

**Magical Artifice and Artificial History in the *Roman***  
***de Perceforest***

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### **Prefatory Note on Quotations:**

For quotations from the source text, Gilles Roussineau's edition of *Perceforest* will be used throughout. It is divided into six 'parts' — from the *Première partie* to the *Sixième partie* — with each part divided into two 'tomes', except the *Troisième partie*, which consists of three 'tomes'.

When referencing a page in the book, I will use the formula: (4.2, p.801). Here, the number '4' indicates the *Quatrième partie*, and the number '2' after the decimal point indicates the second 'tome' of that fourth 'part'. The page number follows after the comma.

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# Introduction: Definitions and Approaches

## ***A Characterful Text:***

This is the story of King Perceforest's life and dynasty. A protégé of Alexander the Great, he is installed to bring civilisation to barbarous Britain. We see the rise, fall, trials and tribulations of this dynasty over several generations, and its eventual amalgamation – via the conquering Sicambrians – into the lineage of Arthur as we know it from the Vulgate. Along the way, the British royal family converts to the faith of the *Souverain Dieu*, and eventually to Christianity proper after the Virgin Birth.<sup>1</sup>

These few lines sum up the grand narrative project of the work, and yet it is the largest extant text from medieval France: "characteristically elephantine," as Jane Taylor puts it.<sup>2</sup> So what's the rest? What exactly is the point of the text? Such questions have stumped critics over the years. Indeed: "The *Roman de Perceforest* [...] has to many critics seemed simply a confused and highly derivative tangle of neo-Arthurian adventures".<sup>3</sup> The author terms his technique *entrelardement*, and this stuffing, or 'fleshing out' is an appropriate description: though each volume has its own central events, circling around them are myriad knightly adventures, tournaments, jousts, battles and marriages. Some of these sub-plots bear some relevance to the grand narrative, most notably the marriages, which secure the correct future Arthurian descendants in a careful and ambitious feat of imaginary genealogy. Many are far less relevant; pure fantasy, comic relief, or repetitive combat. The quality of the episodes varies considerably. Even at its imaginative best, it can remain prosaic: "de manière générale, l'auteur de *Perceforest* voit bien et peint mal."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> And this fills in a historical gap in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the text opening with an accurate translation of the former's account of Brutus' arrival in Britain. On the qualities and putative author of this translation, see Géraldine Veyseyre, 'Les métamorphoses du prologue Galfridien au Perceforest' in '*Perceforest*: un roman arthurien et sa réception', ed. by Christine Ferlampin-Acher (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), pp.31-86.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Taylor, 'The Fourteenth Century: Context, Text, and Intertext' in *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, vol. 1, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, and Keith Busby (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp.267-332 (p.294).

<sup>3</sup> Jane Taylor, 'Reason and Faith in the *Roman de Perceforest*' in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, ed. by W. Rothwell and others (New York: Manchester University Press, 1973), pp. 303-22 (p.303).

<sup>4</sup> Jeanne Lods, *Le 'Roman de Perceforest': origines, composition, caractères, valeur et influence* (Geneva and Lille: Société de publications romanes et françaises vol. 32, 1951), p.189.

To top it off, we cannot know for certain when the putative original manuscript – if it existed – was written, or who wrote either this original, or the extant 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> The debate has raged for many years on the date of composition, splitting into two schools of thought. General consensus posits an earlier manuscript between 1330 and 1350, a theory supported by the text's ostensible status as foundational text pertaining to the ancestry of Hainaut, accordingly playing into the success of the Hainaut dynasty's marriage with Edward III, who possibly founded the Order of the Garter based on the text's own *Franc Palais*.<sup>6</sup> This first theory in no way excludes possible 15<sup>th</sup> century edits or additions.<sup>7</sup> However, certain problems have stuck out for other scholars, particularly that the text was not widely known in its own time, but did see a resurgence in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>8</sup> Such thoughts inspired Ferlampin-Acher's brilliant and persuasive analysis of potential intertextual relationships with authors including Jean d'Arras, Froissart, and Antoine de la Sale, as well as references to the historical Burgundy of Philippe le Bon, that may place the text more firmly as an original 15<sup>th</sup> century work.<sup>9</sup> She pioneers the second school of thought, for a later dating, which I personally find rather convincing. Regardless, critics agree that the author was a knowledgeable reader of the prose romances, as well as verse romance,<sup>10</sup> and transmits Arthurian material in a unique style. As Jane Taylor humorously, yet pertinently

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<sup>5</sup> The elusive author *may* have been David Aubert, and was certainly someone who knew Burgundy well, and had ties to the Hainaut rulers. On the authorship question see Anne Berthelot, 'From One Mask to Another: The Trials and Tribulations of an Author of Romance at the Time of *Perceforest*' in *The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Virginie Greene, transl. by Darla Gervais (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 103-115. See also Gilles Roussineau, 'David Aubert, copiste du roman de *Perceforest*', in *Les manuscrits de David Aubert: 'escripvain' bourguignon*, ed. by Danielle Quérueu (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonnes, 1999), pp.35-51.

<sup>6</sup> See Gilles Roussineau, 'Ethique chevaleresque et pouvoir royal dans le *Roman de Perceforest*' in *Actes du 14<sup>e</sup> Congrès International Arthurien*, ed. by Charles Foulon and others (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1985), pp. 521-535.

<sup>7</sup> On dating the text, see Lods (1951); Jane Taylor, *Le Roman de Perceforest: Première partie* (Geneva: Droz, 1979); Tania Van Hemelryck, 'Soumettre le *Perceforest* à la question: une entreprise périlleuse?', *Le Moyen Français*, 57-58 (2005), pp.367-79; Noémie Chardonens, *L'Autre du même: emprunts et répétitions dans le 'Roman de Perceforest'* (Geneva: Droz, 2015), pp.23-35 and pp.683-688; see also *Perceforest: Quatrième Partie*, vol. 1, ed. by Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1987), pp.ix-xx.

<sup>8</sup> See Alexandra Hoernel, 'Réécriture(s) et réception du *Perceforest* au 16<sup>e</sup> siècle' in '*Perceforest*: un roman arthurien', ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.317-333.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, *Perceforest et Zéphir: propositions autour d'un récit arthurien bourguignon* (Geneva: Droz, 2010), pp.142-149. For a revised assessment of datation see also Gilles Roussineau, 'Réflexions sur la genèse de *Perceforest*' in '*Perceforest*: un roman arthurien', ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.255-267.

<sup>10</sup> The text's relation with the broader Arthurian canon is an enormous topic. For an introduction, see Taylor, 'Fourteenth Century' and for detailed analysis, see Chardonens, *L'autre du même*. On the author's relation to Marie de France, see Sylvia Huot, 'Chronicle, Lai, and Romance: Orality and Writing in the *Roman de Perceforest*' in *Vox Intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages* ed. by A. N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 203-23.

notes: "It is diminished if it is treated as merely expedient or as weak duplication of an existing bestselling formula: this is not just *Son of Tristan*, or *Arthur III* – or even *Nightmare in Camelot XXV...*".<sup>11</sup>

The text, then, is in part a re-working of earlier Arthuriana, padded out with fantastical material, and with a broadly simplistic prose style. What could have attracted critics, including myself, to this lumpy leviathan? More recent criticism has begun to shed light on the hidden qualities of *Perceforest*. Beginning with Jeanne Lods' critical volume, Jane Taylor and Gilles Roussineau subsequently set about the mammoth task of creating an edition, which Roussineau took over, and recently completed. Myself and others are indebted to this work, which will surely open the text to future scholarship. Both Taylor and Roussineau continue to make great critical contributions. In the English language, Sylvia Huot's definitive volume analyses the text's complex meditations on the civilising project using postcolonial and feminist theory, and has opened the work to students and experts alike.<sup>12</sup> In France, we note the contributions of Anne Berthelot, Christine Ferlampin-Acher, Michelle Szklnik, and more recently Noémie Chardonnens. Again, these critics have demonstrated the text's originality and complexity of thought on all manner of topics.

I was originally attracted – to put it bluntly – to the text's weirdness. The author loves putting his characters in contact with the absurd, the strange, and the 'Other'. Giants, serpents, boars, the *Beste Glatissante* with its mesmerising neck, supernatural sites, and, above all, magic. Magic has a special place in the *Perceforest*. There is a lot of it about, practiced by virtuous ladies from the Greco-British royal family, as well as by wicked native witches and warlocks.

It is tempting when confronted with the text's more imaginative or fantastical moments simply to state their idiosyncrasy, or to work out how such episodes manipulate and build on earlier romances. I hope to demonstrate that there is a particular line of thought behind such magical moments: method in the madness. My original mission was to create a typology of magic and artifice in the text, but along the way I discovered an interesting twist to the tale.

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Taylor, 'Arthurian Cyclicity: the Construction of History in the Late French Prose Romances' in *The Arthurian Yearbook*, 2, ed. by Keith Busby (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 209-223 (p.220).

<sup>12</sup> Sylvia Huot, *Postcolonial Fictions in the Roman de Perceforest: Cultural Identities and Hybridities* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007).

### ***The Thesis:***

My thesis is as follows: *the author uses artifice as a lens to consider the ethics and mechanisms of fiction*. The proliferation of magic in the text – and, more broadly, ‘artifice’ or the production of non-real sensory experiences – results from the author’s deep concern with the status of ‘artificial history’. *Perceforest*, of course, is itself an ‘artificial history’ or, more generally, a ‘fiction’. I have opted here for the slightly long-winded terminology of ‘artificial history’ for the sake of specificity, but the handier modern catch-all of ‘fiction’, whilst anachronistic, can carry the same meaning of a *pseudo-historical literary text*.

The thesis has large implications. Immediately, we must state that all prose romances consciously mask – or play with – their status as fiction in one way or another. Consider the *Estoire du graal* with its ostensible basis in historical truth, for instance. It is an obvious point of interest for medieval authors to play with such notions. *Perceforest*, however, is particularly overt, and has original mechanisms in its meditations on fictional status.<sup>13</sup> Another concern for this introduction: whilst the terms ‘artifice’ and ‘artificial’ may be taken at face value, the concepts of ‘magic’ and ‘history’ are far-reaching, and even problematic in the context of the middle ages. I will take some time here to define these terms, and set out my methodology.

