allegory, the concrete and abstract, is a matter of endless deliberation. The literal level is often conceived of as veiling or obscuring a more significant allegorical meaning. The fact that its meaning is hidden, “deviously” (16) presented as Stephen Barney notes, makes allegory a divisive and elitist enterprise. This results in either delight with its artfulness or irritation with its abstruseness. As Ralph Flores observes: “it gives or hides something, presumably esoteric, to or from profane ears” (5). Like irony, then, allegory relies on the prior, the extra, intelligence of its audience; it relies on the appreciation of those “in the know.” As its usual definition of “saying one thing and meaning another” implies,¹ allegory may be regarded as foundationally ironic. Yet Van Dyke argues otherwise: “the words and meaning in allegory correspond not antithetically, as in irony, but on parallel planes” (26). Irony may be part of allegory since it works, as Tuve notes, through indirection (246), but the irony does not occur between a word and its meaning. Barney would seem to agree: “A truly obscure parable or allegory must be a contradiction in terms; we can speak of allegory as retarding or redefining our recognition of the Other, but surely not as veiling it” (41). Veiling equates allegory with euphemism and the linguistic antics of the Narrator-Lover’s

¹ See Fletcher: “In the simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another” (2); Flores: “It is a way of saying something enigmatically, figuratively, on several levels” (5); Kay: “The definition of allegory in Quintilian’s *Institutionis oratoria* (widely known in the Middle Ages) is that allegory involves saying one thing and meaning another” (*Romance* 13); Kelly: “By definition allegory traditionally has at least two levels of meaning: the literal and the allegorical. Each level is ‘other,’ that is, different in meaning from the other level” (31); Madsen: “This idea of allegory as a rhetorical substitute for, or encoding of, an extrinsic discourse is even now among the most popular definitions of allegory – that allegory ‘means one thing and says another,’ is a common explanation of the operations of allegory” (3); Whitman: “The basis for the technique is obliquity – the separation between what a text says, the ‘fiction,’ and what it means, ‘the truth’” (2); Wimsatt: “As used by Greek writers (including St. Paul) and by medieval commentators, the word has a broad application, signifying any statement in which one thing is said and another is understood” (22).

bud-snipping victory. It is precisely this sort of veiling that many critics consider to be the underlying target of Jean's ridicule of the discourse of courtly love.

Zumthor believes allegory's implicit meaning to be of primary importance, but insists that the allegory is not engaged in hiding anything; its veil is so thin as to be almost nonexistent. Not only do the levels of signification concur, they do so, and even in the *Rose*, without discrepancy: "Trois ordres de signification coïncident; aucun espace n'est perceptible entre eux: le récit dans sa littérarité, le développement subjectif d'amour, l'enseignement que ceux-ci comportent" (*Essai* 371: Three orders of signification coincide; no space is perceptible between them: the story in its literariness, the subjective development of love, the instruction that these comprise). The allegory's mechanics and meaning are fully perceptible to the audience because the link between the literal tangibility and allegorical significance of its basic elements, its personifications and the prolonged metaphor within which they occur, is apparent: "les éléments sont aisément reconnus par l'auditeur, qui les rapporte à une autre réalité, bien définie, située au-delà d'eux" (128: the elements are easily recognized by the listener, who refers them to another reality, well-defined and situated beyond them). The moral sense of the allegory is "évident et monovalent" (128: evident and uniform). Rather than immeasurably complex, allegory, in Zumthor's books, is highly rational. With its "sens indiscutable" (127: indisputable meaning), allegory "proclame et engendre un ordre, clair, dépourvu de franges inquiétants" (127: proclaims and engenders a clear order devoid of disturbing fringes). The passage in allegory from metaphor to reality is a process that is not subject to obfuscation thanks to the transparency of the allegorical meaning of each of the work's elements (127).

While disagreeing with Zumthor on many points, the idea that allegory contains its own gloss is maintained by Quilligan. Rather than obscuring, veiling, or meaning something other than what it says, allegory, through personification, "manifests the meaning as clearly as possible by naming the actor with the concept" (31). Her conclusions are not that this manifest gloss ordains and resolves an "other" level of meaning, however, but that it directs the audience to search for meaning in a highly self-conscious way (24). While the meanings may be apparent, how these meanings are to be understood, how they interact and what these interactions mean, is not. Quilligan does not believe that allegory presents its audience with a meaning that is either homogeneous or easily decipherable. She argues that allegory is thoroughly polysemantic, and that its other meanings spring, not from an affinity between clearly identifiable levels of meaning, but a simultaneity of prospects located within, not beyond, the language of the text (26). The rich ambiguity of allegory's figurative language makes *it* the subject of the poem, not a veil obscuring *another* subject.

Rather than as a vertical metaphor, Quilligan envisions allegory as a horizontal network. Meaning does not occur on different levels, but "accretes serially, interconnecting and criss-crossing the verbal surface" of the text (28).

Allegories do not possess a single “allegorical” meaning, but a plurality of meanings generated by the rich multireferentiality of their figurative language. It is the notion of simultaneity, “the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning” (26) that, Quilligan argues, precludes a division of allegory into levels. The literal and allegorical do not occur on separate planes; rather, figurative meaning, which is firmly embedded in the literality, the letters, of the text, traverses the surface of the narrative to set up a complex network of signification (33). Because it so often shifts into moments of irresolvability, however, a coherent network cannot be sketched for the *Rose*. Its disparate strands refuse to produce a neat figurative web, no matter how intricate. It is, as Flores asserts of allegory in general, “provocatively and endlessly semiotic” (4). Meaning accumulates as the allegory unfolds, making it a protean horizontal process rather than a static vertical tableau. This is why the mutability of the rosebud, its shift from bud to rose back to bud, serves as a comment on what it signifies and the variability of signification itself.

Quilligan attributes the desire to find hidden meaning to *allegoresis*, and refutes this as the intended way to go about reading allegory. It is a mode of interpretation to which allegories themselves are the least amenable. “Allegories” quips Quilligan, “do not need *allegoresis*” (31). She argues that allegory is a genre that uses personification and word play to incite the audience to make meaning in a highly self-reflexive way, whereas *allegoresis* is a mode of reading that is able to “make *any* text (from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to Rousseau’s *Julie*), whatever its manifest literal meaning, appear to be about language, or any other (latent) subject” (“Allegory” 164). As well as generate meanings, *allegoresis* also shuts them down. By discounting the explicit in favour of the implicit, *allegoresis* works to confine the literal and becomes, as Van Dyke observes, “a method of suppressing meaning” (45). *Allegoresis* inspires typological readings of the Bible and Christian interpretations of classical literature; it is a method of explaining texts that were precisely not written as allegories. Lady Reason’s praise of the integuments of the poets, while it is often considered a reliable index of how to read the *Rose*, refers to fables and parables, works that are not, as the *Rose* is, allegories. Quilligan insists that the “other” of *allos* does not refer to “some other hovering above the words of the text” (26). Allegory does not obscure, veil, or mean something other than what it says; rather, it means many things at once (26).

The notion that allegory encodes something other than what its words say permits the specificity of the poem’s language to be downplayed. Thus Fleming’s stated lack of interest in the literal integrity of the *Rose* permits him to disregard the masculinity of Fair Welcoming. He closes his study by noting that he has “been largely concerned with the analysis of literal and pictorial iconography, with an attempt to demonstrate what the Lover’s dream means, as opposed to what it actually says” (245). How is it possible for a text to mean something that it does not say? Fleming suggests that the letter of the text, which most critics agree is of

primary importance, may be completely bypassed. To provide the text with a meaning that it does not articulate is to engage in *allegoresis*, to find meanings above and beyond those embedded in the text's language. When Van Dyke asserts that "If a text says one thing it also means that thing: we cannot separate speech from meaning" (42), she is not offering a reductive view of language, but an expansive one. Rather than encode another meaning, allegory draws upon the polysemantic quality of language to set a multiplicity of meanings into play. Rather than interpret a literal thing as an allegorical something else, the *Rose* compels its audience to read, as well as its secondary features, its constituent elements in two or more ways: the narrative voice is both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean; the rosebud is both and neither feminine and/nor masculine; Fair Welcoming is masculine yet contextualized as feminine; False Seeming speaks the truth. The dream's indeterminacies cannot be transformed into a coherent meaning.

Certain critics refute the notion that the literal is a "mere means to the other" (125) as Lewis puts it, and object to a slighting of allegory's literal level. Gaunt argues that the *Rose*, "far from inviting us to look *through* the 'literal' to the 'allegorical' level of meaning, as if the literal were transparent, seems rather to take pleasure in banging our heads against the literal, as if it were a hard and opaque surface" (69). Gaunt speaks specifically here of the ways in which Jean, instead of attempting to conceal the masculinity of Fair Welcoming, repeatedly draws attention to it. Tuve insists that "The story is truly primary" (160) and, like Lewis, insists upon a "double apprehending" whereby we "follow story and symbols simultaneously" (Tuve 199). An insistence upon the significance of the symbol as an object encourages a more flexible reading of the rosebud by engaging the ambiguity that Tuve notes is crucial to the functioning of allegory (239). While Lewis's insistence that one test "how far the concept really informs the image and how far the image really lends poetic life to the concept" (125) credits the image as a critical element in the process of ascertaining meaning, this relationship between image and concept seems to be considered successful only if it upholds the concept as already known, hence Lewis's criticism of Jean's handling of the *Rose* and Fair Welcoming especially.² It is not argued that the image in any sense constitutes the concept, or that the story gives meaning to the symbol, so that the simultaneity of image/concept and story/symbol rests upon the prescribed meaning of the allegorical facet of the pairing. The semantic linkage of

² Lewis posits that Jean is not competent to continue the allegorical work of Guillaume. He is unable to keep "the two stories – the psychological and the symbolical – distinct and parallel" (140). For instance, he "forgets" quips Lewis, that "Bialacoil is a 'young bachelor,'" and that the castle is "purely figurative" (140). Fair Welcoming should be neither masculine nor reticent, and it doesn't make allegorical sense for the Old Woman to smuggle the Lover into the castle (140).

image and concept is known beforehand, and the pleasure is in seeing how, in what ways, the two inform one another.

A.C. Spearing, in his study of the complex symbology of the pearl in the Middle English dream vision of that name, articulates the limitations of this reliance on a pre-existing cultural register to determine the meaning of a symbol, especially in texts that are lengthy and complex. His criticism of the desire to find hidden meanings for the pearl “through any concealed layers of allegory” (101) applies well to the symbol of the rosebud. He argues that while it is true that medieval readers would have come to the poem equipped with a number of meanings for the pearl, that store is not sufficient to determine a reading of the symbol in *Pearl* itself. Rather than with a catalogue of extrinsic explanations, Spearing insists that the reader must begin with “what the poet actually says” (100). Not only is it the case that the poet “uses” rather than merely reiterates the familiar symbols of their culture, but in longer works especially the meaning of the symbol unfolds over time, the result of a “synthesis of symbol with drama” (100, 101). It may be that an image’s meaning is precisely the topic of the poem and cannot be taken for granted, as is the case with the rosebud. The meaning of the image must, in addition to its history, derive from the proclivities of the poem and particularities of its text. Tve proposes an assessment of general tone as another check on meaning in her notion of a work’s overall “drift”: “the principle drift *governs* the meanings attributable to the incidents borne upon the stream; the latter cannot take their own moral direction as they chose” (235). This valuable notion of a governing drift suffers when it is made to run through the gorges of convention and conform to what are endorsed as the prevailing currents of the Middle Ages. *Building on Tve’s metaphor, I would like to draw attention to the rocks, falls, eddies, and crosscurrents that trouble any stream. The Rose is full of such disturbances. The indeterminacy of the rosebud, incoherence of the narrative voice, masculinity of Fair Welcoming, complexity of the other personifications, and pervasive irony of the entire piece, disrupt the usual flow of courtly romance.*

Underlying these diverse views of allegory is a tension in its status as a genre and/or a mode. As Deborah Madsen notes: “allegory names in a variety of ways a trope, an interpretive method and a narrative genre, and a vertiginous overlapping has resulted from these definitions. . . . allegory has been treated as a species of figurative language and as a hermeneutic system” (29). Is allegory a recognizable literary genre, or a pervasive methodology? How distinguishable are the two? The notion that allegory says one thing and means another casts it not as a genre in its own right, but as a mode of reading, a “hermeneutic system.” Allegory is not defined according to its possession of certain features, but in terms of how it is to be read; it is a way of doing something rather than a thing in and of itself. It may be argued that signification is an uncertain process in most texts, that most texts encourage their readers to look beyond the literal surface for a more significant secondary meaning. What, then, distinguishes allegory from

other genres? Is it unique only in terms of the degree to which it is driven by a quest for knowledge, as Madsen suggests (73),³ or its interest in “attenuated semiosis,” (xii) as Russell posits⁴? Is it only the intensity of its preoccupation with semiotic transactions that sets allegory apart from other genres? Kay distinguishes allegory from non-allegories such as romance through their methodologies of encoding and decoding. In Chrétien, she argues, “abstract meanings may be inferred from a literal narrative about individuals, but in explicitly didactic writing the levels of meaning are reversed: the ‘abstract’ level provides the stuff of ‘character’ and ‘plot’, whilst the inferred meaning relates to possible real-world events” (*Romance* 14). The difference between allegories and non-allegories, then, lies in the significance of and relationship between literal and abstract levels of meaning. The abstract meaning, far from needing to be inferred, comprises the literal level. What needs to be inferred is how the literal level relates to “real-world events.” Do all components of the plot work as abstractions, however? Can they be made to correspond to “real-world events”? This idea of levels flattens the differences that exist between the text’s literal elements and obscures the significance of their varying degrees of abstraction. How does one interpret objects that are not already abstractions, like the rosebud? For, although it is often treated as such, the rosebud is not an abstract concept that refers to a “real-world” woman. It is not a personification, but a symbol, the differences between which are substantial. Whereas a personification articulates its own meaning, a symbol does not. The ambiguity that the rosebud interjects into the poem’s figurative economy is precisely the point of its being there. That the central image of the *Rose* is a symbol amidst a mass of personifications problematizes a division of the allegory into levels and constitutes a persistent ripple in the narrative stream.

