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The Art of Flowers, Silks, and Stones: Ekphrastic Literary Fashioning in Floire et Blancheflor and its Receptions in Later French and Italian Medieval Literature

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The Art of Flowers, Silks, and Stones: Ekphrastic Literary

Fashioning in *Floire et Blancheflor* and its Receptions in Later

French and Italian Medieval Literature

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2

Table of Contents

Abstract

This study of Robert d'Orbigny's Old French 'aristocratique' *Li Conte de Floire et Blancheflor* (c. 1170) and its receptions in Guillaume de Lorris' first part of *Le Roman de la Rose* (c. 1230), and Giovanni Boccaccio's later Italian version of the story, *Il Filocolo* (1335 – 1336), seeks to reassess *Floire et Blancheflor* in the light of current scholarly discourses concerning, among other things, ekphrasis and medieval conceptions of nature, recognising it as a work of exceptional ekphrastic and self-reflexive richness interested above all else in its own artefactuality. An argument is presented that Robert d'Orbigny's poem is chiefly concerned with presenting a vivid series of hyper-realistic artefacts, including (both actual and artificial) flowers, silks, and stones, that repeatedly blur the boundaries between art and nature and in doing so contribute to the construction of a sophisticated dialogue about poetic composition. Later chapters examine the reappearance and refashioning of many of the same ekphrastically treated artefacts that characterise and form the subject of *Floire et Blancheflor* within the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Filocolo*, where they become thresholds into other spaces – sites of intertextual exchange and transportation.

Introduction

Threading the Needle, Measuring the Monument, and Sowing the Seeds:

Contextualising *Floire et Blancheflor*

[d]emain irés droit a la tor ;

con se fuissiés engigneor,

quans pies est lee mesurés,

a la hautor garde prendés

[…]

[e]s le vos au pié de la tour ;

a esgarder le prent entour (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 2099 – 2103 ; 2177 –

2178).

The above quotations deal directly with the process of analysis: Floire, the male protagonist of the Old French, 'aristocratique' *Li Conte de Floire et Blancheflor*, is first given instructions to adopt the role of an architect, and then actually proceeds some lines later to perform the part by taking measurements of the Emir's tower, a construction in which the young Blancheflor is being held captive, and to which he hopes to gain access. These lines, which introduce some of the themes that are central to the present study, do not merely show the protagonist in disguise, but allow him to behave as both reader and interpreter of the monument: the tower has already been the subject of an extended ekphrasis some lines earlier, and the playful emphasis placed upon "feet" and on "measuring" – terms that have specific metrical resonances –

establishes a clear metatextual connection with the poetic space it inhabits and to an extent symbolises. Facing the ekphrastic object, Floire becomes, in this passage, a scholar as well as an architect.

Before entering into a full discussion of *Floire et Blancheflor*, and whilst more depth and detail will follow on the narrative framework of the poem in the first and second chapters – albeit without removing the emphasis on the work's concern with ekphrastic exploration of its own artefactuality – a short summary of the plot may prove helpful at the outset. The poem tells the story of two extraordinarily beautiful children born on the day of the *Pâques Fleuries*, one to the Saracen Queen and the other to a Christian maiden. Floire and Blancheflor are said to resemble one another exactly and grow up together in the delightful garden of the boy's father, King Felix: it is in this setting that they learn about love by reading pagan books. The inseparable pair develop an amorous relationship – manifested in a flurry of letter writing – which is soon detected by Floire's parents who wish for their son to marry a daughter of a king. Following this, and under the impression that Blancheflor will soon be joining him, Floire is sent away to reside with his aunt in Montoire where it is hoped that he will soon forget the low-born Blancheflor. Meanwhile, Floire's parents devise an elaborate trick to dispose of the girl: they arrange for her to be sold, feign her death, and construct a magnificent tomb to her memory. The merchants sell Blancheflor to the Babylonian Emir who encloses her in his tower with one hundred and forty other young maidens. Troubled by Blancheflor's absence, Floire returns home, where upon learning of Blancheflor's death and seeing the tomb, he attempts suicide. To prevent losing her son however, the Queen reveals the whole ploy and Floire departs on a quest to recover his love. The young prince is helped by several inn keepers along the way,

and after a long ordeal, the pair are eventually reunited, marry, convert to Christianity, and return home.

The plot of *Floire et Blancheflor* is, however, markedly less important to the working of the poem as a whole than its ostensibly decorative passages, the story seeming sometimes an aspect of only secondary significance within its compositional scheme – an excuse, even, for the poet to explore a phantasmagorical series of hyper-realistic artefacts in vivid self-reflexive detail. The tale itself can be considered the fabric upon which the individual ekphraseis – the sophisticated pieces of appliqué work – are hung, and it is these sumptuously elaborate visualisations of images and artefacts that are the poet's real joy and concern. In relation to medieval ekphrastic literature, Linda M. Clemente has observed, '[i]n this type of poetry not only does the author seek to describe an object but the object itself becomes the formal cause of the poem' (1992: 7). This is nowhere more apparent than in *Floire et Blancheflor*. This poem has nonetheless long been treated merely as one of the sources of a story that would only take a shape worthy of study in later texts – the question of why the authors of these later texts drew upon this particular source is a subject all too often inexplicably avoided. As Floire himself demonstrates for us in the passages cited above, it is only through close examination and analysis of these splendid "appliqué" pieces – the sites and surfaces which seem indeed to have acted as exemplary prototypes for the self-reflexive artefactual constructions of later poets and literary weavers, including Guillaume de Lorris and Giovanni Boccaccio – that possible answers to this question may begin to be approached, and the text's interpretative space finally *entered*.

The text of *Li Conte de Floire et Blancheflor* – composed c. 1170 – has survived in four manuscripts: A (Paris, BNF, fr. 375); B (Paris, BNF, fr. 1447); C

7

(Paris, BNF, fr. 12562 – a later copy of A) and V (Vatican, palat, lat. 1971 – a fragment which contains about half of the text). All references to the poem in the following chapters are taken from Jean-Luc Leclanche's 2003 edition of manuscript A, instead of Margaret Pelan's 1937 rendition of manuscript B (the only modern edition to have followed B since Édelestand Du Méril's first edition of the tale in 1856), since, as Leclanche has put it, A presents a 'texte sensiblement supérieur' (2003: vii). Though only a relatively recent development in scholarship on *Floire et Blancheflor*, the author of the Old French 'aritsocratique' poem (as opposed to the popular adaptation) is referred to throughout this study as Robert d'Orbigny, who was named by Konrad Fleck – the thirteenth-century author of the Middle High German version of the Old French poem, Florie und Blansheflur (c. 1220) – as being the author of the source text of his work (see Leclanche 2003: xiv – xv). All references to *Le Roman de la Rose* are taken from Armand Strubel's 1992 version of the poem; and citations of *Il Filocolo* are from Salvatore Battaglia's 1938 edition rather than Antonio Enzo Quaglio's 1967 text.

Enlightening works by scholars such as Huguette Legros (1992), Patricia Grieve (1997), William Calin (1964), E. Jane Burns (2002, 2009), and Victoria Kirkham (2001) have all explored the tradition of *Floire et Blancheflor* from various angles adding considerably to the growing edifice of scholarship on the work, but Robert's chief concern with artefactuality, ekphrasis, and his employment of the garden setting as an ideal *topos* to display the intertwined relationship between art, nature, and poetic composition still awaits further attention. Although, *Floire et Blancheflor* has often been dismissed as the work of a 'minor artist' (Hubert 1966: 19), a 'conte « charmant et délicat », mais « scolaire » et dont « la composition […] ne manifeste aucune subtilité, aucune habilite même »' (Lefevre 1978 quoted in

Legros 1992: 7), Robert's original poem uses many of the tropes or *topoi* that would be later redeveloped and refashioned in a sophisticated manner to form the spatial, rhetorical, iconographical, and material centrepieces of later French and Italian medieval literature.

There has been a wealth of recent scholarship in medieval studies on the use of ekphrasis, including publications by Linda M. Clemente (1992), Murray Krieger (1992), Douglas Kelly (1992), Mary Carruthers (1998), Claire Barbetti (2011), and Valerie Allen (2015); at the same time rapid progress has been made in the fields of eco-materialism, medieval conceptions of Nature, and the garden as a 'place of thought' by a number of scholars, including Kellie Robertson (2017), Sarah Kay (2007; 2019), Nicolette Zeeman (2019), Miranda Griffin (2018), Gillian Rudd (2007), and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2013; 2014; 2015). The intention here is to reassess *Floire et Blancheflor* within the context of these recent scholarly developments. Robert's poem makes a particularly memorable and heightened use of ekphrastic passages – curiously enough, its descriptive splendour is one of the principle reasons why it has been passed over during the last century and there has not yet been an adequate reassessment of it within this new scholarly conversation which seeks to understand their presence within medieval literature and to see such florid ekphraseis as no 'decadent habit of decorative dilation' or literary defect (Baldwin 1928 in Clemente 1992: 7, compare Strubel 1992: 51).

Claire Barbetti has observed that '[e]kphrasis does not construct a rigid body. Its principle rather is to create relationships, connections', and on this point, we might also cite Linda Clemente's similar recognition of it as '[a]s a cohesive force' that serves to 'unite that which is disparate'(Barbetti 2011: 27; Clemente 1992: 142). The intention here is not to create a 'rigid body' – that is, a conclusive and definitive

treatment of the subject at hand – but to display relationships and connections between *Floire et Blancheflor* and later responses to it in Guillaume de Lorris' first part of *Le Roman de la Rose* (c. 1230) and Giovanni Boccaccio's version of the Old French poem in *Il Filocolo* (c. 1335 – 1336), simultaneously showing these works to be in dialogue with one another and attempting to open a new dialogue on these relationships.

Roberta Krueger (1983: *passim*) and Norris Lacy (1992: 24) have respectively written of the 'literary subtext' of the *Floire et Blancheflor* and Robert's concern for 'literary factitiousness'. In both cases, these aspects of the work are explored through, and almost entirely attributable to, the ekphrastic passages that can be seen as the principle means by which the poet gives shape, form, colour and meaning to the architecture of the text. Eleanor Winsor Leach, writing in 1974, noted that the employment within a work of multiple ekphraseis 'offer[s] the artist an opportunity to speak *in propria persona* and to make us aware of the self-consciousness of his art through his attention to the fictional artistry of some other creator' (1974: 104). Nowhere is this idea more amply demonstrated than in the highly metatextual episodes of Blancheflor's false tomb or the Emir's tower, which will form the main subjects of discussion in the second chapter, but it also appears in the other artefacts – especially woven – that recur throughout the poem and pattern it as though a repeating motif. In these artefacts, Robert intermingles and frequently makes indistinguishable from one another the apparently opposing concepts of art and nature. Later chapters will explore medieval responses to Robert's innovative exploration of the artefactuality of his poem in the works of Guillaume de Lorris and Giovanni Boccaccio, focusing especially on the fountain, both as a site and a structure through which intertextual relationships can be established.

Chapter One:

Ekphrastic Embroidery: Flower Imagery in *Li Conte de Floire et Blancheflor* and Poem as Text and Textile

At several points in the narrative of Robert d'Orbigny's *Li Conte de Floire et Blancheflor*, flowers are overtly associated with the act of crossing or being carried across an otherwise impenetrable boundary. In a 1964 article on the work, William Calin recognised the importance of the flower motif to the structure and atmosphere of the poem, referring to the 'willed pattern of flower imagery which sets the tone of the work as a whole and gives it its unique literary quality' (1964: 103). Calin listed the points in which flowers feature in the text, but by confining his study to the story itself without reference to the frame narrative, brief as it is, he surprisingly managed to miss the first appearance of the motif, one that is of great importance due to its prominent position at the start of the tale and its highly self-conscious, even programmatic function within this frame narrative. The first mention of flowers occurs in line 41, as part of a short but significant ekphrasis that describes and illuminates the appearance of the ornamental bedspread on which the narrator is sitting.

En cele camber un lit avoit

qui de paile aornés estoit.

Molt par ert boins et ciers li pailes,

ainc ne vint miudres de Tessaile.

Li pailes ert ovrés a flors,

d'indes tires bendes et ours (*Floire et Blancheflor*: ll. 37 – 42).

11

It is only once the narrator has reclined upon this piece of richly embroidered silk that the text's frame narrative slips into the tale of Floire and Blancheflor, which he overhears from two mysterious and anonymous noble ladies who happen to be in attendance. There may well be some suggestion that the bedspread, and indeed the bed itself, provides the stage (and stage scenery) for the subsequent story, and that the story itself incorporates an imaginative dream element. It is upon sitting on the silk, whose exoticism is emphasised through mention of 'Tessaile' and 'indes tires', that the narrator is transported to faraway lands metaphorically. Thessaly's traditional association with magic and mystical plants is worth noting, though Robert does not dwell on the allusion. The embroidery, which includes 'bendes et ours' and most significantly – since mentioned first – 'flors', anticipates the enclosed gardens that appear later in the story and in which the most crucial plot developments occur. The bedspread should be interpreted as the inspiration for these subsequent imagined settings, but regardless of whether the tale is read as a dream narrative or otherwise, the early appearance of this motif has an anticipatory function that is central to the work's tightly woven and unified structure, as well as its thematic cohesiveness and tonal continuity, as Calin so pointed out with reference to later examples within the poem.

One of these examples comes relatively early on, when King Felix and his wife sell Blancheflor to some merchants in exchange for gold, silver, a precious golden cup once owned by Aeneas himself, and a series of expensive textiles: these include '[…] vint pailes de Bonivent, / et vint mantiaus vairs osterins, / et vint bliaus indes porprins' (ll. 432 – 434). Much attention has been directed towards the cup, to which Robert dedicates a lengthy ekphrasis and detailed (although amusingly short) provenance (ll.

435 – 504), but the other items that form part of the transaction have been unjustly passed over.[1] Whilst E. Jane Burns has given much consideration to the implications here for historical study of medieval trade and East-West relations,[2] scholars have not commented upon the symbolic role of the silks within this exchange, or the fact that the episode is so deeply concerned with the relative value of something natural and living, and what are essentially *objets d'art*. Blancheflor herself is able to command so substantial a price precisely because she is judged according to the same criteria as these various artificially worked objects, and in *natural* beauty surpasses them all. Nature itself, of course, is often in literature of the period not only personified but likened specifically to an artisan, blurring the already hazy boundary between art and nature even further. In recent years Kellie Robertson, E. R. Truitt, Miranda Griffin, Gillian Rudd, Sarah Kay, and Nicolette Zeeman have all directed their attention towards the *working* of Nature, examining, for example, the subtle shifts that turn it from an instrument to an agent or vice versa in any given context (on this see especially Robertson 2017: 64 – 69, and Truitt 2015: 40); although we do not meet a Lady Nature in Robert's poem, there is an implied personification of Nature as a painter-modeller later in the text (ll. 2899 – 2902), which suggests a conception of the deity (if indeed it can be considered such) as a skilled worker rather than the worker's tools – an *artifex* rather than an artefact. The personification of Nature is, however, playful and lends a balance to the descriptive passages concerning characters even as notions of natural and artificial might seem to be destabilised in the process. The idea expressed remains, even in the midst of this destabilising, that Nature's skill has in the composition and

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[1] The cup is treated in the following chapter, since its significance within the poem is largely in its connections with the other artefacts that appear throughout, such as the Emir's fountain, and it is not of direct relevance to the notion of poetic composition as a form of weaving which here is of primary concern.

[2] See E. Jane Burns (2002), *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*, pp. 216 – 218, and E. Jane Burns (2009), *Sea of Silk*.

creation of Blancheflor outdone any human efforts – best exemplified in the similarly boundary-blurring tomb effigies discussed in the following chapter.

Though the silks are associated with Benevento rather than Thessaly, the catalogue of items acquired in return for Blancheflor directly recalls the vocabulary used to describe the bedspread in the poem's prologue, providing an implied artefactual link with the opening of the work, and with the narrator of its frame. After this point, elaborately decorated and often embroidered silks reappear throughout the poem at periodic intervals as items of great value that can be given as forms of payment or compensation. When Floire sets off to find Blancheflor he takes with him '[…] ciers pailes et or et argent, / biaus dras et mules […] de ciers dras, / des millors que tu troveras' (ll. 1131 – 1132; ll. 1141 – 1142) that prove useful for this very purpose. In a sense, his quest is almost entirely funded and facilitated by silks, and each step of the journey that extends the poem's imaginative landscape is brought about in conjunction with an increase in the number, or a greater emphasis on, these silks.

Another one of the poem's later silks – and one which gives, in some respects, a sense of fulfilment (if not closure as such) to the story by echoing the frame narrative's richly decorated bedspread – comes at the point of Floire's clandestine entrance into the Emir's *Tor as Puceles* – 'Tower of Maidens' (ll. 2300 – 2430). This time, flowers have an even more prominent function to perform in this specific instance of boundary crossing. Flowers do not merely provide a flat pictorial setting that facilitates the act of entrance, as is the case in the poem's opening, where the bedspread and its artificial floral embroidery can be seen as prompting the subsequent narrative; in actually covering and concealing Floire in a basket they play a crucial role in the progression of the plot. The basket, the 'corbeille' (l. 2313), itself an artificial piece of work much like the silken bedspread (and presumably also woven),

albeit considerably more humble than the luxurious embroidered cloth, carries Floire into the otherwise impenetrable tower, much as the narrator has already been carried into the distant eastern setting of an otherwise closed and inaccessible narrative. In this case, however, Floire becomes assimilated with the real flowers in which he is enveloped in a way that the narrator does not, blending with and becoming indistinguishable from them in nature as well as name.

Whilst definitions of what is natural and what is artificial have frequently been blurred within the text, the apparent naturalness or even artlessness of the flowers in the basket[3] – as opposed to the artful arrangement of those embroidered on the bedspread – marks this moment as more than anticipatory, but rather one of distinct action, yet the threshold traversed is not only physical or spatial, but also an amatory one. The text makes clear that these flowers are 'vermel' (l. 2307), a colour already associated with Floire earlier in the poem, where he is represented beside Blancheflor's false tomb by a bright vermilion terabinth: 'turabim vermel; soussiel nen a plus bele cose, plus ert bele que flors de rose' (ll. 612 – 614). Later (l. 2881) Floire appears dressed in a 'reube porprine', another royal colour that similarly recalls the reddish Tyrian purple that had appeared on the bedspread in the poem's opening, but here he dresses in a vermilion bliaut, following the advice of the gatekeeper, so that he and the flowers might be 'une coulor' (ll. 2307 – 2310, quotation from 2309). Shortly afterwards, inside the tower, the connection between Floire and the flowers in which he has been hiding will, moreover, be heightened by Gloris' observation that he is an overwhelmingly beautiful 'flor', in the flower of his youth (ll. 2388 – 2390; ll. 2420 – 2421). At the precise moment of the boundary crossing, then, it is not only the

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[3] Robert does not make clear how much 'art' has been involved in the creation of the basket: his silence on this subject is perhaps suggestive of the greater importance of the natural within this scene – though the natural, it can be assumed, is cocooned within the artifice of the basket trick.

fact that the young man is surrounded by flowers and thus hidden by them from human eyes, but also the fact that he is conflated with them in both a metaphorical and corporeal sense that allows him to enter with ease the famously impregnable tower and to find himself, with only minor difficulty, in Blancheflor's presence. Even if Floire is seen by any tower inhabitants, he will not seem out of place.

The fact Floire is also crossing an amatory boundary makes the colour of these flowers even more significant. Michel Pastoureau discusses the well-known connections between the colour red and love along with qualities such as radiance and beauty, but also refers to the special tendency during the late twelfth century to associate it with virility and grace (2016: passim but esp. 85). These qualities are all frequently attributed to the young prince (see for instance ll. 2878 – 2880), and in a sense are exactly the characteristics that enable him to love and be worthy of the beautiful, pure and noble Blancheflor (ll. 2903 – 2904; ll. 2553 – 2554). In fact, the rightness and purity of their love is emphasised by the workings of the relationship between nature and artifice at this point in the narrative. Patricia Grieve, in her detailed 1997 study of *Floire et Blancheflor and the European Romance*, points out that the luxurious tower with all its ornate fittings and clever design, its 'artifice and planning', is eventually 'no match' for the humble basket of cut flowers (1997: 92). Her argument presents an interesting problem: despite the fact that even the fabric of the tower, with its walls made of green marble and its pillars of wood (ll. 1870 – 1876), attempts visually and materially to mimic the foliage and bark of a tree, blossoming not with flowers but with flower-like virgins (such as Blancheflor) in each of its rooms, the simpler but crucially more real and natural flowers triumph in the end. It is, in a sense, a victory of nature over artifice, one that suggests and confirms the natural and harmonious nature of Floire and Blancheflor's love and places it in sharp contrast with

the contrived, even systematic or mechanical, year-long relationships of the Emir. At the same time, however, there is certainly a degree of contrivance involved in Floire's disguised entrance into the tower, which in this version in particular is slightly reminiscent of the Trojan Horse, even if the trick is more modest in scale and execution, and also rather less ill-intentioned. Grieve does not dwell on the humble basket or the artificiality of Floire's plot, but these elements need not detract in any case from her argument concerning the nature of the two protagonists' love. Instead, we might interpret the basket as a poetic device just like the silken bedspread which has already served as a kind of vehicle to transport the narrator into the tale. Here, the basket functions in a similar way, and helps, most significantly, to weave the poem as a whole together and create the unity, cohesion and 'unique literary quality' that William Calin was so right to observe in 1964.

A significant though often overlooked episode that contributes to this uniqueness in Robert's textual tapestry appears many lines earlier than Floire's entrance into the tower via the basket of flowers and comes in the form of another highly worked fabric. When Floire departs for the East on his quest to recover Blancheflor, he disguises himself as a wealthy merchant (the first of the protagonist's numerous disguises). Members of his entourage are laden with expensive goods, and Floire himself, while perhaps not weighed down as his companions are, is likewise loaded with fine objects – in his case for display as much as disguise. As noted above, the fine textiles he carries also serve as forms of payment for those who prove helpful to him on his journey. Throughout this episode, the already ekphrastic verse proves to be just as elaborately clothed in descriptive finery as the young prince and his men are with the items described. The poet loads his verses with as much ekphrasis as he does the rescue party with merchandise. Among these objects is the sumptuously decorated

saddle on which Floire sits, with its finely embroidered floral saddlecloth. The reader

has already been given Floire's fine inventory (ll. 1132 – 1158), but Robert dedicates

a another full thirty-five lines to describing the horse's tack (ll. 1169 – 1204), a

wonderfully luxurious ensemble of finely worked objects and paraphernalia which add

considerably to the ever-lengthening and intensifying dialogue between art and nature.

Man's artifice and nature's art appear to be particularly intertwined on the patterned

surface of the saddlecloth, which is fashioned from expensive Castilian material and

adorned with organic floral designs worked with great skill in gold orphrey: 'La

covreture de la sele / ert d'un brun paile de Castele, / tote floree a flors d'orfrois; tel le

voloit avoir li rois' (ll. 1181 – 1184). At this point in the poem, the dialogue between

art and nature is intensified by the language used to describe the artificial flowers,

which employs with apt flamboyance a particularly emphatic *figura etymologica*,

making the cloth flower with flowers. In addition to the emphatic eccentricity of this

phrasing, however, Robert's deliberate employment in Old French of the verb 'floree',

as opposed to a more passive construction such as is found in Jean-Luc Leclanche's

modern French translation (2003) – which substitutes a disappointingly staid and

prosaic 'décoré de motifs floraux' for the more animated expression of the original –

serves to impart the saddle cover implicitly with the ability to give and sustain life.

The description carries a verbal force that gives the material an active agency and

bestows a vitality and sense of organic growth and movement on the artificial orphrey

flowers that not only decorate but actually blossom on its surface. This idea of nature

as constantly 'in motion' – as Kay and Zeeman put it – the notion of it 'always

"becoming", a central part of which must be the "vibrancy" of matter', represents a

new direction in current scholarly criticism (Kay and Zeeman 2019: 9). This is a timely

development, and one which is particularly relevant to *Floire et Blancheflor*, since

previous approaches have overlooked and consequently misrepresented the sense of the changeful and unfixed that plays such an important part within the poem's aesthetic scheme and thought, evident also in the tendency for artefacts and trees alike to flower forever in a process of perpetual 'becoming'. Here the modern French translation, in seeking to reduce what may seem clumsiness in the repetitive construction found in the original, drearily obscures the purposeful impossibility that creeps into the poem's descriptive passages, rendering the ekphrasis with a plainness that misrepresents the distinctive characteristics of Robert's text and (far more clumsily) reduces its liveliness to lifelessness. The fact that Robert allows nature to encroach on art in this example reflects the broader concerns of the work as a whole.

The use of 'floree', moreover, may be seen as marking a distinct turning-point within the text, as the first instance of an embroidered fabric beginning to metamorphose verbally into an actual garden. The saddle cover, as it is presented to the reader, is reminiscent of an artificially constructed *hortus* not only because of the flowers that ornament its surface, but more particularly because of the attention that is given to the construction of this mimetic item: while Robert uses animated language to describe the flowers, he simultaneously highlights the careful and laborious craftsmanship involved in their manufacture (ll. 1180 – 1184) and the fact that the King had ordered for the saddle cover to be made in this precise manner ('tel le voloit avoir li rois'; l. 1184). In fact, the exoticism of the opulent gold embroidery work[4] both foreshadows and predicts the Emir's wonderous mechanical garden – where Blancheflor, the text will later reveal, is being held captive. The amount of golden thread, in a sense, anticipates the richly ornamented Babylonian garden ruled by the

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[4] See E. Jane Burns, *Sea of Silk*, for a detailed discussion of the *orfrois* technique and its eastern origin. She defines *orfrois* as a 'band of silk and gold, bearing a decorative pattern that can be either woven or embroidered […], often contains Arabic script (2009: 186).

Emir. Thematically and symbolically, the saddle cloth is of great importance: it exhibits a certain balance between art and nature where the resulting horticultural edifice – this hybrid construction that is skilfully woven from natural flowering threads – is of greater creative and artistic value than its constituent parts.

Furthermore, Robert neatly combines his creative intertwining of art and nature with his own poetic art through repeated instances of foreshadowing, and it seems to be of no coincidence that a garden always happens to be the vehicle for these anticipatory moments. We have already seen that the bedspread in the prologue and the basket of flowers echo one another and act as anticipatory surfaces, or even thresholds, to transport the characters to the next stage in the story, the next setting, and on to other floral surfaces of similar metatextual signification. In each of these cases, the new surface picks up the threads of the preceding example, creating a satisfying narrative continuity and drawing attention to the artful construction of the poem as a whole.

It is in this manner and with this emphasis on the poet's skill that both the floral bedspread of the prologue and the saddlecloth predict the Emir's enclosed garden later in the poem. Despite obvious similarities, however, between the two floral fabrics, the saddlecloth functions in such a way that it bears closer resemblance to the basket of flowers previously discussed. Akin to the carefully woven basket carrying freshly picked flowers, the saddlecloth actually reflects the construction of the garden space in the sense that it reproduces the artistic fusion of nature and artifice. Whilst the prologue's bedspread may project an image of the garden, it does not, crucially, reproduce its composition. Robert's choice of verbs to depict the floral decoration on each cloth distinctly mark this difference: 'Li pailes ert *ovrés* a flors' (l. 41, emphasis mine) in the prologue alludes to a garden whereas, '[l]a covreture de la sele / ert… /

tote *floree* a flors d'orfrois' (ll. 1181 – 1183, emphasis mine) actually reproduces the environment. With the saddlecloth, Robert's significant *figura etymologica* animates the carefully woven flowers and they blossom on its surface, reflecting an artificially erected organic setting: the saddlecloth's flowers bloom and flower like those in the basket, the bedspread's lie flat and artificial.

Floire, himself a flower by nature as well as by name, sits on this blossoming saddlecloth – almost as if he has been planted in the garden space it so vividly brings to life – and in doing so he joins the number of the embroidered flowers as he sets out to find his flowery friend, Blancheflor. The saddle and other trappings certainly suit the rider, who is, in his disguise, somewhat indistinguishable from these accoutrements. Later on, he will disguise himself again with flowers – only, real ones – when he hides in the basket ready for his clandestine entrance into the tower, and in that episode he will become more difficult to distinguish from his surroundings: Floire buried in flowers is, it is made quite clear, something of a needle in a haystack – or rather, hay in a haystack. Throughout the poem Floire has a rather ambiguous status as, on the one hand, a prince bedecked with expensive and skilfully crafted goods, the product of unmatched artifice (see especially lines 1135 – 1228), and on the other, a boy of uncontrived but nevertheless perfect appearance with an innate rather than acquired delicacy of temperament. Alongside Blancheflor, Floire is lauded repeatedly as a fine work of nature, exploiting a conceit that blurs the boundaries between art and nature in a way that reflects the poem's fundamental concern with its own artefactuality: 'damages seroit molt grant / s'ensi moroient li enfant, / car de lor biauté n'est mesure. / Plus biaus ne fist onques Nature' (ll. 3081 – 3084). The artisan Nature, acting as Robertson's 'agent' rather than 'instrument' cannot 'fist' – or produce – a finer child. This same theme acquires an even greater prominence later on, when,

during the trial of the two protagonists at the Emir's court that takes place after the pair have been reunited and discovered intimately but chastely entwined together on Blancheflor's silken bedspread, the poet dedicates a lengthy ekphrasis to the appearance of the two children (ll. 2857 – 2922). In these verbal portraits, Robert describes Floire's physical appearance with a series of uncultured similes:

Flores li enfes fu molt biaus

de son eage damoisiaus.

[…]

front par mesure, molt ert blans,

plus biaus ne fu nus hom vivans.

[…]

Sa face resanle *soleus*

quant au matin apert vermeus

[…]

le car blance com *flors de lis*,

bras ot cras, mains blances com *nois* (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 2857 – 2877, emphasis mine).

Each of the similes employed within these lines to provide a vibrant image of the young boy's beauty likens his features to phenomena that might be described as natural, reflecting the idea that he is himself the finest and most delicate work which Nature is capable of producing – a notion that has already been expressed most clearly

in line 3084. There is, however, a noticeable difference between the sorts of similes used to describe Floire and those that are used in relation to Blancheflor. She too, as discussed above, can be regarded as a natural beauty – her mouth, for instance, is said to be the most exquisite that Nature has ever made (ll. 2901 – 2902) – but far greater emphasis is placed on the multifarious ways in which her beauty surpasses not so much natural phenomena so much as natural materials more typically associated with their use in human art. In this way she is, for example, repeatedly compared with the work of a fine portraitist (l. 2900; l. 2918). Rather than comparing her with the intangible dawn, or with snow, as is the case with Floire, Robert makes a number of favourable analogies between the beauty of Blancheflor's features and the beauty of various materials employed in the creation of luxury objects:

[c]ief a reont et blande crine,

plus blanc le front que n'est *hermine*.

[…]

Suercils brunés, ieus vairs rians,

plus que *gemme resplendissans*.

Nul contrefaire nel porroit.

[…]

Sa face de color tres fine,

plus clere que nen est *verrine*.

Et les narines ot bien faites,

com se fuissent as mains portraites.

Bouce bien faite par mesure,

ainc ne fist plus bele Nature.

[…]

Li dent sont petit et seré

et plus blanc d'argent esmeré.

[…]

La car avoit assés plus blance

que n'est nule flors sor la brance.

Le cors a tel et si bien fait

que s'on l'eüst as mains portrait' (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 2887 – 2918, emphasis mine).

The extended description of Blancheflor in material, or rather *artefactual* terms, does not necessarily indicate that Blancheflor is herself an object, though it does undeniably reflect her treatment earlier in the poem as an object to be bought and sold in exchange for an array of opulent silks, gold, silver, and a precious golden cup – a theme that is given some symbolic closure in this episode. Blancheflor's fundamental (and surpassing) naturalness is emphasised through the comparison between her pale complexion and a white flower – a suitable and dominant image (ll. 2915 – 2916). Floire too, is compared with a white lily, though his face is suffused with a dawn-like 'vermeus' hue (l. 2872) – also a suitable image that ties into the poem's ongoing programme of colour symbolism.