### ***Magic: Context and Typology***

*"Mauditte soit la terre des Bretons et tous leurs enchantemens, et se jamais en puis venir au dessus, je la ferai toute sarter!"* (King Pollidés of the Sicambrians, 5.1, p.615)

Perceforest’s dynasty is perceived by its international competitors as a veritable coven of magic. Alexander had a putative magician father.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, it is the use of magic that leads to the dynasty’s extirpation from history, as it so riles the king of the Sicambrians, who eventually conquers the Isles. Such a magical reputation is partly deserved, as several members of the royal family are magic-users, but it is partly due to mistaken identity, as in this instance, where King Pollidés fell foul of the mischievous Zephyr rather than the magic

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<sup>13</sup> Chardonnens considers it a *texte autonome*: “Le *Perceforest* apparaît donc comme indépendant de pratiquement toutes les oeuvres qu’il intègre.” *L’autre du même*, p.280.

<sup>14</sup> On Alexander in *Perceforest* see Jane Taylor, ‘Alexander Amoroso: Rethinking Alexander in the *Roman de Perceforest*’ in *The Medieval French Alexander* ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 219-234.

of a British knight. From the Greco-British perspective, it is their mission to eradicate the villainous use of magic by the native Trojans. Whichever way you look at it, the text is a web of magic. Fortunately, this can be broken down into fairly clear categories, even if the author's attitude towards magic is not so clear cut.

### ***Historical Context:***

Attitudes to magic in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries may not have been entirely constant, debates raging in theological and legal circles throughout the period, but modern studies can supply a pretty clear picture. Jean-Patrice Boudet offers an insightful introduction via the thought of Isidore of Seville:

Isidore distingue ensuite deux types de divination, *ars* et *furor*, en s'inspirant du *De divinatione* de Cicéron: la première (*ars*) est la divination «artificielle» qui s'occupe de recueillir des signes qu'elle soumet à interprétation; la seconde (*furor*) est la divination «naturelle» ou inspirée que les dieux dispensent aux hommes dans des états de «fureur» ou dans certains songes. [...] Selon la conception isidorienne, divination et magie sont [...] intimement liées. Or toute magie est maléfique: les magiciens sont appelés [...] *malefici* car ce sont des criminels qui «perturbent les éléments, dérangent l'esprit des hommes et provoquent leur mort sans avoir besoin d'utiliser le poison mais par la seule force de leurs incantations». <sup>15</sup>

According to this definition, divination can be virtuous, whilst magic is universally wicked. This dichotomy rests on divination being 'natural' and even inspired by God, whilst magic is artificial manipulation of nature for villainous purposes. Within divination, some (*ars*) is artificially induced, manipulating and reading natural phenomena, whilst another approach (*furor*) may be inspired by dreams and divine visions. To these descriptions, Boudet introduces a further type arising in the 13<sup>th</sup> century:

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), p.15. See also W.E. Klingshirn, "Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners", *Traditio*, 58 (2003), 59-90.



Les choses commencent à changer [...] lorsque des clercs arabisants du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle [...] se réfèrent à la curieuse expression de «nigromancie selon la physique», et qu'un penseur du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Guillaume d'Auvergne, en tire la notion de «magie naturelle», qu'il considère comme une «partie de la science naturelle» et oppose à la magie démoniaque, celle des invocateurs de démons.<sup>16</sup>

In *Perceforest*, *ars* – or 'artifice' as we might say – is the predominant source for magical powers, especially through the medium of alchemy. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the ethical status of alchemy was a matter of significant public and legal interest. In 1396 Inquisitor General Eymerich of Aragon completed his famous anti-alchemical tract *Contra alchimistas* and the practice of alchemy was outlawed under several monarchs and popes.<sup>17</sup> In 1380 Charles V of France banned the practice of alchemy and the ownership of alchemical equipment, and in 1317 Pope John XXII officially pronounced that:

Alchemies are here prohibited, and those who practise their being done are punished. They must forfeit to the public treasury for the benefit of the poor as much genuine gold and silver as they have manufactured of the false or adulterated metal... If they are clerics, they shall be deprived of any benefices they may hold and be deprived of holding others.<sup>18</sup>

Pearsall notes that the latter decree was not popular, and that the notoriously exploitative Avignon Pope may have been more financially than morally motivated. Many of the stars of the world of alchemical theory are themselves anti-alchemical. The real Raymond Lull (or Ramon Llull) wrote against the discipline, forcing authors in his pseudonymous canon to explain this earlier discrepancy.<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest and most famous alchemical thinkers, Avicenna, also wrote against the discipline in his *De congelatione*, more commonly known by

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<sup>16</sup> Boudet, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> On the genesis and ramifications of this text, see William Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp.91-97.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Pearsall, *Alchemists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p.61.

<sup>19</sup> See Michela Pereira, 'Vegetare seu transmutare: The Vegetable Soul and Pseudo-Lullian Alchemy' in *Arbor Scientiae: Der Baum des Wissens von Ramon Lull. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses aus Anlass des 40-jährigen Jubiläums des Raimundus-Lullus-Instituts der Universität Freiburg i. Br.*, ed. by Fernando Domínguez Reboiras, Pere Villalba Varneda, and Peter Walter (Turnhout: Brepols 2002), pp. 93-119.

its incipit as the *Sciant artifices*. William Newman summarises the salient points of Avicenna's argument:

1. Artificial and natural products are intrinsically different, for art is inherently inferior to nature and cannot hope to equal it. Therefore artificers cannot change an inferior metal to a better one, although they can produce passable imitations of the precious metals by inducing superficial characteristics.
2. The true species-determining characteristics of metals cannot be known, since they subsist beneath the level of sense. Since these specific differences are unknown, it will be impossible to bring about the transmutation of one metal into another, for the alchemist cannot manipulate what he does not know.<sup>20</sup>

Dante places alchemists in the final *bolgia* of the eighth circle of Hell (Fraud) where they engage in pathetic disease-ridden brawls, a symbol of the plague they impose on society.

On the other hand, Christian scholars like Albert considered it a potentially fruitful scientific endeavour. Although there may have been a popular association of alchemy with necromancy and the diabolical arts – with the result that theologians frequently discussed them in tandem – the Scholastics are quite clear on the distinction between the two. Albert, Thomas Aquinas, and later St. Bonaventure all commented on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* Book 2 (Distinction 7), which considers the powers of Pharaoh's wizards in Exodus 8. All three commentators saw this as an occasion to address the distinction between demons and alchemy. Newman notes that:

To these writers ... "magic" (*magia*) automatically meant the work of demons, which did not apply to alchemy as such, although demons, like men, could certainly devote themselves to the transmutation of metals. The *Sentence*-commentators found alchemy useful precisely because it was not in itself demonic, but an art known to man – it could therefore be used as a yardstick to assess the things that demons could or could not do.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> William Newman, 'Technology and alchemical debate in the late Middle Ages', *Isis*, 80 (1989) 423-445 (p.427).

<sup>21</sup> Newman, *Promethean Ambitions*, p.53.

There were some thinkers on whom opinion was more divided. Some controversy surrounded Aristotle's *Physics* that led to its removal from the Paris Arts Faculty curriculum in 1255.<sup>22</sup> Aristotle is, in fact, a positive figure in *Perceforest*. The Alexander mythology portrays him as having studied under Aristotle, and Lydoire – the *Reine Fée* – was one of his students, where she learned, amongst other disciplines, alchemy (4.1, p.518).

Whilst Aristotle may receive a favourable review, in general *Perceforest* plays along with contemporary ethical concerns, featuring a distinction following Isidore between wicked magic – manipulating natural forces for evil – and virtuous prophecy using dreams and visions for the general good of the dynasty, as well as a concern with 'natural magic', manipulating natural forces but without the inherent evil that Isidore associates with such practices.

In *Perceforest*, while magical practice is described fairly consistently, attitudes towards such practices are not so clear-cut. The text at times appears to consider most 'natural magic' to be wicked, and yet several members of the royal family use just such magic for virtuous ends. It is difficult to read magic at face value in *Perceforest*, and my study aims to untangle and analyse such ethical concerns in detail. It is useful at this point to set out a concise lexicon of magic in the text.

### ***Magical Typology:***

In terms of the portrayal of magic in the Arthurian canon, for the most part, *Perceforest* doesn't break with tradition. As in the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate, we encounter dubious magical characters in the mould of Morgane la Fée, or any number of wicked enchanter, the importance of prophecy, and even the author's own Merlinesque figure, Zephyr. The major break with these source texts in *Perceforest* is its focus on magical *method*, demonstrating the artifice behind magical effects (whether 'scientifically' or demonically inspired). For instance, in *Le Bel Inconnu*, the Pucele as Blanches Mains creates various illusions to humiliate Guinglains as punishment for his betrayal.<sup>23</sup> After seemingly encouraging and forbidding him to come to her chamber during the night, the confused Guinglains finds himself dangling

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<sup>22</sup> See Cary J. Nederman, *Medieval Aristotelianism and its Limits* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), p.57.

<sup>23</sup> Renaut de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. by G.P. Williams (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1929), pp.138-141.

from a collapsing bridge, only to be found by servants hanging on for dear life to a falcon perch. Guinglains describes this as 'fantomerie'.<sup>24</sup> In *Perceforest* we commonly see such uses of magic – as exploration of character, chivalric ethics, or simply for comic effect – but with an additional, and pervasive emphasis on the method and processes of magical artifice not present in earlier texts like *Le Bel Inconnu*, where Blanches Mains' 'fantomerie' remains mysterious.

Typologies, histories, and analyses of 'real-world' medieval magic abound.<sup>25</sup> This is hardly an easy feat, due to the rather protean nature of medieval 'magic', as Karen Jolly notes:

The concept of magic is, then, a window into medieval mentalities precisely because it was (and is) a problematic and evolving category in European history. This definitional problem is further complicated when examining the common and courtly traditions of magic because they raise issues of class: those of the literate elite who dominate the written sources privilege certain rationalities over others, making various distinctions between demonic magic and Christian miracle, natural versus supernatural forces, black versus white magic, and high and low forms; moreover, literary treatments add a fictional element to magic as entertainment or trickery, particularly in the court environments.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, for Klaassens the term 'magic' is itself potentially anachronistic.<sup>27</sup> I feel justified in using this admittedly modern term, however, as *Perceforest* is a work of fiction, and, accordingly, is not bound to strict realism in its portrayals. Indeed, whilst the text generally upholds common beliefs about magical practice and its immorality, there are times where its portrayals of various sorts of magic have little correspondence with historical attitudes. More importantly, my entire thesis is to suggest that the author uses magic (and artifice) at

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>25</sup> The most approachable, and useful of these is Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Vol. 3: The Middle Ages* (London: Athlone Press, 2002), pp.27-71. For a consideration of the extant manuscript tradition on practical magic, see Frank Klaassens, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), pp.19-80.