Treating the rosebud as a personification permits a fixing of its meaning that overrides the complexities that it occasions. The rosebud is read as a human figure that embodies ideas such as femininity, love, and desire, when it is an object that encodes a multiplicity of diverse meanings. Barney notes that personifications and symbols are alike in that they both manifest a range of reference beyond themselves, yet the differences are significant. Taking the rose of Blake’s poem, “Oh, rose, thou art sick” as an example, he remarks that while “thou,” “nearly turns the word ‘rose’ into a personification” it does not quite because the apostrophe is a rhetorical device (25). In the *Rose*, however, the rosebud is never even addressed such that it may be mistaken for a woman, while

³ Madsen states that “Knowledge as the object of desire is a mechanism exploited by all narratives but exaggerated by allegory” (73).

⁴ Referring to the Middle Ages specifically Russell notes that, “allegory was ‘attenuated semiosis,’ the authorial manipulation of signs that differs from other writing only in its being completely self-conscious and deliberate” (xii).

the Narrator's beloved is predominantly a contrivance and insufficient justification to transform the bud into a woman. The remainder of Barney's comments about Blake's rose apply well to the rosebud:

we sense no radical merger of disparate entities when we associate the word "rose" with the thing, a rose, whereas we do when we associate the name "Pride" with a fictional woman. On the other hand, when presented with the word "rose," our minds have to go far to arrive at the concept "love," and the further we go the less sure we are that we have arrived at the right place. (25)

The composition and signifiatory movements of a personification and symbol are vastly dissimilar. The diverse aspects of a personification – human figure and abstract concept – merge into one meaning, and while this meaning may be complicated, it is nonetheless relatively coherent. While a personification condenses meaning in that its vagaries are collected and cohered under the auspices of one signifier, a symbol disseminates meaning; it conveys a multitude of possible significances. Unlike the rosebud, the question surrounding Lady Reason is not what she represents, but how she represents, what her embodiment of reason suggests about this faculty as it pertains to the speaking voice. Reading Lady Reason as reason does not generate another, distinctly allegorical, level of meaning. The meaning of Lady Reason inheres in her name which includes but is not limited to an historical and cultural knowledge of the concept "reason." Her significance also derives from the particularities of her appearance, actions, speeches, responses, and the observations of the text's other speakers. The *Rose* does not mean something other, more plausible or profound, than what it says, and calling it an allegory does not sanction the interpretive leap that it takes to fix the rosebud as a lady. In fact, this leaping is precisely what Guillaume and Jean set out to thwart, for the poem evokes this association only to undermine it. The subversion of the axiom "rosebud equals courtly lady" compels us to question why we read the rosebud as such, why we attribute this meaning to it in spite of it blatantly not being a courtly lady. We have to "go far" to arrive at any meaning for the rosebud; its object status is so complete that it remains an equivocal, if highly suggestive, entity, providing little figurative support for the conveyance of an ultimate meaning. As Barney contends, we never "arrive," never find ourselves at the "right place"; whatever meaning the reader devises for the rosebud, it refuses to substantiate.

The trickiness of reading allegory emerges in Tuve's remarks on the necessity of allowing it the scope to be suggestive while not blotting out its literal details. She makes the point that it is reductive to make every element of the battle, for instance, "pay its way psychologically as part of an analysis of a particular mind" (251); "it happens," she warns, "to be important that we should

not insistently drive the poems, or portions of them, toward a kind of unity which demands biographical coherence and relevance of the incidents” (160); thus, to dismiss a figurative reading based on an incongruity of detail is an invalid approach to the allegory. Her later caution, however, that we do injustice to the image “if large portions of a work have to be covered with blotting paper while we read our meaning in what is left” (234) demands a fine balance between overlooking the specifics of plot in order to free up the workings of the poem’s figurative devices, and attending to its literal details. While literal plausibility is not to be expected of the *Rose*, manufacturing allegorical coherence from textual ambiguity is not the way to contend with its anomalies either. To wrestle consistency from prosopoeic, symbolic, and metaphoric inconsistency is simply not feasible. Rather, the figurative impetus of the *Rose* requires readers to revamp their thinking about how, and hence what, the poem “means.”

In the absence of a single, either reliable or authoritative, perspective, this examination of meaning is unremitting. What one reader understands as satire, another is as equally justified in considering a good example. The debate over how to read the Lover’s experience at the Fountain of Love is a case in point. Reading the *Rose* consists of a continual readjustment of one’s assessment of the allegory thus far, which does not, however, result in a more lucid understanding of it. The poem does not nicely reorganize itself into a recognizable narrative because its language both generates and upsets too many possibilities for it to be read as only one thing. The reader must learn to grant the *Rose* its simultaneity of readings, and to accept the partiality of any one reading. Because the status of its rudimentary elements – the rosebud, the personifications, and the speaking voice – cannot be pinned down but shifts depending upon the choices the reader makes, the allegory refuses to crystallize into an implicit account of anything. Its key factors are, and purposely so, points of contention. The poem sets up typically suggestive readings only to undercut the typical suggestions. There is nothing particularly feminine about the rosebud, and much that is insinuatingly masculine. In addition, despite its clear sexual overtones, the inclusion of horticultural minutiae undercuts the suggestiveness of the bud. The erotic nuances of the “botons petiz et clos” [1636: “small, tight buds” (53)] and those “Qui se traient a lor saison / Et sont pretes d’espanoir” [1639-40: “that were approaching their season and were ready to open” (53)] are immediately defused by a supply of practical information:

Les roses overtes et lees
Sont en .i. jor toutes alees
Et li boton furent tuit frois,
A tout le mains .ij. jorz ou .iiij. (1642-45)

the broad, open ones are gone in a day, but the buds remain quite fresh at least two or three days. (53)

The Lover's decision not to reach for his chosen bud because he might hurt himself on the "Espines tranchanz et aguës, / Orties et ronces croques" [1674-75: "Cutting, sharp spikes, nettles, and barbed thorns" (53)] casts the hedge as a hedge more so than an allegorical obstacle. Rather than leave the reader with the idea that the flowers are sexual images, the text, as Gaunt says, "bang[s] our heads against the literal" (69) by reminding us that the rosebud is an object. Instead of situating the reader in a literal realm that conjures up the erotic, the text places the reader in an erotic realm that persistently reverts to the literal.

If allegory is to be conceived of as a genre rather than a mode of reading, what are its basic, distinguishing features? Kay identifies one of the markers of allegory to be the text's "declarations of didactic intent" (*Romance* 14) because the pedagogy establishes, and alerts the reader to, another level of meaning: the fiction encodes a real-life lesson. As Sahar Amer and Noah Guynn assert, however, the gleaning of "a totalized, perfected meaning after the fact of the text" (1) is a possibility stated by the writers themselves and not necessarily a reliable indicator of another level of meaning. Rather than take what allegorists say about their own work at face value, we might be better off looking to the works themselves. The Narrator's assertion that he is writing an art of love which he will later clarify is not borne out by the allegory. There is no message or instruction couched in the text of the dream, nor are affirmations of such a sound basis for construing a narrative of courtly love out of a collection of ambiguous personifications and indeterminate symbols. The edification undertaken by the Narrator never materializes, and the expectations that such a promise sets up underlie the *Rose*'s play with and on its audience's desire to formulate a sensible interpretation of the poem. If the *Rose* encodes any lesson it is surely that the interpretive process is neither ever settled nor completed.

It is this belief in the underlying presence of a more significant, more coherent, level of meaning that enables observations such as Fleming's, who insists that although the language of the final plucking scene is entirely confused, its meaning is perfectly understandable:

From a purely technical point of view it may be said that while the *allegoria* of this section is unusually rigorous for Jean's part of the *Roman*, where the details of the love affair are seldom schematically worked out, the *littera* is splendidly and delightfully confused as – in what may well be the most enormous mixed metaphor in Western literature – the Lover's sexual paraphernalia and their object become staves, rods, hammers, shrines, ditches, moats, and so on. (238)

Van Dyke makes the same point: “The ‘pilgrimage’ that he [Jean] here adds to the poem’s metaphoric apparatus is, in itself, implausible and incoherent, while the sexual references are only too coherent” (103). The only way to make the scene’s sexual import comprehensible, however, is to skim over the details of the passage and write off its figurative language as amusingly muddled. The allegorical level may be considered clear and the literal level confused only if the meaning of the allegorical level has been decided in spite of the details of the literal level: grabbing the rosebud’s stalk and shaking it translates into the Lover’s snatching at some part of the lady’s genitals, in spite of stalk-shaking being an unusual gesture in the heterosexual arena, and in spite of the various other activities that such a description implies. Rather than attend to the perplexities of the text’s language, the majority of the *Rose*’s readers assume that the Lover’s pilgrimage to and handling of the rosebud signifies heterosexual copulation. This is accomplished by a combination of disregarding and harmonizing the pervasive ambiguities of the scene’s imagery.

ii) Reading horizontally: the vagaries of dismemberment

Instead of consolidating the rosebud as an emblem of the beloved and/or her genitalia, the Narrator’s description of how the Lover cuts the bud from the bush is far from a mere euphemism for heterosexual copulation. The metaphoric chaos of the passage prevents the audience from clearly picturing what the Narrator is describing. The entire scene shifts into and out of focus as one thing and/or another; it is many things at once, a shimmering daze of overlapping contingencies. While I have already explored the manifold possibilities of the final cutting scene, the prelude to it is just as diversely suggestive. I would like to focus on the Narrator’s comparison of the Lover’s efforts to those of Hercules, and the subtext of dismemberment that in consequence attends the cutting of the bud. Thwarted by a piling that blocks the passageway, the Lover hurls himself repeatedly against it:

Forment m’i convint assaillir,
Souvent hurter, souvent faillir.
Se bohourder me veïssiez,
Pour coi bien garde y preïssiez,
D’Erculés vous peüst member,
Quant il vost Cacus desmembrer! (21621-26)

I had to assail it vigorously, throw myself against it often, often fail. If you had seen me jousting – and you would have had to take good care of yourself – you

would have been reminded of Hercules when he wanted to dismember Cacus.
(352)⁵

Rather than as a metaphor for the taking of “Rose’s” virginity, this heroic comparison augments the homoerotic and autoerotic strands already spun into the text. Extending the metaphor beyond the Lover’s triumph over the paling situates the cutting of the bud as a vengeful dismemberment. Once having battered down the door/paling, Hercules/the Lover proceeds to dismember/cut the prize on the other side; the Lover “dismembers” the rosebud once he gets his hands on it. This last allusion to dismemberment is the culmination of a number of such stories, many of which have to do with castration. Hult suggests that the resemblance of *coille*, “testicle,” and *cueillir*, “to cut,” prompts a “paradoxically symbolic assimilation between castration and penetration, male and female principles” (“Language” 119). Must the Lover’s cutting of this rosebud signify penetration, however? The Hercules/Cacus comparison reinforces the image of cutting as dismemberment, and obscures its status as penetration. Might the Lover be involved, not in a deflowerment, but something else to which dismemberment alludes?