Whilst Floire is not compared with materials or items that can be possessed in the same way as those with which Blancheflor is associated, many lines are nonetheless given in the later episode to the cut and colours of his apparel, meaning that he is also associated, albeit in a different fashion, with the products of human art. This is also seen in his disguise as a merchant, a role which allows for a clever juxtaposition of the boy's naturalness with the artificiality of his merchandise, and, since some trickery is implied by the costume, it also permits a sophisticated though subtle exploration of the sometimes unclear division between appearance and reality. The carefully constructed ambiguity and indistinctness concerning Floire's aspect and character, as well as his floral name, corresponds precisely with the simultaneously organic and artificial composition of the flowery gardens that he sits on or immerses himself in: he is easily assimilated (or conflated) with these various floral 'vehicles', and for this reason is both easily disguised and easily transported when required. As a traveller, Floire seems to advance through the narrative and across the map almost via the process of cohesion, blending effortlessly with his surroundings so long as they are pretty enough, and becoming part of each vehicle that carries him because they always are. As the artefacts within the poem attain an ever greater vibrancy, the characters, and Floire especially, become increasingly indistinguishable from them – a sort of fusion takes place. In this fashion, Robert unites his poem creatively, meticulously weaving the narrative and its actors together to create a cohesive, satisfying and tightly laced whole. The subsequent episode of Floire being carried in the basket of flowers is not only foreshadowed, therefore, but artfully designed to branch from the same stem that has already produced the saddlecloth episode. Through the careful composition and construction of both 'vehicles' and the facility of Floire's cohesive integration with them both, Robert explores metatextual as well as more

merely narratological themes, expressing an overriding interest in the subject of artistic creation, and therefore in poetic composition.

Floire's vehicular employment of both these items is, once again, anticipated by Robert's prologue to *Floire et Blancheflor*; in the opening it is, crucially, the act of sitting on the silken bedspread, and of making contact with its carefully crafted floral surface, that initially permits the narrator to be carried away to the far-off lands afterwards described (l. 43). As discussed above, this bedspread has great prominence as the first of many such artefacts, including the saddlecloth and basket of flowers, and in many respects can be considered the prototype of these succeeding objects which blend art and nature and ensure the continuing visibility of this theme within the text. Emphasis is laid on the fact that the embroidered flowers on the bedspread are meticulously crafted – 'ovrés' – and are therefore highly artificial and purely representational, as opposed to organic or in any way capable of being animate like those blossoming on the saddlecloth. The prologue's fundamental concern with artifice is reinforced not only by the carefully considered gravity given to the topic of craftsmanship, but also by the languid mood that pervades the poem's opening and serves to distance it from the action that will follow. The description of the bedspread constructs an entrance for the story, pointedly hinting at the manner in which it will be told, and programmatically setting out a plan of its intricately entwined structural and symbolic significances.

In the vivid portrayal of this floral bedspread, Robert sows the seeds of the later narrative: the fabric anticipates the forthcoming garden environments, both real and unreal, natural and manmade, that appear periodically throughout the work. The seeds sown so early on in the work do not have a purely narratological purpose, but rather they act more significantly to establish a persuasive metaphorical relationship

between skilful embroidery and Robert's elaborately interwoven and texturally satisfying craft of poetic composition, two art forms that have traditionally been credited with an extraordinary ability to bring the inanimate to life. The highly exalted needlework on the bedspread simply must be attributed to both the hands of the seamster and the poet (11. 38 – 42), yet Robert makes it clear that these are one and the same inventive weaver.

Just to solidify this metaphorical tying-together of the interlaced poetic design and the art of embroidery, Robert makes sure to follow the description of the bedspread with an immediate reference to the art of storytelling, which the narrator (currently reclining upon the floral silk – and himself a storyteller) praises: as the lady begins to recount the tale of Floire and Blancheflor to her younger sister, he listens in and remarks that 'Ele commence avenanment' (1. 55). The deliberate (self-)praise – occurring precisely at the point when the relationship between embroidery and the poet's design is being unveiled – draws greater attention to the artifice of the situation depicted in the poem's frame narrative, since the account presented to the reader, Robert insists (with some humour), is at least four or five times removed from the supposed action itself, which, we are told, 'bien avoit passé deus cens ans' (l. 52). The reader must presume that Robert's telling is likewise at least four or five times refined, improved and embellished, with the story having passed palindromatically – or rather chiastically – from 'escrit' to 'dit' (ll. 53 – 54), and back again, transferred from a mysterious written text to oral tellings before crystallising once again as the written word in Robert's version. While some readers might be tempted to interpret this fictional chain of receptions as imbuing the story that follows with an authoritative antiquity that grants it a feigned credibility, this would evidently be to ignore the undeniable imprint of a veracity-counteracting impulse that comes unavoidably

enshrined in this model of a semi-textual, semi-oral tradition. Far from legitimising the story, Robert's discussion of its transmission history presents the notion that there have been multiple opportunities for interpolation and alteration: the narrator hears the story from a lady of high 'parage' (l. 47), but the contrived descent of the tale itself is dubious. The consequence of all this is to draw attention to the artificiality of the written text in the form in which it is handed to the reader, and to distinguish, as though with a bright thread on a darker ground, the ingenuity and skill of the poet whose compositional choices can be compared so fittingly with those of the weaver or embroiderer.

It is entirely suitable, therefore, that Robert picks up the threads of the prologue's discourse on the relationship between art, nature and creativity at the point of Floire's departure for the east, which mirrors the narrator's own entrance into the exotic world of the poem. In this episode, the metaphorical relationship established in the opening between weaving and poetic composition is of prime importance. Here the metaphor extends beyond the motif of the enclosed garden filled with flowers that overtly links the bedspread with the saddlecloth, and may be seen as transcending or even interrupting Robert's carefully constructed symbolic patterning which so consistently returns to the garden motif throughout the work, but it does so to prepare the way for yet another 'entrance' that still relies heavily upon the garden environment. Beneath the saddle and elaborate flowering saddlecloth lies a blanket that is worked with equal skill and attention, though its pattern is simpler:

[l]a soussele ert d'un paille cier,

tres bien ovree a eskekier

[…]

Sa colors est inde et vermelle

naturelment; a grant mervelle

en est faite l'entailleüre,

li ors assis par molt grand cure. (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 1173 – 4; ll. 1177 –
1180).

Just as the saddlecloth mimics and to some extent becomes a garden space, the
saddle blanket imitates a chessboard, fulfilling a unifying anticipating function within
the text that foreshadows part of Floire's entrance into the tower: the protagonist will
be smuggled in, hidden in the basket of flowers, but only after many games of chess
with the Emir's gatekeeper. The chessboard proper, while not able to be interpreted as
a form of transportation in and of itself, still constitutes a sort of liminal surface that
marks the entrance into the Emir's garden, where the tower awaits, and one that
facilitates the progression from one space into the next, and from a distrusted status to
one of something more agreeable. The games are, on Floire's part, the beginning of a
clever and surpassingly contrived trick that allows him to reach his beloved. Floire
does not simply rely on obtaining a victory in each round, as one might expect, but
opts for a kind of double artifice, choosing rather to impress and win the defeated (and
now speechless) guard over with unanticipated magnanimity and unparalleled
generosity: the latter 's'en merveilla' (l. 2201). The chequered saddle blanket, the
product of a different class of artifice, complements and forms a border to the garden-
mimicking saddlecloth with which it is paired, just as the actual chessboard
figuratively does for the Emir's garden, emphasising again rather than disturbing the
metaphorical equivalence of fine needlework and artful verse. The chequered saddle

blanket also stresses this, it must be added, through the very colours from which it is composed – 'inde et vermel' (l. 1177). The latter reappears continuously throughout the poem and is frequently associated with Floire, while the former instantly recalls the bedspread of the prologue, which had prominently featured 'indes tires' (l. 42). It is perhaps through the apparently simple repetition and interlacing of these colours throughout the work that Robert comes closest to employing the materials of the embroiderer, brings text and textile into a happy creative communion.

The culmination of the numerous instances of imagery furthering the metaphorical relationship between embroidery and poetic composition, and that between art and nature, arrives at the point at which Floire and Blancheflor are finally reunited – a reunion that takes place on a second silken bedspread. The motif of the silken bedspread makes an overt reappearance after Floire's entrance incognito into the Emir's tower via the basket of flowers. Once reunited, Floire and Blancheflor express their love for one another whilst seated together on another 'cortine de soie' (ll. 2465 – 2492) in Blancheflor's bedchamber that instantly recalls the one in the frame narrative, and, although it is not treated with the same florid description as the earlier one – there is not even any mention of embroidered flowers – this coverlet links the two episodes. The embroidered floral patterning that appears on the first bedspread is replaced with the lovers themselves, with all their flowery characteristics. In the poem's opening, the bedspread appears directly after a didactic passage that proclaims that the poem's chief aim is to offer Ovidian instruction to young readers in the ways of love (ll. 5 – 6); here, the bedspread supports the two protagonists, and holds in them a living *exemplum* of the perfect natural love previously advocated in the prologue. Robert comments on the connection between nature and love in a satisfyingly artificial and self-reflexive way.

As Robert's narrative advances towards the Emir's otherworldly garden, the instances of art imitating nature – and of objects such as the floral silken bedspreads, the saddle cloth and the basket of flowers adopting the specific characteristics of a garden space – occur with greater frequency and, moreover, grow increasingly intricate and lifelike; as each successive illustration of the material implications of mimetic imitation is encountered, with each providing a new contribution to the work's continuing discourse about the place of the natural and the artificial in love and in the even more important process of artistic creation, the metaphorical garden space that unites the many objects and actual spaces that appear in the poem also expands. By the time the reader arrives, with Floire, in Babylon, the boundaries and contents of this garden space have already been so often refigured and translated from one material to another that its ever-changing status as something manmade or otherwise has become increasingly uncertain, indefinable and unresolved. One might expect greater material solidity from each object which represents a garden on its surfaces, and in a sense this is precisely what happens with the Emir's garden, where the various artefacts that appear throughout the poem are revisited and realised with a much greater physicality and spatial depth than is possible on the more suggestive than realistic embroidered surfaces discussed in this chapter. At the same time as gaining this material solidity and precise pseudo-geographical location in Babylon, however, the often uprooted and replanted motif of the garden has nevertheless become in other respects dematerialised and delocalised – a sort of non-place whose own 'vehicular' transportability is essential to its employment as a site ideal for metapoetic meditation. The garden is atopical in the sense that it has no specific locality to which it must remain fixed, and is capable of crossing borders and boundaries, among these even those between text and image, east and west, and life and death. Critics have in the

past pointed out with some consternation (and mystified dismissiveness) that 'the geography of the poem is very perplexing, or would be if one did not simply accept it as fanciful' (Hubert 1966: 19) – Grieve likewise describes it as 'muddled' and 'unrealistic' (Grieve 1997: 134 – 135) – but to do so is to disregard the extraordinary way in which the work plays with and mingles locality and artefactuality. Curtius' concisely, even authoritatively, phrased remark that '[m]edieval descriptions of nature are not meant to represent reality' ought to be remembered (Curtius 1952: 183). More recently, several scholars including Kellie Robertson have applied to wonderful medieval descriptions of nature such as those in *Floire et Blancheflor* Gertrude Stein's oft-quoted formulation – 'there is no there there' – although this is sometimes done with a dreary note of misplaced modern critical disapproval that likewise reveals much more about the twentieth and twenty-first century than it does about the excellent material at hand (Eckert, 2012: 243; Robertson 2017: 40).[5] Ken Eckert, for instance, discusses the Middle English *Floris and Blancheflor* but cites scholarship relating to Robert's earlier 'aristocratique' Old French *Floire et Blancheflor*: the two texts are extremely different, and the transportability or atopicality of the garden space is in fact a key attribute of Robert's text that is weakened in the work of the Middle English poet, whose interest lies always in plot action over ekphrasis. Eckert's comment that 'a narrative with no conflict, suspense, climax, or resolution is not much of a narrative' (2012: 243) makes little sense in relation to the later work, and certainly misunderstands the aims and achievements of Robert's more metatextually sophisticated poem.

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[5] Robertson, it must be acknowledged, gives no such hint of disapproval, but other Stein enthusiasts certainly do.

This chapter has focused on Robert's employment of textiles as a metaphorical means of meditating upon the composition and structure of his text, as an advanced literary device with which he can frame his narrative and interweave the several parts of his poem into a satisfactory and unified whole. Each silken surface acts as a transportable and by no means fixed site of interplay between art and nature, and in embodying fluidly this interaction between the manmade and the natural, each becomes a site of significance for the poetic scheme of the work – more than justifying the extensive ekphrastic treatment that is often given to artefacts of this kind.

The *topos* of the garden, with its exceptional *atopicality* and its immense inherited stockpile of associated natural imagery and pliant metaphors of growth, development, death and rebirth, provides an abundant source of analogies of unequalled potency and relevance for literary endeavours, but also for other creative pursuits, crossing boundaries of material – and forming in the process a dialogue between the visual arts and poetic composition – and floating, through ekphrasis, into the realm of inventive literary artifice. The frequent and pervasive reappearance of the garden motif throughout the poem on surfaces ever more richly decorated with ever more realistic flowers, is no meaningless decorative trope, and is also not just a means of foreshadowing the Emir's garden, but serves to pattern the work with persistent self-reflexive references to a single imaginative space that symbolises better than any other the fusion of art and nature, and therefore points to the processes involved in the crafting of the poem. The following chapter will examine in detail some of the other, more monumental, garden-like or actual garden 'artefacts' that Robert describes and constructs in *Floire et Blancheflor* as a means of exploring these issues. As we shall see, the poet constantly draws attention to the processes involved in the construction of these monumental artefacts, approaching from numerous different perspectives

their workings and continually exposing them for the reader. In the tomb episode and most significantly in the Emir's garden itself, the atopical site of the garden as represented on the silken bedspreads and the saddlecloth is given greater depth and three-dimensionality, if not quite specificity of location or, as some scholars have noted, rather missing the point, credibility. Robert extends the metatextual dialogue to include other arts than that of weaving or versification alone – though the underlying implication is always comparative, as the idea of the interpretative surface, or rather of series of surfaces, is maintained throughout. In these other mimetic artefacts, some of which blend more overtly the organic with the engineered or architectural, the garden is transformed from the low relief of the embroideries discussed above to high relief, and finally to a full-bodied, free-standing status – illusionistically naturalistic, yet without ever losing its artefactuality, or indeed, its artificiality.

Chapter Two:

The Tomb, the Tower, and the Tree of Love: Literary Artefactuality

Following on from the previous discussion of how Robert d'Orbigny exploits in *Floire et Blancheflor* the metatextual possibilities of weaving, both as a means of framing the narrative of his poem in an integrated way, and as a way of threading together the other episodes that make up the romance, we might proceed with a study of how artefacts – more varied in their design and construction – fit within the poet's carefully crafted self-reflexive dialogue between art and nature. This can best be figured as a comparison between the two ekphrastic episodes of Blancheflor's extremely elaborate and materially luxurious false tomb, which stands in a garden, and the closely interconnected and indeed inseparable tower of maidens and mechanised tree of love which constitute the most important features of the Emir's otherworldly garden in the highly fantastical Babylon of the poet's imagination. The former monument – explicitly intended by its creators to mislead – is treated to an extended ekphrasis and a passage detailing its reception by the protagonist, whose reaction to its surfaces can be characterised as a kind of reading, or indeed misreading, of obvious metatextual importance within the poet's scheme; the latter, which almost encyclopaedically gathers together all the arts previously encountered in the poem into one location – although this location is by no means to be interpreted as any specific geographical location – is likewise described in a lengthy ekphrasis that dwells on its similarly deceptive blending of art and nature, and in a sense interprets the poem as a whole. An important thread that is woven throughout these passages in particular is that of *engin* as associated with artistic achievement and within the context of the work's

supposedly didactic Ovidian amatory framework. *Engin* is a recurrent idea that is given dual sources – apparently in contest with one another – of *Savoir* and *Amors*. Scholars including Patricia Grieve (1997), Jocelyn Price (1982), and Helen Cooper (1976) have all looked at the use of *engin*: whilst Cooper examines the workings of magic in the Middle English text; Price focuses on the Emir's tower as a symbol of the exchange between the East and the West in the Old French, and Grieve discusses the notion of divine intervention as a form of *engin* in the later Spanish and Italian versions of the poem.[6]

Within the context of Robert's continuing and indeed increasingly elaborate and self-reflexive interplay between art, nature, and poetic composition discussed in chapter one, an episode of exceptional prominence and importance is that concerning the false tomb constructed to the memory of Blancheflor (ll. 535 – 1094). Critical discourse concerning this particular episode has been disappointingly deficient due to the tendency – typical of the last century – to sneer at the medieval period's taste for elaboration and lengthy ekphrasis. For instance, Merton Jerome Hubert, the translator responsible for the only rendering in English verse of Robert's poem that has yet been published, noted in 1966 that 'Blanchefleur's supposed tomb, […] elaborately contrived, decorated and landscaped in practically no time at all, is fascinating, for all the strain it puts on our credulity', and warned self-assuredly that 'one is sometimes well-advised not to examine [this and other artefacts represented within the work] too closely' (Hubert 1966: 18). This somewhat reductive attitude has inevitably stifled approaches to the text which might prove to be surprisingly fruitful. In more recent years, much work has been done by Clemente, Barbetti, Krieger, and Winsor Leach to correct this attitude, and ekphrasis scholarship has, among medievalists, had

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[6] See Patricia Grieve (1997: 54 – 56).

something of a growth spurt. Ekphraseis are no longer seen merely as instances of over-developed description, devoid of meaning, but have been recognised as programmatic passages that can often hold the key to an entire work. Linda M. Clemente has made this observation this rather assertively: 'the natural contiguity which results between the ekphrasis as a representation of an artwork within the poem as artwork makes the reader more aware of the poem itself as a product of artistic creation' (1992: 10). This chapter, needless to say, departs from the disagreeably superficial and trivialising standpoint found in some of the older scholarship and seeks to direct attention towards aspects of this exceptionally ekphrastic work which have been neglected despite their relevance to current critical discourse. The tomb is an excellent place to begin. Although Hubert found aspects of its description implausible, we really need not let this structure strain our credulity too much (that magic is involved in its construction is in fact heavily emphasised by the poet), and once this has been recognised, it is well worth proceeding with a close examination of this contrivance and the landscape in which it sits. The misleading monument, an expensively constructed and ornately adorned tomb set within an ever-blossoming and idyllic natural space which itself contributes to and augments the design and function of the structure at its centre, forms, together with the carefully selected vegetation around it, the most playfully metatextual and certainly the most overtly deceptive interpretative surface or series of surfaces that have yet appeared at this point in the poem. Floire's parents, the impulsive King Felix and his more restrained but no less misguided wife the Queen, disingenuously commission the erection of this immoderately magnificent monument – supposedly designed to commemorate the death of the still-living Blancheflor – for the sole purpose of convincing their son that she has suddenly died during his relatively brief absence in Montoire. This is a rather

costly ploy designed to conceal the fact that she has in fact been sold into slavery – and will soon enough enter the service (and captivity) of the Emir.

The King and Queen oversee the construction of this elaborately worked, extravagantly bejewelled tomb, as well as the exceedingly strange *locus amoenus* that frames the monument – a 'natural' space that is nevertheless highly artificial and not entirely unlike a finely worked setting for a precious gemstone. The narrative is suspended while Robert expends many lines describing the needlessly expensive, sumptuously impressive tomb and its environs (ll. 543 – 660): in adding another generous layer of artificiality to the tomb in the form of so lavish an ekphrasis as this, Robert is, as it were, not only joining forces with the 'machons vaillans / et boins orfevres bien sachans' who he says have worked on the site (ll. 543 – 544), but also nominating himself simultaneously for the various positions of architect and sculptor in chief, of head goldsmith, and of lead gardener – the poet ostentatiously plays with the idea that he has any craft at the tip of his pen, along with sufficient technical expertise to outdo in description any real craftsmen. Such a literary flourish pushes the already artificial edifice quite securely into the realm of the fanciful.

Robert claims that the tomb and its environs have been constructed 'par engin' (l. 1063), which Patricia Grieve translates, not without good reason, as 'artifice' (Grieve 1997: 62). It seems that the poet could not have chosen the word with greater care. Deriving from the Latin *ingenium*, Robert's use here of 'engin' connotes creativity, ingenuity, mechanical invention, and simultaneously carries a strong suggestion of trickery of another sort: the tomb is at one and the same time both a magnificent work of art – an extraordinary artefact – and an elaborate trick or piece of artifice, since Blancheflor does not lie dead inside and it is in reality only an empty box and a monument to art alone (if indeed a monument to anything). The artifice here

is, in every sense, very highly concentrated. Patricia Grieve and Geraldine Barnes have rightly commented upon the double sense of the word 'engin' in the context of the tomb episode: quoting from the latter, Grieve notes that '[t]o conceive of the idea of the tomb exemplifies *engin*, but "*[e]ngin* can also refer to wondrous feats of art and engineering produced by this ability": thus the empty tomb doubles its significance' (Grieve 1997: 62; Barnes 1984: 13, cited in Grieve 1997: 62). Neither Barnes nor Grieve, however, comment at any length upon Robert's ekphrasis of the tomb, despite the fact that this ekphrasis might well be understood as the key to the entire scheme of 'engin' within the episode. When this metatextual aspect is taken into consideration – an aspect which does not merely intensify the supposed duality implicit within the use of the term 'engin' for the sake of the narrative, but one which suggests a rather more sophisticated self-reflexive reading of the scene, the theme of artifice takes on quite a different sort of significance. In her enlightening 1992 study of medieval literary *objets d'art*, Clemente aptly pointed out that 'ekphraseis are further statements of the author's own ingenuity or *engin*, the hyperconscious creation of art within art' (1992: 5). It is of course not unusual within poetry for passages devoted to detailing the construction of artistic monuments to possess and also proclaim some deliberate metatextual relationship with the construction of the literary monument. The episode is highly contrived not for merely ornamental purposes, but as a self-referential reflection on Robert's poetic craft indicates, clearly enough, the author's awareness of the artificiality of the process of literary creation and reminds the reader of the poet's own *engin*.

It is significant here that Robert describes the tomb as sitting or lying on a rather handsome piece of marble: '[u]ne piere ont desus assise / que orfevre fisent de Frise. / Cele piere qui sus gisoit / de tres fin marbre faite estoit, / inde, vert et gausne,

vermel ; / molt reluisoit contre solel' (ll. 557 – 560). The glistening multicoloured veins in the stone recall the colourful and artfully interwoven threads that have given shape, hue, texture, and meaning to the silk cloths described elsewhere in the poem. As an ekphrastic device and a highly ornamented series of surfaces to be interpreted, the tomb neatly fits the pattern established by the silks previously discussed, except that this time, the artefact is embellished not merely by embroidery but by a myriad of crafts: the tomb is an architectural splendour, a structure decorated minutely with the jewellers art as well as the skill of the stonemason, the engraver, the goldsmith, and the enameller, that lies within an actual, ever-blossoming garden, the product of both art and nature. Furthermore, when Floire sits on the marble tombstone in a fit of lamentation over his apparently lost love ('s'assist li damoisel/ desor la piere del tomblel', ll. 709 – 710), he makes contact with the ekphrastically described object in a manner that recalls precisely the situation depicted in the poem's programmatic frame narrative. The repetition and variation of this motif links this episode with the important passage in which the narrator sits upon the floral silken bedspread of the frame narrative and thereby 'enters' the story, and also with Floire's own later contact with the highly decorative saddlecloth and basket of flowers. Both Floire and the reader must study and interpret the finely worked surface of the tomb before the narrative can advance, except this time, it is made clear that anything that might be yielded is keenly misleading and an elaborate trick. The tomb is deliberately designed as a series of surfaces to be misinterpreted.

The surface of the tomb is reportedly swathed in ornate enamel and niello work depicting every living creature (ll. 549 – 552) and encrusted in innumerable precious stones of every colour. The poet lavishes copious attention on these semi-precious stones, not only by means of an epic catalogue of every type present ('jagonses, saffirs,

calcedoines,/ et esmeraudes et sardoines,/ pelles, coraus et crisolites/ et diamans et ametites,/ et ciers bericles et filates,/ jaspes, topaces et acates'; ll. 649 - 654), but also by attributing to them some qualities, or rather talents, more typically to be found associated with animate beings: '[p]ieres i a qui vertus *ont*/ et molt grans miracles i *font'* (ll. 647 – 648). Robert's unusual syntax and careful employment of the active voice here empowers these special stones even further than is usual for medieval writers, introducing an impression of human capabilities (see Cohen, *Stone* 2015 p. 6-7), and suggesting the idea that these material artefacts have supernatural agency. These stones appear to be quite alive, in much the same way as the flowers that later appear on Floire's saddlecloth, imbued by the poet not only with properties, but even with a hint of personality. Robert avoids stating the analogy directly but it was already common and indeed conventional in the twelfth century to make comparisons between gemstones and flowers, and this familiar relationship is implicit within the passage: the bright multi-hued precious stones that ornament the niello and enamel surface of the tomb do so in just the same way that colourful blossoms ornament the surfaces of the herbage and trees that make up the garden that surrounds it. Robert makes clear that the fauna represented on the tomb – every type of animal apparently – are depicted with coloured enamels: the gemstones can be interpreted as the accompanying flora.

During the twelfth century, when Robert was working, the most widely known lapidary was the so-called *lapidaire de Modène* (a version of which was included by Gaston Paris and Leopold Pannier in their 1882 study of lapidaries translated into Old French during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), which offered a collection of interpretations on the meaning of each of the stones contained within along with some often far-fetched accounts of their supposed origin. This lapidary, with which Robert is likely to have been familiar, makes the explicit the perceived

connection between semi-precious stones and flowers. For instance, one of the many stones that appears on Blancheflor's tomb, the sapphire, is described in the lapidary as the flower of all gems: '[d]e gemmes gemme et flor l'apele/ Por çou, tant est et buene et bele' (*Lapidaire de Modène*, ll. 125 – 126). An earlier lapidary had also described pearls (likewise present on the tomb) in flowery terms, directly comparing their delicate colouring with the subtle tints and hues that distinguish the petals of a rose. The frequency and strength with which this idea was expressed during the period in which Robert was working suggests that gems covering the tomb would have been intended by the poet, and subsequently interpreted by the earliest readers of *Floire et Blancheflor*, as imitative in some measure of flowers, reproducing the effects of vibrancy and vivacity so often associated with them in a more permanent medium – with all the robustness, three-dimensionality, and heft of solid stone. The tomb's surface, which is already teeming with animal life – a veritable bestiary in gold and enamel – becomes also garden-like through its exotic encrustation with gemstones. These "flower-stones" with all their apparently various skills and aptitudes which ought more rightly to be characteristic of human abilities, blossom on the surface of Blancheflor's tomb just as the embroidered flowers will, later in the narrative, embellish and indeed actually *flower* on Floire's saddlecloth. The threads of this association are not entirely confined to the subtext of the poem, however. When Floire visits the tomb some lines after the ekphrasis proper has come to an end – not to say the description of the monument more broadly, which the poet extends at intervals – he tenderly refers to his lost flowery friend, Blancheflor, as a 'precïeuse jeme' (l. 725). The vibrant vivacity of the supernatural, flower-like precious stones, however, ought to offer to the distraught Floire at least a glimmer of hope that his flowery friend Blancheflor is still alive. The deceptive edifice – whose ornate surface is crawling with

life and which unexpectedly and inappropriately resembles in every sense a monument to enduring life and love rather than a commemorative memorial to the dead – seems to be revealing its true colours, though unfortunately Floire, for all his learning, does not appear to be the most perceptive, or rather the most insightful, of readers.

That the monument is intended by the poet as more than a merely ornamental structure – an excuse, as it were, for a lengthy digression that injects some exotic colouring into the narrative proper – is signalled with some clarity by Robert even before Floire arrives on the scene. In 1983 Roberta Krueger produced an admirable article on the 'literary subtext' running throughout Robert d'Orbigny's version of *Floire et Blancheflor*, reading the romance 'aristocratique' essentially as 'a frame-story which inscribes the activities of reading, writing, storytelling, and interpretation as critical moments in the adventures of Floire and Blancheflor' (1983: 66). One of the most significant of these 'critical moments' is undeniably the tomb episode, which combines its vibrant evocations of primarily visual arts with references to epigraphic memorialisation. Having discussed the iconography and materiality of the tomb in some detail, Robert establishes that the monument is decorated with text as well as image – namely an inscription engraved in gold Arabic lettering: '[t]oute ert la tombe neelee, / de l'or d'Arrabe bien letree. / Les letres de fin or estoient, / et en lisant çou racontoient : / « Ci gist la bele Blanceflor, / a cui Flores ot grant amor. »' (ll. 655 – 660). With the indefinite pronoun in line 658, the poet introduces the notion of legibility into the episode, and obliquely, the idea that the monument can and should be interpreted – anyone who possesses the ability to read, we are told, should be able to decipher the message. Literacy is essential. Robert has already mentioned, however, that different spectators, or rather visitors, to the tomb and its surroundings read the monument and the space it occupies in drastically different ways. Whilst those who

are literate in the ways of love (and importantly not alone) will respond amorously, by falling into each other's arms with some force, those who are apathetic about love will be lulled into a deep slumber on the grass (ll. 627 – 640). Krueger notes that Robert's 'inscriptions of literary activity invite the audience to reflect on its own role as reader' by establishing 'self-reflective' links between text and audience from the opening (1983: 66), an observation that might be seen as partially foreshadowing Norris Lacy's later similar recognition of the poem as a work overtly concerned with its own 'literary factitiousness', but also preoccupied with the slightly different idea of the 'romance as artifact' (1992: 24): in some sense these formulations present contrasting approaches to the same qualities present within the poem, favouring respectively text, and materiality, which in fact seem to be intrinsically interrelated in Robert's conception of his work and brought especially into the foreground in his sophisticated ekphrastic passages. Reader reception, indeed, forms an essential and necessary part of the ekphrasis itself: Floire's own reaction to the monument, which may be classed as a (mis)*reading* is dealt with soon after its literary subtext has been not merely lifted to the surface, but even engraved in gold. It is important to point out that Floire is not the first literary figure to misunderstand a monumental artwork that forms the subject of an extended poetic ekphrasis: Aeneas can be interpreted as making a similar mistake upon his arrival in Carthage in Book One of Virgil's Aeneid. Examining a frieze or series of panels depicting familiar scenes associated with the Trojan War in vivid graphic detail, Virgil had famously presented the hero reading the work narrowly or even misguidedly as evidence of Carthaginian empathy towards his people – exclaiming that in this place 'sunt lacrimae rerum' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.462) – and failing to realise how its meaning might be contingent upon its immediate context as part of the decorative scheme of the Temple of Juno – Juno, of course, being intensely hostile

to the Trojans. Aeneas takes comfort and finds hope, surprisingly enough, in a work that might equally have been designed to glorify in his and his people's misfortunes. Whilst Robert must certainly have had this much celebrated episode from the *Aeneid* in mind – not least because of his many references to Aeneas and to the Trojan War elsewhere in the poem – the situation in *Floire et Blancheflor*'s tomb episode is the opposite of it in certain respects; far from finding comfort in the monument as well he might, Floire thinks only of his own destruction and indeed how it might be effected. The impressive artistry, with all its multifarious allusions to life and its surprisingly celebratory references to the love of the two youthful protagonists, offers no solace whatsoever, since he is unable to read or interpret it in any constructive or productive way. In fact, William Calin noted that this type of protagonist is common to later medieval works: '[t]he naïve, blundering, comic hero is a literary convention, largely developed by [Guillaume de] Machaut himself (though it existed already in the *Roman de la Rose*), then imitated by Froissart, Christine de Pisan, Chaucer, Alain Chartier, Pierre de Nesson, and others. The Narrator is depicted as a young, innocent boy who has just fallen in love and seeks instruction. Although as a child he possesses the purity and enthusiasm required of a perfect love, he also suffers from physical weakness and intellectual immaturity and is revealed to be timid, foolish, and ignorant' (1974: 36). It is only later, once Floire has arrived in Babylon and is at last nearing Blancheflor, that he shows signs of having regained his ability to interpret text and image in constructive ways, albeit only partially, since the comfort and confidence that he manages to derive from the ornate cup decorated with Trojan scenes and subjects – another one of the central ekphrastic artefacts treated by the poet in comprehensive detail and one said, moreover, to have been owned by Aeneas himself (ll. 435 – 504) – is nonetheless still easily affected for the worse by as little as the passage of time

during a meal: even in this later demonstration of Floire's interpretative faculties, contrasting as it does with his reading of the tomb (in the relative optimism that results from it), he will be assisted by a personified *Amors*, who strongly urges him not only to ignore the advice of *Savoir* and to reveal his identity to his hosts, but also to take (quite possibly false) inspiration and hope from the depiction of Paris and Helen on the cup, rather as Virgil's Aeneas had from the frieze in the Temple of Juno at Carthage (ll. 1701 – 1715). Again, literacy is associated with love, and Robert makes clear that without one, the other is hardly possible.