<sup>26</sup> Jolly et al., p.3.

<sup>27</sup> Klaassens, p.10.

least in part to think about the artifice of fiction, a way of thinking which was hardly widespread. Whoever they were, the *Perceforest* author was hardly a forensically-minded person on the subject of magic, like Bernard Gui, or Nicholas Eymeric. I am interested in what this particular text does with the supernatural, not in charting real historical patterns, so the useful catch-all of 'magic' serves well. Establishing a typology is necessary, but should ultimately centre on how magic works within the *Perceforest* itself, whatever resemblance this may or may not have to historical realities, attitudes, and manuscripts.

Crucially, all magic in *Perceforest* is artifice: it uses techniques and substances, or the intervention of demons, to confuse the senses. The word *art* is frequently used to describe magical practice. The dominant, and iconic type of magic in the text is ***illusion magic***. This is not to be confused with the historical phenomenon that Klaassens calls 'image magic' (which uses physical inscriptions or effigies to create various effects).<sup>28</sup> Illusion magic in *Perceforest* causes the viewer – or, if you like, the 'reader' – to see something that seems real, but is false.

Many famous episodes, including the enchanter Aroès' false paradise, Bruyant sans Foy and his hidden castle, and the knight Estonné's transformation into a bear at the hands of Lydoire, the *Reine Fée*, all rely upon illusion magic (see Chapters 1 & 2). Illusions seem real, but are created artificially. The *Reine Fée* gifts her son Gadiffer (jr.) a ring that allows him to see through illusions, which is testament to their prevalence throughout the kingdom. Illusion magic often relies on scientific knowledge, and scientific processes. Lydoire studied with Aristotle to gain her mastery of the discipline, and Aroès and others use alchemical powders and liquids to create illusory effects. Illusion magic can also be created by using demons, who use their powers to create confusing or terrifying effects. It is not always clear whether demons are being invoked, or scientific processes used. Lydoire certainly uses Zephyr, a fallen angel, to do her bidding.<sup>29</sup> Illusion magic can be thoroughly wicked, practically weaponised by Darnant's lineage and instrumental to Aroès' tyranny, but it can also be benign, particularly when it is employed as entertainment at royal festivals.

*Perceforest* is fairly stable in the vocabulary it uses to describe magic. Such words serve as useful 'tags' for readers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Klaassens, pp.13-15.

<sup>29</sup> On the historical practice of using spirits in necromantic rituals, see Klaassens, pp.115-55.

<sup>30</sup> 'Nigromancie', 'Ymaige', 'Science', 'Experimens', in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* [www.atilf.fr/dmf/](http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/) [accessed 5 December 2020].

1. *Nigromancie* refers to a specific magical practice incorporating elements of divination (for malign purpose), the invocation of the dead, and of demons. It is also attributed to some virtuous magic users, especially the *Reine Fée*, Lydoire.
2. *Ymaige*. This term is not quite the same as our modern 'image'. It refers to any representation in artworks, statues etc. It can also mean an effigy, or idol. Accordingly it has connotations of ungodliness, though not universally so. It can equally refer to a reflection in a mirror (see Chapter 4). It is interesting, given this discussion suggests an equivalence between magic and literary art, that this word which is properly artistic is used to describe magical effects in the text.
3. *Science* refers to knowledge and practical ability. This highlights the fact that magical practices are learned rather than innate. It also refers to knowledge specifically derived from God, which will be an important feature of Lydoire's abandonment of magical practice in favour of the proto-Christian faith (see Chapter 2).
4. *Experimens* specifically referred to magical processes in the Middle Ages. Otherwise, it means knowledge acquired from practical tests or experiments, and this 'scientific' aspect (in the modern sense) is certainly apparent in the text.

### **Artifice in 'Supernatural' Contexts:**

Magical artifice provides a jumping-off point for a consideration of 'artificial history' more generally. This consideration continues in other contexts that we can (very broadly) call 'supernatural'.

For instance, a **mythical creature** stalks the text: the *Beste Glatissante* (see Chapter 4). This monster has a chimerical form, with a long neck that can reflect light to create images desirable to the observer. This wondrous creature is an apex predator, using its supernatural qualities to ambush prey (including knights). Beyond its lasting appeal to readers and critics, the Beast's unique ability to create illusory images presents another opportunity to consider deceptive images.

**Miracle** is categorically *not* magic.<sup>31</sup> Miracle is authored by God, not man, and miracles, unlike illusions, are very much real. Miracles are rare in *Perceforest*, but I will look at

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<sup>31</sup> On the distinction between miracle and magic, see David Collins, 'Magic in the Middle Ages: History and Historiography', *History Compass*, 9.5 (2011), 410-422 (p.411).

one case in this thesis (in Chapter 4) when Aroès' kingdom – the *Roide Montaigne* – is destroyed by God, and the beautiful *Islande* (Ireland or Iceland) takes its place. There is also an embryonic version of Hell, as the knight Passelion discovers (see Chapter 1). Other locations where evil deeds are committed, such as the *fontaine venimeuse* (4.1, p.680), become diabolical environments. A relative lack of miracle makes sense as the Virgin Birth, the greatest miracle, has not yet occurred.

So, if miracles are real, why put them under the heading of artifice? Well, in their reflection of biblical events, such episodes are a reminder of the *divine* 'artificer' – *il miglior fabbro*, as Dante has it – and that the human artificer must tread a careful line to avoid hubris!

**Prophecy** (*prophesie*) requires a bit more explanation. According to Isidore and others, prophecy is not magic. In the medieval mind, it fits a similar category to miracle. Although false prophets existed, and were often executed for their practices, those who had the true sight were granted their visions by God. In *Perceforest* it is only the virtuous pagans – such as Alexandre and the 'Ladies of the Forest' – who are gifted with visions of the future, following these real-world conventions.

However, what these virtuous pagans do with their prophecies is a little more unusual. Because the project of the text is to create a plausible pre-history for Arthur, certain events have to happen. In particular, in Book Six, Gallafur must fulfil specific quests, and, elsewhere, important marriages must take place to create the appropriate bloodlines. Following the text's ambitions in this regard, the prophetesses of the realm use artifice – whether by practical means, or through directive dreams and visions – to make absolutely sure their prophecies come true. As the reader might expect, this process is couched in irony, and forms a major part of the text's treatment of fiction-writing. I will discuss this at length in Chapter 3.

### ***Artificial History: Imagination with Purpose?***

The *Perceforest* author does not believe his text to be a factual account. Like so many 'chronicles', the text is an obviously imaginary history. Just as the author worries about the moral implications of magic and artifice, so it worries about creating 'artificial history'.

Like many of the prose romances, *Perceforest* claims to be a *bona fide* account of a lost period of recorded history, specifically the missing generations in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* between the useless King Pir and the Arthurian era. We are told that,

fortuitously, King Perceforest had the exploits, adventures, and losses of his dynasty recorded by a clerk called Cresus throughout this period (1.1, pp.673-5). These Greek volumes are then stored secretly within the walls of the *Franc Palais*, centre for chivalry in pagan Britain, and later discovered by an abbot, who commissions a translation into Latin. This is shown to the Count of Hainaut, who borrows it and entrusts it to a monk, who then produces a French version (1.1, pp.69-73).

The trope of the 'found manuscript' is a common feature of prose romance, but there are some peculiarities to the *Perceforest's* frame narrative. First, its transmission in two stages – from Greek to Latin to French – lends it, on an intradiegetic level, more scope for error or clerical invention, and the narrator even admits that he embellished it. This frame narrative is little more than a gesture: the reader would know, and moreover would know that the author knows, precisely how the story begins and ends, because *Perceforest* is transparently prescient about the impending Arthurian/Christian age from start to finish. In other words, the frame narrative rather draws attention to the text's status as imagined history. Friedrich Wolfzettel summarises this status:

As an autonomous imaginary history, this pre-Arthurian epic is not content with reminding us of a forgotten aspect of Revelation, as the Grail legends do. It reminds us of a possible alternative history, which we could very well characterize in terms of the modern concept of counterfactual history, according to the scheme "What would the course of things have been if ...?" It seems that the whole *Perceforest* is built on this astonishingly modern device.<sup>32</sup>

But 'counterfactual' is not quite the word here. 'Artificial history' it may be, but I think the author would consider 'counterfactual' an unfair critique. Rather, *Perceforest* is '**hyperfactual**': imaginary it may be, but it is carefully crafted to set out a plausible pre-history for the Arthurian canon. At its core, it is *seriously* imaginary, 'artificial history' with purpose.

But it isn't so 'hyperfactual' as to be stale. Wolfzettel's sense of its imaginative pedigree hits the mark: it is a fantastical and often digressionary text that revels in taking familiar

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<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Wolfzettel, 'Fictional History as Ideology: Functions of the Grail Legend from Robert de Boron to the *Roman de Perceforest*' in *Romance and History: Imagining Time from the Medieval to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jon Whitman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 90-104 (p.101).