Dismemberment is one of Genius’s favourite topics. With relish he expounds upon the horrors of castration that await those who do not perform the work of Nature correctly. Among the variety of others who deserve to be castrated, Genius ends with three examples, two of which feature poor ploughmen, and the other poor readers:

Cil que si leur pechiez enfume,
Par leur orgueil qui les desroie,
Qu’il despisent la droite roie
Dou champ bel et plenteüreus,
Et vont comme maleüreus
Arer en la terre deserte
Ou leur semence vait a perte,
Ne ja n’i tendront droite rue,
Ainz vont bestornant la charue

⁵ In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, VIII 193-267, which is the reference Dahlberg provides for the earlier occurrence of the myth in the attack on the castle, Hercules does not dismember, or evince a desire to dismember, Cacus, but rather chokes him. This alteration emphasizes dismemberment as a figure for the goings-on between the Lover and Fair Welcoming. One of the conundrums posed by medieval occurrences of allusion stems from the fact that we have no way of knowing whether any modifications of the source are intentional or not. It may be simply that Jean did not have a copy of the Hercules-Cacus myth in front of him and misremembered the details of the incident, or had a version of the myth in which that was the punishment Hercules desired to deliver. The pervasiveness of dismemberment in the poem, however, suggests that it is a purposeful alteration.

Et confirment leur regles males
Par excepcions anormales,
Quant Orpheüs veulent ensivre
...
Cil qui tel mestresse despisent
Quant a rebours ses letres lisent,
Et qui pour le droit sen entendre
Par le bon chief nes veulent prendre,
Ainz pervertissent l'escripture
Quant il vienent a la leture;
Ou tout l'escommeniement
Qui touz les met a dapnement,
Puis que la se veulent aerdre,
Ainz qu'il muirent, puissant il perdre
Et l'aumosniere et les estalles
Dont il ont signe d'estre malles!
Perte leur viegne des pendanz
A coi l'ausmoniere est pendanz!
Les martiaus dedenz estachiez
Puissent il avoir esrachiez!
Les greffes leur soient tollu
Quant escrire n'en ont vollu
Dedenz les precieuses tables
Qui leur estoient couvenables!
Et des charrues et de sos,
S'il n'en arent a droit, les os
Puissent il avoir depeciez
Sanz estre jamais redreciez! (19644-55, 19661-84)

those who are so blinded by their sins, by the pride that that takes them off their road, so that they despise the straight furrow of the beautiful, fecund field and like unhappy creatures go off to plow in desert land where their seeding goes to waste; those who will never keep to the straight track, but instead go overturning the plow, who confirm their evil rules by abnormal exceptions when they want to follow Orpheus . . . those who despise such a mistress [Nature] when they read her rules backward and do not want to take them by the good end in order to understand their true sense, but instead pervert what is written when they come to read it; since all these want to be of that party, may they, in addition to the excommunication that sends them all to damnation, suffer, before their death, the loss of their purse and testicles, the signs that they are male! May they lose the pendants on which the purse hangs! May they have the hammers that are attached within torn out! May their styluses be taken away from them when they have not

wished to write within the precious tablets that were suitable for them! And if they don't plow straight with their plows and shares, may they have their bones broken without their ever being mended! (323-24)

I would like to discuss the second kind of sinners first, and what it might mean to read Nature's "rules backward" and to "not want to take them by the good end." These references to backwardness, the bad end, perversion, and Orpheus – who could apparently do nothing right, neither plough, write, nor forge – are evocative allusions to sodomistical relations, including but not limited to anal sex, which the Lover/Fair Welcoming pairing affirms. Sodomy in the medieval era covered any unproductive sexual activity, making the suggested interaction between the Lover and Fair Welcoming neither definitively homo- nor heterosexual.⁶ The subversiveness of the scene lies in the indeterminability of the relations between the two rather than their being exclusively homosexual. I would suggest that the Lover is one of Genius's condemned sodomites not only because his desire lacks a reproductive bent, as Kelly perceives (114), but because neither its enactment nor its orientation can be fixed. As well as the either unruly or incompetent labourers of Genius's harangue, the Lover fits Nature's portrayal of man himself as "a lazy sodomite." When in her confession to Genius Nature complains that he is

Glouz, inconstanz et foloiables,
Ydolastres, desagreables,
Traïstres et faus ypocrites
Et pareceus et sodomites. (19235-38)

foolish, boastful, inconstant, and senseless; he is a quarrelsome idolator, a traitorous, false hypocrite, and a lazy sodomite (317),

she could be talking about the Lover himself. The Lover's status as an exemplar of various, and it must be admitted highly unflattering, human modalities as depicted by Nature, Genius, Lady Reason, Friend, and the God of Love, is another factor in his satiric marginalization within the poem.

The ambiguities surrounding the trajectory and execution of the Lover-Fair Welcoming coupling are enhanced by the Narrator's account of the Hercules/Cacus battle, which clinches a comparison between Fair Welcoming and Cacus implied in an earlier iteration of the myth. Near the end of the attack on the castle, when Fear surprisingly retaliates against the blows of Boldness, Security, surprised and dismayed, reminds Fear of her flight with Cacus before the onslaught of Hercules. She insists that Fear "non pas deffendre" [15593: "must not put up resistance" (264)], thus aligning Fear with Cacus, and Resistance's

⁶ See Kelly, *Internal Difference and Meanings in the Roman de la Rose*, 113-14.

opposite, Fair Welcoming. Security also provides Fear with details of the robbery:

Pour ce que Chacus ot emblez
Les bues et les ot assemblez
A son reçoit, qui mout fu lons,
Par les keues a reculons,
Que la trace n'en fust trouvée. (15583-87)

Cacus had stolen Hercules's cattle and brought them together into his cave, a very deep one, by leading them backward by the tail, so that no trace of them was found. (264)

The insinuation that resides in images of doing things backwards, of the tail, of a bad (i.e., wrong or improper vs. a "good," i.e., right or proper) end, of rear doors,⁷ conjures up a certain aura of impropriety around the Lover's desire to cut the rosebud. The dismemberment that Hercules/the Lover plans to dole out to Cacus/Fair Welcoming evokes Genius's threats of castration as punishment for sexual misconduct, and intimates that the exchange between the Lover and Fair Welcoming lies beyond the pale of normative heterosexual intercourse.

The first group of ingrates that Genius curses are those who, full of pride, waste their seed on desert land. To indulge in such aberrant ploughing insinuates activities that are sodomistic since predicated on an aversion to the fecund furrow. Genius then makes a distinction between those who "plow in desert land" and those who go about "overturning the plow." The inclusion of Orpheus in this second instance of improper ploughing casts it as an allusion to pederasty. Since overturning the plough entails a purely manual handling of it, however, this sort of wasteful activity suggests masturbation as well in that no land, no other body, is involved. (And it is the Lover's hands that do finally effect the "scattering" of the rosebud's seed.) Proud men also come under attack by the God of Love, who complains that "qui d'orgueil est entechiez / Il ne peut son cuer emploier / A server ne a souploier" [2126-28: "He who is tainted with pride cannot bend his heart to serve nor to make entreaty" (60)]. It may be that those too proud to serve others prefer to serve themselves. Can the Narrator-Lover be accused of such conceit? Although he starts off quite humble, by the end of his quest he is very smug indeed. The pleasure that he derives from describing his staff suggests that the real source of his excitement is his own sexual equipment. His boast that

⁷ The Old Woman specifies to the Lover that he is to enter through the rear door of the castle. Gaunt argues that in light of the Old Woman's suggestive references to her "ever-open door," the "rear door" stands as an "anatomical metaphor" that interferes with a reading of the allegory as "a straightforward heterosexual encounter" (72-73).

Nature “vost au doler la main mettre / Ainz que je fusse mis a letter” [21387-88: “wished to put hand to its polishing before I was taught to read” (348)], insinuates the self-pleasure⁸ that in Genius’s book merits the punishment of castration.

The desire that the Lover harbours for Fair Welcoming may be deemed not only homosexual and, hence, other-directed, but fundamentally self-directed. The extent to which the Lover and Fair Welcoming are two aspects of the same voice emerges in Fair Welcoming’s offer that the Lover take the bud “neïs sanz congié, / Par bien et par honneur com gié” (14803: “even without permission, as if you were I, for your well-being and your honor” (252)]. Considering that the two young men are exceedingly alike, and that the Lover’s ultimate goal is to get his hands not on a person but a thing, the Lover’s handling of Fair Welcoming’s bud may be read as a covert reference to self-fondling. His resemblance to Fair Welcoming also aligns the Lover with Cacus and the (sexual) misconduct for which dismemberment is the punishment. Since the Lover is himself engaged in the transgressive act that merits dismemberment/castration, he is not immune from the threat that he himself invokes. By performing the roles of both dismemberer (as Hercules) and dismembered (as Fair Welcoming/Cacus/sexual lawbreaker), the Lover stands on both sides of the paling, which comes to represent not a hymen but the disjointed subjectivity of the speaking voice. The Narrator is both the blustering Lover, and Fair Welcoming cowering on the other side of the portal with his precious rosebud.

Hult suggests that the meaning of castration in the stories of Saturn, Origen, and Abelard is a greater fullness or productivity (“Language” 114). The castration of Saturn results in the birth of Venus and passionate love, while for Origen and Abelard it prompts “philosophical or pedagogical development” (115). Castration is associated with intelligibility. Hult concludes his argument with the *Rose*’s most horrific example of it, Nero’s dismemberment of his mother. He suggests that the quest for meaning may not be mere illusion for, as the rhyme *dismenbree/remenbree* implies, “the body dis-membered attains beauty through the story re-membered (literally ‘put back together’)” (126). The sense and beauty of a thing emerges in its being re-membered, specifically, argues Hult, if we focus on “those material parts we may have otherwise discarded,” which for Jean is “the matter of language itself” (126). Hult’s assertion that Jean’s real subject matter is the materiality of language situates the search for the allegory’s meaning in the letter of the text, the details and dynamic of its language. While it is true that

⁸ Other allusions to masturbation reveal this to be a subtext of the Narrator’s discourse. When Lady Reason poses the question, if a man could drag a boat more easily than you, “wouldn’t he pull better than you?” the Lover responds, “Yes, lady, at least by cable” (113). I am uncertain about Old French, but in English the sense of “pulling” otherwise than by cable is rather suggestive.

allegory mercilessly provokes us to interpret, the readings that emerge must respect the literal dynamics, what Quilligan calls the “surface” (29), of the text; the allegory’s material aspect cannot be discarded in favour of a more significant and plausible allegorical interpretation.

In the cases of Saturn, the Biblical scholars Origen and Abelard, and Nero’s mother, the suffering of castration and dismemberment fosters intelligibility, yet in the mouths of Genius and the Narrator it breeds nothing but obfuscation. The context of dismemberment that besets the cutting of the rosebud is certainly apt, but not necessarily conducive to an image of vaginal penetration. The mechanics of this cutting and what they imply are, to say the least, unclear, as is the significance of the entire event. Nothing intelligible emerges from this final, long-touted and long-winded, severance. It is not possible to re-member, to piece together the various metaphoric components of the Narrator’s salacious recital into an intelligible account of heterosexual copulation. Rather than improve, the context of dismemberment obscures his pedagogical efforts. The Narrator’s reversal of the import of dismemberment underscores the fact (as if such were necessary) that he is neither an Origen nor an Abelard. As readers/students, we are unable to either make sense of, or find beauty in, the Narrator’s “teaching.” It may be argued that the result of this final dismemberment is one of profound, if not pedagogy at least productivity, in that it occasions the Narrator’s production of the poem. Yet productivity in the form of mere proliferation differs from the intellectual evolvment that Hult notes in Origen and Abelard. The Narrator-Lover’s implication in dismemberment does not entail the intelligibility that underlies notions of “fullness and productivity.” In the hands of the Narrator dismemberment yields disorientation, and rather than occasioning, subverts the process of remembering, of making sense, that it connotes elsewhere in the poem. This disjunction between the significance of dismemberment as it appears in the poem’s use of Christian and classical histories, and as it appears in the Narrator-Lover’s own story, partakes of the pervasive disharmony between the context and actual text of the Lover’s affair.