Floire's literacy – his ability to read, write, and more importantly, to interpret – is not in and of itself something to be questioned, since it has at numerous points been made clear that he and Blancheflor possess an exceptional facility with Latin (ll. 265 – 270; ll. 741 – 744); their love has moreover been encouraged in large part by the reading of '[l]ivres […] paienors' (ll. 227 - 234), a phrase which has usually (and certainly with correctness) been taken as referring allusively to Ovid, whose *Ars Amatoria* begins with an invitation to 'anyone' to read and 'with the poem read and [the reader] taught' to love (Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.2). The prologue of Robert's poem, importantly, echoes these notorious lines with the statement that '[s]e mon conte volés entendre, / molt i porrés d'amors aprendre' (ll. 5 – 6), making the loudly disingenuous claim that *Floire et Blancheflor* is supposed to be read as a piece of didactic literature, but also – and more significantly – suggesting in a wonderfully self-reflexive way that it shares its aim with the *livres paienors* that entices the young friends to become lovers: the implication is that in some hypothetical future scenario *Floire et Blancheflor* might be substituted for the *Ars Amatoria*, and itself prompt children to kiss each other. Within Robert's poem, reading certainly has this effect. William Calin pointed out as long ago as 1974, in relation to Guillaume de Machaut's *Le Livre du*

Voir-Dit (composed between 1361 and 1365), that '[t]he Narrator is a lover and a poet, a lover because he is a poet and vice versa', and noted that the same motif can be found in several other famous pieces of French and Italian literature of the period: '[i]n *Floris et Lyriope*, *Cléomadès*, *La Divina Commedia*, *Il Filocolo*, and [in Machaut's *Le Livre du Voir-Dit*], a book causes two people to meditate on love and on each other' (Calin 1974: 199). It is remarkable however that Calin did not notice how important this theme is in *Floire et Blancheflor*. The pre-existing love which the two children bear for each other – that of siblings – is transformed to a more romantic attachment by the new knowledge they have acquired of the 'engins d'amor' – 'the ruses of love': '[l]ivres lisoient paienors / u ooient parler d'amors. / En çou forment se delitoient, / es engins d'amor qu'il trovoient. / Cius lires les fist molt haster / en autre sens d'aus entramer / que de l'amor de noureture / qui lor avoit esté a cure' (ll. 227 - 234). As mentioned above, Love itself will later appear in personified form to remind Floire that '[m]aint engien a Amors trové / et avoié maint esgaré' (ll. 1647 – 1648), but in the tomb episode, Floire can neither produce any artifice or trickery of his own to cheat that of his parents, nor even retain his ability to interpret the signs before him, since his ability to write, read and construe meaning is so thoroughly bound up with his literate love.

As we have seen, the love itself of Floire and Blancheflor is to a great extent attributable to their reading – it might well be considered in some sense the inevitable direct product of the two children's shared education: 'ensamle lisent et aprendent, / a la joie d'amor entendent' (ll. 235 - 236). Roberta Krueger has helpfully recorded that '[t]hroughout [the aristocratic *Floire et Blancheflor*'s] account of the enfances, forms of *aprendre/entendre* recur in end-rhyme position (ll. 203 – 204; ll. 239 – 240; ll. 331 – 332; ll. 375 – 376), reinforcing the conflation of loving and reading introduced by

this pairing in the Prologue', (1983: 67). Earlier on in the poem's narrative, prior to the start of Floire's schooling, the young prince had complained that he would not be able to study or continue to learn to read without Blancheflor by his side: 'Sans li ne puis jou pas aprendre / ne ne saroie lechon rendre' (ll. 211 – 212); upon being sent away to Montoire a little later in the poem, the separation from Blancheflor has already proven destructive for his learning: 'il ot assés, mais poi aprent, / car grant doel a ul il s'entent' (ll. 371 – 372). When he arrives at the tomb, he can therefore be expected to be somewhat ill-equipped to understand the monument in any meaningful sense. Having read the inscription three times, he finds himself rendered speechless and faints, losing consciousness not as a lover should in this space, but like one apathetic about love. Upon waking, it is significantly with a stylus – a writing instrument and a tool of his learning given to him by Blancheflor – that he attempts to end his life.

Bearing in mind that the tomb is constructed with the ostensible purpose of commemorating a girl who has died, and with the actual ulterior motive of enticing Floire to forget about her, the form it takes – a monument flagrantly and brazenly consecrated to the everlasting love of the two young lovers – betrays something of its falsehood through its very unfitness for achieving the ends for which it has theoretically been designed. So extravagant a monument can hardly persuade Floire to consign Blancheflor to oblivion as his parents hope: the *memorial* naturally enough, even inevitably, solidifies her place in his *memory*. Despite the many discrepancies embodied by the tomb, Floire nonetheless fails to see through the deception because he cannot interpret it correctly without the assistance of Blancheflor.

That Floire ought really to find hope in the monument rather than despair is suggested in a number of ways. The gardenlike tomb itself forms only the epicentre of a grander series of concentrically arranged (and only partially mimetic or

representative) garden spaces that are also part of the pseudo-memorialisation of Blancheflor. Four freshly planted small trees or saplings even stand on each side of the false tomb and in so doing form part of the architectural setting of the misleading monument and its scheme of *engin*. These are no ordinary or straightforwardly natural trees subject to seasonal changes, since they are described as being forever locked in uninterrupted springtime bloom (ll. 621 – 626) Robert makes not merely manifest, but abundantly clear that there have been some advanced and mysterious practices involved in the creation of this setting, not least in the nurturing of the ornamental vegetation that surrounds the tomb. The trees or saplings (Robert uses the diminutive form of 'arbrisel' interchangeably with 'arbre', giving the impression that they grow from tender saplings into fully fledged and foliated trees within the space of a few lines), importantly, are said to be perpetually flowering: early on in the description the poet states that '[a]u cief desus de cel tomblel / avoit planté un arbrisel; / molt estoit biaus et bien foillis / et de flors ert adés garnis; / totes sont cargies les brances / et les flors noveles et blances' (ll. 603 – 608). In addition to this, the reader is told a few lines later that '[c]il qui les quatre arbres planterent / trestos les dieus en conjurerent, / au planter tel conjur i firent / que toustans cil arbre florirent' (ll. 621 – 624). The gardener has had at his disposal a whole legion of pagan deities, and what assistance they have been capable of providing has certainly been employed. Whether these were only minor spirits or major gods and goddesses is unclear, but the impression given by the suggestive but unspecific word 'trestos' is of a surpassingly impressive workforce. Of more particular relevance to the present discussion though is the fact that the young trees are described as being always 'garnis', or 'clothed', in flowers. For Robert and his readers, the original sense of the verb 'garnir' as 'to dress' or 'to arm' would have been more readily apparent than to a modern reader (or, as it appears,

translator),[7] for whom this etymology has long been obscured. Its usage here is of course atypical and personifies the tree (much like poet's choice of language concerning the precious gemstones on the tomb itself) while seemingly turning the flowers into objects or artefacts – the product of an art. Norris Lacy has helpfully observed that '[i]n *Floire et Blancheflor*, character tends toward artifice at the same time object and images become lifelike', and noted that 'this method tells us a good deal about the poet's concept of romance as artifact' (Lacy 1992: 24). A changing of places takes place. In a sort of mirroring of the trend towards ever more lifelike forms of artificial ornamentation that appear on the manmade objects throughout the poem, a suggestion is here made that these personified plants are in some sense imitative of human art, both in design and in permanence – comparable indeed in this regard with the artfully worked and highly durable stones that adorn the tomb. It is only later that Floire's saddlecloth begins to blossom and flower in imitation of life, but in this episode the reverse has already occurred, with flowers represented as decorating the trees as if they were appliqué work, and as if the densely woven foliage that forms their background were a kind of cloth. That is not to suggest, however, that these real flowers are rendered inanimate even as objects: the apparent artificiality does not by any means imply lifelessness since the intransience and constancy of the flowers lend them a distinctly supernatural immortality that even allows them to harbour signs of animal life: the trees are also the home of innumerable birds, whose joyful song is inspired by the ceaseless, deathless flowers that cover them. As if to solidify this suggestion of the rare permanence of the plant and its flowers, Robert announces that it is in fact an ebony tree, dark in colour and thus unable to be blackened by

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[7] Jean-Luc Leclanche's translation of *Floire et Blancheflor* removes the imaginative conceit present in 'garnis' by rendering the line more prosaically in modern French as, 'il etait perpetuellement fleuri' (2003: 35).

conflagration. As a matter of fact, he implies rather more outlandishly that it cannot be damaged at all: '[c]ius arbres a a non benus;/ ja un seul point n'en ardra fus' (ll. 609 – 610).

At the foot of the tomb – reportedly the eastern side and therefore the side facing Blancheflor's actual destination – a vibrant red terebinth sapling of incomparable beauty (notably 'plus ert bele que flors de rose'; l. 614) has been planted. The terebinth is native to the Levant and traditionally associated with the east, so whilst on the surface the plant seems to offer only a commemorative veneer of life – a mere colouring of her memory, as it were – its vibrancy and its careful positioning actually give a much more pointed indication both of Blancheflor's good health and of her eastern location – not that these clues are decipherable for the distraught and thoroughly deceived Floire. Robert has composed the scene in such a manner as to produce an impression of an abundant and everlasting life that contrasts with the supposed intention of the artisans involved of commemorating the dead.

In a powerful contradiction of the intentions of the King and Queen, then, the tomb flamboyantly hints that Blancheflor might in fact still be alive. Robert's description of the exceedingly elaborate, and extraordinarily animated automata that take a seat on top of the fallacious monument boldly makes life as well as love one of the defining themes of the entire episode:

Desor la tombe ot tresjetés

deus biaus enfans très bien mollés.

Onques nus hom si bien sanlans

d'or ne vit faire deus enfans.

Li uns des deus Flore sanloit

plus que riens nule qui ja soit.

L'autre ymage ert ensi mollee

comme Blanceflor ert formee.

Et li ymage Blanceflor

devant Flore tint une flor :

devant son ami tint la bele

une rose d'or fin novele.

Flores li tint devant son vis

d'or une gente flor de lis.

L'uns jouste l'autre se seoit,

gente contenance faisoit.

Desor le cief Flore l'enfant

ot un escarboucle luisant ;

par nuit oscure veoit on

une lieu tot environ.

En la tombe ot quatre tuiaus

as quatre cors, bien fais et biaus,

es queus li quatre vent feroient

cascuns ausi com il ventoient.

Quant li vens les enfans toucoit,

l'un baisoit l'autre et acoloit,

si disoient par ingremance

trestout lor bon et lor enfance.

Ce dist Flores a Blanceflor :

« Baisés moi, bele, par amor. »

Blanceflor respont en baisant :

« Je vos aim plus que riens vivant. »

Tant com li vent les atoucoient

et li enfant s'entrebaisoient,

et quant il laissent le venter,

dont se reposent de parler.

Tant doucement s'entresgardoient

que c'ert avis que il rioient. (*Floire et Blancheflor*: ll. 565 – 602)

In their astonishingly thorough and apparently successful attempt to imitate life, these automata represent an extraordinary union between nature and craftsmanship. Robert seems to take every possible opportunity here to remark upon the vivaciousness and veracious naturalism of the two finely modelled and cast figures[8], yet he praises their

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[8] E. R. Truitt (2015: 99), incorrectly observed here the automata are made of marble rather than 'or' (l. 568).

closeness to life and their artificiality quite simultaneously. One might wonder – quite justifiably – whether the poet has fallen for his own pictorial vividness, though this dual celebration of the skill that has been involved in the creation of the automata and of their apparent naturalness promotes an impression of extraordinary mimetic sophistication – the arrival of a much closer union between art and nature than has been encountered up to this point within the poem. Here, the already hazy and apparently permeable boundary between art and life becomes completely blurred in these wonderful automata. Over the short space of two lines, Robert makes amply clear that '[o]nques nus hom si bien sanlans/ d'or ne vit faire deus enfans' (ll. 567 – 568): the figures are at once artificial and alive – more so than any statues ever have been prior to this momentous technical and artistic triumph. The couplet that follows lines 569 to 570 – which refer specifically to verisimilitude – moves from the liveliness of the figures to their beauty and manufacture, noting that '[l'autre ymage ert ensi mollee / comme Blanceflor ert formee' (ll. 571 – 572). The apt rhyming of 'mollee' and 'formee' (ll. 571 – 572), *moulded*, and *formed*, sets up both a comparison and a contrast, implying that nature had used the same methods as the sculptor in order to produce the young girl, that of modelling in a soft material such as clay, and stressing that the artist or artists responsible for these automata have managed, with regard to surface effects at least, to equal nature. The two mechanical statues bear a strikingly, almost supernatural and impossibly accurate resemblance to the young lovers (ll. 569 – 572), and one might be fooled for a moment into believing that they are real. Here the children's identities appear to be confirmed, as it were, by a seemingly mechanically driven exchange of the symbolic accessories with which they are associated and with which they even share their names (ll. 573 – 578). Whether or not the attribute which Blancheflor holds and gifts to Floire is an actual flower or a false

one is made exceedingly ambiguous as Robert describes it as a 'rose d'or fin novele'. This distinctly contradictory description of the rose – that it is, concurrently, freshly picked and made of fine gold, the best of both worlds, as it were – is significant here because it boldly reflects and accentuates with some vigour the utterly intermingled state of, and indeed fusion of, art and nature within the passage.

Almost as if Nature itself cannot tolerate the death of Blancheflor, and is in insurrection against the ignominious ploy of the King and Queen, the lifeless figures on the tomb's surface obtain a sort of resurrection from the elements, and, once animated by a wonderful combination of skilful engineering and the singularly favourable climate or set of environmental conditions in which they are positioned, they become capable of motion and speech that utterly defies the purported meaning of the monument for which they have been crafted. Nature, or more specifically, the wind, alongside some other rather mysterious and apparently supernatural forces – 'si disoient par ingremance' (l. 591) – brings the two automata to life, and in a sense, resuscitates the artfully modelled, cast, and crafted, but hitherto inanimate statues of the children, allowing them to move, talk, embrace, kiss, and most importantly, to breathe. A complex series of intricately fashioned pipes – one at each corner of the tomb – channel the supple breezes with a highly engineered, almost scientific, precision to breathe new life into the figures. The culmination of the lengthy ekphrasis comes at the point of this "breathing" of life into the two metallic figures. This may ostensibly appear to be a symbolic bestowing by nature of an illusion of vitality upon the products of human artifice, but it is in fact a wondrous intertwining and combination of natural (or supernatural – Robert's employment of 'ingremance' implies, like the Latin *necromantia*, that a certain amount of sorcery and magical

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forces are involved – see Truitt 2015, especially p. 48-53) and artificial efforts that vitalises and revitalises the effigies of Floire and Blancheflor atop the tomb.

It can be said with some certainty then that these automata do more than simply 'reflect the central concerns of the poem' as Phyllis Gaffney puts it in her 2012 study of certain 'youthful automata in three Old French poems' (57). Robert's creations are not merely reflective of the poem's principal thematic concerns, but embody them in such an extraordinary manner by the full fusion of art, nature, engineering, and magic that the carefully woven dialogue between art and nature that we have already seen play out thus far across the narrative reaches a particularly high point in this passage. On the surface, art and nature are brought into contact in such a way that the relationship between them is completely commingled, adding another layer of deception to this specific fallacious edifice, but also deepening the poem's engagement as a whole with the old questions of poetic, *engin*, creation, and falsehood. Megan Moore, in her 2014 study of exoticism in Old French romance rightly points out that Robert's ekphrasis of the tomb 'culminates' in the description of the automata[9] (60), though she does not elaborate any further on that point, instead proceeding to discuss, albeit fruitfully, the relationship of the automata in *Floire et Blancheflor* with Byzantine craftsmanship and the text's connections with medieval Greek romance – which are only tangential with regard to the theme of art and nature. Whilst it is certainly true that these marvellous automata have been the subject of some scholarly discussion in recent years, it must also be acknowledged that, for the most part, these studies have centred only on the notion that these automata provide evidence for a

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[9] It might be added that in this sense, Robert's automata act in a similar way to other famous examples of automata in the *romans antiques* such as the golden eagle on Adraste's tent that breathes fire in the Roman de Thèbes (ll. 3201 – 3212) and the archer atop Camille's tomb in the Roman d'Eneas that fires an arrow at the least vibration (ll. 7605 – 7720).

fertile (if slightly sketchy) relationship between east and west, whose implications lead away from the text rather than casting much interpretative light upon it – a light that may perhaps more suitably be conceptualised as an appropriately vivifying interpretative breeze. At any rate, Norris Lacy's excellent 1992 article on *Floire et Blancheflor*, ought to have sounded a sufficiently memorable note of caution to medievalists regarding readings of the poem that are narrowly historicising and miss the playfulness of the poet: '[t]he story is, by any measure, a contrived and unrealistic account of equally contrived and unrealistic events and characters. Ironically the narrator cultivates an "illusion of reality" only in regard to art objects created by the unlifelike characters. He repeatedly displaces interest from events to the art of description, presenting objects such as a tomb, a cup, and a tower in minute detail' (1992: 22 - 23). Lacy's generous observation that 'artifice, magic, and manipulation characterize the methods of poet and characters alike', revealing something of 'the poet's concept of romance as artifact' in the process (1992: 24), suggested new possibilities for the interpretation of the work and reflected his more considered appreciation of hitherto ignored aspects of the 'unique literary quality' that William Calin found in *Floire et Blancheflor* (1964: 103). The automata, as artefacts treated at length and said to be of truly unparalleled sophistication, are, in a sense, exemplary and illustrative rather than only reflective of the central concerns of the poet – their simultaneously supernatural and human speech is not the dimly resonant echo of something more significant – the many and varied achievements of actual Byzantine craftsmanship – but the very voice of the poet, and directly expressive of his chief concerns.

The automata on top of the tomb, which vividly encapsulate all the most important themes from the poem and, together with the structure upon which they sit,

can be seen as figuratively representative of the work as a whole, might even be regarded as one of the most prominent – if not *the* actual defining image – of the poem. Considering the extraordinary vivacity of Robert's verse and the audaciousness with which the poem explores and exploits the artefactual aspects of romance composition, one might well expect to find an abundance of medieval artistic depictions of the lovers, Floire and Blancheflor, and the circumstances that befall them, the poem serving as a kind of springboard for later artists and illuminators, or, better than this, a fountain from which they might draw: it is a great shame, however, that only one illuminated manuscript has been located of the Old French 'aristocratic' *Floire et Blancheflor*, and that this is disappointingly devoid of historiated illustrations save for a single miniature showing the capture of Blancheflor's mother and her acquisition by King Felix on the first page of the poem, where it is accompanied by some marginal drawings.
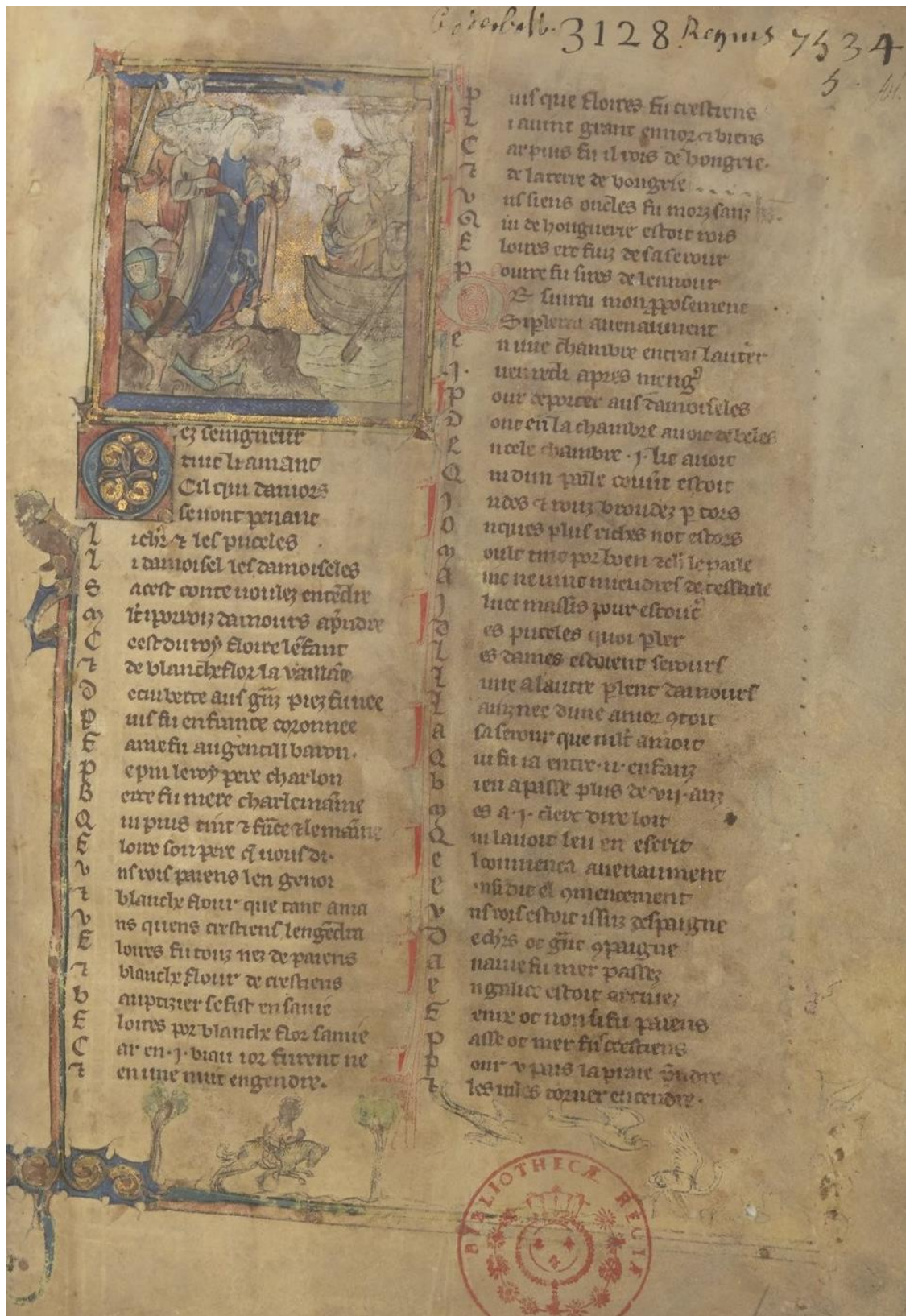
Fig. 1. The only known illustrated frontispiece of *Floire et Blancheflor* accompanied by marginal drawings depicting a hurried rider and some birds – possibly

Floire returning in haste from Montoire. Image taken from, *Le Roman de "Floire et Blancheflor"*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscripts, Paris, Français 1447, f. 1r (1301 – 1400).

Nevertheless, an unusual late fourteenth-century ivory casket either from northern France or possibly the Netherlands (Randall 1993) acquired in 1950 by the Toledo Museum in Ohio has been identified as the sole example of its type that features recognisable depictions of scenes from the romance on its surfaces.

Fig. 2. Box with Scenes from a Romance, lid, ivory with gilded copper mounts, Northern France (Arras) or Southern Netherlands (Flemish), 1350 – 1375, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond, 1950.302, 11.4 x 16.5 x 11.4 cm.

Fig. 3. Box with Scenes from a Romance, front, ivory with gilded copper mounts, Northern France (Arras) or Southern Netherlands (Flemish), 1350 – 1375, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond, 1950.302, 11.4 x 16.5 x 11.4 cm. Note in particular the bottom right quadrant depicting the pair of lovers picking and exchanging a flower.

Fig. 4. Box with Scenes from a Romance, back, ivory with gilded copper mounts, Northern France (Arras) or Southern Netherlands (Flemish), 1350 – 1375, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond, 1950.302, 11.4 x 16.5 x 11.4 cm.

Fig. 5. Box with Scenes from a Romance, right-hand side panel, ivory with gilded copper mounts, Northern France (Arras) or Southern Netherlands (Flemish), 1350 – 1375, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond, 1950.302, 11.4 x 16.5 x 11.4 cm.

Fig. 6. Box with Scenes from a Romance, left-hand side panel, ivory with gilded copper mounts, Northern France (Arras) or Southern Netherlands (Flemish), 1350 – 1375, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond, 1950.302, 11.4 x 16.5 x 11.4 cm. Note especially the bottom right quadrant depicting a young man – commonly identified with Floire – playing chess outside a tower.

Whilst the casket's decorative scheme (which consists, uniquely, of two registers even on the side panels) does not include any obvious depictions of the tomb or any other monument that can be connected directly with the tomb episode, it does make exceedingly prominent, even repetitious, usage of a seemingly formulaic stock scene showing two lovers embracing in a gardenlike setting. Paula Mae Carns, in a

speculative and otherwise only moderately convincing article,[10] has argued with some degree of plausibility that these serve at least partly to remind the viewer (or handler of the artefact) of the tomb – standing synecdochally for the romance as a whole: '[t]he ivory box […] evokes Blancheflor's tomb in its precious, shiny materials and its images of Floire and Blancheflor coming together repeatedly to hug, cuddle, and swap tokens of affection, often in tree-filled gardens […] The text's detailed account of Blancheflor's grave would surely have spoken to the ivory's maker, who, as an artist, must have enjoyed hearing of its precious materials, its modes of construction, its skillful [*sic*.] craftsmanship, and its iconography' (Carns 2011: 147). Whilst it is unfortunately not possible to determine whether or not Robert was aware of the fact that funerary monuments in the ancient world had commonly been adorned with depictions of the youthful Cupid and Psyche tenderly embracing in a manner of which the effigies on Blancheflor's tomb are strongly reminiscent, this widespread practice makes for a thought-provoking point of comparison. Many examples may be found of this formulaic motif appearing from the second century BC onwards on ancient sarcophagi, where it undoubtedly possessed an allegorical significance relating to the union of the soul (*psyche*) and love (*eros*) in death, which may indeed seem to have some direct relevance for the poem, although it is equally possible that any reminiscence that may be perceived in the medieval automata of these ancient reliefs is less indebted to the original symbolism of these ancient reliefs than it is to the memorable image represented on them, divorced from its intended meaning. On an

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[10] Carns' scheme regarding the way in which early users of the box would have read the panels is overly complicated and difficult to accept considering the fatal absence of corroborating evidence and near impossibility of recovering it. Her interpretation of the eccentric ordering of the panels specifically is unsatisfactory, and her early, methodologically important, citation of Mary Carruthers' contention 'that convention—not innovation—played a greater role in facilitating remembrance with regards to the visual arts' (p. 126) jars with her frequent observation that 'striking or unusual' (what might also be termed 'innovative' or 'unconventional') images are more memorable (see especially p. 135). Despite these unfortunate contradictions, the article does, however, make a number of constructive observations.

ivory casket, the repetitious presence of images depicting a pair of young, embracing lovers undoubtedly takes on a different kind of significance altogether, especially in a context of gift-giving, but this too is relevant: significantly, the last quadrant on the right-hand side of the front panel's lower register displays the pair exchanging a flower. Notwithstanding the superficial funereal associations that are evoked by the tomb itself, an exchanging of gifts is precisely the context and attitude in which the figures of Floire and Blancheflor are represented on the tomb in Robert's poem – as well as embracing and miraculously expressing their love for one another in human speech, each youthful figure also offers the other a flower symbolic of the self, one red and one white.

The tomb cannot be regarded as having any sort of 'vehicular' function in a manner that is directly comparable with that of the bedspread in the poem's frame narrative, or indeed with that of the saddlecloth or the basket that will follow, but it must be noted that the vehicular function is in all these other cases chiefly characterised as a means of traversing interpretational boundaries: the highly ornamented surfaces of the various artefactual gardens that both the narrator and Floire encounter are always representative of liminal spaces to be in a sense (through some trick or ingenuity) entered, reached, crossed, or breached. Tombs are of course always associated with liminality in some sense, although it is noteworthy that Blancheflor has not in actuality crossed over into an afterlife and that, as a threshold of the kind conventionally associated with such monuments, it is consequently null and void. Taking a seat on the marble plinth of the tomb itself, beneath the united, embracing effigies of himself and his lover, Floire mournfully exclaims that '[m]'ame le m'amie sivra, / en Camp Flori le trovera / u el keut encontre moi flors, / car molt se fie en nos amours. / Molt hastivement le sivrai / et au plus tost com ains porrai. / Ele m'ara

proçainement / en Camp Flori u el m'atent' (ll. 777 - 784). Floire reads the gift-giving action of the two cast figures – one apparently his mirror image – as a vision of how he and Blancheflor will interact with each other in death once he has managed to commit suicide. The richly ornamented surface of the monument, encrusted with precious gemstones and supporting the two breathing statues, becomes in this vision representative of the blossoming 'Camp Flori' or *Champ Fleuri* that Floire hopes to visit soon. This interpretation is given greater solidity a number of lines later, when Floire's attempt to cross over and join Blancheflor is frustrated by the sudden appearance of the rightly alarmed Queen, who reminds him sternly that the afterlife awaiting those who have committed suicide is unpleasantly infernal, lonely, and deplorably flower-free: '[s]e vos ensi vous ociés, / en Camp Flori ja n'enterrés / ne vos ne verrés Blanceflor : / cil cans ne reçoit pecheor. / Infer son calenge i metroit : / la irés, biaus fius, orendroit' (ll. 1021 - 1026). Not only does she return (seemingly independently of her son) to the motif of the 'Camp Flori', but she uses the verb *enterrer* – 'to bury' – while admonishing him: he will not be interred in the same tomb with his sinless beloved, nor see her again (l. 1022). In Jean-Luc Leclanche's modern French translation this is rendered inaccurately as if the verb were the more typical though less distinctive *entrer* – 'to enter' (Leclanche 2003: 47), but Robert's poem makes a clear suggestion that the site of interment or entombment is one and the same as the location of the paradisiacal *Champ Fleuri*. The tomb, which Floire has unfortunately interpreted as symbolic only of the life he expects to experience after death, ought not to be understood as a structure whose bounding surfaces are to be breached or entered in a literal sense, as is undeniably true of the Emir's tower, in which Blancheflor might accurately be described as being interned (if not quite interred). On this point, when Floire eventually does gain access to the tower in which

67

Blancheflor is actually enclosed, he arrives concealed in a basket of red flowers and disguised as an offering – a gift of picked flowers no less – that overtly recalls the ekphrasis and dialogue of the tomb episode: the manner in which Floire enters the tower mimics the earlier exchange of flowers depicted by the automata sitting on top of the tomb – which had only pretended to hold Blancheflor inside – and gives some belated fulfilment to the young prince's imagined reunion with his beloved in the otherworldly *Champ Fleuri*. When Floire, resting on the tomb, exclaims that 'en Camp Flori le trovera / u el keut encontre moi flors,' (ll. 778 – 779), he predicts, albeit inaccurately, his actual reunion with Blanceflor.

In spite of the fact that no 'entering' as such takes place in the tomb episode, the situation in which the protagonist finds himself in it – that of sitting on the tomb, reading the words on its surface and listening to the automata talking about love – recalls too closely the circumstances into which the narrator stumbles in the poem's frame narrative – that of listening to two beautiful ladies discoursing about love from the greater comfort and emotional distance of a highly decorative embroidered silk – for the similarity to be mere coincidence. Both are moments of seated contact with an artefact that is imbued with great symbolic significance for the unity of the poem as a whole, and the visual patterning is certainly deliberate. Floire will be depicted in a similar situation on a few more occasions – most overtly when he sits upon the embroidered saddlecloth that bears him from his homeland in search of Blancheflor, and when he nestles himself in the basket of flowers as a means of entering the Emir's tower. The surfaces in the tomb episode are interpretative ones, and Floire's *entrance* or advancement beyond this point in the poem is dependent upon his not becoming entombed within, but on finding and taking note of the various symbols of life and love that cover the edifice not as markers of the continuation of life after death, but as

a pressing indication of the necessity of staying alive. As has been discussed above, however, Floire is unable to read the tomb as a threshold of this kind on his own, and it is only after his thwarted attempt at suicide, when his mother, the Queen, has revealed the deception to him out of fear for his safety, that he is finally able to gain the requisite hope and sense of purpose to continue his life and begin his search for Blancheflor (ll. 1063 – 1066). Having had all the trickery and *engin* explained and dispelled, and having been told that Blancheflor is not in fact dead but has rather unromantically been taken to the port and sold in business-like fashion as a piece of prized merchandise, Floire can at last take some comfort, but it is important that he does not reach any optimistic conclusions without some assistance that exposes the artifice through which he himself cannot see. The Queen's revelations set up another pattern that continues to excellent comic effect throughout the 'quest' part of the poem – that of strangers telling Floire exactly where to go and what to do in order to find Blancheflor so that he, a beautiful and noble flower born to good fortune, never really has to do any interpreting or thinking for himself. In a sense, then, even if the tomb must be regarded, because of the unparalleled complexity of its workings as a site of liminal progression, as being in some measure set apart from the other interpretative surfaces that appear throughout Robert's poem, it *does* nonetheless work as an significant turning point within the narrative.