Arthurian tropes to new imaginary places, whether or not they serve this 'hyperfactual' historical mission. Ferlampin-Acher describes the text as an *entremet*:

*Perceforest* est donc à la croisée de deux univers: entre les *Voeux du Paon* et le monde Arthurien, d'Alexandre à Arthur, il occupe une place intermédiaire. Si la littérature était un repas, *Perceforest* serait un de ces entremets, à la mode à la cour de Bourgogne à l'époque où, à mon avis, il fut écrit. Dans ce cadre, le pastiche pourrait se développer dans plusieurs directions.<sup>33</sup>

She goes on to comment that its playful pastiche breeds a certain *art du faux*, specifically its faux-antiquity which it accomplishes by relating its own present to a nostalgic past.<sup>34</sup> The text is very open about its status as created history. Rather than chronicle proper, we can see *Perceforest* as a work of writing *about* the writing of chronicle. Huot comments that:

The growth of the lai repertoire is paralleled by the construction of monuments – both paintings and sculptures, often with short inscriptions – that commemorate these same adventures. In short, the romance is a *mise en scène* of the making and recording of history. When Alexander and his men explore Britain, they encounter various prophecies and magical adventures waiting to happen. Betis acquires the name Perceforest, for example, because it was foretold that the evil sorcerer Darnant, whom Betis kills, would meet his death at the hands of a certain King Perceforest.<sup>35</sup>

The author loves to 'show his workings', and this idiosyncratic approach to the chronicle genre instills a pervasive sense of ironic distance.<sup>36</sup>

There is another element to this self-awareness: just as magical artifice is criticised, so 'artificial history' is problematic. The same pitfall applies to both: any representation or manipulation of Creation can be hubristic. The author walks the tightrope: he wants to write

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<sup>33</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, '*Perceforest*: De l'entremets et de l'entrelardement au pastiche, ou l'art de cuisiner les textes', *Études françaises*, 46.3 (2010) 79-97 (p.81).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>35</sup> Huot, 'Chronicle, Lai, and Romance', p.207.

<sup>36</sup> On authorial distancing, see Christine Ferlampin Acher, 'Aux frontières du merveilleux et du fantastique dans *Perceforest*', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 101.2 (1997) 81-111.

'artificial history' – to perform his own, literary 'magic' in service to the Arthurian canon – but, if he can, he wants to do it the right way. *Perceforest's* concern over its own artificiality is a defining feature of the text.

### ***Historical Cyclicality:***

So what is the right way to do it? How did the author define his historical project? For Jane Taylor, the text's notion of history is defined by two competing "modes of historical understanding":

The first of these, which I shall call reciprocal cyclicality, sees history as vicissitude and therefore as discontinuity: human history consists of a series of virtually discrete cycles each of which has its own organic pattern of birth, maturity and destruction. The second, by contrast – linear cyclicality – stresses continuity: while not ignoring the discontinuities, it nevertheless posits a central, surviving core which runs intact, and above all purposeful, across mutabilities. [...] it views history as a matter of a single "organism" which is itself subject to cyclical swings from which the organism itself finally emerges undiminished.<sup>37</sup>

The text as linear cyclicality may have "a continuing and transferable core such that a triumphant collective past will be present in each successive generation".<sup>38</sup> Genealogy is accordingly a central concern: "This author is not using genealogy as a key to narrative invention; he is putting narrative invention at the service of genealogy, by manipulating what serves in the late Middle Ages as canonical history in pursuit of a linear and purposive cyclicality".<sup>39</sup>

Yet, as reciprocal cyclicality, the *Perceforest* and the imaginary history it creates may be little more than a closed narrative loop, shut off from the rest of the Arthurian canon. For Taylor, this may be inspired by medieval notions like the Wheel of Fortune, and the Six Ages:

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<sup>37</sup> Jane Taylor, 'The Sense of a Beginning: Genealogy and Plenitude in Late Medieval Narrative Cycles' in *Transtextualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicality in Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 1996), pp. 93-123 (p.100).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, 'The Sense of a Beginning', p.112.

The cyclicity of the *Perceforest* [...] stems less from expedient narrative replications of Arthuriana [...] but from the deterministic models that medieval theology and history employ to represent *le devenir du temps*: the eschatological sense of a dialectic shaping the historical process toward finality by a necessity independent of human agency, the analogical sense of human history as a process akin to the process of nature, in which empires, like man himself, wax, wane, decay, and recreate themselves.<sup>40</sup>

It is a peculiar trait of the *Perceforest* that, especially at its climax, it may seem 'unfinished'. The concluding events of this saga take place beyond the borders of *Perceforest's* pages. The Virgin Birth, of course, is not witnessed first-hand, but heard via the Gospel of Nicodemus (6.2, pp.830-74). Arthur remains little more than a prophecy, carefully prepared in the DNA of the characters, most of whom die before the new age has come about. In this way, it is 'discontinuous' with Arthurian history.

At times, the text can appear almost entirely discontinuous, or even carnivalesque in the sheer diversity of episodic tone it exhibits:

Carried to extremes [...] this shift in emphasis towards the episode will tend to favour narrative variety, the comic and the exotic, at the expense of continuity and concentration. The prose-romance, especially it seems in its cyclical form, becomes a narrative structure whose function is to provide an overall coherence in which to embed the greatest possible range of exciting and intriguing incident.<sup>41</sup>

So, is *Perceforest* an indulgent, discontinuous, imaginary history, or a serious 'hyperfactual' genealogy of Arthur's putative ancestors?<sup>42</sup> We will trace the fluctuations of this dichotomy through the course of the text.

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<sup>40</sup> 'Arthurian Cyclicity', p.211.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, 'Fourteenth Century', p.328.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Berthelot captures this duality: "Le début du roman reflète l'ambiguïté de la position de l'écrivain: d'une part il est si soucieux d'apparaître comme un historien qu'il inflige au lecteur un pot-pourri de traduction d'auteurs antiques, parfois contradictoires, ayant trait à l'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne ou à celle d'Alexandre; d'autre part, il greffe son propre récit sur une oeuvre essentiellement romanesque, où l'histoire n'est qu'une structure-cadre, un prétexte à la matière chevaleresque: les *Voeux du Paon*, de Jacques de Longuyon." 'Le mythe de la transmission historique dans le roman de *Perceforest*', in *Histoire et littérature au*

### **'Resolution' and 'Revelation':**

We can also consider *Perceforest* in light of another duality. Seymour Chatman identifies two types of narrative that we may see competing within the text: narratives of **resolution** and **revelation**.

In the traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem-solving, of things being worked out in some way, of a kind of ratiocinative or emotional teleology. Roland Barthes uses the term "hermeneutic" to describe this function, which "articulate[s] in various ways a question, its response and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer." "What will happen?" is the basic question. In the modern plot of revelation, however, the emphasis is elsewhere; the function of the discourse is not to answer that question nor even pose it. Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same. It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed. Thus a strong sense of temporal order is more significant in resolved than in revealed plots. Development in the first instance is an unravelling; in the second, a displaying. Revelatory plots tend to be strongly character-oriented, concerned with the infinite detailing of existents, as events are reduced to a relatively minor, illustrative role.<sup>43</sup>

*Perceforest* is caught on the horns of this dichotomy, which tallies with Taylor's two species of historical cyclicity. Its 'resolution' narrative is easy to spot: Perceforest's dynasty, albeit through cyclical decline and resurgence, eventually exterminates the native Trojan savages, and intermarries in such a way that Arthur's birth is guaranteed. They even have time to hear the Gospel of Nicodemus, and convert to Christianity proper (6.2, pp.875-7).

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*Moyen Âge. Actes du Colloque du Centre d'Etudes Médiévales de l'Université de Picardie*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), pp.39-48 (p.42).

<sup>43</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p.48.

However, relatively little of the text's content pertains directly to this over-arching narrative of resolution.<sup>44</sup> Often, extraneous events actively disrupt it.<sup>45</sup> Chatman identifies two components to most plots, *kernels* and *satellites*:

Kernels are narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events. They are nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths... A minor plot event – a *satellite* – is not crucial in this sense. It can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot, though its omission will, of course, impoverish the narrative aesthetically.<sup>46</sup>

*Perceforest* is dominated by satellites, rather than kernels. If the function of satellites for Chatman "is that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel [...] form(ing) the flesh of the skeleton"<sup>47</sup> then ours is a slender skeleton with a lot of flesh. *Perceforest* takes the premise of a Galfridian historical blind spot as the premise for a superfluity of fictional material.

Such an episodic structure constitutes a narrative of 'revelation', focusing on communicating a state of mind or being, rather than a specific event. For Lyotard:

...la forme narrative, à la différence des formes développées du discours de savoir, admet en elle une pluralité de jeux de langage : trouvent aisément place dans le récit des énoncés dénotatifs, portant par exemple sur ce qu'il en est du ciel, des saisons, de la flore et de la faune, des énoncés déontiques [etc.].<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ferlampin-Acher notes: "D'une part, la perspective eschatologique et l'avènement du Dieu souverain succédant aux cultes païens et annonçant le christianisme, orientent le roman selon un temps linéaire. D'autre part, se trouve au coeur du roman un temps cyclique et folklorique." Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Le Sabbat des vieilles barbues dans *Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Age*, 99.3-4 (1993) 471-504.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor comments: "Ne prétendons pas que ces fils conducteurs soient toujours en mesure de créer une unité foncière dans le roman. Il n'en est rien: dans la profusion des armes et des amours, des tournois et des combats, des batailles et des conquêtes, nous perdons souvent de vue la structure fondamentale de l'oeuvre." Taylor, *Perceforest: première partie*, p.40.

<sup>46</sup> *Story and Discourse*, pp.53-4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p.54.

<sup>48</sup> Jean François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Les Editions Minuit, 1979), p.39.

This is a neat description of many points in the text, where events may seem meandering, whimsical, and poetic, rather than event-focused.

What, then, is *Perceforest* revealing? What concept does it subtly expound? I think it reveals, fundamentally, its own 'createdness', its own artifice. The myriad satellite narratives are thoughtful, meditative, and almost invariably entertaining, but they rarely drive the narrative towards its end, and often present themselves as such: as diverting artifice. Such episodes are interesting and entertaining, but not faithfully representative of, the reality of God's Creation.

It is useful to think of narratives of 'resolution/revelation' as the way in which the text's fluctuating notions of history manifest themselves in the narrative structure itself. They are also evidence of the text's dual character: a serious genealogical project, yet simultaneously meandering and digressionary. It is this dual character that forms the 'debate' surrounding fiction within the text; as medieval scholars and theologians questioned whether magic was virtuous or dubious, so the author of the *Perceforest* wonders whether artificial history constitutes a serious addition to the canon, or imaginative fripperie, and, moreover, whether – as a form of artifice, or literary 'magic' – it is a morally justifiable pursuit.