A belief, desperate perhaps, that the *Rose* points beyond itself to another level of meaning has resulted in the transformation of the literal plot into, not an “allegorical” message, but essentially another plot: Lover desires and cuts rosebud is supplanted by Lover desires and deflowers female virgin. The rosebud is replaced by either an abstraction or other meaning more concrete than its literal manifestation. While it is true that, through the promises and boasts of the Narrator, Guillaume and Jean encourage their audience to interpret the poem’s figurative language along conventional lines, it is equally true that they proceed to undermine the meanings the audience attaches to that language. Signification becomes an increasingly unreliable endeavour. Stakel argues that this subversion of the capacity of language to signify in a trustworthy fashion does not mean that the authors of the *Rose* regarded truth as arbitrary, but rather that as a human and

hence fallen medium language is a notoriously unreliable communicator of it. Stakel, in fact, reads Jean's subversion of symbolic language, the relationship between signifier and signified, as an indication of his commitment to truth. Jean "explodes allegory" she asserts, but never rejects truth:

Jean never denies the possibility or even the desirability of attaining ultimate truth. What he does, however, is shatter the mirror of symbolism, making of its smooth, if enigmatic, surface a multi-faceted reflector which allows for the expression of the many aspects of our nature, both human and divine – a semic analysis, as it were, of humanness. (5)

This "multi-faceted reflector" is the rosebud, which Van Dyke describes as "the magic mirror's complete, permanent destabilization of perspective" (78). The indeterminacy of the rosebud foils all attempts to circumscribe its meaning. Standing in a relation of sameness to the Narrator-Lover, the rosebud "explodes" the complacencies of heterosexual and hierarchical orders by invoking the most standard of readings only to subvert them. As what Van Dyke notes is a not "very satisfactory symbol for a woman" (78), the rosebud introduces a seam that provokes the appearance of other seams until what had appeared a smooth fabric emerges, upon closer inspection, as a series of ridges. The mediation of these ridges, instances of discrepancy and contradiction, becomes the subject of the allegory; they force the issue of interpretation and impel the reader to rethink "meaning" as a complicated series of negotiations.

One of the primary means of rendering this seamy allegory smooth is to read it as a bilevel narrative, merge the levels, and exchange the literal symbol of the rosebud for a literal female beloved. Fleming's assertion that "the literal signification of the rose" is "*con*" (186), when it is literally a flower, exemplifies this assimilation of levels. Do all the "things"⁹ in the poem have a "literal signification?" What, then, is the hedge, really? "Literal signification" seems to be a mode accorded specifically to the rosebud to facilitate its being interpreted as the female genitals. This is a profound oversimplification of the rosebud and its attendant ambiguities. A similar amalgamation of literal and allegorical levels enables Huot to retain a "she" as a constant while noting the variable language in which this "she" is invoked: "As the woman metamorphoses dizzyingly (rosebud, young man, lady, tower, tablet, anvil, field, statue, shrine) so too does the language in which the assault is described" ("Bodily Peril" 61). Might not this proliferation of images subvert the entire concept of "woman," however? The rosebud may be a thing, but it cannot be fixed as one thing. Rather than the

⁹ Fleming considers the rosebud to be a "thing" rather than an idea (126).

transformations of a woman, the poem portrays language figuring and refiguring the object of desire.

If, according to conventional readings of the poem, the rosebud represents a woman, what does the Lover represent? If it is generally agreed that the *Rose* consists of two levels, a literal and an allegorical, what, then, is the more “plausible” reading of the Lover? Kelly argues that the Lover must be something besides a man on the allegorical level, and concludes that his allegorical significance is as a foolish lover (135). Fleming concurs, insisting that the Lover is an idea, not a character, a *fol amoureux* (45-46). This transformation of the Lover into a generic figure does not place him on the same abstract plane as the personifications, however. To generalize is not to abstract, to make “allegorical.” It may be said of many characters in non-allegories that they are best read as representatives of a certain group. At the same time many critics do not view the Lover as an allegorical figure; he remains a character. The *Rose*’s allegorical meaning, then, springs from figures not unique to allegory – a character and a symbol. This mixing of devices – personification, character, and symbol – on the same vivid stage problematizes from the outset any neat division of the allegory into literal and allegorical levels. Each element signifies in a distinct way, and the trajectories of their figurative import cannot be synthesized into one abstract message. The *Rose* ends up conforming to the heterosexual ethos of romance narrative because it is the aim of the critical discussion, rather than the tangibility of the symbol, that determines whether we have “Rose” or “a rosebud.” Literal and allegorical levels are treated as interchangeable in order to make sense of a puzzling plot. The issue here is not that the *Rose* demands to be interpreted, it does, but how that interpretation is to proceed.

iii) The conundrum of personification

The occurrence of personification in an extended metaphoric narrative seems to be one of the primary signs of allegory. Quilligan characterizes allegories as “webs of words woven in such a way as constantly to call attention to themselves as texts” (25),¹⁰ and asserts that allegory becomes apparent when it “announces itself by a number of obvious, blatant signals – most notably personification and wordplay” (“Allegory” 163). The main generators of this web are personifications. One significant approach to the *Rose*’s personifications is to consider them psychological entities whose behaviour and discourse represent the mental and emotional states of the Lover and, especially, the lady. In his analysis of the poem Lewis hardly mentions the rosebud, or “Rose,” at all. He discusses

¹⁰ Strubel uses similar terminology to describe the deliverance of Fair Welcoming, calling the plot a “trame métaphorique” (*Le Roman* 69-70: metaphoric web). Rather than develop textual interconnections, however, this web, according to Strubel, provides a formal and coherent framework for the discursive debates that constitute the genuine subject matter of the poem.

the heroine, considers her heart to be setting of the romance, and its struggles the poem's most interesting scenes (118). He argues that the "Rose" symbolizes the lady's love and that the lady "is distributed among personifications" (118), this distribution arising from the inappropriateness of "the lady, and, say, the lady's Pride, walking about on the same stage as if they were entities on the same plane" (118). This co-presence of a character and his or her attendant personification does not seem to be a problem in the case of Lady Reason, however, who "belong[s] to the hero" (Lewis 121). There are numerous inconsistencies that arise from a psychological reading of the poem. While certain personifications may make sense as attributes of either the Lover, such as Lady Reason, or of "Rose," such as Fair Welcoming and Resistance, many do not. There are a number of personifications that cannot be psychologically accounted for. For instance, Kay notes that "The Vielle can scarcely be seen as an attribute: . . . And although Bel Acuel, Dangier, Honte and Paor may be attributes of the love object, it is difficult to gloss Malebouche and Jalousie except as social phenomena operating on 'individuals' from without" (*Subjectivity* 180). Many other personifications pose further difficulties in terms of their psychological relevance. Wealth, Foul Mouth, Friend, Nature, and Genius seem to have little to do with the psyches of either the Lover or "lady" at all. Although it has been argued that Genius represents the masculine side of sexuality, he is too dynamic a figure, too full of particularizing contradictions, to be reduced to either the psyche of the Lover, or a principle of masculinity. Such gendering has already been exploded by the Old Woman's story of her love for a rascal in relation to whom she stood as the devoted and duped "male" that she counsels Fair Welcoming to exploit. The status of Lady Reason is another matter of debate. In a psychological reading she stands for the Lover's own reason, and their discussion a mental debate that the Lover conducts with himself. The Lover, however, is too stupid for Lady Reason to be a mere component of his psyche.¹¹ The fact that Lady Reason far outstrips his mental capabilities is something of which he himself often complains. As an integral part of the social fabric within which the Narrator-Lover operates, Lady Reason is not an aspect of the Lover's psyche, but a discourse with which he must contend, and against which he articulates a self based on the changeable principles of the God of Love.

The sheer mass of personifications, in all their variant states of abstraction, makes attributing them to one and/or two psyches an unworkable and ultimately frustrating endeavour. Their "populousness and activities are," Flores notes, "too complex to be convincingly subsumed to governing schematisms" (101). Tuve argues that a psychological reading of the *Rose* does not do justice to its scope of

¹¹ See Kay, who notes that "Raison, Nature, and Genius are, compared to the dreamer at least, giants of intellect who survey a vast range of human possibilities" (*Romance* 28).

reference: the personifications and their interactions are too complicated to be deciphered as a “drama in some single mind” (251). Those figures with an appreciable literary heritage, the God of Love, Lady Reason, Nature, and Genius, fall short of their conceptual prestige; new creations, such as Friend and False Seeming, are less than ideal; and those voices imported from fabliau, namely the Jealous Husband and the Old Woman, lend a distinct crudeness to the work that undermines its status as a general, or allegorical, tale of courtly love. Rather than the mental states of the Lover or what is construed as his lady, the *Rose*’s personifications represent a multitude of discourses that encompass, develop, and gender the speaking voice. Together they body forth an extensive discursive economy that provides Guillaume and Jean with a context through which to satirize masculine subjectivity in a courtly register.

Tuve outright criticizes a carving up of allegory into discrete levels, which serves to “reduce,” she quips, “human life to a psychomachia” (55). The simultaneity of Tuve’s “double apprehending,” while it prevents an indiscriminate partitioning of the *Rose*, nonetheless relies upon a bilevel, literal/allegorical approach to allegory. Her reading of the *Rose* as a moral rather than merely psychological tale still invests it with a separate implicit meaning, what Quilligan terms “some other hovering above the words of the text” (26), in part because the rosebud remains a representation of the female beloved. For Tuve “simultaneity” means apprehending the symbol as both a rosebud and a lady at the same time, without downplaying either meaning: the simultaneity is in the doubleness of the apprehending rather than in the meaning of the image itself. Quilligan’s understanding of “simultaneity” as “the often problematical process of meaning many things simultaneously with one word” (26) locates it in the complex network of signification that arises from the multireferentiality of the text’s language. There are, in the *Rose*, elements that demand a more than “double apprehending.” The incertitude that, under the aegis of False Seeming, becomes the radical instability of seemingness, makes the grasping of stable relations, such as that between story and symbol, literal and allegorical, rosebud and young woman, an ultimately unreliable endeavour. Premised on a speaking voice that is itself an incoherent construct, being both and neither Guillaume and/nor Jean, the allegory necessitates an approach that sees more than double.

Personification is not as straightforward as it may seem. Flores’s definition of it, alongside allegory, as “an uncertain relationship between signs” (9), and Hicks’s assertion that once “contextualized, personification cannot be practiced without incurring aporia” (69), attest to the ambiguous character of personification. The significance of the correspondence between a figure and the concept it represents is not self-evident, nor are the implications of that figure’s transactions in the poem, as the patent lack of agreement over the how the *Rose*’s personifications are to be read reveals. Christine de Pisan certainly did not agree

with Jean's portrayal of Reason.¹² The debates that rage around the meaning of Fair Welcoming's masculinity affirm that, as Tuve warns, personifications are not mere ideas. If they were, dissension over how they are to be read would not arise (28). Their material aspect shapes how they mean. One of the conundrums surrounding the poem's personifications is their various stages of abstraction; certain of them can hardly be said to be abstract at all. While Lady Reason clearly represents an abstract concept, others such as the Old Woman, Friend, and Foul Mouth do not.

In addition, many of the personifications embody the peculiarities of characters such that it becomes difficult to consign them an allegorical meaning, to fit them into an allegorical schema of things. When Jealousy confronts Fair Welcoming she scolds him such that the Narrator refers to her as "*la grieve / Qui contre nos va et estrive*," [3555-56: "this contentious woman . . . who argued and struggled" (81)] against the Lover and youth. The anger that Jealousy manifests here seems to have little to do with jealousy *per se*. Jealousy is upset because Fair Welcoming has made friends with a "*garçon desree*" [3548: "misguided wretch" (81)] of whom she "*mauverse soupeçon*" [3536: "suspect[s] evil" (81)]. She vows never to trust Fair Welcoming again, threatens to lock him up in a tower, and blames Shame for his waywardness. Judging from the speech alone, we would not attribute it to "jealousy." The material specificity of the personification leads to questions about its status as an abstraction. Fair Welcoming's later reference to her as "*jalousie la rienigne*" [12698: "Jealousy the quarrelsome" (221)] is a case in point. Should not Jealousy be simply jealous? Are we to grasp that jealousy only manifests itself through other emotions such as anger? Yet why would a personification need to resort to such human perversity? The intensity of Jealousy's behaviour as a cantankerous woman undermines her status as an abstraction because she comes across as more of a character than a concept.