As unique as it is, the episode of Blancheflor's highly contrived tomb and the four rather mechanical trees which surround it finds itself an equally artificial and architecturally wondrous companion piece in the Emir's enchanted garden (ll. 1819 - 2037) and its neighbouring *Tors as Puceles* – 'Tower of Maidens'. Both Floire and the reader learn about this exotic, oriental complex during a speech from Daire, one of the prince's hosts, who, like many others whom the young prince has already

encountered along the way, does not only provide food and lodging, but also advice or helpful instructions. Having recently and (rather too) coincidentally hosted at their inn a similarly distraught young girl of refined aspect who happened to resemble the young prince, a pattern emerges in which these hosts always tell Floire where Blancheflor was being taken and cooperatively point Floire in the right direction. The thoughtful Daire however, goes a step further: upon learning of Floire's seemingly impossible quest, he imparts the young grieving traveller with some local knowledge of Babylon, as well as – most importantly – the customs and habits of the exceedingly jealous Emir who is alleged to have bought Blancheflor and to be holding her in his green marble tower. Here, Robert's extended ekphrasis of the Emir's tower, his garden, and the brutal concubinary rituals that take place there constitutes another turning point in the poem's narrative: it is only after having listened to Daire's speech that the now distraught Floire begs his sympathetic and extremely obliging host to formulate for him a master-plan to retrieve Blancheflor from the clutches of the Emir. Floire does not have to worry for long though, or indeed do any plotting for himself, as Daire has everything already planned within an instant. Revisiting one of the most prominent motifs of the tomb episode, the instructions that follow make numerous noteworthy references to *engin* – both that of the Emir and that which Floire will need if he wishes to outwit him and find Blancheflor (see for instance line 2105). Floire's distress upon hearing about the Emir's apparently impenetrable and heavily guarded tower echoes his utter despair upon being confronted with Blancheflor's tomb: he promptly reiterates his desire to die if he cannot be with her again. In light of the earlier episode, it should come as no surprise that the young prince is once again unable to contrive a plan for himself, and the young protagonist's immoderate pessimism here points so specifically back to his similarly intemperate sorrow when confronted with

the tomb that the reader is naturally encouraged to draw connections between the two passages.

Robert's descriptions of the monumental tomb and the Emir's *Tor as Puceles* are closely related not just by way of their impressive and similarly designed architecture, which alone ought to be sufficient to prompt readers to make connections between the two notable edifices, but because of the similar way in which each functions within the narrative and expresses the poet's deep concern with metatextuality and with the conceptualisation of his work as a literary monument – both a construct and a construction. Like the tomb, the tower is said to have been constructed by the most skilled craftsmen and even planned by the Emir himself prior to construction – the Emir's unusual personal touch and hard work researching the materials for the window frames is emphasised by Robert's rhyming of 'travail' and 'amirail' (ll. 1875 – 1876). The tomb is the product of 'machons vaillans / et boins orfevres bien sachans' (ll. 543 - 544) and Robert mentions twice the fact that those who built the tower were very able: '[c]il qui les fist molt fu sages'; '[l]I engignieres fu molt sage' (ll. 1848; ll. 1860). The similarity between the adjectives 'sachans' – 'knowledgeable' – and 'sages'/ 'sage' – able, or wise – further intertwines the two episodes. It is significant that 'sage' and 'sachans' share the same etymological root in Latin: we have already encountered a 'savoir' – which also belongs to this etymological family – personified and explicitly contrasted with *Amors* as a source of *engin* in the internalised debate that Floire experiences upon his arrival in Babylon, just prior to Daire's lengthy speech telling him about the Emir's tower, his garden, and his barbaric customs. The references in this episode to knowledge and wisdom ('sachans' and 'sage'), with implied connotations of cleverness and cunning as opposed merely to intelligence on its own, suggest strongly that the similar *engin*

shown both by Floire's parents in commissioning the tomb and by the Emir in constructing his tower has not *Amors* at its heart, as it should, but *Savoir*, which, we have already been told, can easily be outmanoeuvred by the god of love when the need arises: as *Amors* itself has already phrased this, with remarkable perspicacity and persuasiveness, '[m]aint engien a Amors trové / et avoié maint esgaré. / Li vilains dist que Dieus labeure, / quant il li plaist, en molt peu d'eure' (ll. 1647 – 1649). Quite apart from only stating a simple contrast between Floire and the Emir, however, or indeed, from only foreshadowing the positive outcome that the reader might expect from the poem's conclusion, the tower, like the tomb before it, serves – as a product of *Savoir* – to reveal to the reader something of the processes underlying its construction: at the same time, it suggests something about the processes involved in the construction of the poem. The great emphasis that the passage places on the complexity of the tower's design and of its organisation naturally has implications for Robert's text as a whole, which, as has been demonstrated, is not only aware of what Lacy refers to as its own 'factitiousness', but constantly seeking to draw attention to its contrivances, artificiality and indeed, literary artefactuality, through analogous descriptions of this kind. Crucially, the poet hints that *Savoir* has something to do with his own poetic *engin*.

At the same time as bringing *engin* once more into the foreground, the parallels that Robert overtly introduces and explores between poetry and monumentality carry with them an implied authorial conception not only of the 'romance as artifact', to use Lacy's phrase, but also of romance as architecture, and indeed, *romancier* as architect. Indeed, as the poem approaches its climactic ending, it seems everyone is adopting the role of architect. We have already been told that the Emir, with his great *savoir*, has been involved in the research and construction of the tower in a surprisingly direct,

hands-on capacity, dealing specifically with the design and composition of its wooden window frames: Floire, too, hitherto clad in the rich cloth of a particularly gaudy and attention-seeking merchant, soon adopts the guise of an architect wishing to study, interpret, and reproduce the tower in his own country. The process that Floire imagines and describes to the gatekeeper is plainly an act of cultural translation that closely mirrors that of the poet himself in a highly humorous and extraordinarily sophisticated self-reflexive way. Floire, seeking to enter the tower, claims that he wishes to make some observations and take some measurements in order that he might produce an exact replica in his homeland: 'por içou l'esgar et voi / k'en mon païs tele feroie / se ja mais venir i pooie' (ll. 2184 – 2186).

In the first line of his ekphrasis, Robert describes the Emir's famed tower oddly (considering the Emir's involvement in its construction) as belonging in some sense to antiquity: it is a 'tor d'antiquité' (l. 1820). This phrase, quite apart from simply conferring upon the fictional monument the substantial though admittedly vague and unquantifiable degree of prestige and venerability that age is so often presumed to have offered things during the Medieval period, it serves more robustly to prompt readers to recall similar examples both of actual ancient towers, and more importantly of towers familiar from biblical and classical literature alone.

Also serving to evoke a sense of the tower's 'antiquité' is a series of paintings that covers the ceilings in each of the girls' bedrooms. These do not serve a merely decorative purpose, but one of a distinctly educational nature: '[l]i cieus desus qui ferme au mur / est pains a or et a azur. / Molt a apris de l'escriture / qui puet savoir de la painture: / li fait i sont des ancissours, / les proueces et les estours' (ll. 1879 – 1884). Through the emphatic positioning of 'escriture' and 'painture' at the end of the lines, where they rhyme, Robert gives memorable expression to the idea that writing and

painting ought to be considered equally effective means for passing on and acquiring

knowledge, especially when this knowledge consists of stimulating *exempla* of ancient

deeds involving nobility and bravery. That the paintings are completed in 'or' and

'azur', contributes further to the connection drawn between writing and painting, since

it was these colours most of all that characterised the manuscript illumination of the

period. Both constitute interpretative surfaces, and these paintings are as a

consequence inescapably evocative of others already encountered within the poem.

These paintings, both because of the fact that they treat classical subjects, and since

they are painted in colours reminiscent of manuscript illuminations, recall strongly the

livres paienors from which Floire and Blancheflor learned to read earlier in the poem.

Most particularly, they recall the Trojan imagery that appears on the magnificent

painted cup for which Blancheflor was partly exchanged – though whether the most

important image that appears on this artefact, that is, Paris' abduction of (or in some

versions elopement with) Helen, can be ranked as an *exemplum* of admirable ancient

nobility suitable for the living quarters of the maidens is perhaps open to debate.

Since it is decorated with a series of surfaces to be interpreted, and is in some

sense educational for the young girls who inhabit the tower, the monument in which

the paintings are to be found can be categorised, like the tomb, as another literary

artefact of principally metatextual significance. Robert was by no means the first poet

to conceptualise his work in architectural terms, as a complex edifice of well-

proportioned, precisely positioned, and long-lasting stone rather than one consisting

of relatively insubstantial verses. Prior to composing the *Aeneid*, Virgil had set out his

scheme for the epic by imagining it as a marble temple, richly ornamented with

sculptured friezes and paintings (Virgil, *Georgics* 3. 8 – 39). This notional temple,

importantly, was to feature statues described as 'breathing'- although not in the same

literal sense in which Robert's automata do on top of Blancheflor's tomb (*Parii lapides, spirantia signa* – Virgil, *Georgics* 3.34): Robert himself had certainly studied his *livres paienors*. According to Suetonius, Virgil also spoke of unfinished lines as temporary props (*tibicines*) to be used for structural support while the polished marble or *solidae columnae* of his finished verse was awaiting delivery or yet to be composed – Virgil was a slow worker (Suetonius, *Life of Virgil*, 19. 24). Robert implies – disingenuously – that his verses, unlike Virgil's, come easily to him, by insisting that his tower does not need wooden supports (ll. 1823 – 1824).

In a similar fashion to Virgil's marble temple, Robert's description of the Emir's impressive monument of green marble is evidently intended as a metatextual mirror of his own poem, and perhaps its sources, which are generally considered by scholars to have possessed an Eastern origin – Robert's work being in some sense an act of *translatio*, though certainly not an exact copy of any earlier poem. The tower is an unusual one, constructed of coloured marble: 'tote est de vert quarrel de marbre' (l. 1823). The striking green hue of the marble blocks that exclusively make up the extremely tall metatextual (and apparently intertextual)[11] tower is of significance for several reasons. One of these is the obvious connotation of jealousy, an attribute – or rather, the most distinctive personality trait – of the Emir[12]. Chief among the implications of the tower's exotic, viridescent colouring, however, is the fact that it gives the monument's surface an inevitable association with vegetation, with verdure, and with vitality, and contributes, crucially, to the structure's imitation of organic matter. While stressing that wooden struts are not needed for the tower's stability,

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[11] Other green marble edifices which start to appear in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries will be discussed in chapter two.
[12] See Michel Pastoureau, *Vert: Histoire d'une couleur*, (2013) for further discussion about the symbolism of the colour green in the Middle Ages.

Robert places 'marbre' and 'arbre' in rhyming positions – not for the first time within the poem, since the same rhyme also appears in the tomb episode (ll. 1823 – 1824; ll. 553 – 554). In both cases, albeit more obviously in this case, Robert subtly provokes the reader to consider the contrasting uses, properties, and values of these two materials, while simultaneously implying a comparison between the potential achievements and beauty of natural and manmade structures respectively. The only external parts of the tower which are made of *arbres* rather than stone are the Emir's window frames, which, apparently in spite of their natural origins, have the explicit property and purpose of keeping living creatures out. The wood that these special window frames are constructed from comes, notably, from two of the trees that surround and form part of the tomb's monumental arrangement – the white, ever-flowering ebony and a myrrh from which chrism is said to flow (ll. 603 – 610; l. 615; ll. 1871 – 1878). These trees, as we have seen, are characteristic of the nature-and-art-blending *engin* that permeates that earlier episode. Here they simultaneously contribute to the sense that the artfully constructed tower is somehow encroaching upon the sphere of nature, while supposedly functioning as a means of disallowing nature from trespassing in return.

The tower is in numerous respects thoroughly treelike.[13] Robert gives a picture of an elaborately contrived plumbing system which allows for fresh water to be effectively transported up the tower and into every chamber (ll. 1855 – 1859) – in many ways mimicking the natural system of water flowing upwards from the roots to

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[13] Robert describes the tree-like characteristics of other artefacts in the text: one such example is the elaborately decorated saddletree – 'li arçon' (l. 1175) – which is positioned in such a way as to support both the saddle and the flowering saddlecloth.

the leaves in real plants. It is not insignificant either that this arboreal tower is a tower of maidens: like a tree, it bears flowers and fruit. Young girls are its blossoms and its produce – and like real fruit and flowers are brought forth seasonally, since a year spent figuratively flowering as the Emir's bride only precedes each girl's death by decapitation and burning. The abundant maidens who live in the luscious, green, fertile tower are referred to specifically as flowers (ll. 2076 – 2080). Regardless of this specific relevance to the romance's narrative, the relationship between art and nature is, as we have already seen, one of the central concerns of the poem, with ekphrastic passages that highlight the mimetic functions of various artefacts the most important way in which this is explored.

In her commendable 2007 monograph, Sarah Kay has shown that 'the tree image is ubiquitous in the Middle Ages. The various structures that it offers – the vertical axis of summit and base, the network of roots and branches, the progression from flower through fruit and seed – seemed to medieval writers ideal of systematizing and unifying thought' (Kay 2007: 19). By the time the reader of *Floire et Blancheflor* has arrived in Babylon – even before the Emir's tower has been mentioned and its similarity to a tree adumbrated, the motif will already be familiar from the numerous hints that have previously appeared in the poem, to the extent that the tree-like character of the monument might indeed seem to be inevitable. Robert's architectural conceptualisation of the structure of his work is inseparably intertwined with a more organic, plant-like vision, which indeed, ties into and perhaps accounts in some measure for the absolutely essential preponderance of floral images which colour and give cohesion to the work. Calin's important observation that the poem's 'unique literary quality' is ultimately a consequence of the flower imagery points also towards the underlying arboreal framework that supports and gives sustenance to the surface

effects: where flowers denote finality, perfection, and high polish, the dense network of roots, interconnected boughs and dense foliage that accompanies and produces them signifies something of the labour and skill involved in the process of poetic composition.

In this context, another 'artefact' of metatextual significance is worth discussing in some detail. In the centre of the Emir's extensively foreshadowed garden, planted above a clear, magical fountain whose waters sustain it, stands the monumental 'arbre d'amors' (l. 2028) – or tree of love – that, according to Daire, annually selects a new bride for the Emir. The Emir's *arbre d'amors* has been anticipated throughout the poem by numerous references to trees of various kinds: one of these is the mystical, mysterious mandrake tree planted by Floire's father, King Felix, in the centre of his palace garden (the first of the text's three garden settings proper), in which the young children pass their time reading *livres paienors* and joyfully composing love letters about birds and flowers (ll. 241 – 264). The mandrake, traditionally associated both with poisonous properties and (significantly for the fact that the love of Floire and Blancheflor develops so distinctly in its presence) with aphrodisiac qualities, is the first in the series of actual trees and tree-like structures that patterns the imagery of the poem as a whole and reaches a crescendo in the Emir's garden and its *arbre d'amors*. The Emir's tree of love may seem ostensibly to be a natural landmark, but the tree is in actual fact no less artefactual, and indeed, no less artificial than the tree-like tower of maidens which stands nearby, green and full of flowers. Robert turns the tree swiftly from a natural, organic structure – wild, uncultivated and untouched, these being the more typical characteristics to be found in the various elements that traditionally make up a *locus amoenus* – into an overtly mechanical device, highly cultivated and irreversibly transformed by contact with advanced and interfering human culture.

Whether the Emir's tree can still be considered the work of nature, therefore, is left in some substantial doubt, along with whether it should be regarded as a tree or only a tree-like structure: either way, it is directly comparable to some of the other artefacts that have already appeared in the poem, which likewise have hovered on the boundary between art and nature. The text details with care and especial emphasis the way in which the tree has been changed and reengineered by craftsmen of dubious motivation, misapplying their skills to serve the whims of the corrupt Emir.

> [u]n arbre i a desus planté,
>
> plus bel ne virent home né ;
>
> por çou que tos jors i a flors
>
> l'apelë on l'arbre d'amors :
>
> l'une revient quant l'autre ciet.
>
> Par grant engien l'arbres i siet,
>
> car li arbres est tos vermeus.
>
> De çou ot cil molt bons conseus
>
> qui le planta k'a l'asseoir
>
> fu fais l'engiens, si com j'espoir.
>
> Au main, quant lieve li soleus,
>
> en l'arbre fiert trestos vermeus.
>
> Cil arbres est si engigniés
>
> que tostans est de flors cargiés (*Floire et Blancheflor*: ll. 2025 – 2038).

This peculiar tree – if indeed one can still call so thoroughly mechanical a device by the name *arbre* – with its boughs perpetually laden with vermillion blossoms (like the ones picked to conceal Floire in the basket in order to transport him into the tower), recalls the equally mysterious ever-flowering ebony and terebinth trees which had surrounded Blancheflor's tomb, though this specimen elevates the artifice to a much higher level. Not only is this tree, like those surrounding and overhanging the tomb, perpetually flowering – a fact that is stated in lines 2027 to 2031 and reiterated a moment later (l. 2038) after the temporally specific but continuous phrase, '[a]u main, quant lieve li soleus' (l. 2035) – but it has been engineered in such a way that it *magically* drops a flower on the pre-selected maiden: 'sor li fait par encantement / la flor caïr a son talent' (ll. 2071 – 2072). The linking of 'encantement' – 'magic' – and 'talent' – referring to the Emir's desire or wish is a humorous one which gives two alternative explanations – mutually inconsistent with one another – of how exactly the tree mechanism functions. Manuscript B (BNF, fr. 1447), goes further: it explains in precise, rather scientific, terms that, in order for the tree to flower constantly, a steady breeze is required to maintain a stable and unchanging temperature around it. Robert makes it overtly clear that it is no simple tree: he repeats the word *engin* four times throughout the extended description which he devotes to the tree alone, and even uses the participial form 'engigniés' – which carries a verbal force – to bookend the fifteen-line description of the ever-florescent tree, placing a truly unique emphasis on the artificiality of this altered plant and the exceedingly unnatural manner in which it frondesces and flowers. As mentioned above, the *arbre d'amors* stands above and is closely connected with an architectural structure that, owing to its provision of life-sustaining nutrients and water, is almost part of it (ll. 2021 – 2024). This magical

fountain of clear water, seemingly derived from the nearby Euphrates, is imbued inexplicably with an ability to detect whether a maiden passing over its channel is sufficiently virginal for marriage with the Emir or has been deflowered – in which case its waters will tremble and she will promptly be taken away from the garden to be burned (ll. 2039 – 2056). The importance of this fountain for the tree in metatextual terms – it can be viewed as the 'source' or inspiration that underpins the arboreal artistic arrangement above it, nurturing the roots of the poet or craftsman's thought and feeding its reticulated growth structure – is confirmed by the number of lines devoted slightly earlier on to the plumbing system of the green tower: a less appealing metaphor for poetic creation perhaps, but one which is in essence strikingly similar.

After any unsuitable candidates have been rooted out by the fountain's offended water, it is the simultaneously mechanically and magically designed and constructed tree which – on the surface at least – is supposed to select the Emir's bride for each following year by dropping its petals on her – supposedly without any subterfuge or outside agency. There ought to be no prompting by human hands, yet with a keen sense of comedy Robert deconstructs the elaborate artifice of the structure by revealing that the tree is in fact engineered in such a way that, should its master – the Emir - desire any particular young "flower" more than the other options available, its petals can be made to fall on the maiden already chosen: in other words, the complex and supposedly impartial system can be programmed or overridden, reducing the technological and magical abilities to a mere pretence – a helpful but ignominious trick whose cheated outcome is entirely dependent upon the whims of its operator.

The motif of the tree is central to the way in which the poem deals with the distinction between Floire and his rival for Blancheflor's hand. The Emir's *Savoir*-derived *engin* and false 'love', the workings of which are not only characterised as

81

mechanical and highly artificial, but also deceptively so, are contrasted with Floire's perfectly natural and unaffected love, and with the rather different *engin* of which *Amors* is capable. Early in the poem, whilst Floire is alone in Montoire, Robert gives an account of how isolation affects the young prince's condition that makes memorable figurative use of the tree. Floire's first painful experience of longing is figured as a perfectly Ovidian *wounding* in one sense, since Robert makes an allusion, albeit in circumlocutory fashion, to the traditional idea that Cupid has pierced his heart with a love dart from his bow, but the metaphor is converted at the same time into an unconventional and innovative symbol of new growth: the shaft does not merely pierce Floire's heart, but is implanted there, and changes in an instant from an immobile and inanimate instrument of torture to an organic agent, animate, continually developing, and feeding on Floire – the arrow is not simply a wooden rod, but a living plant still capable of putting forth shoots and of flowering. The image is of *Amors* grafting a tree into the young boy's grief-stricken heart:

> Amors li a livré entente,
>
> el cuer li a planté une ente
>
> qui en tous tans flourie estoit
>
> et tant doucement li flairoit
>
> que l'encens ne boins citouaus
>
> ne giroffles ne garingaus.
>
> Et cele odour rien ne prisoit ;
>
> toute autre joie en oublioit :
>
> le fruit de cele ente atendoit,

mais li termes molt lons estoit,

çou li ert vis, du fruit cuellir,

quant Blanceflor verra gesir

jouste soi et le baisera,

le fruit de l'ente cuellera (*Floire et Blancheflor*: ll. 373 – 386)

Floire's graft and the Emir's tree are contrasted. The two – that is, the Emir's mechanical device and Floire's graft – stand, respectively, for *Savoir* and *Amors*. Whilst it is true that both trees are in some way changed by human intervention – grafting is, after all, the process of *artificially* fusing two plants together – Floire's graft – which has been inserted by the natural and spontaneous *Amors* rather than the coldly calculating *Savoir* – is distinctly more organic and considerably livelier. The graft ever-effloresces in a manner similar to that of the majestic, fully-grown tree standing in the Emir's garden, yet Robert's decision here to employ in the description of Floire's plant the verbal expression 'tous tans flourie' (l. 375) instead of the more passive noun-focused phrases that he uses to refer to his rival's tree – phrases such as 'tos jors i a flors' and 'tostans est de flors cargiés' (l. 2028; l. 2038) – imbues the blossoms on Floire's graft with a true sense of life and vitality – they are untreated and untended, quite unlike the seemingly false flowers that hang on the Emir's artificial tree. The organic nature of the graft represents Floire's unaffected love for Blancheflor while the artificiality of the Emir's *Savoir*-created tree symbolises the latter's apparent disregard for or ignorance of true love – never do we hear of the Emir actually expressing any genuine affection towards his short-lived maidens. It is significant too that Floire's graft is the only "tree" that will flower naturally and produce fruit:

Robert's picturesque portrayal of Floire's *Amors*-derived scion makes clear that it is able to produce, without any clever trickery, a profusion of nurturing balms, flowers and fruit. The essences and oils mentioned are, as E. Jane Burns has pointed out, all of eastern origin and, moreover, present without exception in the Emir's garden (Burns 2002: 222): upon encountering them later in the poem, the reader ought to be reminded by these specific sensory cues of Floire's graft. The ripening of the fruit, importantly, indicates that Floire's true love for Blancheflor will last a lifetime. In fact, Robert stresses – with considerable disregard for the idea of keeping surprises for the reader – the longevity of Floire's true love by surrounding the passage's reference to the young prince's reunion with Blancheflor with two forms of the verb 'cuellir' – 'to pick'. The change from the infinitive, 'cuellir' (l. 383), to the more specific simple future tense of the same verb a few lines later – 'cuellera' (l. 386) – indicates without any ambiguity that Floire's quest will, in the end, be successful, and also implies that after a passage of some time (longer than the prince suspects at this point), he and Blancheflor will be able to enjoy the fruit of love. The full benefit that *Amors* can reportedly offer a true lover like Floire may only be enjoyed once he has managed to relocate Blancheflor and keep her by his side: the gratification associated with love, meanwhile, is deferred to the future reunion, and is not only to be found in the present union, as in the Emir's case.

By way of contrast with the abundant productivity – abundantly described – of Floire's graft, Robert deals with the highly regimented, grimly unromantic annual dropping and instant replacement of a single flower from the Emir's so-called *arbre d'amors* in a single line: 'l'une revient quant l'autre ciet' (l. 2029). This contrivance signifies the short duration of the Emir's many marriages, none of which lasts long enough, we must assume, to 'bear fruit' of any kind. Whilst Floire is by nature (and

by name), perfectly compatible with the floral sprig that *Amors* grafts into his heart, having been in a sense born, educated, and reared for love by circumstance, reading, and companionship, the Emir seems to have no such natural disposition towards love, the result being that he can only attempt unconvincingly to imitate it through magic and engineering.

As we have seen, Robert uses the motif of the arboreal structure on numerous occasions throughout his poem as a means of organising his material, but also as a way of drawing connections and creating parallels that assist greatly in binding the work together as a whole. Whilst the tree stands at the very centre of Robert's conceptualisation of his poem, the garden that surrounds it is also fundamental as part of the monumental or artefactual arrangement of the poem, and contributes greatly to the work's uniqueness of character – something which has in recent decades only belatedly been recognised. The garden is the site which connects the tree and the tower, the artefact and the artificer, the overly cultivated with the uncultivated – art, crucially, with nature. The Emir's garden, whilst it is in possession of a solidity and spatial presence – even three-dimensionality – that is only implied or imitated on the various interpretative surface on which art has flourished and indeed approached the illusion of life, is nevertheless characterised ultimately as the most artificial construction in the poem.

The Emir's garden brings together all the previous artefacts, surfaces, and constructions of metatextual significance from elsewhere in Robert's *Floire et Blanchefor*: whilst the earlier artefacts and interpretative surfaces all foreshadow, in some sense, this enclosed oriental garden – the Emir's eastern *locus amoenus* – this very garden also refers back to each of those artefacts. They find, in this highly contrived creation – this site in which artifice and human *engin* have triumphed over

nature – a new location in which they can simultaneously contribute to the cohesion of the work and in concert with one another express again the centrality of artefactuality and artificiality in the text. As we have already seen, the episode of Blancheflor's tomb finds, in many respects, its companion piece in the Emir's tower and surrounding garden. In the later episode, Robert's earlier ekphrasis of the tomb and surrounding garden environment is extended and embellished to exhibit levels of unparalleled artificiality. Aside from the most prominent of the architectural and organic elements already discussed in detail above – namely the *arbre d'amors* and the tower – other elements from earlier in the poem (and most of all the tomb episode) reappear which make certain that this garden space is no merely generalised *locus amoenus*, but a site whose individual characteristics are *specifically* designed and ordered so as to bring to mind these earlier artefacts and to confirm once and for all the perfection of the poem's arrangement and composition. Chief among these elements are the bronze avian automata that perch between the merlons and fill the crenels on the garden's crenelated boundary wall. The perimeter wall itself, upon which these mechanical birds sit, is entirely covered with paintings in gold and blue – 'mur / tot paint a or et a asur' (ll. 1963 – 1964) – colours which link it symbolically and iconographically with the similarly decorated and tinted instructive pictures that adorn the ceilings of each of the young maidens' bedchambers in the Emir's tower (ll. 1879 – 1884). As has been already demonstrated, those ceilings serve an explicitly educational, and indeed interpretative, purpose for the girls who live in their presence; likewise, the perimeter wall of the garden, similarly covered in paintings characterised by the same limited but luxurious colour scheme, presents an interpretative surface, though the subjects depicted are not elucidated – perhaps suggesting that in this setting any didactic messages that might have been intended have been partially effaced by

the competing splendour of the plant life and the mechanical marvels above. Nevertheless, even without any detail regarding the subjects to be found on the wall, it remains an interpretative space, and the automata that form part of its decorative scheme are also evidently central to any didacticism that might be credited to it. In a sense, the description that would be given to the paintings is transferred to the birds, since these are more wonderful and unusual than their elaborate perches. Robert implies that the process of reading and coming to understand these automata, these markers of the garden's threshold, is imperative for the comprehension of the entire *locus*. Apart from representing the infinite variety of the garden's content – birds of every kind feature – they point, of course, to artefacts described in great detail earlier in the poem. The image Robert presents of these finely cast bronze birds quotes and reproduces visually the single beautifully worked golden bird that graces the lid of the ancient Trojan cup for which Blancheflor was traded – another work of art whose apparent vivacity has already been treated with some elaboration, linking it with other mimetic images that appear in the poem: '[d]'or avoit deseure un oisel / trifoire, qui molt par ert bel, / qui en son pié tenoit la geme, / plus bel ne vit hom ne feme: / c'ert vis celui qui l'esgardoit / que vis estoit, si voletoit' (ll. 489 – 494). The fact that this bird holds in its talons a luminous gemstone – a symbol suggestive of the rapacity of the Emir, who has Blancheflor, another 'precieuse geme' within his grasp – is given greater significance by the presence of the birds on the garden wall, which do not only recall but also bestow additional meaning upon the earlier artefact. The birds in both instances can be interpreted as symbolising both the acquisitiveness and jealousy of the Emir, but there is also another ostensibly contradictory way of reading them: William Calin, referring to the motif of the bird generally in medieval literature, observes that it 'manifests grace, charm, liberty, and triumph over physical obstacles

associated with young love' (Calin 1974: 31). This interpretation, which can in fact be seen as concurrent with the 'rapacious' reading, is also of obvious relevance within the context of Robert's poem. At the same time as helping to suggest the characteristics of the Emir, the mechanical birds – whose own rapacity is not so obvious, unless it be interpreted instead as a protective watchfulness befitting of their sentry-like stationing within the crenels of a fortified wall – point even more specifically to the vivid imagery of the tomb episode, both in aspect and in their alarming ability to produce song: the music-making birds – reminiscent of the breathing and talking children – recall, and even condense into a single image, both the metatextually significant automata of the young lovers that move and speak to each other on top of Blancheflor's false tomb, and the 'mil oisel' – 'thousand birds'– that perpetually sing melodies of an extraordinary sweetness in the trees around that monument (ll. 626 – 628). In that episode, they are overtly credited with the ability to stimulate amorous gestures between lovers who happen upon the scene – here too, on the garden wall, they both form part of the boundary between the two lovers and serve as reminders that winged things – whether birds or love itself – are able to transcend and traverse such obstacles without too much difficulty. Despite the familiarity of the motif, Robert rather cheekily has Daire insist that no one has ever seen or heard anything similar to these birds: 'sor cascun cretel, / divers de l'autre a un oisel ; d'arain est trestous tresjetés, / onques mais ne fu veüs tés : / quant il vente si font douç cri / que oncques nus hom tel n'oï' (ll. 1965 – 1970). Daire proceeds to give an epic catalogue all the types of birds that he can remember – though his memory admittedly fails him.

Other elements that form part of the Emir's garden that give it specific resonances of earlier episodes from the poem are the essences and spices already mentioned, which refer back to the fragrances produced by the graft springing from

Floire's heart, and the abundance of semi-precious stones that line the bed of the Euphrates (ll. 1987 – 2000), which apparently flows directly from 'Paradis' and courses around the garden as a natural moat – untraversable for living things. The stones mentioned allude specifically to those on Blancheflor's tomb: Robert lists here all of those that had adorned the surface of the earlier monument, adding rubies as well to their number and casually gesturing towards 'autres que nomer ne sai, / car pas oï nomer nes ai' (ll. 1999 - 2000). In the medieval lapidary tradition, the ruby – usually described as vermillion in colour – is honoured with the title of the 'principaus sor totes pieres' (Pannier 1882: 79); Calin also noted that it was considered the '"gemme des gemmes" [quoting himself from Léopold Pannier], superior to all others in splendour, symbolises mobility and power, presents defeat in battle or before a tribunal, cures despair, and grants love' (Calin 1974: 155). The ruby's unique presence here in the Emir's garden is therefore eminently suitable – being indicative as it is of the climactic context in which it appears. The Euphrates itself presumably provides the source for the magic fountain which stands in the garden beneath the *arbre d'amors*, and which, like the tree with which it is intimately associated, plays an important part each year in the selection of a new bride for the Emir. The fountain itself provides not just a reflection, but rather what might be regarded as a kind of final, conclusive realisation, of one of the prominent anticipatory interpretative surfaces given an extensive ekphrastic treatment earlier in the poem, recalling, like the pictures painted inside the tower, the ancient cup for which Blancheflor was exchanged, and which Floire will use to tempt the tower guard. Shortly before Daire's description of the Emir's garden, with its lengthy passages devoted to the tower and the tree of love, Robert pauses the narrative to explore Floire's – uniquely and unprecedentedly successful – attempt to interpret the images represented on the side

of this cup, and, crucially, it is likened in this episode to a fountain: 'Flores a le coupe esgardee / qui por Blanceflor fu done, / qui devant lui fu tote plaine / de plus cler vin que n'est fontaine' (ll. 1701 – 1704). The Emir's 'fontaine', with its Euphratean water that runs 'clere et saine' (ll. 2021 – 2022), directly recalls the clear wine and the marvellous receptacle which holds it. In this elegant simile, which signifies a subsequent turning point in Floire's state of mind and also establishes a symbolic connection between two distinct artefacts that appear in the work, Robert encourages the reader likewise to see parallels between the various structures encountered throughout the poem, allowing these *objets* not merely to imitate but also to interpret one another as well as give a satisfying unity to the work as a whole – itself an artefact and an artwork to be considered in relation to these other arts.