### ***A Humorous Approach:***

The ever-present, overt narrator enjoys commenting on events, "variously a *moraliste*, philosopher, editor, and antiquarian."<sup>49</sup> We could even go so far as to call the *Perceforest* a self-conscious text, following Robert Alter's definition: "A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality".<sup>50</sup>

Such self-consciousness opens the text up to humour, and *Perceforest* is a very funny text. This is something that critics regularly remark upon, and I am no exception. I would ask the reader firstly to enjoy these moments – any thesis ought in part to allow critics and students to re-experience a text, and *Perceforest* is a truly golden entry in the canon – but also to see it as representative of a joyful attitude to writing.

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<sup>49</sup> Taylor, 'Fourteenth Century', p. 286.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Alter, *Partial Magic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p.10. Cited in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p.250.

The corollary of humour is humility, so I should make some disclaimers. It is not my claim that *Perceforest* is a unique, undiscovered work of genius; there are other, and earlier texts that are self-aware, and that have intelligent and interesting portrayals of magic and fiction. Indeed, Taylor reminds us that even within the prose romance tradition: “although the writer is unusually ingenious in his provision of *effets de réel*, his methodology is, fundamentally, that of the mainstream of prose-romance writers.”<sup>51</sup> Other critics have already touched on my subject matter for this thesis, finding ‘figures for the author’ in certain episodes, as I will discuss in due course. I do not claim to have found some revolutionary stance on fiction-writing in *Perceforest* but intend rather to disentangle the major strands of thought on the matter in a single, lengthy treatment, taking into account that work which has already opened the text to the critical field.

***Structure:***

The structure of this thesis falls into two parts. Part 1, “Appreciating Artifice” will demonstrate a fluctuating attitude to (predominantly magical) artifice. Part 2, “Artificial History Under the Microscope: Techniques and Evaluation” will look at those episodes where magic and artifice are more or less explicitly used as a medium for meditation on the fiction-writing process. *Perceforest* is effectively a text of two parts, with differing foci in Books 1-4 and 4-6, so my argument is by necessity broadly chronological in approach.

## **Part 1**

# **Appreciating Artifice**

***Condemning Magic:***

Put simply, the text is concerned for the most part to show that it toes the line in its portrayal of magic. That is, as something evil, following the conventions of the age. It is particularly (if not entirely) surrounding the use of illusion magic – that is, false images – that such condemnation occurs.

***Appreciating Artifice:***

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Fourteenth Century’, p.286.

However, a tension underpins such ethical propriety. As I will show, the text has a clear appreciation for magical artifice. Members of the royal family use magic to run the kingdom, and even truly diabolical magic is viewed with fascination.

## **Chapter 1: Bad Magic, and its Allure**

### ***Greco-Britons Unite Against Immoral Magic:***

[...] the common Christian view of witches and magicians as agents of the devil is that they do harm primarily through deception or creating illusions in the mind. [...] The antidote to magic is then manifested in the miraculous power of the one God as wielded by his saints and emissaries.<sup>52</sup>

There are certain forms of magical practice which received almost universal opprobrium in the middle ages and, on the face of it, in *Perceforest*: demonic magic, necromancy, and their befuddling effects. This style of magic defines two evil kingdoms in the text. The first, and by far the most successful, is the *lignaige Darnant*: these descendants of the tyrant sorcerer Darnant plague the new British regime from beginning to end, and represent a constant inimical presence throughout the story. Aroès the enchanter's kingdom, situated on "Islande" (Iceland or Ireland), is more short-lived, as Gadiffer II destroys it in Book Three (3.2, pp.58-129), but is an extraordinarily magical affair, and one of the most famous episodes in *Perceforest*.

Both dynasties are defined by magic, on the one hand, and immorality on the other. They rely on illusion magic, which is both demonically and scientifically inspired. They fit an almost biblical mould of diabolical sorcerer, reminiscent of famous condemnations of magic such as "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22.18), or "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them." (Leviticus 20. 31) There are witches in *Perceforest*, as well as more virtuous magic-users like the *Reine Fée*, who uses Zephyr, a demon, to do her bidding (see Chapter 2). Most wicked magic-users are male, rather than female. At times, it is easy to imagine the author agreeing with Augustine:

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<sup>52</sup> Jolly et al., pp.18-19.



All the arrangements made by men for the making and worshipping of idols are superstitious, pertaining as they do either to the worship of what is created or of some part of it as God, or to consultations and arrangements about signs and leagues with devils, such, for example, as are employed in the magical arts, and which the poets are accustomed not so much to teach as to celebrate.<sup>53</sup>

Darnant is worshipped as a god in the later books, and Aroès likewise. Both consort with demons to a greater or lesser extent, and both use the magical arts.

Our *enchanteurs* also conform neatly to Isidore's description of *malefici* (see above), and, in their use of illusion magic, to Michael Scot's category of unacceptable magical practice:

Michel Scot, dans la version longue de son *Liber introductorius*, ne parle pas de magie naturelle mais se place dans une perspective assez proche lorsqu'il distingue trois sortes de magiciens, «l'illusioniste, le faiseur de maléfices et le sage dans les arts secrets de la nature, comme dans les jugements sur le futur et dans l'élaboration des choses secrètes, tant bonnes que mauvaises.» Selon lui, depuis l'avènement du Christ, seul le troisième type de magicien, le *magus sapiens*, est légitime; les deux autres sont condamnables.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, King Perceforest's stated goal in establishing the new order in Britain is to eradicate the sorcerous lineage, ensuring a kingdom free of rape and barbarism, as he sets out in a speech to his citizens (1.1, pp.505-6). The lineage is finally wiped out by Gallafur II in Book Six.

Members of this lineage are identifiable by their frequent use of magic. King Perceforest has a particularly difficult encounter with Bruyant sans Foy, who has turned his castle invisible:

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<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, transl. by J.F. Shaw (Chicago and London: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1952), p.646. Passage cited in Boudet, p.208. It is interesting to note that for Augustine such practices are particularly aligned with the poetic arts.

<sup>54</sup> Boudet, p.20.

En verité, dist le roy, je suis moult esbahis comment par ces maudis enchantemens l'en peut ainsi muchier une place. – Par ma foy, sire, dist la pucelle, ilz s'en scevent bien aidier et c'est la chose qui plus les tient en vertus. Et n'est contree au monde en qui l'en use tant de ces maledictions comme l'en fait en cestui royaume, et sont ceulx de ce mauvais lignage de Darnant. (3.1, p.207)

In this sense, the entire thrust of the Greco-British kingdom is based on an anti-magical ethic. Indeed, Lydoire gives her son Gadiffer (jr.) a ring that protects him from enchantments. In this chapter I will consider the relation between magic and evil: what is it about Darnant's and Aroès' magic that makes them evil? Or is it their evil that leads them to use magic? I will also question whether magic is thoroughly reprehensible: does it have any redeeming features? Could it have any purpose other than as a marker of immorality?

### ***The 'lignaige Darnant' and Illusion Magic:***

Darnant's lineage constitutes a barbarous threat to civilisation: a "negative, mocking mimicry" of Perceforest's kingdom.<sup>55</sup> Whenever Perceforest's dynasty is weak, the lineage gains in strength. The entire text is a wave form along these lines, fluctuating between strong Greco-British martial rule, and isolated enclaves of Perceforest's kingdom struggling to survive against lineage incursions.

Throughout, the native Trojans use illusion magic in their skirmishes with the British knights. We see this in action from the beginning of the text, when Perceforest (known as Betis at this point) finds himself in single combat with Darnant (1.1, pp.140-147).

Perceforest is delighted by the beautiful forests of his kingdom: all the trees are neatly spaced, and he thinks it a shame that none of the natives are out enjoying the scenery. Little does he know that this is due to Darnant's tyrannical rule, which has the people running scared. Darnant promptly appears, intending to imprison Perceforest for using a fountain on his land. Perceforest declares that water should be "de commun". Combat ensues, and after a first exchange of blows, Darnant is wounded.

Facing a dangerous opponent, Darnant decides to change his tactics, casting three

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<sup>55</sup> Huot, *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.189.

spells to confuse his pursuer and make good his escape. First, an illusory river appears. Perceforest's horse, perplexed, jumps as though into water, and stumbles. Horse and rider are panicked by the deep waters, but eventually stagger confusedly onto the bank. Second, two lions appear, and after a brief skirmish, Perceforest forges ahead. The lions lose their magic, and disappear. Finally, Darnant sends an image of himself charging towards Perceforest/Betis, who prepares for the joust. The image is so real that both horse and rider stagger with the collision. Perceforest realises he has been tricked by Darnant's *enchantelements*, and pursues him to Castle Gloriande. From a window, Gloriande – a damsel – reprimands Darnant for his cowardice. Perceforest defeats Darnant in single combat. In one last desperate attempt, he casts a spell and transforms into Perceforest's Queen, Ydorus. This causes him to hesitate, and Darnant stabs him in the chest with a dagger, missing his heart only by God's grace. Gloriande exhorts Perceforest to kill Darnant, which he does with aplomb, decapitating him, and a terrible wailing of *mauvais esprits* resounds through the forest.<sup>56</sup>

Darnant's magic serves as an extension of his evil traits: his cowardice, his deceptiveness, and his inability to compete in fair combat with his Greco-British superiors. The wailing of spirits that accompanies his death is an omen of the lineage's longevity, and of their diabolical nature. The first-time reader may rightly feel that this fight is over rather too quickly and rather too easily. Suffice it to say, the lineage takes a little more defeating than that.

Throughout the early books they seek to avenge their patriarch, using magic to gain unfair advantages in combat. This normally involves clouding the senses of their adversaries. Their use of smoke clouds to escape (1.1, pp.164-70) is frequent enough to be almost a stock part of their arsenal.<sup>57</sup> But not all their magic is so passive. Later, one Menalus creates an illusion of many armed combatants rushing Perceforest and his companion Floridas from behind, distracting them enough for the lineage warriors to get in some cheap shots (1.1, pp.364-77). Elsewhere, multiple knights fall foul of an *enchanteur* who blows magic powder

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<sup>56</sup> Ferlampin-Acher suggests some interesting literary and political implications to the death of Darnant, as well as other characters within and outside his lineage. See Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Les morts violentes de Darnant, Estonné et Bruyant dans *Perceforest*: l'Histoire imprévue', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 22 (2011), 293-305.