The discrepancies surrounding the "referent of Jealousy (a husband's possessiveness? the suspicions of other relatives? the beloved's own jealousy?)," Van Dyke characterizes as "debates that entail embarrassing speculation over the age and marital status of the 'heroine'" (70). Jealousy is not a personification that can be neatly assimilated into an allegorical narrative of courtship and seduction except as a standard presence, and even then she remains something of a puzzle. Why is it Jealousy of all personifications that manifests itself when the Lover receives a kiss from Fair Welcoming? Who is jealous of what? Jealousy cannot be accounted for as allegorically "real." She represents neither a real-life character, nor, because unallocatable, a real-life emotion. Instead, Jealousy

¹² Christine takes issue with Lady Reason's statement that "*Car adés vient il mieus . . . / Decevoir que deceüz ester*;" [4395-96: "it is always better . . . to deceive than to be deceived" (96)], and with her naming "the secret members," *coilles*, in her account of Jupiter's castration of Saturn (Baird and Kane 48-49).

consolidates the literary self-consciousness of the allegory as a commentary on courtly love, being an indispensable component of it.

The tension manifest in each personification between its material and figurative aspects means that we get to the meaning of a figure only after responding to a material presentation that, as Van Dyke notes, does not recede upon an understanding of its abstract significance. Delight (or Diversion) she observes, is both an idea and “a skilled landscape architect with a great deal of money” (76). The God of Love is both heavenly and “a tinsel angel, for his dress and behaviour are courtly clichés,” especially when compared with his antecedent, Alan of Lille’s *Natura* (76). We generalize the young lady as “idleness,” she notes, “only after responding to the deictic image of Oiseuse as a peer of the narrator” (75). Kay remarks that the effect of Guillaume’s “lengthy depictions” of the personifications is to “diminish” the work’s “interpretability *as* allegory” (*Subjectivity* 174). An emphasis on the materiality of the personifications also arises from their couplings, a number of whom are accompanied by blatantly non-allegorical figures. As Van Dyke notes about the carol, “the two perspectives literally go hand in hand, for the personifications are partnered by anonymous individuals” (75). Wealth is attended by a beautiful young man, Generosity an Arthurian knight, Openness a “young bachelor,” and Youth “her sweetheart.” At the same time, and in as great a capacity as an allegory, we read the text as a romance, paying attention to the specifics of its plot alongside the other meanings that arise from the interplay of its exaggerated signifiers.

Besides the constitutionally unreliable False Seeming, other personifications of a more intelligible nature pose their own interpretational dilemmas. Not only do the personifications not work together to transmit a coherent allegorical message, many of them do not transmit a coherent allegorical message all on their own: Fair Welcoming rebuffs, Resistance acquiesces, False Seeming tells the truth, the God of Love is a hypocrite and, as Van Dyke observes, in the wake of False Seeming both Generosity and Openness demonstrate “some decidedly ungenerous, uncandid behaviour” (93). Although Lady Reason stands as the poem’s most dependable speaker, she does not provide clear guidance, nor do other potential worthies such as Nature and Genius. Rather than clearly compliment or refute, the speeches of various “opposed” personifications echo one another, blurring crucial distinctions. While it may be argued that a less-than-admirable speaker may deliver admirable counsel, this inserts a radical uncertainty into what are presented as blatant and authoritative correspondences. Speech is no longer a reliable index of character. The abstract concept that stands as the speaker’s identity does not encompass the complex nature of the meaning that he or she embodies in the literal narrative. It is the “person” status of the personifications and the “garden” status of the garden, in other words the material specificity of the allegory that, far from imprisoning meaning, nourishes its proliferation. As an allegory the *Rose* forces us, as we read and reread, to make

and remake meaning, and it is through this process of continual revision that the “other” meanings of allegory arise. Far from an allegorical site of delight, the garden is a minefield of shifting textual significances. To impose an “allegorical” reading on the *Rose* according to the usual set of conventions is to approach it from the wrong end. Our understanding of allegory must be modified to better incorporate the features that allegories contain. To return to Spearing, his observation that “In some ways it may be that we can better take *Pearl* as a guide to medieval symbolism than medieval symbolism as a guide to *Pearl*” (101), rings true for the *Rose*. Instead of being made to conform to a standard definition of allegory, the *Rose*, as a highly influential work, might be better regarded as formative of that definition.

The tension that arises from the dual definition of allegory as both a mode of reading and a genre makes the question of approach a matter of ongoing contention. Faced with an allegory, how does one read its basic storyline? How much credit is to be granted the specifics of its textual details? The conjunction of Tuve’s warning against “modern clichés about depending only on what is ‘in’ the poem” (20) with her statement that “The story is truly primary” (160) attests to this dilemma of basic approach. She insists on the significance of both the historical background of prominent images, and the distinctiveness of their literal aspect. This leads to an engagement with the ambiguity of the rosebud only in that the character of the lady cannot be pinned down; the symbol remains, unambiguously, an emblem of the female sex. The impetus behind this search for another level of meaning derives from what is considered the absurdity of the plot, in this case a man falling in love with a rosebud. According to Poirion: “Visiblement le récit, qu’il est impossible de prendre à la lettre, cherche à nous dire autre chose. Il implique une double lecture cherchant derrière le ‘dire’ incroyablement un ‘vouloir-dire’ plus vraisemblable” (*Le Roman* 11: Visibly the story, which it is impossible to take according to the letter, seeks to tell us something else. It implies a double reading that looks behind the incredible account for a “wanting to say” that is more plausible). The coherence of the letter is, in Jean especially notes Strubel, “superficielle” (*Le Roman* 79). James Wimsatt asserts that the literal action exists for the sake of its implied message only: “The literary story does not justify its own existence” (26). This is a dismissal that Hipolito applies to the *Rose*: “The plot . . . is a decoration” (71). Hult claims that the *Rose* refuses to “reduce itself to mere content” (“Fountain” 147), and while what “mere content” is remains unclear, it is compared unfavourably to the pleasure of levels.

Abstracting the garden and its inhabitants in the service of either a general lesson or a more important secondary meaning becomes difficult amidst the vividness of the fiction. From the beginning of the poem’s dream segment Guillaume hampers an abstract reading of the tale by so highly particularizing its elements. The trees in the garden are not just any trees, but “de la terre alixandrins / Fist ça ces arbres aporer,” [592-93: “imported from Saracen land”

(38)]; “d’oissiaus .iij. tanz / Qu’en tout le roiaume de France” [482-83: “three times as many birds as in the whole kingdom of France” (37)] reside there. As Van Dyke notes: “It seems paradisaical, ‘espiritables’ (l. 638), the creation of the idea of Delight and therefore an idea itself; on the other hand, it is full of familiar plants and animals” (76). The inclusion of particular place names, Fair Welcoming would rather be at “Estampes ou a Miauz” (3532) than in front of a raging Jealousy, heightens the romance-like qualities of this scene. Such detailing is not extraneous, but part of the dynamic through which the *Rose* generates, and problematizes the generation of, meaning. The distinctiveness of the landscape, its catalogues of birds, trees, and animals, alongside the human-like variableness of the personifications, works against a reduction of the fiction into a meagre covering for a more profound “allegorical” message, either didactic or abstract. The setting and its personifications do not convey an overarching allegorical meaning; they are neither manifestations of the interiority of the Lover and his “lady,” nor abstractions of the poetic “realities” of courtly love. The matter of how to approach an allegory, how to envisage its highly figurative literality, makes not only the “what” but the “how” of interpretation a pervasive issue. The reader must learn to admit partial interpretations since not all elements of the poem can be made to fit any one schema. Alongside the narrative voice, the other target of the allegory’s satire becomes the belligerent reader who insists on pruning the poem into an either shapely other narrative or allegorical message.

Besides the ambiguity that arises from being simultaneously concrete and abstract entities, personifications as basic carriers of meanings are not stable.¹³ Once “contextualized” as Hicks notes (69), once described and placed in a specific setting, personifications become aporetic constructs. The difficulties in accounting for the beauty of Courtesy, or the anger and shame of Fair Welcoming, subvert their lucidity as abstractions (75). As soon as a personification embarks on an action, Hicks contends, it becomes a contradiction in terms. In fact personification, the crucial factor of allegory, prevents its synthesis with romance: “Individuation is produced each time an action is performed, and since romances are made of actions, the process is fatal to allegory” (75). The interplay of the two

¹³ See Gaunt on the impropriety that underwrites, and hence undermines, Genius’s explication of “straight” writing and all of its attendant activities (89); Hill on Reason’s inability to comprehend human sexuality in its fallen, irrational, state (422); Huot on the nonsensicality of both Genius and Nature (“Bodily Peril” 58); Kay on the ironic undercutting that prevents the speakers from articulating a clear-cut perspective: “Raison talks of folly, Ami of friendlessness, Nature gestures towards the supernatural” (*Romance* 47-48); on Genius as a confusion of the soul and genitals, of spiritual enlightenment and “enlightened self-interest” (*Romance* 92); and on Nature as “both a silly woman and a learned teacher” (“Women’s Body” 232); Piehler on Genius’s inconsistency in joining the assault of the Castle immediately after disparaging the Rose Garden (109); Van Dyke’s observation that the advent of False Seeming causes many of the personifications to “lose their meanings,” (93), and that Friend is a character and not the personification *Friendship* (88).

genres generates a tension that mangles allegory by continually compromising the integrity of its abstract level. The complications that pervade representations of abstract concepts, representations which one would suppose to be simple and incontestable because abstract, are attested to by disagreements, such as that evinced in the fifteenth-century *querelle* over the construction of Reason, the God of Love, and Genius. The extent to which Lady Reason represents reason, the God of Love love and so forth is made questionable by what these personifications say, by their very occurrence in the text as something other than static objects. Even the meaning of static objects is contentious, however, as dissent over the symbol of the rosebud makes clear. An impairment of allegory in favour of romance arises from a skewing of the mechanics of a transgressive allegory in order to accommodate the plot of a conventional romance: because romance requires a female beloved, the rosebud and Fair Welcoming are read as such. The death of allegory at the hands of romance only occurs if allegory is required to possess an abstract level of meaning. If allegory is regarded as a narrative comprised of personifications that generate a network of multiple meanings, then it is not allegory but romance that the *Rose* exploits in its exploration of desire as an ambiguous trajectory. The romance that the Narrator tells may be of the courtly love variety, but its occurrence as an allegory upsets an easy understanding of it as such. If the particular and general, or the concrete and abstract, are not treated as separate and/or antithetical domains but elements the interconnections between which facilitate an investigation into the workings of subjectivity – the inconsistencies of which allegory is particularly well-suited to explore – allegory and romance may be regarded as complementing, rather than incapacitating, one another. The fact that the Narrator-Lover's quest is presented as an allegory makes the reader's interpretation of it a basic issue, and that it is presented as a romance makes the hero's own understanding of it likewise fundamental. The Narrator's complete lack of self-reflexiveness makes him a poor reader of his own experience. His original disparagement of Lady Reason and devotion to the God of Love he repeats at the dream's end. That the Narrator ends up right where he begins attests to his learning nothing in the course of either his dream or its documentation.

While it is unfeasible to interpret certain personifications as psychological entities, certain others it is not. Kay states that "some of the personifications make no sense unless they are seen as internal to the protagonists" (*Subjectivity* 180). She notes the "slippages" between Fair Welcoming and Resistance and concludes that this merging of one personification into the domain of the other stems from a complex interaction that seems to "reflect changing moods within a single individual" (180). Does the merging of Fair Welcoming and Resistance suggest a series of interior shifts within the psyche of the beloved? As I have already argued, unlike the Lover there is no beloved to whom we may attribute a psyche, and a series of personifications affiliated with a rosebud is too intangible a

construct to constitute a character. In fact, I would question the extent to which the poem is interested in interiority at all. Neither the character of the Lover nor his psyche is at the centre of the narrative. Vitz considers the Lover to be “a void,” completely lacking in “psychological interiority or inwardness” (“Inside/Outside” 151). He notes the absence of any sort of “thought processes” or “psychological plurality” (152) that would constitute an interiority for the Lover, and argues that the personifications cannot be resolved into externalizations of the psychic qualities of either the Lover and/or his beloved. Vitz asks: “are we to understand the Lover’s exhortation by Dame Reason as an inner monologue, an abortive struggle between his good sense and his new-found passion? Or rather, did he (when all this took place ‘in reality’) get a lecture from his mother or father – or from some kindly chaplain?” (154), and notes the same for personifications associated with the rosebud: “Is Dangier the maiden’s father or husband or a churlish side of her own character?” (154-55). Vitz’s hesitation about attributing the personifications to the psyches of Lover and/or beloved exhibits the sort of scepticism that the *Rose* demands. The extent to which the voices of the personifications are foreign to the Lover is significant, and generates questions about the nature of their relationship to the narrative voice. It is not the psyche of the Lover, but the nature of the personifications and their status as discourses constitutive of the subjectivity of the Narrator, that forms the principle subject matter of the *Rose*.