Robert d'Orbigny's sophisticated employment in *Floire et Blancheflor* of artefacts as a means of exploring the relationship between art, nature, and poetic composition has unquestionably been undervalued by modern scholars, all too often tempted to gloss over the ostensibly ornamental ekphraseis that form such an important part of this poet's treatment of the tale. The poem has been deprecated for its perceived failure to conform to modern preconceptions, especially concerning plotting, but this is in fact a failure on the part of modern critics, who, like the apparently bereaved Floire, are too often unable to appreciate the full significance and literary worth of the descriptive passages which interrupt the narrative, but do so deliberately in order to dwell upon the artefactuality of the tale and on the related themes of authorial artistry and artifice. Nevertheless, even those who have, from the perspective of the twentieth or twenty-first century, criticised the supposedly 'over-developed descriptive passages' and 'purple patches' for the way in which they disrupt the flow of the narrative have had to admit that the aristocratic *Floire et Blancheflor* is undeniably – even uniquely – 'the

work of an artist' with a 'considerable gift for telling a story' and 'a certain lightness of touch and a delicate gaiety of spirit that have not been blurred by the passage of time' (Hubert 1966: 17 – 19). William Calin considered Robert's poem to be a 'partial exception' to the medieval literary custom, as exemplified by Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, of selecting a single image that might 'stand as a marker for the entire work' (Calin 1964: 103), because of the unusually persistent recurrence of the flower motif throughout, but recognised clearly enough that the poet's unique preference for a unified pattern of imagery cannot be interpreted as something that diminishes the importance of the motif: Calin remarked perceptively on Robert's 'creation of a meaningful pattern of flower imagery, yielding a symbolic structure and an emotional tonality which suffuses the entire work and helps give expression to its unique poetic spirit' (Calin 1964: 110). In other words, the flower motif, and by extension the garden with which it is inevitably associated, stands as much as a marker for the work as a whole as other more singularly treated images do for other medieval works. Norris Lacy's excellent observation that '[t]he poet […] privileges the status of a literary text as an artifact, a created object that does not masquerade as life' is indeed dependent upon the poet's finely polished ekphraseis, whose gem-like brilliance and highly visual intensity are – as Lacy himself put it – to be regarded as something more than mere 'gratuitous flights of rhetorical fancy' (1992: 23 – 24). It is remarkable in a way that scholars have focused so much on plot when this is so clearly only of secondary interest to the poet, and the phenomenon is evidently closely related to the dismissive manner in which the ekphrastic passages have been treated: Robert's work is openly and unashamedly more concerned with its own artefactuality than with plot or realism of characterisation, and it is precisely the unfashionable 'purple patches', whose purposeful aesthetic coherence and cohesiveness are

indisputable, that allow this to be explored with the greatest depth, erudition, eloquence, artistry, and – one might suggest – *engin*.

Chapter Three:

***Floire et Blancheflor* and Guillaume de Lorris' *Le Roman de la Rose*:**
Artefactual Intertextuality

Despite the fact that only a single miniature survives in the extant manuscripts of *Floire et Blancheflor*, and only a single casket has been identified as depicting the tale, that Robert's overriding interest in the artefactuality of his poem was not entirely lost on his medieval readers is amply shown by the extraordinary appearance of the text as a physical object in the early thirteenth-century Occitan work, *Le Roman de Flamenca o Las Novas de Guillaume de Nevers* – tentatively attributed by modern scholars to the cleric Sir Bernardet (Blodgett 1995: xi; Hubert 1962: 6 – 8). In this, not only do the protagonist, Flamenca, and her friend Alis read aloud from the tale of *Floire et Blancheflor* in order to learn about the art of love – apparently echoing the opening the prologue of the poem and using the work precisely for the purpose for which Robert had disingenuously claimed to have produced it – but, even more significantly, the two ladies also employ *Floire et Blancheflor* as a physical prop. Almost regardless of whether Robert's version is actually used here, this is an example of the tale having explicitly become an artefact. The poem's *materiality* is greatly emphasised in this episode, in which *mimicry* – a theme that Robert had explored in depth in his ekphrastically treated artefacts – is also thrown into high relief. Adopting the role of a priest, Alis performs a 'kiss of peace' – a liturgical ritual from Mass, in which each member of the congregation must kiss the Bible – as a sort of demonstration for Flamenca who will soon have to repeat the act herself; in lieu of the Bible, however, a nearby copy of *Floire et Blancheflor* is used as a an eminently suitable substitute (*Flamenca*, ll. 4475 – 4488). This seemingly blasphemous action, even though performed in private and in jest, makes Robert's romance an artefact deserving of

worship and adoration – like the Bible, a vessel in some sense, in which flowers of truth and wisdom are contained, and an object to be treated with reverence.

The artefactuality of Robert d'Orbigny's now relatively obscure *Floire et Blancheflor* was likewise recognised and the implications of its image-making developed and exploited several decades later by Guillaume de Lorris in his first, original part of the celebrated *Le Roman de la Rose* (c. 1230): in numerous respects Robert's poem can be considered a forerunner to Guillaume's later text. Erich Köhler (1963), Elizabeth Pearsall and Derek Salter (1973), Armand Strubel (1992), and Jacek Kowalski (2006) have all noted connections between Guillaume's poem and *Floire et Blancheflor* – seeing Robert's work as 'part of the complex derivation of the developed landscape of the *Roman de la Rose*' (1973: 51), yet the reception of Robert's d'Orbigny's work in the *Rose* still awaits detailed attention in *Rose* scholarship.[14] This chapter will explore several encounters with artefactual sites of intertextual significance within Guillaume de Lorris' poem, including the outer wall of Deduit's garden, the castle of Jalousie, and the fountain of Narcissus, whose iconographies and functions closely resemble, but also redevelop, those of the most prominent prototypical artefacts which are given ekphrastic treatment in *Floire et Blancheflor*.

As has been contended in previous chapters, a focus on artefactuality and materiality reveals the almost endlessly transferable *topos* of the garden as an extraordinary site of interaction between various art forms. In Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, the narrator of the frame narrative enters the story by reclining on a decorative silk bedspread embroidered with a pictorial representation of an artificial garden that prefigures the garden-like artefacts and indeed actual garden

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[14] Ernest Langlois, in his 1891 *Sources et Origines du Roman de la Rose*, mentions one such source as *Florence et Blancheflor* – this is not to be confused with *Floire et Blancheflor*.

settings that occur later in the text, as well as simultaneously suggesting the fundamental unity of the arts by comparing text and textile, embroidery and verse composition. In his programmatically significant prologue to the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris develops this metaphor of weaving in a manner that is highly suggestive of his familiarity with Robert's earlier poem, as well as with the *Chansons de Toile* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* or *Le Chevalier au Lion*. The floral silken bedspread upon which Robert's narrator sits does not only anticipate the various garden spaces that follow it within *Floire et Blancheflor*, but it also prefigures most particularly the enchanted *vergier* that is described in the opening of Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose*.

Threaded throughout Guillaume de Lorris' prologue are metaphors of weaving that develop Robert's implied analogy between text and textile, craft and poetic composition. During a lengthy but exceedingly lively exposition of the springtime setting, Guillaume devotes a number of lines – closely juxtaposed and thus demonstrating an implicit relationship between the two incidences – both to Nature dressing herself in her freshly spun spring finery, and to the dressing of the narrator, who dwells particularly on the lacing up of his sleeves. The seasonal rejuvenation of the landscape makes both Nature herself and the dreaming narrator yearn to dress gaily and, at least in the case of the fictionalised Guillaume, to rush "outdoors" and delight in the perfect environment. The poet depicts Nature's early-spring dressing routine as follows : '[l]ors devient la terre si goube / Qu'el viaut avoir novele robe / Si fet si cointe robe faire : / Que de colours i a .c. paire : / Herbes et flors blanches et perses, / Et de maintes colours dyverses, / C'est la robe que je devisse, / Pour quoi la terre mieus se prise' (ll. 59 – 66). Nature's dress is skilfully made and, most importantly, adorned with flora of over a hundred different colours. With this floral embellishment

especially, the conceit of Nature putting on her finery for Spring reworks and develops substantially a motif to which Robert had also been attracted in *Floire et Blancheflor*. It recalls directly the garden-like silken bedspread, similarly embroidered with flowers, that had played such an important and metatextually suggestive part in the earlier poem's prologue. That Guillaume also intends this springtime garment as a material of metatextual importance is made overt by the way in which he stresses his own part in conceiving the design of this dress: '[c]'est la robe que *je devisse*' (l. 65 emphasis mine). In naming himself as the chief tailor, or at the very least, the individual in charge of the design, Guillaume implies a conflation of the arts of weaving and sewing as vehicles for pictorial representation, with the literary device of description, but places himself, as a poet, in a position of impressive power – capable as he is of clothing nature. In so doing Guillaume makes evident the artificiality of his work.

A short while later, the prologue continues to describe the sleeping narrator preparing to cross the threshold, depart the town, and to explore the landscape in its finest hour:

Sonjai une nuit que j'estoie.

Lors m'iere avis en mon dormant

Que matins estoit duremant.

De mon lit tantost me levai,

Chauçai moi et mes mains lavai ;

Lors trais une aguille d'argent

D'un aguiller mingnot et gent,

Et pris l'aguille a anfiler.

Hors de vile oi talent d'aller

Pour oir des oisiaus les sons,

Qui chantoient par ces boissons

En icele saison novele.

Cousant mes manches a videle,

Lors m'en vins touz seus esbatant

Et les oisselez escoutant

Qui de chanter mout s'esjoissoient

Et nule foiz ne reposoient (*Le Roman de la Rose*, ll. 86 – 102).

The reader hears of the dressing of nature and the dressing of the narrator in close proximity – implying that the two events are closely related. Whereas in *Floire et Blancheflor*, it is simply contact with a woven and embroidered surface had marked metatextually the entrance of the narrator into the narrative proper, Guillaume pushes the idea much further, actually having the narrator engage in the weaving or lacing himself in an active, hands-on fashion (ll. 98 – 99). Medieval illuminators depicting, or rather glossing, Guillaume's prologue to the *Roman de la Rose* responded to the poet's metaphors of weaving and repeatedly selected this important scene in which the narrator dresses himself and laces his sleeves as one of the key moments in the opening of the poem, recognising this symbolic action as in some sense programmatic – an analogy for the construction of the work as a whole. The five following examples show a particularly keen understanding of Guillaume's text:

Fig. 7. A quadripartite frontispiece depicting a series of moments from the opening of

the *Roman de la Rose* – especially note the synthetic bottom left quadrant in which the

narrator is seen lacing his sleeves in the blossoming *vergier* itself as well as washing

his face in the stream. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscripts, Paris, Français 24392, f. 2 r (Paris, Early Fifteenth Century).

Fig. 8. A frontispiece miniature illustrating the dreaming lover beginning his adventure and discovering the garden of Deduit. The dreaming narrator is clearly shown with a silver needle lacing his sleeves as he leaves the bedroom and enters the *vergier*. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque municipale d'Albi, Manuscripts, Albi, MS. Albi Rochegude 103, f. 1 r (Early Fifteenth Century).

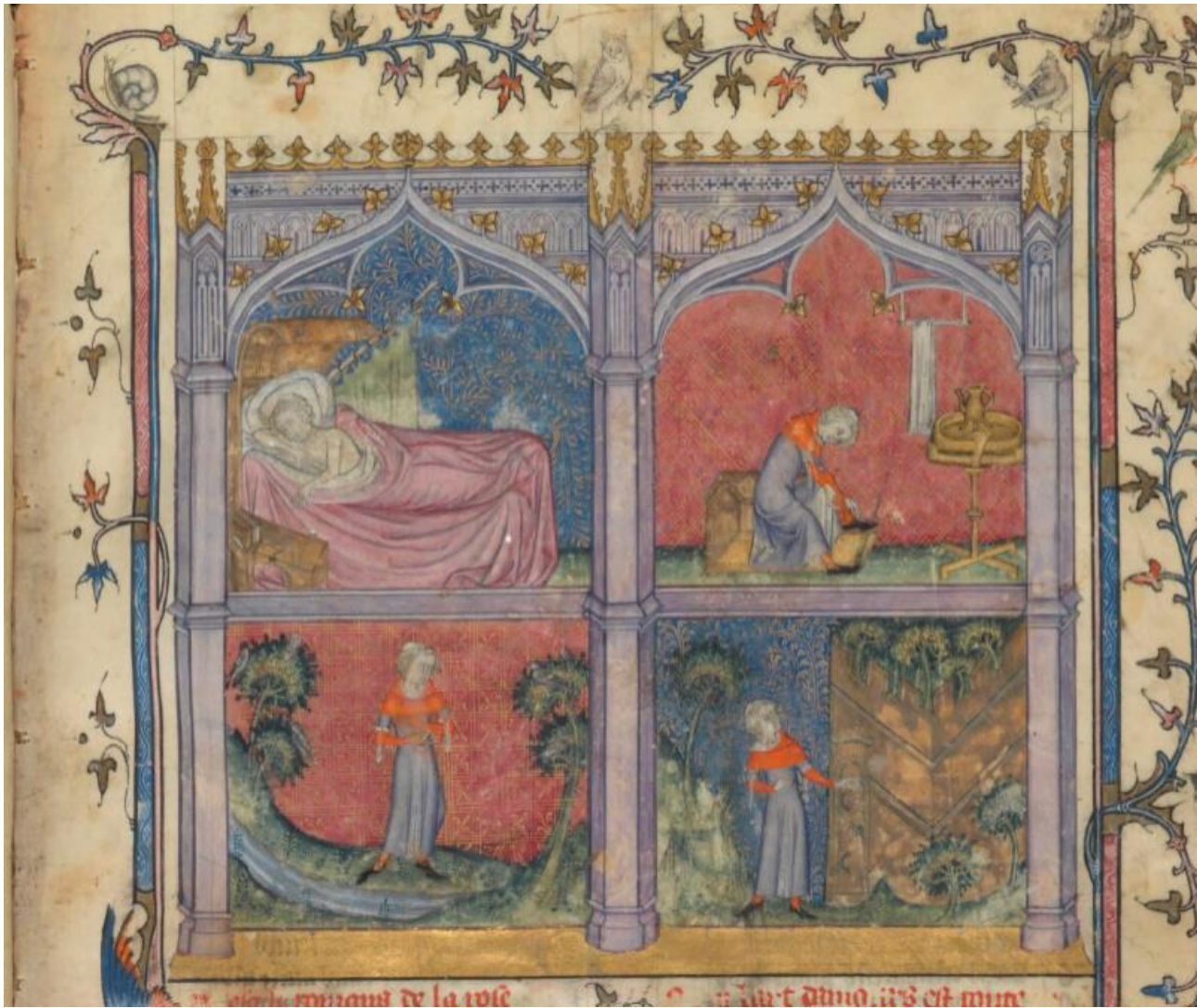Fig. 9. A quadripartite frontispiece miniature, presented within a gothic-style architectural frame, depicting the events that precede the narrator's entrance into Deduit's garden – note the top-right and the bottom-left quadrants illustrating the dreaming narrator dressing and lacing his sleeves. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de Médecine, Montpellier, MS. H 245, f. 2 r (Paris, c. 1475).

Fig. 10. An elaborate synthetic frontispiece image showing the narrator sleeping, dressing, lacing his sleeves, washing his face, and finally interpreting the garden wall. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Manuscripts, Arsenal 3339, f. 1 r (Paris c. 1410 – 1415).

Fig. 11. Detail of the narrator lacing his sleeves surrounded by the *vergier*. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Manuscripts, Arsenal 3339, f. 1r (Paris c. 1410 – 1415).

In MS. H 245, and Français 24392 the narrator is illustrated lacing his sleeves, not in his room as in Guillaume's poem, but rather in the *vergier* itself, demonstrating artists' recognition of the connection between the dressing of the narrator and the dressing of Nature. In MS. Albi Rochegude 103, on the other hand, the action of lacing is positioned at the moment of the narrator's crossing from the frame narrative into the space of the *vergier*, itself a liminal zone. In both cases, the careful alteration of the narrator's sleeve is associated, not merely with a change in his clothing, but with a change in the narrator's environment. One manuscript miniature dating to the late fifteenth century – MS. Douce 195 – treats the scene with especially minute care and precision, even detailing the individual stitches on the narrator's sleeve as he sews. It is difficult not to see also an implied affinity between the dreaming narrator and the illuminator in this particular image.

Fig. 12. Detail of the narrator lacing his sleeves with great precision and concentration. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Manuscripts, Douce 195, f. 1v. (France, Late Fifteenth Century).

Robert d'Orbigny's prologue, set as it is in a bedchamber, and involving a bedspread, can be interpreted as the opening of a dream narrative: contact with the woven surface is made when the narrator *reclines*, and it is never rendered explicit whether or not the two women from whom the tale of Floire and Blancheflor is heard are really present or imagined, or indeed, whether the entire story has been suggested by the decorative bedspread itself, which in its structure and design so overtly stands for the poem as a whole. The fact that the frame narrative of *Floire et Blancheflor* never closes ensures that this point remains highly ambiguous.[15] Guillaume de Lorris,

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[15] Roberta Krueger's argument that the frame closes when Floire begins to tell his tale at court to the Emir is, in my view, mistaken. This is an example of the story-within-a-story or what Gide termed a mise en abime, but does not give closure to the story in any way. Instead of exiting the poem's narrative, the reader enters deeper into the poet's composition (see Krueger 1983: 69).

on the other hand, makes clear from the outset that his narrative is a dream-vision. Claire Barbetti sees the dream-vision text, by its very nature, as 'a text that contemplates composition, both the process of composing and that of apprehending a composition' (Barbetti 2011: 17); by clarifying this point, Guillaume places an even more direct emphasis than Robert on the craft involved in the construction of his poem, but this dream element is here inseparably tied to the ekphrastic aspect that serves a similar function within the earlier work – within the dream-vision, and nowhere more so than in the *Rose*, the compositions composed and apprehended by the narrator and reader alike are consistently encountered through ekphrasis. That Guillaume's *vergier* is, in some sense simultaneously suggested by and suggestive of a piece of elaborately worked cloth, an artistic composition like that which opens Robert's poem, is also made more evident by the weaving imagery and the way in which this is connected with the dream element.

As has been argued in the previous chapters, Robert uses the metaphor of weaving not only in the prologue of *Floire et Blancheflor*, but threads it throughout the entirety of the poem. An important example occurs during the episode of Blancheflor's false tomb, in which Robert describes the ever-blossoming trees that surround the monumental structure as 'garnis' with flowers, and Floire's later entrance into the Emir's tower disguised as a flower provides another significant instance. Guillaume, having already hinted at the dressing of Nature in his prologue, does something similar, most particularly in his extensive ekphrasis of the appearance and apparel of the God of Love (ll. 864 – 900). Like Nature – and indeed, like Floire in the basket – the deity wears a cloak not made of any fabric, but woven together from every type of living flower in existence – a 'robe de floreites' (l. 877) – and other vegetation, and embellished with even more actual flowers: the phrase Guillaume uses to indicate

this embellishment – 'ovree de flors' (l. 883) – quotes directly from Robert d'Orbigny's prologue, where these words appear in the same position within a line describing the bedspread (*Floire et Blancheflor*, l. 41). In addition, Guillaume notes that the God of Love's cloak is (rather fittingly, given Cupid's flighty nature) both covered in and surrounded by birds. As Sylvia Huot has recognised, the garment can and should be interpreted as a representation of a garden of love, both artificial and organic, like that which constitutes the poem's actual dream setting, and at the same time an artefactual representation of the *Roman de la Rose* itself (Huot 2010: see especially pages 11 to 17). In this way, the cloak ought to be compared with the vision of the whole garden that the Amant sees reflected in the Fountain of Narcissus: both surfaces – that of the woven garment and the surface of the water – exhibit illusionistic images that reflect the poetic environment in which they are found and which the Amant must interpret. The false image of the rose on the surface of the fountain will be discussed below, but a brief comparison of two particular artistic representations of the roses that the Amant sees in the fountain will prove revealing here. Manuscript miniatures that treat the rose bushes, or rather their reflections, in an overtly decorative manner, by, for example, portraying them as a repeating pattern or border, show a sophisticated understanding of the poem's weaving imagery. In both Français 19156 and Français 1575, for example, the rose bushes are shown on the side of the miniature as something resembling an ornamental border, the flowers and leaves set against a solid golden ground that excellently emphasises the closeness of the weave and the firmness of the boundary that separates the roses from the Amant.

Fig. 13. The Amant sees a reflection of the rose dense rose thicket hedge in the fountain of Narcissus. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Manuscripts, Français 19156, f. 12. r (Paris, c. 1320).

Fig. 14. The Amant approaches the closely woven rose hedge and attempts to touch a flower. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Manuscripts, Français 1575, f. 12. v (Paris, c. 1300 – 1325).

The *Roman de la Rose* does not merely return to the weaving imagery found in Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, but also seems to derive some of its highly innovative structures from the earlier work. In particular, the iconographical similarity between the perimeter wall of Deduit's garden and the Emir's garden wall does not appear to have been noticed by scholars of the *Rose*: in 1916, seeking to find a Byzantine source for Guillaume's poem, F. M. Warren wrote, quite incorrectly, that '[t]o other striking features of the *Roman de la Rose*, however, such as the park wall with its allegorical features […] the literature of the West had not made any reference. Before Guillaume de Lorris they are not so much as hinted at' (1916: 236). It seems

that Warren was not at all familiar with *Floire et Blancheflor*, or more particularly with the decorative wall that surrounds the Emir's garden in it; since his 1916 article, nonetheless, the wall has as far as scholars are concerned remained, remarkably, a completely novel construction with no antecedents. Whilst Robert had not described the subjects represented on the Emir's wall with any pictorial specificity, instead opting to discuss the mechanical birds that perch on top of it, there are nevertheless obvious and striking parallels between this structure and the wall that encloses the garden of Deduit in Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*. Both are painted in blue and gold, colours which were associated with manuscript illumination – and which therefore give both surfaces an implied informative or interpretative function – and both are fortified, crenelated boundaries designed not merely to delineate or demarcate a division of space but to separate in a more solid, concrete sense. Both walls are explicitly intended to keep in and to keep out. Where Guillaume's garden wall differs from Robert's is in the positioning of the pictures which give it its interpretative purpose and inflections of meaning: the Emir's garden wall, we are told, is painted and gilded on its private interior surface, and nothing is said of its exterior appearance other than what might be assumed from the suggestion that the avian automata are placed between its upright merlons – presumably visible from outside as well as inside the garden. In placing the birds on top of the wall, as distinct markers of this liminal space, Robert ensures that the ambiguous automata can be interpreted both as a form of surveillance – part of the fortification of the site beyond – and as representative of the act of crossing – especially since he has already told the reader that no living creature is able to traverse the moat that also surrounds the perimeter of the garden: no living creature, that is, that is not in possession of wings. I have already argued in chapter two that these avian automata simultaneously work, through a highly

interconnected and intratextual web of closely related artefactual imagery, to refer both to the rapacity and jealousy of the Emir and – in their realism and ability to sing like real birds – to the automata of the two children, Floire and Blancheflor, that sit on top of the latter's false tomb. Importantly, the dual reference both to the Emir and to Floire allows the birds at once to stand, through their mechanical character, for the *Savoir*-inspired, almost robotic love of the Emir, and also, by way of their striking closeness to life and wondrous ability to sing, to embody Floire's natural *Amors*-enthused love. Something that Robert perhaps suggests but does not emphasise is the notion that simply as winged creatures, they can also be interpreted as traditional symbols of the similarly winged God of Love, who, when flying, is likewise supposed to be able to cross any physical boundary. This is an image that is not exploited by Robert, but one that is memorably included in the *Roman de la Rose*.

Guillaume de Lorris' garden wall, unlike Robert d'Orbigny's, is described in a lengthy ekphrasis from the perspective of only of one attempting to penetrate its elusive threshold. It is not the *interior* – which, indeed, is never described – but rather the *exterior* surface that is apparently richly decorated with ten, exceedingly undesirable, apotropaic allegorical figures (ll. 131 – 470). The fact that in Guillaume's case only the outside surface of the wall is elaborated – or at least described as being elaborated – fits within the allegorising poetic scheme of the work: instead of giving us the mysterious 'inside knowledge' of Daire in *Floire et Blancheflor*, who indeed knows far too much about the workings of the Emir's household and the colour of his wallpaper, Guillaume offers the perspective only of one who cannot see beyond the imposing outward facing side of the garden's outer wall. Its interest within the poem is as a boundary for the narrator to cross, and which, once crossed, is not encountered again – as John Dixon Hunt has observed well, the narrative of the *Rose* is 'all about

crossing these boundaries, […] making it past a series of obstacles, learning the next step in a navigation of its spaces' (Dixon Hunt 2016: 35). Guillaume also states with clarity that the wall surrounding Deduit's garden is decorated with text as well as images: the rhyming of 'escritures' and 'pointures' – inscriptions and paintings (ll. 131 – 134) – gives more definite expression to the suggestion, already present in Robert's poem, that there is a connection between each of these interpretative boundaries and the poem as a whole. In a sense, the *Rose*'s sumptuously decorated garden wall is much closer to the floral silken bedspread that appears in the prologue of *Floire et Blancheflor* than it is to the wall surrounding the Emir's garden, since it serves similarly to mark the narrator's entrance into the narrative proper, and into an imaginative allegorical garden that, once entered, can expand indefinitely – in true dream-like fashion, the landscape stretches forth immeasurably and the narrator does not come across the wall on the opposite side of the square enclosure. Once the fictional Guillaume is inside the garden, he moves deeper and deeper into the concentrically arranged spaces but does not leave.

Within this compositional structure, interpretative surfaces are always encountered as an outsider, and therefore always appear on the exterior of a boundary rather than the interior. The disagreeable figures which decorate the outer surface of Deduit's garden wall, significantly, are both anticipatory and apotropaic: they both prefigure and warn the *Rose*'s narrator of the allegorical characters that actually will appear with greater solidity and realism inside the garden. In this way, Guillaume's three-dimensional, architectural structure plays a similar role to Robert's rather two-dimensional embroidered garden surfaces in *Floire et Blancheflor*. These garden surfaces recur throughout this earlier work, but it is in Robert d'Orbigny's prologue that the silken floral bedspread most overtly serves as an artefact with transportative

capabilities, providing an iconographically suitable interpretative site or threshold over which the narrator can enter into the orally transmitted story. The mimetic garden space represented artistically on this surface will subsequently gain greater relief as Robert's narrative reaches its climax in the Emir's Babylonian garden. In Guillaume de Lorris' garden wall, this idea of prefiguration and subsequent fulfilment is explored in greater depth. The narrator is already asleep when he arrives at the garden wall, which will in time likewise give him an entrance into the space beyond – this space is, importantly, not merely narrative space, but a dream landscape that is fundamentally allegorical in nature. Although the garden belongs within this allegorical scheme to Deduit, it also reflects the opening lines of Guillaume's prologue, in which the poet discusses the relationship between the images presented in dreams, and truth – finally affirming that many men have premonitions in dreams, seeing things that are afterwards encountered or experienced in real life:

[m]aintes genz cuident qu'en songe

n'ait se fable non et mençonge.

Mais on puet tel songe songier

qui ne sont mie mençongier,

ainz sont après bien aparant

[...]

Quiconques cuit ne qui que die

Qu'il est folece et musardie

de croire que songes aveigne,

111

qui ce voudra, por fol m'en teigne,

car androit moi ai ge creance

que songe sont senefiance

des biens au genz et des anuiz,

que li plusor songent de nuiz

maintes choses covertement

que l'en voit puis apertement (*Le Roman de la Rose*, ll. 1 – 5 ; 11 – 20).

At the start of this passage, Guillaume establishes a connection between dreams and falsehood, even as he attempts (however seriously) to argue for the potential veracity of dreams, by alternating emphatically between 'songe', 'menconge' , 'songier', and 'mensongier' – all of which are given final positions, rhyming with one another and thereby becoming thoroughly connected as concepts within the work. At the very outset, Guillaume symbolically interlaces lies into his dream, ensuring that his claims regarding the actual truth of the dream to follow are not straightforward. Guillaume might well seem to be, through his choice and positioning of words, undermining the message he means to convey, but any irony that may be detected in the passage is certainly deliberate, as it is in Ovid's famously dubious claim at the start of the *Ars Amatoria* that 'in[…] meo nullum carmine crimen erit' – another instance where the sense of the line is subverted by the wordplay (in this case between 'carmine' and 'crimen': Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1. 34). Whilst acknowledging with an Ovidian flourish the fiction of the dream, Guillaume explicitly expresses nonetheless a belief that dreams are to be interpreted, and in doing so instructs his readers to search for the

hidden meanings within the 'dream' he proceeds to recount. Armand Strubel has noted that the conventional rhyming of 'covertement' and 'apertement' (ll. 19 – 20) represents a traditional opposition – or as David Hult has recognised, an 'oscillation between what is visible and what is hidden' (1986: 116) – between the 'sens caché et l'interprétation dans les textes allégoriques' (Strubel 1992: 43 n. 2). Before this, however, in the memorable susurration of the markedly sibilant phrase 'songe sont senefiance' (l. 16), Guillaume has already emphasised the reader must interpret signs, much as the narrator does in when, shortly afterwards, he encounters the garden wall decorated with symbols. It is only after study of these illusory images – a motif that recurs throughout the poem – that he can finally *inter*pret and *enter* the space beyond. It follows that the garden wall, decorated as it is with illusory images, is partially representative of sleep and dream vision itself, since it presents the narrator with allegorical personifications that he will subsequently meet inside. Since the *Roman de la Rose* as a whole is a dream vision, Guillaume also reaffirms, through the blue and gold manuscript-mimicking garden wall decorated as it is with text and image, that his poem is not merely a vehicle for falsehoods but contains fundamental truths that should not be ignored. As Sylvia Huot has noted, these opening passages 'force us to consider ways that the dreams of lovers, like the lies of poets with which they are so intimately connected, may have an epistemological value as vehicles for knowledge despite their inherent fictionality' (2010: 20 – 21). One might even take the lines quoted above, and substitute 'poetry' for each mention of 'dreams' and the passage would not be too drastically distorted.

In the final episode of Guillaume's part of the *Roman de la Rose*, once the narrator – or Amant, as he is now known – has already crossed a series of thresholds that demarcate and divide the poem's dream landscape, including the garden wall, and

the fountain of Narcissus (this latter boundary will be discussed below), he finds himself, once again, outside an exceedingly imposing walled stone structure that he will not this time be able to cross. In the impossibly short space of time that follows the Amant's successful attempt to kiss the rose – an interval of such brevity as befits, and can in fact only occur in, the context of a dream where any degree of credibility with regard to temporal logic is naturally cast aside – an outraged Jalousie and her immense army of disagreeable allegorical companions speedily manage to rise up in force and erect a monumental fortified castle. This nightmarish construction, a fortress hastily built yet apparently quite impenetrable, has two roles: firstly, it serves as a prison for Bel Accueil, and secondly, it guards the rose bushes, likewise imprisoned within, from any further effronteries from eager lovers wishing to kiss the rose petals or inhale their sweet perfumes. In a manner reminiscent of the equally imposing earlier garden wall, Guillaume dedicates an exceedingly lengthy and impressive ekphrasis to the construction, overall layout, and general appearance of Jalousie's new edifice (ll. 3795 – 3934). The extensiveness of Guillaume's description led Daniel Poirion, in a 1987 article on architecture in medieval narratives, to remark that 'nous sentons ici une autre présence d'auteur, celle de l'admirateur des maîtres d'œuvre et des maçons' (1987: 19). Guillaume, in the guise of the learned poet, even expresses a keen interest in building methods, although the ingredients from which he claims the mortar used to create the tower walls is made – lime and vinegar ('de fort vinaigre et de chauz vive': l. 3839) – is perhaps not to be taken too seriously. A connection can be made here between Guillaume's apparent admiration for architectural design and his immediate concern with the construction and the composition and building of his poem – the ekphrastic treatment of the castle emphasises and exposes the processes by which the final result is reached, and naturally suggests a by now traditional

conceptualisation of his verses in architectural terms – a phenomenon discussed in more detail in the previous chapter with regard to Robert d'Orbigny. In many respects, Jalousie's castle acts as a companion piece to the splendid garden wall appearing at the beginning of the work: this final architectural monument is an equally imposing structure that provides yet another site well suited for metatextual, and indeed intertextual, meditation.