<sup>57</sup> A technique which Ferlampin-Acher calls "nuit artificielle". See 'La nuit des temps dans *Perceforest*: de la nuit de Walpurgis à la nuit transfigurée', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 106.2 (2002), 415-35 (p.423).

in their faces, which causes them to fall instantly asleep. They are taken to Darnantes (capital of the forest of Darnant) for execution, only to be saved in the nick of time by Estonné and a virtuous enchantress, who puts an end to their enchantment (1.1, pp.388-409).

The most successful of Darnant's descendants is Bruyant sans Foy, whose devious cunning often gains him the upper hand on the honourable Greco-British knights. In fact, Bruyant rarely resorts to magic, preferring other forms of trickery. When the *Chevalier a la Belle Geande* defeats him in combat, Bruyant begs for his life, and is granted clemency on condition that he surrender to Perceforest (3.1, pp.156-171). Bruyant cannot believe that Perceforest will spare his life, given the crimes he has already committed. Here we see a fine example of Huot's "negative mimicry" as Bruyant can't understand the fundamental framework of chivalry. He has no concept of honour or forgiveness; he is a true Trojan savage, and, as the narrator succinctly puts it: "fist depuis maint desplaisirs aux chevaliers du Francq Palais et se retrouva en maint peril de mort, mais tousjours eschappoit par son malice". (3.1, p.170)

One of his most ambitious *desplaisirs* is the imprisonment of several of Perceforest's finest knights (3.1, pp.205-20). They are held in the *Chastel Desvoyé*, so called as it is near-impossible to find due to its magical enchantments. An illusory river deters would-be invaders, and the castle itself is completely invisible. Fortunately, Gadiffer II – Perceforest's nephew – comes across his uncle on his way to the *Roide Montaigne*. Thanks to his magic ring,<sup>58</sup> the illusion has no effect on him, and he rushes to his companions' aid, destroying the apparatus that powers the enchantment:

Car il vey amont, au milieu de la sale, la gaiolle plaine de ampoules de voire et de plusieurs malefices qui destournoient a veoir le chastel pour les enchantemens dont plaines estoient. Alors il leva la lance contremont parmy la gaiolle tant fort qu'il la rompi et les fiolles qui y estoient plaines d'enchantemens cheurent par terre emmy la sale et se rompirent. Ce fait, l'enchantement qui estoit environ le chastel perdy sa force, tellement que l'en pouoit veoir le chastel comme ung autre. (3.1, p.211)

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<sup>58</sup> Magic rings were a historical reality, often worn to protect against demonic assault, which could confuse the mind. See Jolly et al., pp.42-53.

Illusion magic is right at home with Bruyant's dishonourable character. Later, he is a more overtly diabolical character. After he murders Estonné (4.1, pp.163-176), and is in turn killed by a very young Passelion (4.1, pp.299-301), he is seen in Hell alongside Darnant (4.2, p.749).

But Hell is rather porous in this pre-Christian age, and the spirits of the lineage haunt the land. Several knights investigate the foul-smelling smoke that billows from Darnant's sarcophagus near Castle Gloriande, which can still be seen even in Book Six (6.1, p.39). The tomb acts as a reminder of Darnant's horrid persistence, and the site is guarded by a powerful spirit called Malaquin. In one adventure (3.1, pp.77-85), the *Bossu de Suave* is compelled to seek combat with this spirit. At midnight, Malaquin materialises with a retinue of demonic knights, and carries the *Bossu* on the point of his lance to an island where he is left for dead (3.1, pp.79-83). Here and elsewhere, such spirits are seemingly invincible and very dangerous, a testament to the perennial evil presence of the lineage.

Ferlampin-Acher considers the Malaquin episodes evidence of the lineage's genesis in the contemporary concern with heretical sects of sorcerers, which she argues the author shared.<sup>59</sup> Their use of magic serves as an extension to their penchant for deception and differentiates them from the Greco-Britons. Their supernatural qualities mark them as *contre nature*: a logical continuation, we may say, to their enmity with the *Franc Palais*.

But they are not always portrayed as a serious threat. In Book Six, during the second *aventure*, Gallafur is going about his business exorcising the remaining sites where lineage spirits reside, when he encounters a series of goading signs, all competing with each other to accuse the age's knights of cowardice (6.1, p.63). The signs begin to contradict each other: where one accuses British knights of being "moisnes [...] de cloistre / qui laissent icy tant l'erbe croistre" (6.1, p.63) and incites them to prove their worth, the next day a new sign claims the adventure has already been completed, so they needn't bother (6.1, p.68). Earlier, during the first *aventure*, signs warned of mortal danger ahead (6.1, p.34). It is as though the spirits or living descendants of the lineage fall into two camps: half wishing to lure knights into danger, half fearful of defeat. In both cases, the semiotic method is deception, advertising that the *aventure* is more or less dangerous than it really is. Gallafur is not fooled, and exorcises the spirits.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Perceforest' et Zéphir, pp.353-359.

Beyond the obvious comedy of this episode, it reveals deception to be the lineage's core function. Here, they are deceptive in the act of writing. They use their magic to create confusing illusions, and cast other underhand enchantments to improve their odds in combat. Likewise, as spirits, they seek to trick knights into unfair combat. Ferlampin-Acher comments on the descriptions of the *Beste Glatissante*: "Ces évocations peuvent être comprises comme la condamnation morale d'une [...] rhétorique mal maîtrisée".<sup>60</sup> I think this notion of 'uncontrolled' or even 'unhinged' rhetoric applies just as well to the lineage, for whom immoral artifice – unfair, dishonourable, deceptive – is a common theme, whether in their magic, or more 'literary' methods.

And we should not ignore the delight the author takes in these villains. Jeanne Lods comments on the importance of the *merveilleux* in the early books:

[...] si les chevaliers qui servent la bonne cause [...] n'avaient en face d'eux que des hommes usant de procédés naturels dans l'attaque et la défense, ils seraient vainqueurs tout de suite et il n'y aurait pas d'aventure, mais leurs ennemis les entraînent au milieu des fleuves ou les font lutter contre des ombres, les endorment soudain ou les enferment dans des geôles invisibles.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the clear fantastical entertainment they provide, they occasionally bring outright comedy. In Book One, Porrus runs into some lineage knights and is convinced by an enchantment that he's been decapitated, at which point – in a rather Kafkaesque display – he surrenders to his opponent. Whilst potentially dangerous, the absurd comedy of this scene is obvious (1.1, pp.272-82). Also in Book One, Alexander and co. are tricked by a spell into thinking they're riding donkeys, delivering goods to a castle (1.1, pp.171-80).<sup>62</sup> Indeed, if we think back to the 'epic' combat between Perceforest and Darnant, certain moments may seem more like slapstick than high-octane drama: horse and rider thrashing around in a river that doesn't exist, fighting lions which disappear into thin air, Perceforest seduced as the evil

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<sup>60</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Fleurs de rhétorique, Buissons Ardents et Arbres de Jessé: Autour de quelques comparaisons, métaphores et paraboles dans *Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Français*, 60-61 (2007) 205-231 (p.216).

<sup>61</sup> Lods, p.97.

<sup>62</sup> See Lods, p.101.

enchanter turns into the Queen, and so on. Humour and irony are everywhere in *Perceforest*, and tied particularly to moments of magic and the supernatural.

Several of the above episodes show an interest in the *process* of magical artifice: the *enchanteur* who puts the knights to sleep employs a powder, the glass phials full of magical liquids in the *Chastel Desvoyé*. It is not always obvious whether the lineage's magic is demonically or scientifically inspired, but in these two cases where we can identify a scientific origin, there is a clear fascination in demonstrating this artifice, like those popular magic shows that might have been put on in the Burgundian Court of the day.<sup>63</sup>

So, we see a dichotomy: on one level, the *Perceforest* author denounces deceptive artifice, fit only for murderers and savages, whilst on another level, he clearly takes great enjoyment in exhibiting the processes and effects of artifice.

### ***Aroès the Blasphemer:***

Aroès (3.2, pp.58-129), like Darnant, is thoroughly evil, and his magic appears as an extension of his inherent pagan wickedness. He lives on the island of *Roide Montaigne*, which is surrounded by high cliffs, and is largely inaccessible to the outside world. He is a tyrant, and demands his subjects worship him as a god. To further his megalomania, he constructs an artificial paradise as 'evidence' of his apotheosis. He deceives and euthanises his subjects, and harbours a mad fantasy of copulation with his own daughter. This last point illustrates one major difference between Aroès and Darnant: the lineage has strong homosocial bonds between themselves, where Aroès is truly isolationist. We are not dealing with a 'mocking mimicry' of monarchy here so much as blasphemous hubris.

Aroès' immorality – as pagan tyrant, and pretender to godhood – is extended in his immoral use of magic. His rule is predicated on dissimulation. On the condition that he is worshipped "comme le Dieu Souverain", he promises his people various bounties. First, national security:

Bonnes gens, moult vous devez louer et prisier, veu que vous habitez en telle province que vous ne avez cause de doubter homme vivant, car il n'y a au monde tant puissant prince qui vous puisse nullement grever. (3.2, p.88)

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<sup>63</sup> Jolly et al., pp.66-70.

On top of this he offers a wondrous afterlife. In a purpose-built 'hospital', subjects may be cured of "toute mauvaises maladies", where in fact they are anaesthetised, killed, and dumped in the sea. This is a necessary step to maintain the integrity of the bodily afterlife advertised. Aroès' most egregious claim is that of godhood:

Et moy mesmes, qui [...] suis vostre roy francq comme celui qui n'en doit feauté ne nul  
hommage n'en ciel ne en terre, car je suis roy sans seigneur terrien et dieu sans  
reconoissance du Souverain Dieu (3.2, p.94)

Szkilnik suggests a parallel with Exodus 19. 4-6: "Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people". She points out that such appropriation of divinity is a mark of serious sin: "Répéter, voire s'approprier la parole divine est procédé courant dans les œuvres littéraires du Moyen Age. Mais parce que les motifs d'Aroès sont diaboliques, la reprise confine au sacrilège."<sup>64</sup>

Other features bear similarities to the Old Testament God. Where Aroès offers his people a terrestrial paradise, God offers the Israelites "a good and spacious land ... flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3. 8). The enchanter's secret laboratory (from where he creates his illusions) is shrouded in smoke, and when he appears to his people enthroned in the paradise, he is accompanied by the sound of wind instruments. This recalls God's appearance to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19. 16), clouding the mountain with smoke, and issuing forth a trumpet blast. Aroès denies entry to his tower, just as God commands Moses to "set limits around the mountain and keep it holy" (Exodus 19. 23).