This conundrum of identification, of trying to produce a meaning for allegory, reflects *its* primary concern, the complex dynamic and knotty politics of interpretation. Despite the quandary of definition, it is generally agreed that, as Quilligan states, the point of allegory is to “prod” the reader to “produce some meaning for it” (241). An insistence on the centrality of the text’s language rather than the discovery of another level of meaning does not translate into a disparagement of the process of producing meaning, however. Rather, it is the form and focus of this process, this prodding, that is at issue. Because their meaning can never be adequately summarized, allegories harry the consciousness of their readers. Any synopsis, any abstract reading, remains glaringly insufficient. Rather than to answers, attempts to unravel the *Rose*’s signifiatory web lead to more questions, questions that proliferate because they do not leave either the previous questions or the previous answers intact. The accumulation of implied meanings does not arrange itself into a neat picture, but causes the reader’s assessment of the poem to shift continually. Misgivings about the effectiveness of language to sustain an economy of stable and reliable signification, following the revelations of False Seeming especially, make this shifting a radical occurrence, for it remains up to the audience to decide what perceptions it will endorse. This responsibility on the part of its readers as to how they choose to comprehend the text makes the interpretation of allegory, as many critics note, an ethical undertaking. Making choice an integral component of

interpretation – ultimately one much *choose* how to read Fair Welcoming, whether to read him as male or female or somehow both – forces the reader into a self-reflexive scrutiny of the ethics that confirm that choice. The conundrums that attend a reading of allegory are incessant because the paranoid query of *how* one produces meaning, and why *that* meaning, is an unremitting one. It is no surprise that Jean finishes the *Rose* by having the Dreamer simply wake up. A perfunctory action becomes the only possible means of alleviating the allegory's compulsion to explore and expound upon the politics, and its own process, of making meaning. In its confounding of definition, allegory is "true" to itself. As a genre and/or mode, allegory "is" what it enacts; it both has and produces a diversity of meanings. It is like the rosebud then, unsettling any complacencies we may have about attributing meaning to form.

The *Rose* uses allegory to play with assumptions that underlie interpretation. It may be that a knee-jerk reaction to the *Rose* as really a tale of heterosexual courtship is the veil that needs to be cast aside upon an apprehension of its many seams and rents. It may be that these seams are what the allegory is really about; they are the disruptions that force the issue of interpretation. As a tale of heterosexual seduction the poem is, as Langlois notes of the symbolic rosebud, rather banal. Upon being "understood" as such, and seen to be unsatisfactory, the reader is provoked to reconsider the allegory. Quilligan's point that reading an allegory consists of "learning how to read it" (227), which requires readers to forget what they already know, or think they know, emerges as the lesson, if any, that the *Rose* teaches. Once remarked upon, the ways in which the poem does not work as an allegory of courtly love become increasingly perceptible. While the poem's personifications do compel the reader to interpret the allegory in terms of a further significance, they do not sanction its transformation into a tale of courtly love. Requiring another, more sensible, level of meaning from the allegory results in the creation of what is essentially a different narrative altogether.

This confounding of the abstract by the literal is also reflected in what Kay argues is the destabilization of hierarchies that Jean effects throughout his section of the *Rose*. It is always the "lower term of the pair," she states, "which, although seemingly inferior, apparently triumphs over its higher-placed partner" (*Romance* 113). This penchant for upsetting hierarchical constructs underlies not only the content but the form of the allegory, and demands that we credit the design of the literal. The Narrator's assertion that implanted in the dream is a worthwhile lesson serves, not so much to remind the reader of its existence, but to force the issue of interpretation. Promises to explain the dream's meaning raise expectations about interpretation that are not fulfilled. Accompanying this realization that no instruction will emerge from the narrative is a suspicion that direct statements, and that includes the transparency of the rosebud, are ultimately misleading. The promise is ironic, and casts the poem as an interpretational

hazard, leaving, as Kay notes, the reader “in doubt about the possibility of assigning any determinate meaning at all” (14). The ambiguities that permeate the *Rose* and obscure its ostensible purpose as an art of love force its readers to confront the premises that underlie the courtly love narrative that they may initially construct, question why the *Rose* evokes these premises only to belie them, and finally examine their impulse to make a coherent narrative out of a series of disjointed textual elements. Am I going to assume that the rosebud represents a woman? Am I going to continue to assume so? The outcome of this self-questioning is not a reassurance on the part of readers that their interpretations are correct, but a sense of discomfort with themselves and any reading on which they may settle. Rather than point beyond itself to an abstract allegorical significance, the literal generates from within itself an array of figurative meanings; it is the wide-ranging figurative capacity of the literal that both compels and complicates interpretation.

**iv) The contrary, the contradictory and the somewhat distorted:
wrapping up *The Romance of the Rose***

While the poem is preoccupied with a number of contradictory ideas about courtly love, it is not the only philosophy to undergo questioning. The tendency of certain personifications to contravene the sense of their own appellations and manifest the opposite tendency suggests that meaning is never clear-cut. What are the implications for processes of signification if the personifications that we expect to be contraries are not? Specifically, how does this merger of opposing discourses reflect upon the Narrator’s remark that “things go by contraries”?

The Narrator-Lover’s musings on the final leg of his journey to the rosebud include an affirmation of difference as integral to the process of definition and the development of human understanding. This treatise is often regarded as an accurate and trustworthy hypothesis:

Ainsi va des contraires choses:
Les unes sont des autres gloses;
Et qui l’une en veult defenir,
De l’autre li doit souvenir,
Ou ja par nulle entencion
N’i metra diffinicion;
Car qui des .ij. n’a connoissance,
Ja n’i connoistra differance,
Sanz coi ne peut venir en place
Diffinicion que l’en face. (21577-86)

Thus things go by contraries; one is the gloss of the other. If one wants to define one of the pair, he must remember the other, or he will never, by any intention,

assign a definition to it; for he who has no understanding of the two will never understand the difference between them, and without this difference no definition that one may make can come to anything. (351)

This is all well and good if difference is as straightforward a concept as it is presumed here to be. The fact is that it is not, and the preceding text has occupied itself in a repeated subversion of the differences that it invokes. The above observation follows the Narrator's comments on the differences between old and young women when it comes to seduction. The Narrator's understanding of the subtleties of this art consists of a reductive compartmentalization that the earlier speech of the Old Woman entirely dispels. While the Narrator asserts that older women are wiser to the tricks of fraudulent lovers than younger woman, the Old Woman's chronology of her *amours* suggests otherwise. It is as an older woman that she succumbs to the charms of a false lover, while in her younger years she routinely tricked and manipulated a multitude of attentive ones. The Narrator's division of women into the old and the young rests on a notion of contraries that proves entirely unreliable as a basis for understanding the politics of either seduction or age.

This corroboration of contraries as a harbinger of understanding is critiqued by no less than Lady Reason when the Lover attempts to undermine her argument by misrepresenting it. He reduces her criticism of his foolish love for the rosebud to an advocacy of what he believes to be its opposite, hate: "Ou j'ameré ou je harré" [4651: "either I love or I hate" (100)]. Calling on Horace, Lady Reason retorts that her objection to his loving *par amour* does not imply that he hate anyone. Proceeding via a knowledge of contraries is exposed as facile through the Lover's peevishly simplistic notion that love and hate are the only options available to him. Shortly thereafter she reveals that a progression by contraries is of no value whatsoever:

Oraces dist, qu'il n'est pas nices,
Si li fol eschivent les vices
Et s'il torment a lor contraire,
Si ne vaut pas mieus lor afaire. (5733-36)

Horace, no fool, said that when madcaps flee from vices, they turn to the contraries, and their affairs go no better. (116)

Contraries, she reveals, are inadequate indices to human understanding.

The reality of difference and its efficacy as a vehicle of comprehension is seriously undermined by the dynamic of sameness and repetition that permeates the *Rose*. Rather than in a discernment of contraries, the poem delights in a mutual tainting of them. Two of the most important concepts upon which Lady

Reason discourses, love and fortune are, according to her, composed of entirely contradictory elements. Fortune consists of both good and ill fortune, neither of which may be easily defined or differentiated from the other. Lady Reason insists that a spell of bad fortune ultimately proves beneficial to the sufferer because affliction reveals the identity of one's true friends, if one should even have any. The duality of Fortune, the simultaneity of its "good" and "bad" aspects, suggests that defining these contraries is too simplistic a methodology for understanding what either "good" or "bad" or "fortune" means. In a world where bad fortune is good fortune and good fortune bad, the ability to "define one of the pair," as the Narrator advises, does not afford an understanding of the meaning of the other.

Difference is not so easily established, and is even less easily maintained. Huot argues that throughout the *Rose* opposing discourses act upon and transform one another; that, for instance, the "Ovidian discourse" of Friend and the Old Woman, "infects and subverts the Boethian discourse of Reason" ("Bodily Peril" 44). Similarities between the words of the Old Woman and Lady Reason effect "an intricate set of substitutions and reversals of key conceptual pairs: body and soul, letter and spirit, signifier and signified, feminine and masculine" (46). This subversion of the above conventional hierarchies also jeopardizes what are touted as foundational disparities. For his part Genius manages to obscure key differences in a speech geared towards distinguishing the blessed Park of the Lamb from the profane Garden of the Rose. The heterosexual imperative that he so vigorously propounds collapses amidst a throng of metaphoric ambiguities. Ultimately, as Huot notes, the reward for rigorous copulation is the transformation of all participants into female sheep, a total obliteration of sexual difference (59). As well as by the discourses of Friend and the Old Woman, the singularity of Lady Reason's speech is compromised by convictions that she shares with False Seeming. Her statement that it is better to deceive than be deceived confirms his mendacity. Lady Reason's advocacy of the mean – "On i peut bien trouver moiien" [5756: "One must find the right mean" (116)] – also finds its way into the mouth of False Seeming: "Li moiens a non souffisance: / La gist des vertuz l'abondance," [11279-80: "The name of the mean is sufficiency. There lies the abundance of virtues" (198)]. This echoing of Lady Reason's advice by False Seeming does not serve to debunk the merits of moderation, but to complicate False Seeming, and hence notions of falsity and truth, by making him a paradoxically reliable guide. As a speaker of the truth False Seeming subverts the foundational premise that truth and falsehood are antithetical by making them compatible and complementary entities: truth becomes a discourse of falsehood. Because he articulates what he does not represent, False Seeming jeopardizes the integrity of signification. How can False Seeming speak the truth? An inability to distinguish the true from the false plays havoc with the Narrator's confidence in a knowledge of contraries as the anchors of human understanding. If the truth of a thing cannot be known, of what use are definitions at all? If the meaning of a

thing does not correspond to the truth of it – if good fortune is really bad – knowing the difference between the contraries “good” and “bad” is meaningless. Of course, False Seeming may only seem truthful, which further compromises the union of truth and signification. For False Seeming to so entangle truth and falsity as to make them interchangeable aspects of “seeming” suggests that they are not contrary entities. While it is true that a contemptible speaker may utter admirable sentiments, an argument that is often made about Genius, this mingling belies a simplistic hypothesis of definition by contraries. The poem continually sabotages an evocation of and reliance on difference. Rather than confirm a natural order, difference and, as Kay notes, sexual difference especially, produces textual disorder (“Sexual knowledge” 84). The Narrator plugs an ideology of contraries because a discourse of sexual difference undergirds his articulation as the Lover and a masculine subject. The erosion of difference throughout the poem, then, renders the narrative voice a highly indeterminate, because sexually destabilized and hence “de-gendered,” endeavour. The irony of the Narrator’s speech on the perception of meaning is that while relying on language and the authority of definitions to communicate the truth of his dream, he at the same time manages to expose the radical inconclusiveness of signification. We come away from the *Rose* with no understanding of who the Narrator-Lover is, of what it is that he has just described himself as doing, or of how to be a more successful lover. It is not that the Narrator is not very good with language, that he does not know how to explain things. Rather, Jean shows through the Narrator how language can tell a story yet signify such that the identity of the speaker and meaning of the story cannot be determined.