As with the garden wall that marks the entrance to the poem's allegorical space, much as the embroidered bedspread had marked the beginning of the tale of *Floire et Blancheflor*, a similar development of Robert d'Orbigny's artefactual imagery occurs in Jalousie's castle: Guillaume's imposing construction can be seen as having elaborately reconstructed and extended Robert's equally formidable tower of maidens in the Emir's Babylonian garden. Whilst Robert goes to great lengths to describe the impenetrability of the tower due to the innumerable sentries posted in every possible niche (and birds in the crenels), Guillaume goes one step further in elaborately depicting the unyielding walls of the structure. The poet of the *Roman de la Rose* makes clear that the bailey wall of Jalousie's fortress cannot be undermined: he places a great deal of emphasis on the point that the foundations of the enclosing walls descend right down to 'roche dure', to the 'piez des fossez' – commenting quite directly on the impossibility of removing jealousy from a character in which it is fixed:

ainz est fondez seur roche dure.

Li fondemenz tout a mesure

jusqu'au piez des fosez descent

Et vient amont en retraiant,

S'en est l'uevre plus fort assez (*Le Roman de la Rose* : ll. 3807 – 3811).

115

This extraordinarily daunting crenelated quadrangle (ll. 3812 – 3813) encloses the rows of neatly planted rosebushes and behind them, in the centre of the fortress, lies the magnificent tower:

> '[e]nz au mileu de la porprise
>
> font une tor par grant maestrise,
>
> cil qui dou fairent furent mestre.
>
> Nule plus bele ne puet ester,
>
> car ele est granz et lee et haute.
>
> Li murs ne doit pas fere faute
>
> por engin qui sache geter,
>
> car on destrempre le mortier
>
> de fort vinaigre et de chauz vive.
>
> […]
>
> La tour si fu toute reonde:
>
> Il n'ot si riche en tout le monde (*Le Roman de la Rose*, ll. 3831 – 3839; 3843 – 3844).

This passage makes reference to the familiar theme of *engin* (see line 3837) – an idea which so characterised the description of the Emir's tower of maidens – and the fact that Jalousie's castle has been apparently been constructed with the expertise of *all* the builders and craftsmen in the land (ll. 3798 – 3799) with 'grant maestrise' – or

'great skill' (l. 3832), much like Robert's monumental edifice. Guillaume's profusion of superlative phrases in this passage makes abundantly clear that the height, strength, beauty, and richness of the castle cannot be surpassed. The Emir's tower is built from blocks of green marble – a colour often associated with jealousy in the medieval period – which does not only associate the prison-like construction with, but makes it symbolic of, that undesirable trait. In this manner, the tower stands for the character of the Emir himself – always full of suspicion, and so wary of other lords possessing his maidens that he ensures they are heavily guarded in his prison-like tower and once they have served a potential purpose as his bride, he beheads them so that no other man, 'clerc', or 'chevalier' might possess a lady that he has loved (*Floire et Blancheflor*, see especially lines 1945 – 1952). Marie de France, a near contemporary of Robert d'Orbigny, also employed the motif of a green marble wall enclosing a garden and a 'donjun' or tower, in her *lai*, *Guigemar*, and for a similar purpose: in this work, an older husband explicitly characterised as having been devoured by jealousy confines his beautiful young wife in a tower within a garden surrounded by a wall of green stone – its greenness symbolising and providing an exaggerated visual image of his jealousy (*Guigemar* ll. 209 – 224). The walls of Jalousie's castle in the *Roman de la Rose* are not explicitly said to be constructed of green marble blocks as are the Emir's tower and the old husband's 'donjun'-complex, but they are treated with a special attention that implies a degree of agency on their part. Whilst Guillaume gives a lengthy ekphrasis to the negative allegorical figures displayed on the surface of wall that frames Deduit's garden (figures that the narrator will encounter once he has entered the enclosure), the poet actually personifies the wall of Jalousie's tower: '[l]i murs *ne doit pas fere faute* / por engin qui sache geter, / car on destrempre le mortier / de fort vinaigre et de chauz vive' (ll. 3836 – 3839). In a sense, this wall – the very

threshold that the Amant would have to (but cannot) cross in order to reach Bel Accueil – becomes an extension of the allegorical figure of Jalousie herself: it is constructed with *engin*-infused mortar and is just as wary and stereotypically suspicious as one might, given the context, expect it to be – fearing, like Jalousie herself, that in the event of a siege its special cement and stone might not hold as strong as they need to.

In his 2006 chapter on the fortress, Jacek Kowalski has also rightly pointed out the similarity between Jalousie's castle in Guillaume's work and the earlier castles, or prison-like tower structures in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès* (ll. 5489 – 5575), in Marie de France's *Guigemar* (ll. 218 – 227) , and in Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor* (ll. 1811 – 1964): '[l]e châteaux de Jalousie […] est le point de départ et, en même temps, le point d'arrivée de l'évolution d'un motif littéraire' (Kowalski 2006: 81). As a literary motif, Guillaume's portrayal of Jalousie can indeed be considered as a stock character type derived most likely from Ovidian elegy – the possessive *vir* who locks up his lady and allows her no visitors. A particularly famous and revealing articulation of this motif occurs with the *durus vir* of Ovid's *Amores* 3. 4. For his part, the fictionalised Guillaume himself is, when confronted with the castle, derived from another ancient trope – that of the *paraclausithyron* or 'lament beside a door': Guillaume combines the traditional image of the miserable *exclusus amator* 'the locked out lover' (see especially lines 3989 to 4000) with the (also traditional) elegiac notion of the *militia amoris* or 'warfare of love': the castle, after all, implies a siege, even if such an event will in fact not come to pass in Guillaume de Lorris' poem.

The flower-like maidens that are enclosed in the Emir's tower in Robert d'Orbigny's poem become the actual rosebushes incarcerated in Guillaume's structure, although in Jalousie's prison the roses are confined behind the outer wall and Bel Accueil is held in the tower itself. The Amant's beloved flower, however, is

a great deal more inaccessible than Blancheflor is for Floire in the Emir's heavily guarded tower. Even if the narrator were able to penetrate the fortified stone walls and obtain the rose, there is quite simply no way he would be graciously received with 'a pleasant welcome' as Bel Accueil himself is imprisoned even deeper than the flower. In fact it is worth making the comparison between Bel Accueil and the figure of the gatekeeper in Robert's poem: like Floire in the earlier work, the Amant has to reach, placate, befriend, and pass the gatekeeper before he has any hope of being reunited with his beloved rose.

In a sense, the roses have been enclosed in yet another walled 'garden' (ll. 3847 –3850); when confronted with the immense curtain wall of the castle, the Amant is yet again the paraclausithyronic *exclusus amator* locked outside another stone garden wall whose surface must be interpreted before there is any hope of crossing the threshold. The miniature of the castle of Jalousie that follows depicts the fortress as a kind of garden – the curtain walls surround blue flowers among grass. The turrets on the bailey wall are – like the earlier garden wall – described as being elaborately carved: [l]es torneles sont lez a lez, / qui sont richement entaillies' (ll. 3816 – 3817) but these images seem not to provide the same resourceful gloss as the painted and sculpted figures did on the first wall. The Amant is invited once again to interpret the surface of the threshold, but as the reader finds out some lines later this interpreting yields no success: he finds no point of access and he dares not try ('[m]ar vi les murs et les fossez / que je n'os passer, ne ne puis' (ll. 3990 – 3991)). Guillaume makes clear that this stone wall is an ultimate boundary and the Amant is now alone, resourceless and with no all hope of finding the rose:

quant il me menbre de la perte

qui est si granz et si aperte.

Si ai paor et desconfort,

qui me donront, ce cuit, la mort.

[…]

Je ne sai or comment il vait,

mes durement sui esmaiez

que entroblié ne m'aiez.

Si en ai duel et desconfort:

james n'iert riens qui me confort

se je per vostre bienvoillance,

que je n'ai mes aillors fiance (*Le Roman de la Rose*, ll. 4037 – 4040 ; 4050 – 4056).

The Amant's displeasure could not be made more apparent in these lines: Guillaume has him repeat his lack of 'confort' three times, associating it with fear, pain, and, in rhyming position, with 'mort'. This apparently overdramatic allusion to death might seem familiar. The dreamer's desperate and dramatic plaint is highly reminiscent of Floire's suicidal despair before Blancheflor's false tomb in Robert d'Orbigny's poem and the young boy's wish to cross the threshold into the tomb in order to join with his beloved in the gardens of the *Champs Fleuri*. The dreaming narrator has already managed – albeit with some difficulty – to enter into Deduit's garden, but now, faced

with this new garden structure surrounded by seemingly impenetrable walls and ruled by a rather unforgiving Jalousie, he is at a loss.

Fig. 15. The castle of Jalousie. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, The British Library, London, Manuscripts, MS Egerton 1069, f. 29. v (Paris, c. 1400).

That the castle of Jalousie might be considered as a kind of garden space is nowhere better suggested than in manuscript representations of the castle of love. Although the marginal illustration included below of the besieged castle of love is taken from the Luttrell Psalter (commissioned in the early fourteenth century) rather than from a manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose*, it might well be considered a depiction of Jalousie's castle – and in fact numerous scholars including Pamela Porter (2003) in her monograph on courtly love in medieval manuscripts have remarked on the close correspondence between the two castles, textual and visual. The image of

ladies hurling what seems to be a large number of deadly red flowers over the castle walls at the knights rampaging below is strikingly reminiscent of Guillaume's vividly described image of the blossoming rosebushes confined behind the square, turreted castle wall made of cut stone. The marginal illustration of the castle is positioned in such a manner that it forms the lower right-hand part of the border, connecting and merging with the decorative masses of foliate shapes that join together to enclose the text on this folio. importantly, the linkage between the two structures, both serving to contain and frame, can be interpreted in this case as implying an analogous relationship between the text and the flowers and flower-like maidens, all of which are in some sense walled-in or enclosed in elaborate constructs.

Fig. 16. A folio from the Luttrell Psalter depicting the siege of the castle of love. Note that the castle itself forms part of the manuscript border. Image taken from: *The Luttrell Psalter*, The British Library, London, Manuscripts, Add MS 42130, f. 75v. (England, North Lincolnshire, c. 1325 – 1340).

Fig. 17. Detail of the Castle of Love under siege. Image taken from: *The Luttrell Psalter*, The British Library, London, Manuscripts, Add MS 42130, f. 75v. (England, North Lincolnshire, c. 1325 – 1340).

To return to the *Roman de la Rose* itself, the two following manuscript miniatures by the mid-fifteenth century Parisian workshop of Maître François show an unusually innovative interpretation of Guillaume's new enclosed garden structure and the various boundaries from which it is composed:

Fig. 18. The rapid construction of Jalousie's castle taking place under the close supervision of Jalousie herself. Note the new outer wall that boldly bisects the garden space. Image taken from, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Philip S. Collins Collection, Philadelphia, PMA 1945 – 65 – 3, f. 30r. (Paris, Mid fifteenth century).

Fig. 19. A miniature depicting a plan of Jalousie's fortress that closely reproduces Guillaume's description in paint. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*,

Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Philip S. Collins Collection, Philadelphia, PMA 1945 – 65 – 3, f. 30v. (Paris, Middle of the fifteenth century).

The novel way in which this fifteenth-century illuminator has depicted the rosebushes growing on trellising around the tower imprisoning Bel Accueil emphasises in visual terms the concentricity of the arrangement of the various structures that make up the whole complex. It simplifies with some elegance the slightly different idea expressed by Guillaume that they are planted in neat rows around the tower, but, fittingly, these miniatures also bring the flowers into direct contact with the external surface of the tower, decorating its surface as mural paintings or organic relief sculpture would, or indeed, embroidery on a cloth – they are woven around the very fabric of the stone wall itself. The fact that these roses – the objects that the Amant desires more than anything – are positioned flush against the surface of the wall heightens the impression that this construction is not just an intratextual reference to, but a pendant to the episode depicting Deduit's garden wall. The closely intertwined arrangement of the different artefactual surfaces in this miniature makes a clear indication that the castle, the centre of the poem's ever-changing concentric dream landscape is in some sense equivalent to the outer garden wall – the structure furthest from the centre: the roses occupy the same position on the wall of the tower as the painted and sculpted figures had on Deduit's garden wall, but instead of cautioning the Amant to stay away in the same manner that the *apotropaic* figures had there, offering their warnings of the dream landscape's potential for nightmarish twists and turns, the roses attract the narrator and draw him in, beautifying the unwelcoming façade of the fortified tower and promising an unobtainable fulfilment. The illuminator's innovation in the treatment of this scene is astute: by actually weaving the roses like a sleeve around the tower of Jalousie, in which Bel Accueil is being held

prisoner, the miniature gives closure to the theme of weaving that is so emphasised at the start of the poem. As in Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, where the two lovers are reunited on a bedspread that recalls the one in the frame narrative, the forbidding tower becomes, in spite of itself, a site of fulfilment for the poet and the reader – though not in this case for the narrator, whose own threading has been outdone by that of Jalousie. The Amant has lost control of his dream.

Jalousie's castle is a drastic escalation and expansion of the various architectural garden structures that thus far have both shaped and given solid form to Guillaume de Lorris' allegory. The architecture of the poem changes here much more rapidly than the dreaming narrator can contend with or fully comprehend: the landscape is redeveloped, reshaped, and extended with the swiftness that one would naturally expect from a dream poem, yet the narrator is daunted and, as things are left by Guillaume, even defeated by the fast pace of these new developments. The following sixteenth-century manuscript miniature by the Master of Girard Acarie provides a particularly revealing interpretation of Deduit's garden as a space capable of endless imaginative expansion. Here, the garden is transformed into a vast and varied landscape, featuring rolling hills and mountain ranges that extend to the horizon.

Fig. 20. Jalousie's castle and the expansive dream landscape beyond. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, MS Morgan 948, f. 41v. (Rouen, c. 1520 – 1525).

Jacek Kowalski has attempted to explain why Jalousie's castle was such an effective and influential piece of literary architecture: it 'n'est pas seulement le reflet d'un archetype: c'est une image puissante dont l'action, grâce à l'architecture, est plus efficace que celle des autres images' (Kowalski 2006: 85). Whilst the fountain of Narcissus may lie at the symbolic centre of the poem – providing a crucial turning point in which the fictionalised Guillaume first catches sight of the rose (reflected in its waters) – the castle brings the narrative to a climactic halt. Jalousie's fortress forms a different sort of concentric centre to the fountain: in its imprisonment of Bel Accueil

129

and removal of the roses the narrator desires, it presents a literal moving of the goal posts, causing the Amant, in a sense, to lose his sense of direction. While the goal, as it were, is still visible, the Amant is not able to reach or pass through this centre as he has with the inspiring but illusory vision in the fountain.

The fact that Guillaume's admiration for the art of the architect seems to imply a conceptualisation of his own poem in architectural terms – not dissimilar to the way in which Robert d'Orbigny dramatises the process of poetic composition through the employment of extensive ekphrastic descriptions of architectural and artistic structures – has already been noted above. In Guillaume de Lorris' poem, as in Robert's, the castle does not form an exit back into the surrounding *vergier* of the frame narrative. The sleeper does not wake up. Instead, the fortress presents an insurmountable obstacle that simultaneously brings to a bleak and rather stark end the journey of the Amant and the progress of the poem.

Unlike the castle of Jalousie, which is both a *climactic* centre and the actual centre of Deduit's garden after some exceedingly swift construction work has seen to the re-landscaping of the poem's imaginative space, the fountain episode forms the symbolic centre of the poem itself, not least because its description occurs roughly at the midpoint of the work (ll. 1422 – 1619). A certain amount of critical attention (see especially Alan Gunn 1952, Sylvia Huot 2010, and David Hult 1986) has rightly been directed towards this fountain and the importance of its positioning within Guillaume de Lorris' poetic scheme has not gone unnoticed: as Claire Nouvet puts it, the *Roman de la Rose* 'performs a provocative gesture when it decides to graft the pool of Narcissus at the very center of its own oneiric space' (Nouvet 2000 b: 3). At this pivotal point in the poem, the *fontaine d'amors* – and, most particularly, two marvellous crystals which lie at the bottom of it – offer a telescopic view of the

130

extended dream landscape: crucially, the fountain provides the Amant with his first sight of the rose, which is reflected on the still surface of the water. The fountain itself is portal-like, offering a view not merely of that which is immediately above it, but a magical microcosmic image of the entire garden. Once again, the dreaming narrator is required to study[16] and interpret this surface and the vision he sees there before he is able to advance – in this respect the fountain works in a similar way to the garden wall encountered at the outset. The transition from a dream landscape to a *reflected* dream landscape adds another symbolic dimension to the discourse of illusion already explored in the earlier structure and in the poem's prologue, which is so concerned with truth and falsehood. The poem's already phantasmagorical mode sinks deeper, in this episode, into the subject of illusion. The fountain is arguably the most overtly illusionistic artefact in the garden, offering as it does not the desired object itself but an image or likeness of the object, misleading in its nearness to life and inevitably a source of frustration for the Amant. Jean Frappier has helpfully pointed out, in a 1959 article on the use of the mirror motif and the myth of Narcissus in Guillaume de Lorris' work, the etymological connection between the words for 'shadow' and 'reflection' in both Old French and in Latin (Frappier 1959: 138); it is worth adding that in the myth as it is found in Ovid, a connection is also made with the reflection of sound via Narcissus' rejection of Echo's love shortly before his discovery of the pool – the echo being, like the reflection, a phenomenon by which the boy is deceived. Both a reflection and a shadow retain the shape of an object – and are seen within Guillaume's poem as comparable in some sense to mimetic representation of an artistic kind, not unlike those already encountered within the poem. The fountain displays a

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[16] As Erich Köhler put it, the fountain is a 'source de la connaissance' – in this case, a source of knowledge about love (1963: 93).

representation of the rose on its surface, though the vision the narrator perceives is highly deceptive – obviously he cannot simply pass through the surface of the water and continue on his quest. Claire Nouvet's view of the fountain in the *Rose* as a site stripped 'of all negative connotations' and a 'source of life' cannot be accepted here (Nouvet 2000 b: 3). Guillaume makes clear, through references to Narcissus, and the fact that the fountain is repeatedly described as perilous (see especially lines 1510 – 1519; 1568 – 1579 and 1604 – 1611), that to pursue the reflected object might be considered a kind of death – a rejection of life and love in favour of the mere semblance of these things. During a lengthy ekphrasis of the surface of the water and the magical crystals below, Guillaume explicitly describes the *reflective* surface of these precious stones that rest at the bottom of the fountain as 'li mireors perilleus' (l. 1568), and as the Amant now realises, this mirror has the potential to ensnare him like other lovers before him by offering an enticing view of the unattainable – 'cil mireors, car li plus saive, / li plus preu, li plus afaitie / i sont *tost* pris et agaitie' (ll. 1577 – 1579, emphasis mine). In telling the tale of Narcissus, Guillaume can be seen as reflecting or echoing Ovid's well known treatment of the myth, but his employment of the fountain and the emphasis placed on it can be interpreted also as an allusion to *Floire et Blancheflor*. The way in which Guillaume de Lorris' *fontaine d'amors* presents a 'false' image may be compared with the very similar manner in which Robert d'Orbigny presents the elaborate tomb of Blancheflor; this too is series of interpretative surfaces that has as its centre a false image of the two young lovers, Floire and Blancheflor, exchanging flowers. One might consider the automata, the artistic representations of Floire and Blancheflor on top of the tomb, as reflections of the two young protagonists: in fact, the whole monument can be regarded as a shadow, or a reflection even, of a living Blancheflor. Both monuments bear misleading images

and inscriptions to be interpreted, and both are exceedingly perilous for the beholder. Guillaume's fountain bears an inscription explaining that this is the site where the handsome Narcissus died: 'si ot dedanz la pierre escrite / ou bort amont lettre petite / qui devisoient qu'anqui desus / se mori li biaus narcisus' (ll. 1432 – 1435). The funereal tone and style of this inscription, sombrely carved into the stone structure, suggests not so much the untouched spring of Ovid's myth, set within an equally untouched *locus amoenus*, but suggests an epitaph – although Guillaume playfully suggests that Nature has constructed the fountain just so, with its marble basin, epitaph and all, apparently the product of no artistic design or intervention (ll. 1429 – 1435). Guillaume transforms the pool from the mere site of Narcissus' death (and, most pertinently, his transformation into a flower) into a memorial: the poet's use of 'anqui desus' makes it clear that, like a place of interment such as a tomb, the structure – which evidently postdates Narcissus' demise – is dedicated to keeping the boy's memory alive, whilst also serving as a disturbing *memento mori* for the Amant, who must not follow the example of the boy who fell in love with himself. On this point David Hult has noted that this is the first moment in the *Rose* where Guillaume's 'first-person retrospective narration' changes to the third person, implying clear distinction between 'Narcissus as an *exemplum* and the other allegorical figures (1986: 268). Unlike Blancheflor's tomb in Robert's poem, the *fontaine* both embodies the cause of Narcissus' death and acts as a monument to his memory – a monument, however, that conveys an important lesson. This is not so different from the tomb in *Floire et Blancheflor*. The *Rose*'s dreaming narrator is required to interpret the structure and to learn from it before he can continue his journey. Guillaume informs the reader that Narcissus died because he fell in love with his own reflection but could not grasp what he saw, and therefore could not accomplish his desire. As has been discussed in

chapter two, Floire, when confronted by the sight of Blancheflor's false tomb, is driven to attempt suicide with his stylus, and in doing so hopes to fulfil his desire to cross over the threshold into the next life; to enter both the tomb and the *Champ Fleuri* where he mistakenly believes he will be reunited with Blancheflor and the two can pick flowers together. Guillaume's Fountain of Narcissus presents Ovid's myth about the boy who is transformed into a flower in a manner that suggests a comparison with Floire and the tomb episode. Both the tomb and the fountain are sites of memory, portal-like structures whose misleading surfaces require careful interpretation.

In the *Roman de la Rose*, Nouvet notes that prior to entering the garden of Deduit, the Amant encounters and washes his face in a stream whose water 'cites the water of Narcissus' pool; her suitably perceptive interpretation of this connection between the two episodes makes the washing action an indication 'at the very threshold of the garden that the Lover is looking "per", through the deceptively clear allegorical mirror of the pool' (Nouvet 2000 a: 368 n. 21). Following this early symbolic encounter with the stream, the Amant's later engagement with the surface of the fountain can likewise be figured as a kind of entrance, the structure itself being yet another portal-like artefact through which he must pass figuratively without becoming submerged in a literal sense.

As Guillaume's castle of Jalousie reflects in some measure the Emir's tower of maidens in *Floire et Blancheflor*, which can be seen as a prototype for it, the fountain is also a structure which appears in both works in close proximity to a tree that is in some way exceptional. Whilst Robert's fountain lies under the Emir's *arbre d'amours*, Guillaume places his structure under an exceptionally tall pine tree (ll. 1424 – 1428). William Calin compares Guillaume's outstanding tree with other single trees to be found in Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit dou Vergier*, *Le Roman de la Poire*, *La Messe*

des Oiseaux, and *Le Dit de l'Arbre royal* (1974: 30). In some sense, Guillaume de Lorris seems to acknowledge the comprehensiveness and refinement of Robert's treatment of the tree in *Floire et Blancheflor* that together with the fountain forms the artefactual centre piece of the poem, and instead directs the greater part of his attention to the fountain under it. As Erich Köhler has observed, '[d]ans le Roman de la Rose, l'accent principal est mis sur la source qui, maintenant, s'appelle Fontaine d'Amour, sous l'influence sans doute, de cette source de la connaissance qu'offrait au poète le mythe de Narcisse. L'arbre, bien que dépourvu de signification, n'a cependant pas disparu tout à fait. La fontaine est abritée par un pin que Guillaume de Lorris a même introduit dans son résumé du récit d'Ovide, récit qui, lui, ne mentionnait pas d'arbre' (Köhler 1963 : 93). Whilst the site of Guillaume's fountain of Narcissus and pine tree truly does recall the site of the Emir's garden in Robert's poem, the site functions differently within the *Roman de la Rose* and the structure itself can be interpreted as having a much greater similarity with an earlier episode from Robert's poem – that of the tomb.

Just as the highly ekphrastic episode of Blancheflor's false tomb is a passage of extreme metatextual importance for Robert's *Floire et Blancheflor*, the centrally placed episode of the fountain of Narcissus is a site of paramount metapoetic significance for Guillaume de Lorris' part of the *Roman de la Rose*. Whilst the rose might generally be regarded as the principal image of the romance, a motif that on its own stands for the work as a whole, it is rather the fountain, with its *reflection* or illusionistic representation of the rose, that more truly stands for the poem, symbolising both its status as a dream narrative and a work of art. This has indeed been recognised by *Rose* scholars: David Hult has argued that 'Guillaume attempts', with the fountain and the myth with which it is associated, 'to show us that the creation

of poetry occurs at a supreme moment of Narcissism, […] at a juncture where fictional projection necessarily adumbrates but never totally replicates a transcendent meaning – the deceptive surface of fiction whose overwhelming power to fascinate is matched only by its very fragility' (1986: 290 – 91). Whether or not a demonstration of the necessity of 'Narcissism' for the creation of poetry was Guillaume's aim (the sense in which the term is meant ought perhaps to be defined more clearly), the emphasis placed upon the fountain's misleading reflection certainly does echo the parallel constructed at the start of the poem between dreams, poetry, and the potential value of falsehood. The entire garden is contained within the fountain's reflective (and deceptive) surface, just as it is within the dream that constitutes the poem. The rose or rosebush is nonetheless the reflective focus of the metapoetic structure, since it is singled out among everything else in the garden: '[o]u mireor entre mille choses / quenui rosiers chargez de roses' (ll. 1612 - 1613).

Guillaume's centrally placed fountain is arguably the most significant of the *Rose*'s pieces of garden architecture; and to this already spectacular structure – a memorial to Narcissus – the poet adds two marvellous, highly reflective crystals:

[o]u fonz de la fontaine aval

avoit .ij. pierres de cristal,

qu'a grant entente remiré.

Mes une chose vos diré,

qu'a mervoilles, ce cuit, tandroiz

maintenant que vos l'entendroiz :

quant li solaus qui tout aguete,

ses rais en la fontaine gete,

et la clartez aval descent,

lors perent colors plus de .c.

ou cristal qui par le soleil

devient jaunes, ynde, vermeil (*Roman de la Rose*, ll. 1534 – 1545).

These two exceedingly powerful, mystical crystals that reflect more than a hundred colours specifically recall, and once again point readers back to, Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor* and particularly to the Euphrates fed fountain in the Emir's garden that exhibits every sort of precious gemstone below the surface of the water – so many gemstones appear in the fountain that Daire cannot recall them all. One manuscript of the *Rose* seems to have taken Guillaume at his word when he describes that 'colors plus de .c.' appear in the fountain – choosing to depict, not two all-powerful crystals but several stones of various colours.

Fig. 21. The dreaming narrator looks into the fountain and sees multicoloured crystals. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Selden Supra 57, f. 12. v (Paris, c. 1350).

This fourteenth century interpretation of the crystals in the fountain does, however, suggest a certain familiarity with the fountain in Robert d'Orbigny's text. The similarity between both fountains in the two works is another shared element that has not gone unnoticed by scholars working on the *Rose*: in his perceptive 1963 article on Guillaume de Lorris' fountain of Narcissus as a fountain of knowledge,[17] Erich Köhler pointed out that '[j]e n'en appelle qu'a l'oeuvre qui, sous cet aspect, est la plus proche du Roman de la Rose' (1963 : 92). In a sense, Guillaume can be seen as condensing Robert's array of multicoloured stones into two magical crystals that reflect many colours when hit by the sun's rays. However, placed as they are at the bottom of what

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[17] Compare David Hult 1986: 266.

really ought to be called something like the "Narcissus memorial fountain", Guillaume's iridescent crystals do not only reference Robert's magnificent fountain, but more precisely they recall the vast number of multicoloured precious gemstones that adorn the surface of Blancheflor's false tomb. In the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume combines and weaves together the motifs of both the Emir's fountain and the Blancheflor's false tomb in Robert d'Orbigny's twelfth-century poem to create a spectacular single artefact that has extreme metatextual and intertextual significance at this pivotal point in the poem.

In conclusion, the ways in which Guillaume de Lorris conceptualises and finds means of figuring his allegorical dream poem through encounters with artefactual structures such as the outer garden wall, the castle of Jalousie, and, most significantly, through the centrally placed fountain of Narcissus, echoes the analogous manner in which Robert d'Orbigny had already employed artefacts of metatextual significance within *Floire et Blancheflor* – artefacts which might be considered not merely as corresponding in some sense with those in the later work, but as prototypical constructions whose distinctive iconography and functions are deliberately reflected within the *Roman de la Rose*. These structures, which repeatedly act as boundaries to the Amant's progress that must be read and interpreted successfully before the narrative can advance, both develop the artefactual imagery which forms such a significant part of Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, and absorbs it into Guillaume's new and innovative allegorical framework. This chapter has sought to highlight a number of specific similarities between some of these most influential and enduring images in Guillaume de Lorris' first part of the *Roman de la Rose* and those artefacts which form the real subject of *Floire et Blancheflor*. Guillaume reforms and refashions a number of the artefacts to which Robert had already given extensive

ekphrastic treatment, including the floral silken bedspread that appears in the prologue of Robert's poem and plays such a fundamental role for the entirety of the work that follows it, the monumental structures of Blancheflor's false tomb, the Emir's tower of maidens, and the fountain fed by waters from the Euphrates, as well as the decorated wall that encloses the Babylonian garden.

By adapting these structures for his own poem, Guillaume simultaneously produces a work that is richer in intertextual resonances than is often recognised and provides new readings of Robert d'Orbigny's poem: in the mutual reflection that is produced through Guillaume's allusions, both poem's meditations upon art, nature, and love acquire a greater depth of meaning that stems directly from the interpretative light that each is capable of casting on – or even illuminating the way through – the other's surface.

The enormous influence of the *Roman de la Rose* on later literature is well documented in scholarship yet the impact of works such as *Floire et Blancheflor*, a poem that introduces so many of the images that Guillaume de Lorris would later employ so memorably, remains almost untouched by modern critical attention which has yet to trouble, let alone explore the colourful gems that lurk beneath, the still surface of this extraordinary literary spring. The following chapter aims to bring these two works together within the context of *Il Filocolo*, Giovanni Boccaccio's fourteenth-century reworking of Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*: this work also has at its centre a fountain of great significance.