The author may also have had Mohammed's miracles in mind. Various considered a schismatic and heretic in the Middle Ages, his 'miracles' are portrayed in a similar light in Alexandre du Pont's *Roman de Mahomet*. In *Mahomet*, the milk and honey flowing in streams down the mountain were prepared in hand-dug channels the night before, and the white bull who bears the Quran on its horns was a veal bull, trained from infancy to come to heel. Later, his tomb appears to float through the artful use of magnets.<sup>65</sup> *Mahomet* likely had a very

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<sup>64</sup> Michelle Szkilnik, 'Aroès l'illusioniste', *Romania*, 113.3-4 (1992-1995) 441-65 (p.444).

<sup>65</sup> *Le Roman de Mahomet*, ed. Yvan G. Lepage (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1996). See ll.1216-1562 for the false miracle episode.



limited circulation, with only one manuscript extant, but Jolly points out that such views were common in the middle ages, not only as a result of more popular literary texts, but also theological tracts:

[...] increasingly popular stories of diabolical magic indicate the reality of these activities and therefore the guilt of the sorcerers, witches, heretics, Jews and Muslims who are accused of practising them. For example the popular *Golden Legend* presents Mohammed as a sorcerer, while Peter the Venerable's tracts against Islam present it as a diabolical heresy.<sup>66</sup>

Aroès also relies on demons. Faced with Gadiffer's immunity to his illusions, he flees, extracted from his tower by two winged devils. Later, as the very island collapses, Gadiffer and Flamine escape the island by boat, where they see Aroès wrestling with the demons around him, still laying claim to his daughter's hand even as he is dragged to Hell. It may even be that the convincing 'illusion' of Hell that he presented to intimidate his subjects was no illusion at all, but a gateway to Hell which he used to get demons to do his bidding, as was thought common practice amongst enchanters and alchemists. The author reminds us that Aroès' people are "de mauvaise origine", aligning them with the lineage's Trojan bloodline.

Gadiffer and Flamine reflect on Aroès' blasphemy in an uncomplicated manner:

Ha! Mauvais Aroés [...] qui ne es fors une povre creature faitte et composee des quatres elemens par la sapience du Souverain Createur, que tu as oublyé et mescogneu par l'art du deable, dont mauvasement tu es deceuz. Et dois sçavoir que quant le Dieu Souverain fist et crea ton corps, il le composa tant foible et de tant povre matiere pour toy tenir en subjection que de la seulle pointure d'un ver corrompu incontinent tu peus morir. Et pour ce, Aroés [...] me dy comment ne a quelle occasion tu te fais nommer dieu et te fais aourer comme lui, qui ne es fors boe et vyande aux vers! (3.2, p.110).

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<sup>66</sup> Jolly et al., p.21.

And, as the *Roide Montaigne* tumbles into the abyss, the new island that emerges miraculously from the ocean is a new and improved version of the old:

[...] et veirent que la mer estoit comme tout appaisie et la terre pardessus l'eau découverte toute onnye, non point haulte, ainçois basse et de couleur de sablon sans quelque couleur d'arbres ne d'herbes. (3.2 p.120)

An integral part of the civilising process in *Perceforest* is the taming of wild landscapes, including deforestation and the construction of roads.<sup>67</sup> This sequence is a rare instance of proper miracle in the text. The body of Flora, Aroès' long-suffering wife, is washed ashore, divinely preserved from decay. Her tomb is wrought by a divine hand. Out with the old, pagan ways, in with the new (proto-Christian) *Souverain Dieu*.

In her analysis of this finale, Szkilnik notes that the name 'Islangue' is derived from its institution of language, whereas Aroès built no monuments nor established any formal law.<sup>68</sup> The inscription on Flora's miraculous tomb lays down the law of the *Souverain Dieu*, informing us of Aroès' new residence in Hell. Unlike the divine law, Aroès' semiotics was deceptive, and blasphemous, based on false promises of paradise and pagan hubris. His magic supported this deceptive narrative, an illusion which the arrival of the proto-Christian Gadiffer quite literally shatters.

### ***Aroès the Artist:***

Much of the episode is dedicated to a uniquely fantastical exposition of the inner workings of Aroès' magical technology: a kind of medieval science-fiction. The *Perceforest* author disassembles the cogs, levers and screws of this imaginary artifice with the eye of a technician. The island is morally and physically circumscribed, impenetrable both for its topography and Aroès' isolationism. Because of this, it can function as an experimental space. The author certainly makes the most of this in the appearance of Aroès' paradise, which is an entertaining affair for the reader, and a very powerful reality for Aroès' subjects.

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<sup>67</sup> On the civilising process in *Perceforest* see Huot, *Postcolonial Fictions*, pp.25-98.

<sup>68</sup> Szkilnik, 'Aroès'.

It emulates popular medieval depictions of Heaven: beautifully luminous, accompanied by delightful choral music, the apparently transcended crystalline forms of deceased relatives waving from the parapets. Aroès does not offer gems, women or libation as in other medieval portrayals of paradises.<sup>69</sup> His aesthetic, contrary to his morality, is Christian rather than pagan (or 'infidel'), although as Delcourt notes, this can go towards emphasising its perversion:

Comparables à ces "ydolles" dont parle l'ermite dans le "Temple Inconnu," les images trop belles du roi-magicien Aroès ne peuvent que brouiller l'esprit de ceux et de celles qui les appréhendent.<sup>70</sup>

Critics have considered other sources for the paradise. Taylor suggests the story of the 'Old Man of the Mountain' from Marco Polo's *Travels*,<sup>71</sup> whilst Charles Roussel suggests a basis in the character of King Chosroés in the *Roman d'Eracle*.<sup>72</sup>

The floating paradise is so realistic that even Flamine, Aroès' virtuous daughter, is enraptured. The people dub the location of its annual appearance the "champ de Joye" and refuse to believe that it is fraudulent even when Gadiffer destroys the mechanisms that support it. On seeing their master carried off into the night sky by demons, the people believe that an enemy god has invaded the island. This credulity is not gratuitous considering the paradise's convincing aesthetic.

Gadiffer's magic ring allows him – and the reader – to see through the illusions, and this defines the episode's perspective. Through Gadiffer's x-ray eyes, the reader can observe the mechanisms behind Aroès' magic. At the beginning of the episode, Gadiffer gains entry to the island via a goods lift where traders supply Aroès with the various powders and ingredients that he uses for his illusions. He smuggles himself in via a box of ladies' silks, whereupon he is sequestered by Flamine, and a humorous exchange ensues between the

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<sup>69</sup> See, for example, the portrayal of the heavenly house of *Genet hanaym* in chapter 36 of Bonaventura da Siena's *Liber Scalae Machometi*, which was translated into Old French as *Le Livre de L'Eschiele Mahomet*. A modern translation exists: *Livre de l'échelle de Mahomet*, transl. by Gisèle Besson and Michèle Brossard-Dandré (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1991).

<sup>70</sup> Denyse Delcourt, 'Ironie, magie, théâtre: Le Mauvais Roi dans le *Roman de Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Français*, 54 (2004), 33-57 (p.55).

<sup>71</sup> Jane Taylor, 'Aroès the Enchanter – An Episode in the *Roman de Perceforest* and its Sources', *Medium Aevum*, 47 (1978), 30-39.

<sup>72</sup> Claude Roussel, 'Le « paradis » des rois païens', *Le Moyen Age*, 89.2 (1983), 215-237.

damsel in distress and what is apparently a wooden crate. An ironic perspective accompanies the magical episode: we have entered the theatrical space from backstage.

In his secret tower, Aroés is not enthroned in luminous crystal, but in a mechanised chair surrounded by “pommeaux qui estoient chargez de fioles toutes plaines d’eaves,” (3.2, p.108) from which he can manipulate the elaborate machinery of his laboratory. The passage describing these headquarters is one of the most famous in the text:

Et a l’environ de l’estaige, quy estoit comme ung palais tout ront, avoit fenestres, et autour de ce palais avoit un cercle de fer de merveilleuse grandeur, car il avironnoit toutes les fenestres et pendoit atout fillets de fer qui tenoient a la voulsure de la tour. Et estoit tellement pendu que Aroés le faisoit tourner a son doy tout autour de ce galatas ainsi qu’il lui plaisoit. Encores a ce cercle pendoient tant d’ampoules de voirre mises par bonne ordonnance que Gadiffer n’en sçavoit le compte, et estoient toutes plaines de merveilleuses eaves faittes par art mauvais. Mais quant la clarté des torsis qui alumez estoient autour de Aroés feroit parmy ces ampoules, il sambloit aux regardans d’embas qu’ilz veissent les ames de leurs parens et de leurs amis. Encores estoit ce du moins, car Aroés avoit son siege tant advironné d’autres ampoules que ce sambloient menestrelz qui jouassent de tous instrumens. (3.2, pp.108-109)

Jane Taylor comments on the singular invention of this moment: “There is to my knowledge no account so detailed in medieval French fiction, no account which makes so sustained and scientific an attempt to explain [...] the subterfuges of the enchanter”.<sup>73</sup> Aroés has apparent expertise in metallurgy (the iron ceiling), engineering or clockwork (his mechanised chair and the rotating phials and tools), glasswork (the phials themselves), as well as optics and alchemy. The phials and ampules that supply the projected images of the paradise contain mysterious ‘eaves’, and the use of the plural form here, along with the earlier glimpse of the crates of alchemical ingredients, leads us to the conclusion that alchemy plays an important role in the illusion. Such details may not have been all that alien to a medieval audience well acquainted with the ubiquity of mercantilism and snowballing networks of material trade (especially in the Low Countries, where the text was composed). Likewise, by the fourteenth

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Aroés the Enchanter’, p.33.

and fifteenth centuries, the science of optics was fast-developing and finding application in the sphere of fine art, while the luminous chemical phosphorous had been discovered in the twelfth century, and could be derived in its pure form from urine.<sup>74</sup> Medieval readers may have enjoyed wondering how these new sciences might create the paradise, and modern readers have likewise revelled in its detail and imagination.