The efficacy of difference is also undermined by the tendency of certain personifications to merge into their antitheses. Fair Welcoming and Resistance are not rigid contraries, but entities that in their overlapping reveal the instabilities that permeate meaning. Rather than the indecision of an individual psyche, the refusals of Fair Welcoming and compliance of Resistance demonstrate the irresoluteness of signification itself. The vacillations of these “opposites” cast doubts on the capacity of discourse to signify reliably. While the definition of “resistance” is fairly well agreed upon, with Resistance just performing it improperly on occasion, the very meaning of “fair welcoming” is a much contested point among the poem’s speakers. The Lover, for his part, is continually being reprimanded for not understanding what Fair Welcoming “means.” Fair Welcoming seems to have a sense of his signifiatory limits by permitting the Lover to enjoy his company, but forbidding him the more forward gifts of the rosebud itself and, initially, a kiss. That Fair Welcoming comes to allow a kiss suggests that, unlike the other personifications, he embodies a process rather than a fixed meaning. This in itself makes for a complicated entity. At what point does the seemly Fair Welcoming become an unseemly version of the Old Woman? Shame insists that Fair Welcoming intends nothing more than to

“d’acointier genz” [3584: “become acquainted with people” (81)], to be “pleins d’envoiseüre” [3588: “full of enjoyment” (82)], and that he merely “jue aus genz et parole” [3589: “plays and speaks with people” (82)]. The Lover apparently believes that Fair Welcoming may be enticed to give him the bud. The Narrator seems to think that Fair Welcoming means an acceptance of the dictates of Courtesy, which as the Lover enters the burning castle means the gift of the rosebud. This understanding of “fair welcoming” receives support from Fair Welcoming’s offer to the Lover, after listening to the Old Woman’s lecture, of anything that he has, “neïs sanz congié,” [14803: “even without permission” (252)]. That this is, however, not what Fair Welcoming means becomes apparent when he balks at the Lover’s advances. Fair Welcoming seems to go from reserved giving to unreserved surrender to downright rejection.

Fair Welcoming does not “progress” in willingness, but vacillates continually, making him a participant in the economy of seeming that underlies the allegory as a whole. His meaning is ultimately unknowable because of the complete equivocalness of his acquiescence. Might this vacillation be at the heart of Fair Welcoming? While his fluctuations may be regarded as a fitting representation of the mechanics of “fair welcoming” in that his protestations function as enticements, I think that the implications of Fair Welcoming’s indecision are much more extensive. Fair Welcoming seems to have no awareness of using his reserve as a means of allurements. That a certain measure of self-consciousness on the part of a personification is not too much to expect is revealed by Resistance’s distress upon having his inappropriate pacific behaviour pointed out to him. A profound equivocalness is part of what it means to be Fair Welcoming. In addition to owning the bud, then, Fair Welcoming resembles it in that he cannot be pinned down to one meaning. One is a concept, the other a symbol, of indeterminacy. The incoherence of Fair Welcoming also assimilates him to the speaking voice, which heightens the self-directed nature of the Narrator-Lover’s desire. While the indeterminacy of the rosebud permits the Narrator to couch an autoerotic desire in the terminology of normative heterosexual love, the incertitude of Fair Welcoming enables him to prolong a fantasy of seduction that dabbles in an erotics of violation. Whether the Lover’s advances constitute rape, whether Fair Welcoming’s bud is in any way consensually aroused, simply cannot be determined. Alongside the puzzling suggestiveness of its mechanics, the irresolvable character of the cutting makes interpretation itself the main issue of this passage. No reading is a comfortable one, which provokes the question of how and why we reach the conclusions that we do. The *Rose* also forces us to accommodate other readings since no one is sufficient to acknowledge all of the possibilities put into play by the text. All of the allegory’s main players embody a measure of indeterminacy, which provides a certain appeal for not only the narratorial but the authorial voice as well in that it enables Guillaume and Jean force the issue of interpretation through a mockery of

the gratifying self-absorption of a conventionally placed, i.e. courtly, masculine subjectivity. What are the implications of this pervasive indeterminacy for the Narrator's confident assurances that understanding rests on a knowledge of the definition of contraries? With neither secure contraries nor definitions, the understanding that takes them as sure markers of its own capacities is bound to be completely muddled, as the impasse that constitutes the narrative voice shows it to be.

In addition to violating the integrity of courtly love through an omission of its signs, Guillaume and Jean intimate its less than refined conditions by mimicking certain details of the God's description. The servant girl towards whom the God counsels the Lover to be generous is, in the dream itself, a bawdy old woman. Rather than the innocent abetter of a youthful affair, she is a greedy procuress whose connivance with False Seeming transforms inducements into bribes. A series of references to kisses and doors also plays on the proprieties of courtly behaviour. The sole kiss that the God of Love advises is one planted on the door of the beloved's house, which the Lover is prompted to do "Pour l'amor dou haut saintuaire / De quoi tu ne peuz avoir ese: / Au revenir, la porte bese" [2534-36: "for the love of that high sanctuary whose comfort you cannot possess: on your return, kiss the door" (66)]. The Lover, however, kisses not the door, but the rosebud itself. In Jean the Lover does more than merely kiss the door of the beloved's enclosure – he enters it. As Gaunt points out, the fact that this door happens to be the rear door, twice mentioned and surely an extraneous detail, stands as a covert reference to sodomy (73). The Old Woman's specification of the door's location also evokes the God of Love's initial remarks: "Une eure iras a l'uis derrieres, / Savoir s'il est remes desfors," [2516-17: "One hour you will go to the back door to see if it were left unclosed" (65)]. Through a careful referencing of Guillaume, Jean links his work to that of his predecessor and provokes the insinuations latent in the earlier text.

One of the forms that this provocation takes is a literalization of the sanctuary figured by the God of Love in Guillaume. The pilgrimage on which Jean sends the Lover concretizes the metaphor by making his goal an actual sanctuary. While he does not kiss a door here either, his "love of that high sanctuary" is prefaced by his kissing the image perched above it. Rather than his lips, the Lover touches his staff to the aperture that leads to the rosebud. Jean dramatizes what the God of Love says the Lover will never possess through a merciless realization of his delicate metaphoric language. The crude terms of this enactment constitute a mockery of the decorum of courtly love, the gentler beginnings of which are to be found in Guillaume. Jean's evocations and his distorted fulfilment of the God of Love's narration continue with the image perched above the pillars of the castle. In his initial speech the God of Love compares the Lover to an image:

On revenra maintes foïes
Qu'an pensant t'antroblieras
Et une grant piece seras
Auis com une ymage mue
Qui ne se crole ne remue,
Sanz piez, sanz mains, sanz doiz croler,
Sanz iaus movoir et sanz parler. (2282-88)

Now it will happen many times, as you are thinking, that you will forget yourself and for a long time will be like a mute image that neither stirs nor moves, without budging a foot, a hand, or a finger, without moving your eyes or speaking. (62)

Now, the Lover as we know him never succumbs to this love-induced immobility. The only image in the poem is that on the castle wall, to which the Lover battles his way and kisses. While this image has always been read as a representation of the lady, its sex is never made clear and the details of its description evoke idealizations of the male as much as female physique. This early reference to the Lover as “a mute image” casts the eroticized image on the castle wall as a representation of the Lover himself. The eroticized images with which the Narrator surrounds the bud are not only likewise self-referential, but self-representational. As they are throughout the *Rose*, these moments of distorted repetition are subtle movements in a highly orchestrated satire of the Narrator, the self that he so proudly articulates, and the terms in which he does so.

While discussions about love are conducted within a heteronormative framework, whenever we encounter the Lover himself there is no accompanying lady, but a rosebud and a young man. The discourses that surround the Lover configure his tale as a heterosexual one, yet this allegorical reading suffers continual impediments from the account of the Lover's own *amour*. For instance, hard on the heels of what may be read as a conventional scene illustrating the Lover's initial attraction to his beloved as represented by the rosebud is a less than reassuring depiction of the God of Love's pursuit and capture of the besotted youth: the prolonged chase evokes the erotics of venery, while the details and duration of the subsequent ceremony of vassalage amplify the homoerotic suggestiveness of the scene. Guillaume follows this unsettling portrait with a firm return to heterosexual politics in the God of Love's account of the chronic pangs that assail and incapacitate true lovers. The fact that Lover is spared the worst of these torments¹⁴ – that, as Strubel remarks, “Jamais nous ne le verrons se torturer

¹⁴ The only agonies that the Lover endures are the very simple ones of sighing, shivering, constantly desiring to see his Fair Welcoming, and hanging around the castle in the hopes of seeing him.

dans son lit, courir chez sa belle et ne pas oser proférer une parole une fois arrivé; les “biens d’Amour” n’interviennent pas” (*Le Roman* 56: We never see him torture himself in his bed, run to the house of his beloved nor dare to utter a word once arrived; the “comforts of Love” do not intervene) – suggests that Guillaume was engaged in a subtle mockery of the Lover, and that the difference between the two authors lies in the severity of their unbalancing manoeuvres. Having noted the conduct expected of a faithful vassal, the Lover meets Fair Welcoming, whereupon, instead of the timid, tongue-tied youth of the God’s recital, he shows himself a forthcoming speaker who has few qualms about asking for what he wants. If the Lover’s behaviour here serves as a model for what not to do, counter-examples being an important aspect of any manual, his being named “the Lover” by centuries of the poem’s readers is highly ironic. The shame, stumbling, and forgetfulness that the God of Love outlines as the inevitable behaviour of a true lover is not at all evinced by the Lover himself; nor is Fair Welcoming a very aloof beloved.

As with interpretations that derive from extratextual sources, contextual material is not a sufficient determinate of the meaning of the Lover’s affair. While surrounding discourses provide a heteronormative framework for the allegory, this outline does not accord with and cannot stipulate the meaning of the Lover’s relationship with Fair Welcoming and the rosebud. It must also be said that the *Rose*’s contextual material is not entirely heterosexual.¹⁵ The tension between the context of the Lover’s affair and the affair itself is an irony that radically complicates a reading of the allegory. The God of Love’s portrayal of love in terms of a “him” and “her” is thrown completely off balance by the approach of a beautiful young man. The confusion that Fair Welcoming injects into the love-story is profound, and to insist that he can be read, for whatever reason, as a masculine abstraction of a non-existent female character called “Rose” is untenable. His uncertain status is revealed by his diverse appearance in manuscript illuminations, where he is either a young man, or a young woman, and/or sometimes both in the same manuscript. What he is doing in Douce 195, xv, “a careful manuscript” as Tuve notes, pictured as “old and with a perceptible corporation” is, as she remarks, “unaccountable” (323). The presence of Fair Welcoming is a discordance that constitutes one of the great interpretative stresses of the allegory. Rather than feminizing Fair Welcoming, the heterosexual context sets up a disharmony between context and text that undermines the coherence of both the Narrator-Lover’s desire, and the interpretive process itself. If the experience of love does not replicate its given description, as the Lover’s performance does not replicate the God of Love’s account, if occurrence and explanation are not in agreement, again, how useful is a knowledge of definitions? Must the occurrence be made to conform? Part of what makes the *Rose* so

¹⁵ Harley argues that the Fountain of Narcissus is steeped in allusions to masculine homoeroticism.

disconcerting is its penchant for making us think it is about one thing without ever settling comfortably into that one thing. It is precisely this disparity between context and text that the allegory of the *Rose* instigates and explores. Personifications, symbols, and metaphors generate an immediate interpretive frame, the fulfilment, subversion, or complication of which becomes itself the theme of the allegory.

Quilligan makes the assertion that reading allegory comprises a “learning how to read it” (227). This learning “operates by a gradual revelation to a reader who, acknowledging that he does not already know the answers, discovers them, usually by a process of relearning them” (227). While she concludes that as a discoverer of meaning the reader of allegory resembles the allegorical protagonist (227), in the *Rose* the opposite is true: the protagonist learns nothing about how to read: his “hermeneutic methods” remain, as Madsen remarks, “inadequate” (68). As he himself announces to Lady Reason, his interpretive abilities extend to simple euphemistic substitution. The Narrator-Lover provides us with a model of how not to read. Rather than engage in the active and ultimately self-reflexive endeavour of interpretation, the Narrator-Lover merely rejects the discourses that hinder, or reiterates those that forward, his desires. He does not walk away from the Fountain of Love with any increased self-knowledge, but replicates the consequences of having gazed at himself in it. The Narrator’s lack of self-awareness shines through in his embodiment of various discourses intended, not to valorize masculine conquest, but to ridicule feminine depravity. As Kelly argues, it is the Narrator-Lover himself who most glaringly evinces the feminine mores that are assigned to the whole of the female sex (116-19). The Narrator’s penchant for unreflexive copying emerges in the language in which he couches the final cutting of the rosebud, which stands as a rather erratic imitation of the not much better controlled series of metaphors to which Genius resorts in his speech on how to ensure oneself a spot in the Park of the Lamb. Even Genius, who offers one of the most comprehensive guides to proper sexual behaviour, falls into absurd figurative situations.¹⁶ Lady Reason’s definition of carnal love is not much of an improvement, comprising what Huot notes is “a jumble of incomprehensible oxymora that extends for over thirty lines” (“Bodily Peril” 59).