Chapter Four:

Boccaccio at the Fountain: Poetic Reflection and Refashioning in *Il Filocolo*

In modern scholarly criticism of the various versions of the story of *Floire et Blancheflor*, there has often been a tendency to overlook the earliest iterations of the tale in the misguided belief that later adaptations present a more developed or advanced formulation of the tale. Indeed, the general consensus has for many years been more or less that the Old French aristocratic poem of Robert d'Orbigny contained only the seeds of a literary growth that would only truly flower and bear fruit in Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*. The *Filocolo*, composed prior to the *Decamerone*, despite the fact that it is commonly regarded itself as only a minor work, is the most famous adaptation of the story of *Floire et Blancheflor*, constructed from relatively mysterious sources. Victoria Kirkham has written rather too confidently – perhaps inadvisably taking Boccaccio at his word – that the author 'was working with a rambling, episodic popular romance' (2001: 196) – a 'favolosi parlari degli ignoranti' (*Filoc*. 1, p. 7). Roberta Morosini has likewise argued that Boccaccio's chief aim in composing the *Filocolo* was to 'compensate for a defect' – this being the fanciful chatter that constituted his source material (2006: 277). Another (considerably shorter) Italian adaptation of the story, roughly contemporary with Boccaccio's version, fits this description fairly well, though the idea that it was a direct source must be treated with some caution. Ironically, the *Filocolo* has long been regarded by critics itself as a rambling and episodic piece of work, lacking in unity and in numerous respects confused, a viewpoint that has only seen revision in relatively recent years thanks in no small part to the efforts of Patricia Grieve and Kirkham herself. Aside from the aforementioned *Il cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore*, the two Old French versions, 'popular' and 'aristocratic', have been put forward as

possible sources though not explored in sufficient depth. More recently, Patricia Grieve has sought to prove that Boccaccio was drawing, most of all, upon a Spanish version, and this hypothesis has received support from Kirkham, though not all scholars interested in the legend (Grieve 1997; Kirkham 2001: 204 n. 4). Particularly relevant to the present discussion is Kirkham's work on the compositional structures used by Boccaccio, which she refers to as 'typically symmetrical or "Gothic" arrangements around a center' (Kirkham 2001: viii). This idea can be augmented by a greater focus on the physical structures and spaces that appear within the work: it is a shame that, in scholarship on the *Filocolo*, so little interest has previously been shown towards the subject of artefactuality, even where it is used ingeniously as an almost telescopic means of extending the work's concentricity into new but ever more distant centres. Compared with the richly ekphrastic poem of Robert d'Orbigny, descriptive passages in the *Filocolo* are restrained. Boccaccio was undoubtedly less interested in artefactuality for its own sake than Robert, and this is accordingly manifested in the treatment given in the *Filocolo* to some of the artefacts upon which the most attention is lavished in the twelfth-century work. Whilst the Emir's tower, for instance, is fleshed out with a relatively extensive description, the false tomb of Blancheflor that acts in many respects as its parallel or companion within Robert's poem is, as Patricia Grieve puts it, 'barely described in the *Filocolo*' (1997: 63), though numerous specific resonances of its distinctive iconography and arrangement are nonetheless subsumed into the description of the *amiraglio*'s tower, and preserved most particularly in the elaborate picture presented of Biancofiore's bedroom: here, surrounding the bed instead of a tomb, we do in fact find the familiar array of coloured semi-precious stones, along with inscriptions, four fruit-bearing trees, and singing birds, although the impression created is one chiefly of exoticism

rather than of self-reflexive artefactuality (*Filoc*, 4. pp. 381 – 382). Boccaccio's

employment of natural imagery and artefacts retains a sense of continuity and

sophistication that has led Grieve to claim, even if not quite convincingly, that '*Il

Filocolo* […] develops the most complex system of garden imagery' (1997: 135) of

all versions of the tale. The garden still undeniably remains a site of extreme

importance within the scheme of the work, being repeatedly the location for dialogue

of a simultaneously metatextual and intertextual nature. The respective garden

settings associated with Montorio, Alexandria, and Naples form the greater part of

the following discussion, which attempts to demonstrate some of the ways in which

Filocolo makes reference to and re-imagines some of the most exciting and vivid

pieces of natural imagery that occur in Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor* and

in Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*. Setting the works in dialogue with each

other should cast a brighter interpretative light on each. This is, moreover, an

excellent opportunity to look at and analyse some more artefactual responses to the

tale of *Floire et Blancheflor*, in the form of illuminated manuscripts of Boccaccio's

Filocolo. Work by a series of critics, including Martha Dana Rust, Michael Camille,

Sylvia Huot, John Fleming, Mary Carruthers, Laura Kendrick, Kathryn Smith, Helen

Solterer, and Jonathan Alexander, has sought to show that manuscript artists often,

as Rust puts it, 'exploited the tension between word and image to brilliant effect,

conveying meanings that do not properly reside in either text or image alone'

(2007:17): rather, meaning is created by a kind of melange of the two. Text and

image are artfully combined in the following miniature, taken from a Sienese

manuscript and selected here for its special relevance to the themes of this chapter;

this image is unique within the manuscript in which it appears, and therefore stands

for the entirety of the *Filocolo*: the fact that Florio and Biancofiore are shown

standing together in a garden indicates the importance of this motif within the work and more than justifies the focus here given to garden spaces within the text.

Fig. 22. A Sienese miniature depicting Florio and Biancofiore together in a verdant garden. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, MS. Chig. L. VI. 223, f. 1 r. (Siena, c. 1450).

In order to explore Boccaccio's references to romance literature, the author's own claims regarding his hopes for the *Filocolo* (and by extension for himself) make an appropriate place to begin, not least because these might be seen as having driven some scholars astray. Before proceeding to Filocolo's exploitation of the motif of the garden, which is the principal concern of this chapter, it will prove helpful to address a few points concerning the scholarship on Boccaccio's relative dependence on, or independence from, earlier French prototypes. Book I opens with a frame narrative that introduces an immediate motivation for the composition of the work: in the convent of Sant'Arcangelo a Baiano, a character named Maria laments that the story of Prince Florio lives on only in the 'fabulosi parlari degli ignoranti', as opposed to the words of a poet, and asks Boccaccio himself to correct this with 'una picciola

libretto volgarmente parlando' (*Filoc*. 1, p. 7). Boccaccio agrees, and despite

composing his version in prose, continually refers to his 'versi' and boldly ranks

himself among Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Ovid, and Dante, the writers 'among whom',

in Kirkham's interpretation, 'he eventually hopes to be ranked as a great poet' (2001:

190). Boccaccio's use in particular of the word 'versi' to refer to the *Filocolo* has

prompted discussion; Roberta Morosini asks '[w]hy would Boccaccio use the word

verses for a work in prose[?]' (2006: 278) – as we shall see, the *Filocolo* is shot

through with references to poetic glory even though it is otherwise regarded as

innovative precisely because of its status as the first prose romance. The use of this

word is conspicuous. Despite Boccaccio's disingenuously modest decision to place

his vernacular prose a short distance behind the work of the best-known poets of

Roman antiquity, the *Filocolo* repeatedly makes manifest its numerous debts to

Romance literature. One of these debts is apparent in the very title of the work itself,

which undoubtedly constitutes one of the most noticeable alterations Boccaccio

made to his source material: although it may seem on the surface that the title marks

a break with the romance tradition underlying its composition, it has rightly been

observed that Florio's adoption of a new name at the end of Book III (just as the

young prince and his companions are about to depart on their quest for Biancofiore),

that explains and encapsulates something of the nature of his journey – that is, the

assumed name of Filocolo, is most likely an inheritance from Chrétien de Troyes that

has no real parallel in ancient epic poetry (Kirkham 2001: 178 n. 42). This extremely

significant innovation, which must be regarded as having much more import than if

it were only indicative of a simple redefinition of the protagonist's character and

status, because it impacts at the same time upon the renaming of the work as a whole

and alludes directly to the romance tradition and to earlier French literature. While

there has been an understandable tendency among modern scholars to give in to the temptation to pursue Boccaccio's programmatic posturing when it comes to Dante and the poets of the ancient world, this need not be done at the expense of the other (supposedly less refined or less dignified) sources at his disposal. The reference to *fabulosi parlari degli ignorant* has all too often been understood inappropriately as if it can be applied to the highly refined Old French text that provides the probable earliest version of the story. As Nicolas Perella has succinctly put it, 'Virgil, Ovid, and Dante are only the most obvious and persistent influences' in this highly intertextual work (1961: 330). Does it follow that they need necessarily be the most meaningful influences? Perella even went as far as to claim, concerning classical and especially Virgilian influences upon the later Italian writer, that 'Boccaccio's culture could tyrannize him and do violence to his own genius' (1961: 331). This is of course an extreme and somewhat uncharitable interpretation to follow, and one that takes the imaginative device of divine machinations (with which Perella takes specific issue) a trifle seriously, but it may perhaps be seen as pointing to the fact that some of the other, less ancient elements that made up 'Boccaccio's culture' are due some attention. Perella credited Boccaccio with an extraordinary talent for imbuing his characters with acute psychological insight and cited particularly the fact that the two young learners, Florio and Biancofiore, are transformed into lovers while meticulously studying 'amorosi versi' from the holy book of Ovid ('[c]redo che la virtú de' santi versi, che noi divotamente leggiamo, abbia acceso le nostre menti di nuovo foco, e adoperato in noi quello che in altri giá veggiamo adoperare', *Filoc*. 2, p. 62, 64): this awakening, if it might be so termed, he regarded as a natural development within the context of their shared upbringing and reading, and a certain sign of Boccaccio's 'own genius' for psychological penetration – but one that is only

undermined by the involvement of Venus and Cupid behind the scenes. This apparently realistic psychological detail is, however, taken directly from Robert d'Orbigny,[18] whose talent for believable characterisation has less frequently been acknowledged, let alone praised, by modern scholars – even those who have sought to rescue the earlier poem from the regrettably obscure position it has occupied during the last century, along with other medieval works that explore their own factitiousness. Indeed, William Calin noted somewhat unjustly that Robert did not create 'rounded, believable characters' (1964: 110), apparently failing to recognise that Floire, whose apparently unlikely character and seemingly overemotional behaviour are explained in great measure by the fact that he remains throughout the poem little more than a child, is presented by Robert as precisely the sort of 'young, innocent boy' or 'naive, blundering, comic hero' that, as Calin would himself later observe, was to become a conventional – even ubiquitous feature – of the *Roman de la Rose*, and of the work of Guillaume de Machaut, Christine de Pizan, and others (1974: 36). When the age of Robert d'Orbigny's protagonists is taken into consideration, it should become adequately clear that the received notion that they are uncomplicated, flatly uninteresting, or with regard to personality entirely implausible and deficient is in need of some revision.

Boccaccio's Florio is in many respects a different kind of character: while, like Floire, he relies extensively on the counsel of others, he exhibits a greater capacity for independent thought and a resourcefulness that suggests a greater maturity than that found in the principal actors of Robert's poem. For instance, when Florio, having arrived in Babylon, begins to doubt the potential success of his quest, the

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[18] Ovidian resonances recur throughout the aristocratic *Floire et Blancheflor*: most importantly Robert has the children read '[l]ivres […] paienors' together and subsequently share a love that is in many respects defined by its *literariness*.

debate that takes place about whether he should continue or return home is entirely

internalised, and devoid of any divine intervention or allegorical manoeuvrings such

as occur in Robert d'Orbigny's poem, where this is presented as a rather unequal

argument between *Savoir* and *Amors*:[19] Florio's decision, however, to act in the

name of love, strongly implies that Boccaccio was familiar with the less confident

protagonist and his dependence upon the helpful allegorical personifications that

appear in Robert's poem. Only when confronted by the *amiraglio*'s (Boccaccio's

version of Robert's Emir) tower itself does Florio begin, like Floire, to doubt

himself; for the first time he asks himself whether Biancofiore will even remember

him: '[t]u t'inganni, se pensi che colei ora di te si ricordi, essendo senza vederti tanto

tempo dimorata. Nulla femina è che sí lungamente in amare perseveri, se l'occhio o

il tatto spesso in lei non raccende amore' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 386). This relatively brief

episode of hesitation is highly reminiscent of the lengthier lament of the excluded

Amant before the Castle of Jalousie that forms the wonderfully stark ending of

Guillaume de Lorris' portion of the *Roman de la Rose*. There too, the lover expresses

fears that he might have been forgotten by Bel Accueil:

Je ne sai or comment il vait,

mes durement sui esmaiez

que entroblié ne m'aiez.

Si en ai duel et desconfort:

james n'iert riens qui me confort

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[19] The allegorical debate is preserved also in Konrad Fleck's version of the tale, but most treatments of the theme abandon this element (Grieve 1997: 69).

se je per vostre bienvoillance,

que je n'ai mes aillors fiance (*Roman de la Rose*, ll. 4050 – 4056)

There is another echo in this passage of Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose*. When Florio arrives at the tower, upon the high roof of which the garden is placed, he rushes towards it and embraces it enthusiastically, much as the Amant when confronted by the Castle of Jalousie in the *Roman de la Rose*: 'dove disteso con la braccia aperte s'ingegnò d'abbracciare le mura, quelle baciando infinite fiate, quasi nell'animo di ciò che faceva sentendo diletto' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 389). A close iconographical relationship can even be detected between illuminated treatments of these two scenes.

Fig. 23. A Lombard miniature depicting Florio, who has dismounted from his horse, embracing the wall of the *amiraglio*'s tower. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 143 r. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

Fig. 24. A later miniature depicting the Amant embracing the door knocker of the Castle of Jalousie. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, Morgan Library, New York, MS. M.948, f. 29 r. (Rouen, c. 1525).

Both the Amant and Florio are shown embracing the boundary that they cannot cross, becoming in both cases the archetypal *exclusus amator*. Despite his apparent resourcelessness at this point within the text – a characteristic associated with earlier lovers – Florio nonetheless also demonstrates an idiosyncratic ability to recall and for self-motivational purposes draw upon his learning that is quite alien to the isolated and often confused Floire of Robert d'Orbigny's work: suitably enough,

Florio remembers and is inspired by a line from his reading of Ovid: 'Filocolo, cosi incalzato, e piú ognora dubitando, per avventura si ricordò d'un verso giá da lui letto in Ovidio, ove i paurosi dispregia dicendo: 'La fortuna aiuta gli audaci, e i timidi caccia via'' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 396).[20] Even if the line quoted is spurious, the attribution of the sentiment to Ovid gives a satisfactory sense of circularity to this element within the text. Whereas Floire forgets his education and seemingly loses his ability to think critically as soon as he and Blancheflor are parted, Florio certainly does not.

Almost thirty years after Calin's article, Norris Lacy likewise observed that the characters that appear in *Floire et Blancheflor* are 'unlifelike' (1992: 22), though, as earlier chapters have shown, this has more to do with the deliberate and pervasive artefactuality that the poet seeks to explore throughout his poem than with his putative inability to treat his protagonists realistically. Of course, Robert d'Orbigny's motive in making the fundamentally aesthetic decision to heighten the contrivance even in his characterisation can by no means have been an overwhelming desire to achieve an incisive psychological realism that scholars writing in the twentieth-century might recognise as belonging to their own age, even if modern critics have not been able to resist the temptation to criticise him on this point. Whether this was Boccaccio's intention may also be open to some question, even if this traditional element takes on a different flavour within his work. Perella's insistence that the characters of the *Filocolo* are treated with psychological realism has, at least, been criticised in more recent years, with current scholars of Italian literature generally

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[20] The quotation is not a direct translation of any line from Ovid. Whilst playful variant forms of this common Latin proverb do occur in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10. 586 and *Ars Amatoria* 1. 608, as quoted it resembles more closely the formulations of the expression that occur in other authors with whom it is more commonly associated. Because of the importance of Ovid's *amorosi versi* in Florio's education (*Filoc*. 1, p. 62), the deliberate misattribution of the proverb to Ovid is more structurally satisfying and coherent at this point in the narrative than one to Virgil or another Roman poet.

disagreeing strongly with the older idea that Boccaccio's inclusion of pagan deities and mythological figures derived from Ovid and Virgil confuses or proves injurious to the unity and coherence of *Filocolo* (see, for example, Heinrichs 1990: 146).

A resonance in the *Filocolo* of the original ending of the *Roman de la Rose* has already been cited above. Unfortunately it is not uncommon to encounter in scholarship on Boccaccio evidence of an imperfect knowledge of the pre-Boccaccian source material, and even when links have been made between the literatures of France and Italy, and comparisons suggested, all too often the conclusions drawn from these – if any – are reductive rather than stimulating. Perella again provides a helpful example: in his 1961 article, he pointed out with some casualness that the supporting cast of the *Filocolo* recall in some measure the work of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, but neglected to justify this observation with anything more than a cursory oversimplification of the earlier work, seemingly known only at second hand: '[i]t is interesting to note that in the *Filocolo*, the friendly figures that revolve around Florio and Biancofiore readily remind one of the personifications of courtly love qualities that move around the figure of the Amant in the *Roman de la Rose*, just as Florio himself is the Amant […] Unlike the *Roman de la Rose*, however, these qualities of *cortesia* in the *Filocolo* are not simply the proper means to conquer the desired object as is the case in the *Roman de la Rose*' (Perella 1961: 337). Furthermore, a footnote motioned towards the reappearance of a motif (if not quite a plot device) from the *Roman de la Rose* in the *Filocolo* – seemingly without noticing, again, that this had in fact been borrowed from Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*: '[i]n one case, a friend counsels Florio that in order to win the aid of the chatelain of the tower in which Biancofiore is enclosed, the young lover should seek to engage the chatelain in a game of chess and deliberately allow his opponent

153

to win. This is the same thing the Amant is told to do with Bel Accueil in the *Roman de la Rose*' (Perella 1961: 337 n. 14). Florio subsequently executes the trick without any inventiveness of his own, and also without any interruptions. Sadoc, the Castellan (or chatelain), is, predictably enough, so pleased to have won the game and to have received so much gold (*Filoc*, 4.394 – 396) that he promptly offers to assist the young man who has deliberately accepted defeat. This may be contrasted with the more complex version of the game-of-chess ruse that appears earlier in Robert's *Floire et Blancheflor*, to which Jean de Meun was evidently alluding in the passage from *Roman de la Rose* which Perella cited. This is substantially more sophisticated than the simple, straightforward deception mentioned or performed in later works – almost disconcertingly so for modern audiences more typically accustomed to associate literary reworkings and refashionings with elaboration rather than increasing simplicity. In Robert's poem, Floire manages in some sense to confound expectations, not by straying from the instructions he has been given by his Babylonian host, Daire, which are, indeed, comprehensive, and include almost every detail of the trick as actually executed some lines later, but by quietly declining nevertheless to do anything so dishonourable as to allow the greedy guard of the tower to win. Instead of simply permitting the guard to taste the pleasure of several small triumphs, and accordingly reaping the benefits of whatever putative improvement might occur in the latter's mood and disposition towards his opponent as a consequence, Floire repeatedly defeats the lesser man. In a wonderful inversion of the ruse familiar from its subsequent corrupted repetition and conversion into a conventional scene, it is the unexpected graciousness and generosity of the winner rather than that of the loser that leads to the necessary trust between Floire and the

guard, and the former's subsequent entrance into the tower where Biancofiore awaits him.

Further resonances of romance literature abound throughout the *Filocolo*. A more fruitful approach than that which many scholars have adopted is to reconsider the place of such figures as Robert d'Orbigny, Guillaume de Lorris, (and to an extent, Jean de Meun) within this tradition, and to reassess Boccaccio's work in the light of this. While the *Filocolo* has not historically attracted the same attention as the *Decamerone*, one episode from it – a lengthy digression (both in subject and setting, since Florio has been driven off-course by a storm) that ostensibly has little impact as far as narrative is concerned – has proved perhaps disproportionately attractive to commentators, albeit not by any means unjustly. This is the memorable *questioni d'amore* (*Filoc*. 4.14 – 70), or love debate, that seems to prefigure Boccaccio's later, more famous work. Connections have been drawn between this episode and the *joc-partitz* and *jeux-partis* of Provençal and Old-French literature (Crane, 1920: 62 n. 11). At the same time, the episode recalls most particularly Jean de Meun's lengthy continuation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, which can likewise be characterised as a sort of powerful prototypical *questioni d'amore*: in fact, the entirety of the *Roman de la Rose*, including Guillaume de Lorris' original poem, has been categorised as 'a grand debate or symposium treating all facets of love' (Calin 1974: 39). With this considered, it can only be regarded as extremely unfortunate that the prominence of French sources within Boccaccio's learning and web of allusions, and especially Robert d'Orbigny's version of the tale, has been passed over by scholars in recent years.

The episode featuring the *questioni d'amore* takes place within a Neapolitan Garden – labelled by Grieve '[t]he ideal landscape *par excellence*' (1997: 66) –

which Florio and his shipwrecked companions chance to come upon, significantly enough, whilst wandering sadly in the direction of the spot where Virgil's ashes ('le reverende ceneri dell'altissimo poeta Maro': *Filoc*. 4, p. 294) are said to have been buried. The fact that this garden – which will soon become the site of a poetic dialogue and a meditation on love – is near this revered burial site (an actual site in Naples), recalls both Blancheflor's tomb in Robert's poem, which is also surrounded by, or connected with, a garden, and the tomb-like fountain of Narcissus in Guillaume de Lorris' part of the *Roman de la Rose*, both of which, as has been argued in the previous chapters, are sites of metatextual and distinctly intertextual significance: though this implied connection with the memorialisation of the great Augustan poet of Mantua, an early indication is given that the Neapolitan garden is likewise a site which has literature planted deep within its history and its landscape. The wandering near this tomb is an attempt to escape, as Florio himself puts it, 'gli accidiosi pensieri che l'ozio induce' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 295), not without a significant verbal echo of Guillaume de Lorris' *Oiseuse*, and an evocation of the traditional Roman concept of *otium*. Whilst pausing to listen to the sweet music that emanates from the garden, Florio and his companions are invited in to participate in the *festa* taking place there, and after a spell of time he is furthermore entreated to stay longer by the beautiful Fiammetta, in order that he might join in with the *brigata* and associated 'varii parlamenti' with which she intends to occupy the hottest part of the day. Seeking refuge from the heat of the midday sun – a familiar convention of traditional love elegy and much used by Ovid, but one that takes on an even greater symbolic significance here due to Boccaccio's specific mention of the sun god Apollo – they find a relatively secluded and shady meadow replete with all the

156

abundant flowers, verdure and scents to be expected from such a setting ('prato, bellissimo molto d'erbe e di fiori, e pieno di dolce soavità di odori': *Filoc*. 4, p. 298).

Fringed with a number of young but established trees with thick green boughs that are well able to offer protection from the sun, the centre of this *locus amoenus* features 'una picciola fontana chiara e bella' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 297-8), which forms the structural, rhetorical, and symbolic centrepiece of the ensuing debate as well as the most prominent manmade landmark within its setting. In this respect the *Filocolo* follows most overtly the *Roman de la Rose* with the fountain of Narcissus at its centre. Even before the debate proper begins, Boccaccio emphasises that conversation between those present is accompanied by the pleasant but also richly symbolic activities of gazing at the fountain and of gathering some of the many flowers that form part of the scenery – plausible activities that seem not only natural to the episode's physical environment, but also apposite considering the context of implied poetic inspiration that pervades the *questioni d'amore* as a whole and the *florilegium*-like gathering of multiple individuals and voices that defines the dialogue to follow and characterises its content. The fountain is in both Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor* and Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose* associated with a nearby tree that is in some way outstanding – and this can also be found emphasised within the episode of the *questioni d'amore*. In the *Filocolo*, the trees that shield the group from the sun do not necessarily keep the sun god away, at least in his other capacity as patron god of the arts: from a position directly above the fountain some low-hanging branches of green laurel cast their shadow over its water and simultaneously confer on it any connotations of Apolline inspiration and poetic glory that might possibly be thought to be in any way missing from the scene, though by this point Boccaccio's references to poetic inspiration and tradition and

accompanying insinuations of the significance of this episode within the scheme of his work ought already to be as clear as the fountain water. From this particular laurel tree Ascalione, who happens to be Florio's old tutor and the eldest of the companions who are present in the garden, gathers some branches and with them weaves together a crown ('una bella coronetta'), which he proceeds to give to Fiammetta. Sitting around the beautiful little fountain, in the shade, each member of the party proposes a question about love, upon which Fiammetta, her head garlanded with the crown of green laurel, passes judgement.

This fountain forms one of Kirkham's 'concentric spatial centers'; it is surrounded by 'a circle of young people sitting in a meadow inside a garden in Naples' (Kirkham 2001: 196; see also Grieve 1997: 147). Kirkham does not, however, perhaps due to her overriding interest in the intratextual design and unity of the *Filocolo*, discuss in any depth the significance of this fountain as a site of *intertextual* allusion, though this is essential to an understanding of the episode as a whole and reveals much about Boccaccio's own self-positioning within an ancient literary tradition. As Sarah Kay has shown, the seemingly conventional reuse within a medieval text of a setting or 'common place' that is familiar from earlier works is a way of conjuring up by means of implication a host of associations with which this space is already enriched, and this function of what she terms the *locus communis* is magnified when it becomes a site in which an author seeks 'to group together sets of characters' for the purpose of argument (Kay 2007: 2-3). This is precisely the form that Boccaccio adopts in the *questioni d'amore*, whose familiar setting is therefore an entry point into other texts. In a sense, the concentric arrangement reaches a focal point but not an end in the fountain itself, since this structure acts symbolically as a window into other worlds and other narratives, both reflecting on a metatextual level

and casting some light upon the organisation of the episode as a whole, whilst also strongly recalling the fountains that are so prominent in numerous Old French romances, including Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, the *Roman de la Rose* – a type of structure which would continue to appear prominently and develop in significance in the *Dits* of Guillaume de Machaut approximately three decades after the first appearance of the *Filocolo*. The fountain structure, with its clear but ever-moving water, undeniably marks the site around it as one of great intertextual importance. The thirteen questions that distinguish the episode contain several narratives, told by the various attendees of the *brigata*, and in these narratives the episode's carefully constructed concentricity is given greater depth and distance from Boccaccio's own authorial voice: inevitably, these narratives simultaneously reflect and cast light upon the frame within which they are set by centring around spaces and artefacts similar to those found in the Neapolitan garden where Fiammetta presides. Two examples of this window effect, and associated artefactual centrepiece, may be noted here as especially illustrative. The first of these 'window' narratives, and indeed the first 'question of love', is verbalised by Florio himself, and centres around the interpretation of an ambiguous symbolic gesture. A maiden gives her own garland of 'verdi fronde' to one man, and takes for herself a garland of woven 'fresche erbette e di fiori' worn by his rival: Florio asks which of the two men she loves more greatly, and naturally, a debate follows in which Fiammetta opts for the first man, and Florio for the latter (*Filoc*. 4, Question I, pp. 300 – 304, quotations from p. 301). The fact that the story features a lady sitting in judgement, just like Fiammetta, and concerns itself, moreover, with the crowning of its characters, ensures that the reader cannot help but draw a connection of some sort between Fiammetta and the lady in the story and the fact that both (to begin with

anyway) wear chaplets of woven leaves. Visual representations of this first question make the relationship explicit. A fifteenth-century (approximately 1450) panel painted by Giovanni Toscani, which would once have served as the front of a *cassone*, depicts Florio's story – the first question – within a garden strongly reminiscent of the verdant Neapolitan setting of the framing episode and, moreover, arranges its many actors (Toscani's own additions) in a semicircular group around the central figures, mirroring the very similar way in which Fiammetta, Florio and others are positioned around the fountain.

Fig. 25. Giovanni di Francesco Toscani, *Scene in a Court of Love: Filocolo's Parable*, *c*. 1425, tempera and gold on wood panel, 39 x 122.4 cm. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin, gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

The relationship is made even clearer by means of a comparison with a Lombard manuscript miniature, from slightly earlier in the century (about 1425), which depicts the gifting of the laurel garland to Fiammetta in front of the fountain – here imagined as something more like a pond than anything else. One of the women, to the left of the miniature, is shown holding a flower, corresponding closely with Boccaccio's description of the activities of the group. This manuscript treats the first

question differently to Toscani's *cassone* panel, including only seven figures in all, though retaining a clear suggestion of the thematic continuity between the Neapolitan frame and the subject of the question through the repetition of the crucial crowning scene. Although Toscani's panel depicts the question, it is closer in several respects to the frame miniature, even down to the humble kneeling position in which the central figures are shown, which may be compared with the manuscript illuminator's portrayal of Fiammetta.

Fig. 26. A Lombard miniature depicting Ascalione crowning Fiammetta with a wreath of laurel. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 112 r. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

Fig. 27. A Lombard miniature depicting the first question of love. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 112 v. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

Another garden that appears within the *questioni d'amore* – one that is reasonably well known due to the fact that Boccaccio would later adapt and repeat it as the fifth tale of the tenth day of the *Decamerone* – is also relevant. The question itself with which it is connected does not have a direct bearing upon the subject here at hand but the story, which centres, like that of the first question, around an

artefactual core (in this case a site rather than a single object as such) not dissimilar to the setting of the frame narrative, is relevant (*Filoc*. 4, Question IV, pp. 311 – 325). This question, asked (but mostly narrated) by Menedon, again concerns a love triangle in which a married lady promises to be with a rather unrelenting man named Tarolfo on the condition that he first furnish her with a gift that she rather rashly believes to be impossible – a magical garden that flowers in winter. The lady phrases her rejection of Tarolfo's unwelcome advances as a request, asking for 'del mese di gennaio, in quella terra, un bel giardino e grande, d'erbe e di fiori e d'alberi e di frutti copioso, come se del mese di maggio fosse' (*Filoc*. 4, Question IV, p. 312). Tarolfo enthusiastically accepts the challenge as if it were a commission and, after a span of time spent travelling to *Tesaglia* or Thessaly[21] (associated since antiquity with witchcraft) and with the acquaintance of a magician named Tebano who can assist him with a lengthy and sinister incantation that invokes the underworld and chthonic deities, he manages, much to the lady's surprise, to produce the garden. Boccaccio describes her reaction:

> Mossesi adunque la donna da molti accompagnata, e, pervenuti al giardino, v'entrarono dentro per una bella porta, e in quello non freddo si come di fuori, ma un aere temperato e dolce si sentiva. Andó la donna per tutto rimirando e cogliendo erbe e fiori, de' quali molto il vide copioso: e tanto piú andora avea operato la virtú degli sparti liquori, che i frutti, i quali l'agosto suole produrre, quivi nel salvatico tempo tutti i loro alberi facevano belli: de' quali piú persone, andante con la donna, mangiarono (*Filocolo*. 4, Question IV, p. 317).

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[21] Tarolfo first encounters the weary Tebano, who is collecting herbs needed to produce medicines and other mysterious potions, on the 'misero piano che giá fu tutto del romano sangue bagnato' (*Filoc*, 4, p. 312). This plain – which must be taken as the plain of Pharsalus – alludes to Lucan's *Pharsalia* or *Bellum Civile*, and connects Tebano's magic with that of the Thessalian witch Erichtho, to whom Lucan devotes a particularly memorable and lengthy passage.

The emphasis Boccaccio places on the garden's 'bella porta' and on the all-important moment of entrance – the crossing of the threshold – is worth noting, since these can be seen as pointing directly to the liminal spaces that divide and give structure to Guillaume de Lorris' first part of the *Roman de la Rose*. The Lombard manuscript mentioned above manages with some apparent (and impressive) perseverance to include a 'bella porta' in almost every one of its miniatures that represents a garden space, even though a wall is never indicated in the foreground. In so doing it both alludes to and is separated from manuscripts of the *Roman de la Rose*. Another illustrative example may be cited here – that of Florio entering the Garden in Naples where he will meet Fiammetta, Galeone and others, and take part in the *questione d'amore*. The iconographical likeness between this miniature and depictions of the moment of the Amant's entrance into the garden in many *Rose* manuscripts is remarkable: for instance, the celebrated miniature on the verso of the twelfth folio of Harley MS. 4425 (c. 1490 – 1500), in the British Library, might almost illustrate the opening of the *questioni d'amore* just as easily as the *Roman de la Rose*. Interestingly, the 'bella porta' of the Neapolitan frame narrative is in the Lombard manuscript explicitly associated with the fountain structure that forms both the concentric centrepiece of, and means of entering into, the numerous *questioni* that make up this portion of the *Filocolo*: both are figured as a means of accessing a space – a portal through which one must pass in order to take part in a debate of this nature. The characters are depicted in one miniature standing halfway between the impressive entrance into the garden and the fountain – an entrance of a sort into other gardens – almost as if the Neapolitan garden itself were a liminal or transitional space of minor importance, and the actual thresholds the sites of genuine consequence and significance.

Fig. 28. A Lombard miniature depicting Florio and his companions arriving at the
Neapolitan garden and entering through a pair of doors to find a *festa* taking place
inside. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel,
Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2°
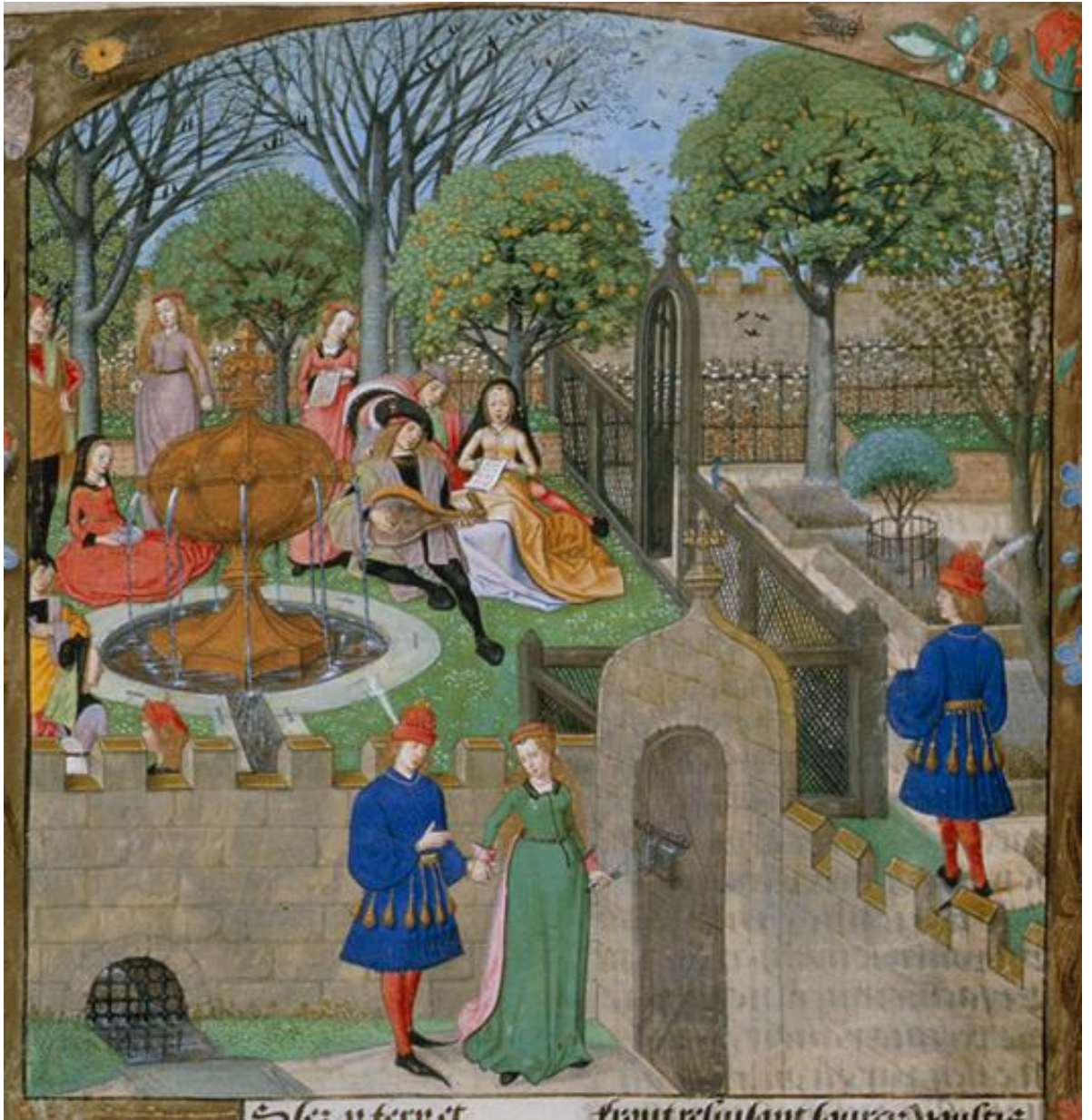poet. et roman. 3, f. 110 r. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

Fig. 29. The Amant is granted access to the garden of Deduit. Image taken from: *Le Roman de la Rose*, British Library, London, MS. Harley 4425, f. 12 v. (Southern Netherlands (Bruges), c. 1490 – 1500).

Fig. 30. A Lombard miniature depicting Florio and his companions inside the Neapolitan garden; Fiametta points towards the fountain which will form the centre of the *questioni d'amore*. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 111 v. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

This last image makes explicit the connection between the solid architectural threshold into the Neapolitan garden (shown on the left), and the more fluid threshold into the *questioni* themselves (the fountain on the right). The manuscript illuminator elides the *festa* that takes place between these too moments and focuses only on these portals. The lady in Menedon's tale also enters through the 'bella

porta' into a supernatural space explicitly defined as having been established with improbable swiftness and characterised as miraculous, recalling both Deduit's garden wall and speedily constructed Castle of Jalousie of the Guillaume de Lorris' original *Roman de la Rose*. It too features a fountain. The experience is dreamlike. The lady has unwittingly and unsuspectingly given her patronage to Tarolfo, whose distinctly artificial and magical garden has been constructed with impure intentions in mind – in this sense the space contrasts with the more chastened Neapolitan garden in which Fiammetta and the others convene and converse. If anything, it resembles the highly artificial garden of the Babylonian Emir in Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor*, a magical but also mechanical showpiece of elaborate deception which functions similarly as a misleading and manipulative means of possessing an unwilling woman. The corresponding garden of the *amiraglio* in the *Filocolo* (discussed in greater detail below) will also be characterised as a space in which artifice and necromancy are employed to win lovers. More significantly, perhaps, Tebano's prayer-like nocturnal incantation, and the enchanted garden it produces that flowers in winter, is suggestively characterised as being not entirely dissimilar to a piece of fanciful literature – a piece of *ingremance* or a vehicle for the exhibition of various kinds of *engin*. Following Tarolfo's instructions, Tebano finds a place for the garden beside a river, in which he dips his hair before beginning to cast his spell – an action that recalls the opening of the *Roman de la Rose*, in which the narrator encounters a stream outside the garden of Deduit and washes his face in its richly symbolic waters. Here the action seems to signify a ritual purification, though the partial submersion also marks the crossing of a boundary between that which is possible and which more typically falls into the jurisdiction of imaginative literature. In this sense, the river here is not so very far from the fountain at the

centre of the Neapolitan garden. Working beneath a full moon, Tebano proceeds,

importantly, with an invocation to Night ('O notte, fidatissima segreta dell'alte

cose': *Filoc*. 4, Question IV, p. 315) and afterwards builds altars to Hecate and to

Ceres 'quello della rinnovellante dea' (*Filoc*. 4, Question IV, p. 316). Robert R.

Edwards has pointed out that Medea's attempt to rejuvenate the father of Jason in

Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (179 – 293) must have been Boccaccio's source

for at least part of the enchantment process (Edwards 2002: 225 n. 28). Within the

context of the *questione d'amore*, this garden created at night and with the assistance

of chthonic deities presents a striking tonal contrast with the Neapolitan garden,

although this frame is by no means devoid of references to pagan gods.

The frame narrative of Book IV is not without a certain magic. It has already

been observed above that the trees that shade the group of youths during the episode

of the *questioni d'amore* do not keep the sun god away. It is indeed essential that

they do not, since the warmth and light of Apollo colours the episode just as Night

and Hecate cast a black shadow over the creation of Tarolfo's garden, even if the

product of the occult practices described by Boccaccio is an artificially temperate

rather than cold climate, and these dark forces are not necessarily visible to the

visitor. Before accepting the laurel garland from Ascalione, Fiammetta articulates a

striking and memorable, albeit somewhat circumlocutory, invocation to Apollo,

asking not only for the god's assistance in answering the *questioni* to come ('l'aiuto

di colui a cui queste fronde furono già care'), but even for his voice: 'io divotamente

il priego che egli nel mio petto entri, e muova la mia voce con quel suono, col quale

egli già l'ardito uomo vinto fece meritare d'uscire della guaina de' suoi membri'

(*Filoc*. 4, p. 299)*.* This presents a contrast with Tebano's invocation to the goddesses

associated with darkness. It would seem that Fiammetta's prayer is at least partially

answered with the god's favour, since we are later told during the seventh and most central structurally of the thirteen *questioni* that the sun, which Boccaccio has already connected explicitly with Apollo, has filtered through 'le verdi frondi' which otherwise shade the gathered youths, and has been reflected by the fountain's crystal clear water onto the 'bel viso dell'adorna reina' (*Filoc*. 4, *Questione VII*, p. 335). The bright ray of reflected sunlight, which is likened, with some playfulness, to a little flame or *fiametta*, could be understood in both pagan and Christian contexts as suggestive of divine inspiration – a holy inspiriting not unlike the tongues of fire associated with the Apostles (Acts 2:3). This light darts between Fiammetta's golden hair and the dark leaves of her laurel crown, symbolically blessing her head with Apolline splendour: this sight, furthermore, prompts Galeone, one of the young men present, to express his love for her not merely in prose but at last with a *canzone*, in which the light is characterised overtly as a little spirit of divine source:

> Io son del terzo ciel cosa gentile,
>
> sí vago de' begli occhi di costei,
>
> che s'io fossi mortal me ne morrei.

> E vo di fronda in fronda a mio diletto,
>
> intorniando gli aurei crini,
>
> me di me accendo:

> e 'n questa mia fiammetta con effetto
>
> mostro la forza de' dardi divini,
>
> andando ogn'uom ferendo

che lei negli occhi mira, ov'io discendo

ciaschedun'ora ch'è piacer di lei,

vera reina delli regni miei (*Filocolo*. 4, *Questione VII*, p. 336).

It is explicitly suggested that it is specifically the reflection of Apollo's light in the fountain that inspires this striking break in the form of the work – this sudden substitution of poetry for the more typical prose. Boccaccio finally adopts the *versi* which he takes care to mention – seemingly disingenuously – throughout the work. Before this has even been taken into consideration it is worth noting that numerous scholars have already suggested that Boccaccio's narrator seems to '[conflate] his own love affair with that of [Galeone]' (Grieve 1997: 156), the latter has as a consequence frequently been interpreted as a kind of 'self-portrait' representing the author himself (Stewart 1996: 70).

Galeone's vision of Fiammetta bathed in reflected light is itself reflected later in Book IV when Florio arrives at the *amiraglio*'s tower: while still far away from the structure, he perceives a resplendent face at the window, aglow with reflected sunlight, and, believing that such a face could belong only to Biancofiore, he rushes towards the tower:

'ad una finestra una giovane, alla quale nel viso i raggi del sole riflessi dal percosso cristallo davano mirabile luce, per che egli imaginò che la sua Biancofiore fosse, dicendo fra sé impossibile cosa essere che il viso d'alcun'altra giovane sì *splendente* fosse o essere potesse' (*Filoc*, 4. pp. 388 – 389 emphasis mine).

The vision of the 'splendente' maiden created by the sunlight reflecting off the surface of the crystal simultaneously recalls and confirms the importance of the

earlier scene from the *questione d'amore* in which Fiametta's face is similarly illuminated by the clear waters of the fountain. In front of the tower, Florio is momentarily misled by the reflection in a manner that is not entirely dissimilar to the way in which Narcissus was fooled by his own reflection – though Florio is not presented here as the vain type: the scene specifically recalls the fountain episode within Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*, where the Amant is similarly presented with a false image not of himself but of the rosebushes which he will subsequently seek to possess. It has already been noted above that Florio's own response to the sight – to rush over and embrace the tower itself – has an intriguing parallel in the behaviour of Guillaume's Amant outside the castle of Jalousie. In the light of these allusions, the earlier episode in which Galeone bursts into song can be read as a similar moment in which the pursuit of love and beauty is figured as an illusion. Fiammetta rejects Galeone's advances, and he remains, like Guillaume's Amant outside the castle, an *amator exclusus*, and a counterpoint in this sense to Florio himself, who will eventually find a means of entering the tower.

Whilst the *questione d'amore* has traditionally, though not necessarily correctly, been considered something of a digression within the context of the *Filocolo*'s narrative, the work contains two other significant garden spaces which have generally been recognised as having a more direct bearing upon the plot. More important than their narrative function, however, which if focused upon leads to a risk of ignoring or downplaying their delicate symbolism, is the way in which these two spaces introduce a sort of symmetry or parallelism into the text, mirroring and interpreting one another much as the Neapolitan garden discussed above gives and is given new meanings by its working as an interpretative and intertextual point of entrance to other gardens and other narratives. The first of these appears during

Florio's time away from Biancofiore in Montorio, which corresponds with Montoire in Robert d'Orbigny's poem. The second is the garden of the Alexandrian *amiraglio*, which actually surmounts the tower in which Biancofiore is being held, and which, of course, corresponds with the opulent garden of the Babylonian Emir in the older work. Both are, like the garden in Menedon's question, sites associated with artifice of one kind or another.

During the time which Florio spends in Montorio, he is the victim of plot concocted by his tutor Ascalione and Feramonte, the Duke of Montorio (who owns the garden in question): together, the two attempt to influence the lovesick young prince to forget Biancofiore, from whom he has involuntarily been parted, by arranging a seduction in a garden. This garden is described in familiar terms: '[e]ra quell giardino bellissimo, e copioso d'arbori e di frutti e di fresche erbette, le quali da piú fontane per diversi rivi erano bagnate' (*Filoc*. 3, p. 179). Two attractive women are given the task of diverting his attention and affections as a means of displacing and effacing the memory of Biancofiore – the substitution of one love (or in this case two loves) for another being perhaps the most authentically Ovidian way of ridding a lover of his woes. The women, having seated themselves beneath 'una chiara fontana' (*Filoc*. 3, p. 179) that forms (once again) the site of attempted seduction or trickery, manage to have some success before the scheme ultimately (and inevitably) goes awry on account of the intrusive influence of love itself. More striking than the attempt to win Florio's affections, however, is the fact that this same garden has already presented the young protagonist with a sign that has set him thinking about Biancofiore by displaying a *white* flower entangled in thorns:

  Era entrato l'innamorato giovane, […] in un piacevole giardino, […] vide tra

  molti pruni un bianchissimo fiore e bello, il quale intra le folte spine sua

173

bellezza serbava. Al quale rimirare Florio ristette, e pareagli che 'l fiore in niuna maniera potesse piú crescere in su, senza essere dale circostanti spine pertugiato e guasto, né similmente dilatarsi, o divenir maggiore (*Filocolo*. 3, pp. 165 – 166).

Being a rather different sort of character to the continually muddled and uncertain Floire of Robert's tale, it does not take Florio long to interpret what he has seen as an omen. He says the following to himself:

> Oimè, chi e qual cosa mi potrebbe piú apertamente manifestare la vita e lo stato della mia Biancofiore che fa questo bianco fiore? Io veggio ciascuna punta delle circonstanti spine rivolta al fresco fiore, e quasi ognuna è presta a guastare la sua bellezza. Queste punte sono le insidie poste dal mio padre e dalla mia madre alla innocente vita della mia Biancofiore, le quail lei alquanto muovere non lasciano senza amara puntura. (*Filocolo*. 3, p. 166)

Patricia Grieve praises Boccaccio for the addition of this motif, noting that '[t]he attempted seduction of Florio does occur in different versions, but the garden imagery is greatly expanded here, and the episode of the white flower among the thorns is completely original to Boccaccio' (Grieve 1997: 67). Unsurprisingly, the episode was also recognised by illuminators as one of great significance, as may be seen from the Lombard manuscript cited above and another in Venice – the sight of the white flower is as important for the reader as it is for Florio in interpreting *Filocolo*. Even when the episode itself is not illustrated, as in the magnificent Mantegnesque manuscript produced by the court painter Pietro Guindaleri with Andrea da Lodi for Ludovico Gonzaga in the early 1460s, illuminators tend to give

unsubtle indications of the garden setting in which the white flower will appear and in which the attempted seduction will occur.

Fig. 31 A Lombard miniature presenting Florio, in Montorio, being prompted by the sight of a white flower surrounded by thorns to meditate upon the condition of his lover, Biancofiore. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 62 v. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

Fig. 32. A historiated initial (R) representing Florio, in Montorio, being prompted by the sight of a white flower surrounded by thorns to meditate upon his love, Biancofiore. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, MS. It. X. 31, f. 42 r. (Workshop of Cristoforo Cortese, 1430).

Fig. 33 Florio, in Montorio, prepares with his companions for a hunt; behind him, a wall featuring impressive prismatic rustication encloses the Duke's garden, indicated by fruit trees beyond. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Canon. Ital. 85, f. 67 r. (Pietro Guindaleri, with Andrea de Laude, 1463 – 1464).

The garden of the *amiraglio* is presented to the reader not long after the end of the *questioni d'amore*, by Dario (Daire in Robert d'Orbigny's version). The description is worth quoting in full, since it also explains the workings of the *amiraglio*'s tree of love and the fountain that stands beneath it:

[…] nella sommitá di questa torre è un dilettevole giardino molto bello, nel quale ogni albero o erba che sopra la terra si trova, quivi credo che si troverebbe: e in mezzo del giardino è una fontana chiarissima e bella, la quale per parecchi rivi tutto il giardino bagna. Sopra questa fontana è un albero il cui simile ancora non è alcuno che mai vedesse, per quello che dicono coloro che quello veduto hanno. Questo non perde mai né fiori né fronde, ed è di molti opinione che Diana e Cerere, a petizione di Giove, antico avolo del nostro

177

amiraglio, pregato da lui, ve lo pianteassero. E di quest'albero e di questa

fontana vi dirò mirabile cosa, che qualora l'amiraglio vuole far prova della

virginitá d'alcuna giovane, egli nell'ora che le guance cominciano all'aurora a

divenir vermiglie, prende la giovane, la quale vuol vedere se è pulcella o no, e

menala sotto questo albero. E quivi per picciolo spazio dimorando, se questa è

pulcella le cade un fiore sopra la testa, e l'acqua piú chiara e piú bella esce da'

suoi canali; ma se questa forse congiugnimento d'uomo ha conosciuto, l'acqua

si turba e 'l fiore non cade (*Filocolo*. 4, p. 382).

Both the *albero* and the *fontana* function as a means of testing the virginity of the

young women who live in the tower, much as the fountain – though not,

interestingly, the tree – does in Robert d'Orbigny's poem. The symbolism of the Old

French poem, in which the tree of love is credited with a major role in selecting (or

at least appearing to select) each new bride for the Emir, is changed significantly in

Boccaccio's rendering of the tale. In the Old French poem, only one flower is

dropped, with the fountain serving well enough on its own as a test of the maidens'

virtue, the relative clarity and purity of its water reflecting the chastity (or otherwise)

of the girl in question; the *amiraglio*, on the other hand, does not bother with even

the pretence of allowing his magical, mechanical tree to choose his bride for him. In

the earlier work, the process is selective, highly discerning and precise, the annual

picking of a *single* bride from the tree-like tower being mirrored by the annual

sheding of a *single* flower from the tower-like tree; in the later work, however, the

flower is given to any young woman who has not known a man – 'se questa è

pulcella le cade un fiore sopra la testa', and the tree is thus deflowered on behalf of

maidens who have not been themselves. The careful balance of the imagery is rather

disrupted by this alteration, but it places a greater emphasis on the personal

178

involvement of the *amiraglio*; because of the presumably rather large number of flowers dropped, a different kind of emphasis is perhaps also placed on the excessive plurality, wastefulness, and thus meaninglessness, of the *amiraglio*'s loves.

Grieve sees the garden in Montorio and that of the *amiraglio* as contrasting spaces that balance one another within the text: referring to the former, where Florio's love is tested and where he also sees the white flower encircled by threatening thorns, she writes that '[t]his garden [...] functions as the setting for the Duke's and Ascalion's scheme to sway Florio away from Biancifiore, as a scene of Divine Intervention (at least by the pagan god of love), and as a thematic and spiritual juxtaposition to the Admiral's garden, his test of the maiden's virginity and Biancifiore's comportment while in his realm' (1997: 67). Strictly speaking, the 'thematic and spiritual juxtaposition' that Grieve has recognised is one that chiefly concerns the contrasting behaviour of the two lovers when separated and under duress, but the apparently innovative natural imagery that distinguishes the earlier episode, and for which she so praises Boccaccio, may also be seen as serving an important contrastive function within the text. The flower surrounded by thorns does not merely suggest Biancofiore, almost perpetually threatened and in danger, but also can be read as a kind of counterpoint to the *amiraglio*'s vermilion tree of love, which bears not just a single flower like the vulnerable little plant Floire sees in Montorio, but many flowers, dropped inconsequentially, and instantly replaced once lost. When approached from this perspective, the white flower nearly smothered by thorns can be interpreted less as a sign of Florio's lover – which is how Florio naturally enough understands it – than of his love itself – a singular, unique, and beautiful thing at this point facing grave danger from competitive interest in his

179

affections. Florio's own 'comportment', to use Grieve's term, is also represented by the white flower's survival in the face of this danger.

The episode of the white flower might be an original feature of Boccaccio's telling of the tale, but the image of Biancofiore as a white flower is already deep-rooted in Robert's poem, and preserved in all versions in her very name – something that Florio himself observes (*Filoc*. 3, 166). For instance, Robert d'Orbigny presents the automaton of Blancheflor that sits on top of the false tomb (constructed prematurely to her memory by Floire's parents) receiving a lily from her lover that can only be white in colour (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 577 – 578). In addition to this, one of the perpetually flowering trees that surround the tomb – the ebony placed at its head – is explicitly described as white (*Floire et Blancheflor*, l. 608). At the same time, the specific image of a lily among thorns is picked directly from the Song of Solomon 2:2, where it is often interpreted as a reference to the Virgin Mary. In a sense then, the image is not anything like as new to Boccaccio as Grieve claims, but its employment in this passage may nevertheless be seen to some extent as an innovation on his part, albeit one that also echoes another of Robert d'Orbigny's images – as will be shown below. A distinctive feature of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, as we have already seen, is a sophisticated and highly intertextual reuse or rather repurposing of sites and motifs already associated with intertextuality. In this case the white flower must be read through its relationship with other texts, and other flowers.

As indicated at the very threshold of this chapter, the most prominent of Boccaccio's sites of intertextual exchange and reflection is the garden and its associated portals, but to see this particular characteristic of his work as a wholly new growth sprung from nowhere is clearly a fallacy. Even despite excellent work

by Sarah Kay especially which is of direct relevance to this example, scholarship has tended to stress Boccaccio's innovation whilst losing sight of this extremely significant intertextual aspect. Grieve has claimed, in the second chapter of her study on different versions of *Floire et Blancheflor*, that whilst '*Il Filocolo* makes use of the garden for a variety of purposes […] those that appear in the work differ somewhat from the ones in the Old French poem' (1997: 66) – it is unclear whether 'those' refers to the motif of the garden or to the purposes for which it is used. This point is nevertheless expanded and dealt with in greater detail in her fourth chapter: there she insists that of all versions of the tale '*Il Filocolo* […] develops the most complex system of garden imagery', noting that 'Boccaccio's use of the garden includes, but extends beyond, the typology of the myth of spring (found in the aristocratic French, for example) by creating ideal landscapes that contribute to the overall thematic intent of the book, and are therefore related to each other in significant ways' (1997: 135). These 'ideal landscapes', as well as being related to each other, are also closely connected with those that had appeared in earlier literature, which are by no means less meaningful or complex sites within the texts they so elaborately embroider. Earlier chapters here have already dealt with some of the ways in which the 'ideal landscapes' of the Old French poem, both actual and artefactual, relate to one another and together contribute towards the thematic intent of Robert's poem. They cannot be described as insignificant. A rather extreme and prejudiced opinion concerning the supposedly inferior literary importance of the French work Grieve maintains even despite (and perhaps partly as a means of avoiding the implications of) the rather problematic fact that in the Spanish Chronicle, which she steadfastly believes to have been Boccaccio's principal source for the tale, '[d]escriptions of nature are almost totally lacking'. Grieve has also had

to make the awkward admission that '[e]ven the Tree of Love, a staple in all other versions of the legend, is not in the Chronicle' (1997: 66). This is a serious omission. In her interpretation, which requires us to pass over certain important pieces of evidence, the 'juxtaposition' of the white flower with the *amiraglio*'s tree of love, and the symbolic contrast between the two gardens in which these plants are respectively situated is therefore entirely Boccaccian.

To take this line, however, is to ignore the pervasive and in reality, much more developed natural imagery that occurs throughout Robert d'Orbigny's *Floire et Blancheflor* and has been shown in previous chapters to be absolutely essential but all too often misunderstood aspects of the work. According to Hugette Legros (1992: 35) and William Calin, it is *Floire et Blancheflor*'s patterning of natural – especially floral – imagery that gives the earlier poem its great aesthetic individuality. Earlier chapters here have investigated the poem's extraordinary fusion of art and nature in its ekphrastic treatment of numerous artefacts and actors within the tale – natural imagery there serves a distinctly metatextual function, serving to approach the subject of poetic composition through analogies that continually refashion and refigure the act of creation itself and simultaneously lend the work a compelling unity and cohesion that readers do not generally find in Boccaccio's more digressive but still structurally integrated prose treatment of the story. Grieve cites Calin on Robert's unusual employment of natural imagery, but seems to miss entirely the significance of this, and indeed, rather unjustly deprecates Robert d'Orbigny's work by suggesting (quite wrongly) that its natural imagery is limited to what she indistinctly terms 'the typology of the myth of spring' (1997: 135). Such a dismissive attitude is surely reductive. In Robert's poem, as we have already seen in earlier chapters, the Emir's tree of love is treated much more extensively than in the

Filocolo, with alternative explanations given of its workings, and it is, moreover, similarly contrasted with an earlier image that likewise materialises when Floire is parted from Blancheflor for the first time in Montoire: this is the image of Love grafting a new branch into the young prince's heart. Robert's poem develops and emphasises this striking motif with an extraordinary descriptive flourish in a series of effervescent verses that Jean-Luc Leclanche has even interpreted as an exceptional, albeit subtle, shift into the lyric mode.[22] These verses may be placed in dialogue with Boccaccio's image of the white flower:

> Amors li a livré entente,
>
> el cuer li a planté une ente
>
> qui en tous tans flourie estoit
>
> et tant doucement li flairoit
>
> que encens ne boins citouaus
>
> ne giroffles ne garingaus.
>
> Et cele odour rien ne prisoit;
>
> toute autre joie en oublioit:
>
> le fruit de cele ente atendoit,
>
> mais li termes molt lons estoit,
>
> çou li ert vis, du fruit cuellir,

---

[22] The shift might be described as subtle because Robert does not seem to break the form of his poem in order to introduce this change, which is entirely communicated through the extremely memorable burst of vibrant natural imagery and emphasis upon the senses. Leclanche prints lines 373 – 386 with an indentation to indicate the sudden and unprecedented change in tone (2003: 22).

quant Blanceflor verra gesir

jouste soi et le baisera

le fruit de l'ente cuellera (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 373 – 386).

The apparently balancing passages in the *Filocolo* dealing with the white flower and the *amiraglio*'s tree are not far at all from Robert's poem's finely-constructed contrast between Floire's pure and promising though painful graft, violently placed in his heart by *Amors* himself, and the Emir's artificial tree of love, controlled and manipulated with an ingenuity seemingly derived from *Savoir* – but certainly not from any genuine love. A comparison between the two corresponding passages dealing with the protagonist's separation from his loved one, both of which make unusual use of exceptional natural imagery, suggests a reading of Boccaccio's adaptation of the episode in Montoire not so much as a moment in which Florio's devotion is merely tested, but in which he is actually tricked by the *Savoir*-derived *engin* of another. The nature of the trick described in the *Filocolo* has already been outlined above; it is worth noting with regard to Robert's text that in addition to the fact that Floire's stay in Montoire is there intended by his parents as a devious means of separating him from Blancheflor, the young prince is likewise subjected to misguided attempts to bring him into contact with other girls. The queen's sister, Sebile, makes efforts to introduce him to other young maidens from Montoire but he is emphatically uninterested in his schoolmates (*Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 365 – 368). This is the immediate context in which the grafting occurs. Like Boccaccio's white flower, Floire's graft is introduced and characterised as a symbol of the protagonist's unique, individual love, and placed in direct opposition to the Emir's artificial tree of love. Whilst the latter hovers ambiguously somewhere between the status of an

enchanted plant, that of a machine, and that of a mere stage illusion, fed by

otherworldly waters from the Euphrates and possessing a constantly covering canopy

of red flowers, Floire's graft of longing is treated as a tender little sprig that manages

to mature and produce fragrant flowers (but no fruit without Blancheflor) in spite of

the deception brewing around him. It might even be regarded as Floire's heroically

childish and obstinate response to the deception he does not yet fully comprehend.

Florio's white flower among the thorns, on the other hand, can be interpreted, as has

already been demonstrated above, as a symbol representative both of his lover and

his love, and similarly signifying that he will survive the similar attempt to deceive

him and to destroy his love, however tender or vulnerable it might appear.

Florio's own reading of the flower as chiefly symbolic of Biancofiore must,

however, remain dominant, even despite Florio's lack of familiarity with Christian

symbolism at this point within the text – which alone suggests a connection between

Biancofiore and the Virgin Mary: as a sign of the prince's own love, the whiteness of

the flower would seem to violate the careful colour symbolism of the original Old

French poem, in which Floire is consistently associated not with white flowers, but

with red. This element is also preserved elsewhere in Boccaccio's text, appearing

prominently in the early episode in which the two young lovers are caught in a

moment of amorous distraction from their studies, with their books closed. In this

important scene from Book II, much admired by Perella, the shame prompted by

their discovery causes them to blush in a particularly memorable and relevant way:

'Florio e Biancofiore, divenuti i candidi visi come vermiglie rose per vergogna della

non usata riprensione, apersero i libri; ma gli occhi loro piú disiderosi dell'effetto

che della cagione, torti si volgevano verso le disiate bellezze, e la loro lingua, che

apertamente narrar soleva i mostrati versi, balbuziando andava errando' (*Filoc*. 2, p.

185

64). The literary subtext that Roberta Krueger (1983) has noticed in Robert's poem is maintained though somewhat inverted in this episode, which can be interpreted as marking the pursuit of love and the reading of Ovid's verses on love as alternative rather than completely complementary and concomitant activities – as they are in Robert poem. Nevertheless, the association constructed in this passage between love and literature – still following Robert's cue – and the 'vermiglie rose' which suffuses the faces of the two lovers forms a point of reference to which both the white flower in Montorio and the similarly vermilion tree of the *amiraglio* in Alexandria allude. Boccaccio also makes clear, after Florio has made his entrance into the tower concealed in a basket of flowers, that he has done so dressed in 'una gonnella quasi di colore di vermiglie rose' (*Filoc*. 4, p. 405). Manuscript illuminations, including those featured above, always depict Florio splendidly dressed in red, preserving this iconographical element so heavily emphasised in Robert d'Orbigny's poem and suggesting that Boccaccio's readers preferred not to disturb the traditional colour symbolism which connected Florio with the red rose and Biancofiore with the white lily. The Lombard manuscript already cited provides a fine synthetic image showing Florio not merely being carried but actually lifted – in pseudo-Virgilian style – into the tower, concealed in a woven basket full of flowers; the colouring in it is faint for the sake of linear and pictorial clarity but still perceptible. After all, Florio, just like Floire in Robert d'Orbigny's poem, must become indistinguishable from his disguise – becoming merely another flower in the basket. For the reader of this manuscript – but not for the *amiraglio* – his face must remain faintly visible when viewed up close.

Fig. 34. A Lombard miniature depicting Florio's entrance, buried in a basket of flowers, into the tower of the *amiraglio*. Image taken from: *Il Filocolo*, Universitätsbibliothek Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, Kassel, MS. 2° poet. et roman. 3, f. 148 r. (Lombardy, c. 1450).

By placing these texts in dialogue with one another, new ways of appreciating each can be discovered. It must be recognised without prejudice that Boccaccio's natural imagery in the *Filocolo*, chiefly manifested throughout the work by the patterning of floral motifs and garden spaces with fountains at their centres, while different in numerous respects from the harmonious workings of the refined natural imagery in the Old French poem, is nonetheless thoroughly reliant upon that of Robert d'Orbigny and other romance literature as both fountain-like sources and fruitful sites – to use two metaphors of which Boccaccio himself seems to have been rather fond – of symbolic conventions helpful in the planting, nurturing, and cultivating of his own narrative. The *Filocolo* excels in the inventive interweaving of

motifs drawn from *Floire et Blancheflor* and the *Roman de la Rose*, as well as from classical literature. As in these earlier works, the garden is significantly more than a mere 'ideal landscape' or remnant of a vaguely defined 'myth of spring' but acts as a site in which issues of metatextual and intertextual themes of literary construction, artifice, and design can be explored.

<u>Conclusion</u>

We have seen that the innovative ekphrastic treatment that Robert d'Orbigny gave to the various artefacts that constitute the principal concern of *Floire et Blancheflor*, provided not only a means of conceptualising his own poetic craft through the analogous arts of weaving, sculpting, architectural design, and many other art forms besides, but also a compelling series of memorable images to which later writers and artists could return in order to address similar themes. Through his extended meditations upon the materiality of these artefacts – most particularly the tomb and the tower, but also the nature and art blending silks, trees, and statues – he reflected the highly self-reflexive artefactuality of his own work with a playfulness for which the work has not been justly credited; this aspect, that is, the extreme descriptiveness of the poem, although misguidedly considered little more than a stylistic fault during the last century and even disparaged in some recent scholarship, appears to have been one of the main reasons why later medieval writers such as Guillaume de Lorris and Giovanni Boccaccio were attracted to this pictorially vivid but superficially simple work, and sought to refashion and redevelop its artefacts and their actually rather misleading surfaces in their new and equally innovative allegorical or narrative contexts. For instance, *Floire et Blancheflor* frequently imagines itself as a fine piece of elaborately embroidered silk, its settings and structure relating to the appearance of such an object; the *Roman de la Rose* refashions this motif for its own purposes, most famously and perhaps significantly emphasising its own status as an illusory dream vision or reflection of reality; Boccaccio, by contrast is more concerned with narrative spaces and with framing as a device, but the image – which already acts a frame within Robert's poem – is by no means absent from the *Filocolo*, a work which combines its allusions to *Floire et Blancheflor* with others to classical literature and to the *Roman*

de la Rose, producing, if not quite a finely woven silk, then certainly a patchwork of complex and colourful design. The aim here has been to reassess *Floire et Blancheflor* and its reception by both Guillaume de Lorris and Boccaccio with a special focus on the recognition of its sophistication as a work of exceptional ekphrastic richness and self-aware artefactuality. In this way it can be situated more appropriately within a current scholarly discourse on medieval ekphrasis that has already sought to appreciate these qualities in other works but has not yet given *Floire et Blancheflor* the attention it merits.

49507 Words

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193

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