It is, perhaps, little wonder that the Narrator-Lover is a poor reader considering the discourses on love and sexuality to which he has been exposed. Regardless of the confusion that pervades the portrayals of sexual attraction and performance to which he is subjected, however, the Lover is still, and contentedly, ignorant. Lady Reason complains that he is not “bons logiciens” [5752: “a good logician” (116)] in his conclusion that hatred is the only other solution to loving

¹⁶ See Huot, “Bodily Peril: Sexuality and the Subversion of Order in Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*,” in which she examines the “logistics” of Genius’s metaphoric account of sexual behaviour and heavenly being.

par amour: She also chastizes his incapacity to recall the significance of what he reads:

Tu mez es livres ton estuide
Et tout par negligence oublies.
Que vaut quanque tu estudies
Quant li sens au besoing te faut
Et seulement par ton default? (6780-84)

You give your attention to books, and then forget everything through negligence. What is the value of whatever you study when its sense fails you, through your fault alone, at the very time that you need it? (131)

The Narrator-Lover dismisses Lady Reason with an insinuation of his general lack of interest in interpretation. He will gloss poetical works upon being cured, which he little desires. Considering his inattention to glossing, it is no surprise that the Narrator provides no explanation of his dream. It seems that he is unwilling to engage meaning in any other than a denotative or euphemistic register, hence his difficulties with Lady Reason's use of the word "balls" in a story meant to explain why love is worth more than justice. His talent for spotting euphemism has little to do with the rigours and intricacies of interpretation, however. This indifference to the more complex dynamics of meaning translates into an inability to be coherently suggestive. While he may grasp it, when it comes to employing euphemism the Narrator loses control of its figurative trajectories. Linguistic substitution becomes a breeding ground of mixed up metaphors. The Narrator gets carried away by the self-generating impetus of his figurative language; he is more interested in his oral than sexual endeavours. Pleasure in configuring the bud-plucking performance surpasses that of the performance itself. There is neither goal nor ground, however, to the Narrator's account. The recital does not teach anyone anything, nor can it be secured as an intelligible exposé of heterosexual seduction. The delight that the Narrator takes in producing his own words to no purpose casts his versifying as a sort of mental masturbation that itself figures one of the many possible activities implied by his climactic passage. The fact that he natters on about his benefactors and opponents after having cut the rosebud suggests that his linguistic performance is inseparable from his sexual one. The merits of each it is left up to the reader to decide. Overcome by this convergence of linguistic and sexual play, and powerless to effect any sort of linguistic closure, the Narrator is forced to cut off the poem and dream at precisely the same moment.

Conclusion

Having concluded that the *Rose* parodies the masculine subject position of the narrative voice, I am now ready to expand upon that conclusion. True to form, the *Rose* cannot leave well enough alone. Or rather, considering that allegory impels a certain self-consciousness on the part of its readers, it is more likely I who cannot leave well enough alone. My motive for modifying my earlier ideas about the *Rose* as parodic is the lack of interest that it seems to take, ultimately, in the moral fibre of either the Lover or the narrative voice. While the *Rose* may be read as a parody of the ideals of courtly love, that either begins or intensifies as the narrative progresses, two of the poem's primary elements depart from the parody by exceeding its object of ridicule. These are the identity of the Narrator-Lover and phenomenon of False Seeming. It is the conundrums that these entities as formal structures pose that are of interest, by which I mean that the content of their utterances is not as noteworthy as the paradoxical form of their being. More so than the conduct of the Narrator-Lover, the *Rose* is interested in its own linguistic maneuvering, the complex network of connections that it sets up within the text, and the havoc that it wreaks by subverting the import of its allusions to conventional narratives and images. It is not so much the moral dilemmas of the Narrator-Lover that are at stake, but a disruption of prevailing mores of signification and interpretation. Because it is only at the highly self-referential and disjointed surface of the allegory that signification occurs, meaning in the *Rose* can only ever be a contingent enterprise.

The constitution of the speaking voice and of False Seeming shifts the emphasis of the poem away from parody. In parody the point of imitating a distinct text, theme, or style is to critically, and often comically, engage it (Rose 51-52). Unlike an estates satire such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, however, the *Rose* does not ridicule the constructs of either the Narrator-Lover or False Seeming in order to underscore their shortcomings and insinuate measures for their reform. The radical disjunction of Lover, Dreamer, and Narrator that the God of Love effects in his explanation of who the Lover is does not imply that the consolidation of these voices is either attainable or desirable. The incoherence of the Narrator-Dreamer-Lover configuration is not a parodic moment, not a piece of criticism. It is rather an interpretational conundrum, a means of radically destabilizing the narrative voice and, in consequence, the entire poem. It is an impasse that cannot be negotiated, the point of which is to stop readers up short, force them to struggle with the text – and admit defeat. The reader simply cannot exit this poem gracefully.

False Seeming presents the reader with a similar impasse. While the speech of False Seeming exposes the hypocrisy rife within the Church, the phenomenon of False Seeming has no satirical target. Of what is he a mockery? In his speech to the barons he ridicules the religious orders especially, but as a figure in his own right, as a principle of falsehood who speaks the truth, he is a

complete paradox. Since they issue from the mouth of False Seeming, his exposures of deceit and dishonesty do not reassure us that truth is anything more than a conceptual fiction. For all we know he may be lying. A character like Chaucer's Pardoner, based in part upon False Seeming, is a target of ridicule; the details of his unsavoury physical appearance and fraudulent behaviour clearly imply his corruption. The important thing about False Seeming is not that he is corrupt so much, but that he both is and is not to be trusted. The Pardoner is a mockery of a recognizable type, while False Seeming is pure ambivalence. He is not only being ironic, but is irony incarnate: he embodies the phenomenon of signifying in entirely indeterminate ways. False Seeming epitomizes the dynamic of seeming that pervades the poem and undermines the stability of links necessary for the positing of deeper meanings. The dilemma that their status as textual paradoxes poses means that the material construction of False Seeming and the speaking voice cannot be bypassed. This is not to say that they are superficial, however. On the contrary, they are highly complex structures, open to a multiplicity of interpretations. The radical instability that they inject into the text confirms that its real interest is not lovers, wise or foolish, but the politics of signification; it emphasizes the allegory's status as a language construct rather than a lesson or prophecy or history or index to another meaning beyond the surface of the text.

What is it about surfaces that is so disconcerting? What is it about depths that are so reassuring? Depth connotes substance and lends the comfort of an essence, a guarantee of truthfulness, to what is believed to be, if not the unreliability at least the inaccuracy of the surface. It suggests that behind or beyond the surface stands a prior, stable meaning that either verifies the surface as truthful or exposes it as deceptive. Yet the search for "deeper" meanings is an impulse that the *Rose* delights in thwarting. Because Credible Significance always comes to the rescue of Illogical Plot, however, conservative allegorical interpretations take precedence over transgressive literal narratives. In a sense, the allegorical message is regarded as the original text, and the literal narrative a somewhat distorted version of it.

Surfaces seem artificial, alien, while depths seem natural. The notion of depth offers the assurance of a pre-ordained form, an innate order. Surfaces are confused with the superficial and depths with the profound, a term that openly equates depth with meaningfulness. We confuse the surface with the superficial because we do not know how to read surfaces, accustomed as we are to making vertical rather than horizontal connections. Yet when we call a literary work a text, a "network" or "web of words," we invoke surfaces of wondrous complexity. Because "depth" implies insight, however, we look deep into a work, beyond instead of at its words, for its "real meaning." That the truth may be at the surface is a disconcerting thought. Hiddenness suggests discovery and connotes value. It is a convenient way of getting around a surface one doesn't like or understand. It

is difficult to orient oneself on a surface. Surfaces allow for a slippage, a shifting, that depths are conceived of as thankfully preventing.

Alongside that of courtly love, the text's misogyny is, not surprisingly, another puzzling discourse. Is the invective of the Jealous Husband meant to be parodic in its excess? Does it demonstrate the lie of courtly love and the demise of its precepts upon marriage, a fact that Friend notes after his diatribe in the voice of the Jealous Husband?¹ Yet the misogyny of the Jealous Husband may be read at face value as well, as intended to be a legitimate complaint against the deceitfulness of women. The same goes for Genius's exhaustive recital of the beguilements to which women habitually resort. What are we to make of the bishop Genius, who has inside knowledge on the Park of the Lamb, with his trite catalogue of woman's deceitfulness, to say nothing of his choice of addressee, the goddess Nature? Do we pass it off as typical medieval humour, which assumes a great deal about the audience and its responses, or look at it as seriously problematizing the credibility of both Genius and his precious park? Huot is completely in tune with the humour of the piece when she notes the silly ambiguities that riddle Genius's praise of it; the sheep for example. While they evoke the lambs of the Christian flock, Huot remarks that:

in the overall context of the poem, one cannot help feeling that they are more accurately to be seen as a group of sexually liberated farm animals, such as those described so eloquently by la Vieille. In their freedom from agricultural exploitation (their wool is not (usually) sheared, nor their flesh eaten) they even recall Nature's vision of animals throwing off the yoke of domesticity. ("Bodily" 58-59)

In conjunction with his adamant counsel to avoid women at all costs, Genius's declaration that relentless vaginal copulation will secure his listeners' conversion into ewes is absurd and renders his status as a trustworthy guide to human conduct and salvation dubious. Jean also equivocates about misogyny through the Narrator, who places blame for his unkind observations about women squarely on the shoulders of his worthy predecessors. This grand piece of squirming suggests that Jean is not interested in misogyny per se, but how to situate it such that its import in the poem cannot be determined.

It would be dangerous to conclude any study of the *Rose*, especially one that posits one of its primary themes to be a subversive exploration of interpretation, and its primary delights to be the infliction of a relentless self-consciousness on the part of its readers, without examining the partialities that inform my own relationship to the poem. My insistent attentiveness to the literality of the rosebud corresponds to an investigation into how the *Rose* and its

¹ See 9447-96 in Strubel; 170 in Dahlberg

readers gender the poem's images and voices. It thus seems that my questioner had tapped into something with his observation to my panel on the coincidence of our being women and our focus on the materiality of the images that had captured our interest or, in my case, ire. It is thus noteworthy that Christine de Pisan's rejoinders to Pierre Col's rationalizations of the poem take place in similar terms. She accuses him of skewing the text to forward a reading of the poem that validates his admiration for it. In response to his torturous justification for Lady's Reason's statement that when loving *par amour* it is better to deceive than be deceived she writes: "You, in fact, interpret in an extraordinary way what is said clearly and literally" (126). While Christine speaks here not of an image but a statement, her insistence on crediting the words of the text with their literal meaning is consistent with my own approach to both the allegory of the *Rose* and its critical heritage. This particular locus of resistance continues today. For instance, in Canadian writer di brandt's poem "but what do you think," the speaker's anger against her father emerges in her frustration with his unsubstantiated, traditionalist insistence on what the Bible means: "the meaning i say through clenched teeth is related to the structure / of the sentence for godsake anybody can see that you can't just take / some old crackpot idea & say you found it in these words even the / Bible has to make some sense" (4).

I do not mean to suggest that this focus on the literal is a stance to which women are by nature partial, but one adopted by readers compelled to resist their habitual marginalization as the inferior term of conventional hierarchical divides. After having grappled at length with the *Rose*, I have come to believe that contentiousness is a response that the text incites and, once accepted, aggravates. This is because it refuses to be "wrestled to the ground."² Whenever the reader thinks she has pinned an image, episode, or discourse down it squirms out of her grasp. The *Rose* is a capacious text with the potential to refute whatever claims are made about it. This makes interpreting it an exercise that hinges on choice. To say that it does not, that one merely discovers what the text encodes, means that one has chosen to assume that it signifies along the lines of least resistance. This is an assessment unworthy of the *Rose*, which provokes our resistance every step of the way.

² This is an observation made by Anne Savage in a discussion of the *Rose*'s resistance to being itself allegorized.

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