The author sets out in Book One that he wishes his material to be *plaisans a oïr* (1.1, p.445) and these passages are amongst his finest achievements in this regard. As Delcourt comments, it is difficult to read these passages merely as evidence of Aroès' evil, but rather as admirable feats of artifice:

[...] do we of the poet's audience bristle necessarily with contempt at Aroès's virtuosity as a maker of fiction? Is there not also a spirit of emulation that stirs the poet who so brilliantly evokes the virtuosity of Aroès's magical exploits? Is the poet of the *Perceforest* not projecting backward into his pre-Christian world his own dreams of artistic creation, dreams that would be harshly censured by the "true" religion shortly to triumph? [...] By inviting us to visit this laboratory of fiction along with his hero, the poet of the *Perceforest* directs our attention to all of the intelligence and "subtlety" (*subtiveté*) that go into artistic production.<sup>75</sup>

Ferlampin-Acher even draws a comparison with late medieval theatre.<sup>76</sup> Delcourt continues to consider the implications for literary artifice:

We might expect, then, that the poet of the *Perceforest* should also be concerned by the implications of such association for his own art, and [...] we will see that its author will take care to demonstrate what is different in his fiction from that produced by

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<sup>74</sup> For a history of medieval optics see Olivier Darrigol, *A History of Optics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a very detailed study of medieval optical theories see David C. Lindberg, *Studies in the History of Medieval Optics* (London: Variorum, 1983). On the use of optics in late medieval and early modern painting, see David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Denyse Delcourt, 'The Laboratory of Fiction: Magic and Image in the *Roman de Perceforest*' *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 21 (1994) 17-31 (pp.23-4).

<sup>76</sup> '*Perceforest*' et *Zéphir*, pp.156-162.

the magician and his accomplices, the devils. Fiction is employed by Aroès with the purpose of deceiving his audience, while the poet will employ it to enlighten his.<sup>77</sup>

For Delcourt, the author gets out of any magical affiliation by writing in “an iconoclasm of apocalyptic proportions”.<sup>78</sup> While this is true, we should note that this apocalyptic conclusion is rather over-the-top, and one wonders if it isn’t delivered with a certain degree of impish humour, rather than piety alone.

### **Double Standards:**

*“Towards the illicit and extreme kinds of magic we have seen repeated the varying attitudes of religious reprehension, rational criticism whether that of hostile scorn or the attempt to find some explanation for the supposed phenomena, and curiosity thinly disguised under a pretense of disapproval, occasionally an open and sympathetic exposition.”<sup>79</sup>*

Several important points present themselves from this initial foray into magic and writing. First, magical artifice serves as an extension – even an emblem – of the villainy of the characters who use it. There are also linguistic elements to these characters’ evil, whether deceptive writing or lies of godhood; parallels between magical artifice and literary artifice are brought into question.

At face value, ‘bad magic’ suggests a condemnation of all magical artifice. Yet there is abundant evidence for the author’s admiration of artifice, whether the antics of the lineage or Aroès’ paradise. As Richard Kieckheffer notes: “Even when magic was most explicitly demonic [...] it held a kind of romantic fascination. The demons themselves may not be glamorized, but their magical effects do take on a wondrous aura.”<sup>80</sup> Jolly notes that not all necromancy was seen to be straightforwardly evil, with some popular texts presenting a more ambiguous attitude.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Delcourt, ‘Laboratory of Fiction’, p.20.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>79</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-58), IV (1934), p.611.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Kieckheffer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.113.

<sup>81</sup> Jolly et al., p.62.

## Chapter 2: Good Magic, and its Limits

*Perceforest* maintains a continuity in terms of the methods and techniques of magical production, specifically in their reliance on either scientific process or demons. As was the case historically, we may wonder if magic might nevertheless be used for virtuous ends.

In *Perceforest*, where bad magic centred around deception, isolationism and tyranny, good magic involves protection, healing, nourishment, and the judgement of transgressions. If bad magic was a means of considering immoral pagan characters and immoral artifice, it follows that good magic may allow the author to explore the virtuous pagan. It stands to reason that this may also provide an opportunity to consider the virtues of the author's own, literary artifice.

Whilst characters like Lydoire *must* be good, as they are the ancestors of Arthur, and precursors to the Christian age, they also use dubious magical practices, and we observe a familiar suspicion of the 'pagan' artifice embodied by Aroès and Darnant.

### ***Lydoire's Magical Pedigree:***

This chapter focuses on the 'Ladies of the Forest' and Lydoire, Queen of Scotland and so-called *Reine Fée*. This epithet is inaccurate, the narrator insists, because her magic is derived not from any supernatural source, but rather from her philosophical and scientific expertise, having studied under Aristotle (4.1, p.518). Whilst she also receives magical instruction from one Corrose – "qui estoit une des subtiles enchanteresses et qui plus sçavoit de conjurations et de nigromancie que femme qui fust au paÿs" (2.1, p.146) – she quickly outstrips her teacher: "sy y mist toute son entente, et avec ce elle y adjousta sy grant foy par le grant desir qu'elle avoit de sçavoir la science" (2.1, p.146).

She uses Zephyr – a demon – to perform tasks for her. In his various guises, he can be seen gathering herbs, delivering messages, rescuing knights, and so on. Although we rarely see Lydoire interact with Zephyr, this is clearly the partnership of a magic-user and her 'familiar spirit'.

Like other magicians in *Perceforest*, Lydoire and other enchantresses create illusions: invisible *manoirs*, powerful transformations, and effects that befuddle the mind.

They fit a similar mould, in this sense, to Aroès and certain *lignaige* enchanters. It is also important to note that, although Lydoire – like many other virtuous magic-users – is female, and so perhaps intuitively a different archetype to the evil male enchanters discussed previously, the very origins of evil magic can be traced back to a woman: Cassandra, who arrived in Britain after the Trojan diaspora, and was struck by heavenly lightning for her crimes (1.1, pp.354-7), a punishment also reserved for Cerse la Romaine for strangling her son – Perceforest’s heir – and betraying the Greco-Britons to Caesar (4.1, pp.607-8). Lydoire and her ilk are not entirely free from the negative associations of magic by their gender alone.

In many cases, good magic is just that: good. Anyone can see that the purposes that magic is put to by Lydoire is entirely different to that of an Aroès or Darnant. Indeed, Ferlampin-Acher notes that many of the female magic-users in the *Perceforest* constitute ‘rehabilitations’ of portrayals elsewhere in the Arthurian canon, particularly concerning the character of Seville.<sup>82</sup> But the author never eliminates the possibility of magic’s innate immorality, and the ethics of its use is scrutinised even when it comes to the *Reine Fée*.

### ***Benign Magic:***

When King Perceforest emerges from his depression after Alexander’s death, he prays to the *Souverain Dieu* in the *Temple Inconnu*. One detail may strike an unusual note, as God is likened to a mother hen:

Ha! Noble Ouvrier et Souffisant, se n’estoit la grande misericorde, la grant charité et la fiable amour que vous avez envers voz creatures, on porroit dire que l’homme seroit en fin dampné. Mais la grant amour que vous avez a luy vous fait samblant a la geline qui a ses poucins pardevant luy, qui ne scevent par ignorance querre la viande dont ilz ont nécessité. Mais elle, par destrainte de vraie amour, prent le grain de blé et l’apporte pardevant eulx comme celle qui veult dire: “Prenez, mengiez pour vostre famine estaindre.” Ha! Vray Nourrecier en vraye amour, ainsi en ouvrez vous. (2.1, p.223)

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<sup>82</sup> See ‘*Perceforest*’ et *Zéphir*, pp.378-391.



Like the mother hen, God protects the weak, and provides for his brood. This feminine image is no coincidence. The emerging *nouvelle foi* sits well with much of Lydoire's magic (and that of other enchantresses): providing nourishment, medicine and surgery, and magical entertainment. Lydoire will even take the reins of the kingdom when kingly rule falters. Like the divine mother hen, magic can have a benign role.

In Book One, Porrus and Cassiel are out adventuring and save some maidens from lineage knights. As they prepare to bed down for the night, they find conjured candelabras, fine food and comfortable tents awaiting them (1.1, pp.273-4). This reward marks the beginning of a cooperation between Greco-British knights and virtuous enchantresses. The two knights leave a thank-you note for their mysterious benefactors – as yet too shy to show themselves to these new foreign knights – cementing this symbiotic alliance. Such magical banquets are a touch of fantasy in the early parts of the story. The knights are more than self-sufficient but such treats and displays of magic are always met with wonder.<sup>83</sup>

Other damsels help in the struggle against the lineage's magic, removing debilitating magical effects. In one instance, Porrus is saved from an enchantment that leads him to believe he has been beheaded (1.1, pp.280-2). Later, Estonné and Claudius are assisted by an enchantress, who counteracts a sleeping spell that has been cast on four of their companions. This lady "scet d'ingromance plenté" (1.1, p.406), but is clearly beneficent. The rescued knights are described as *desenchentez* (1.1, p.408): good magic can actively counteract magic used by others to do harm.

Medicine – or *chirurgie* – is clearly a learned, practical skill, and it is described in wholly physical terms as its practitioners tend knights' wounds on the battlefield. Yet even if it is not magic as such, it occupies a similar position of prestige and wonder. It may be the author was imagining what classical medicine (inherited from Greece) may have been like, or else was keen to avoid any suggestion of folk medicine which, by the time of *Perceforest's* composition, may have been viewed with increasing suspicion.<sup>84</sup> At the battle of *Mont Ardant* (1.1, pp.464-510) – so called because magical fires burn the remains of the evil Malebranche and his army for two hundred years in commemoration of the battle – it is surgery that saves

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<sup>83</sup> Estonné lends a lengthy exposition of how to prepare pressed game. See 1.1, p.300.

<sup>84</sup> Jolly et al., pp.30-5.

the day, sustaining Perceforest's knights beyond all natural compass. Malebranche is furious at the ladies' skill:

Je voy gisant par la place plus de la moictié de mes gens ne encore n'avons nous occis personne des leurs. Mais c'est par ces mauvaises femmes que nous avons soustenues jusques a ores, que je voy qui leur bandent leurs playes et ratournent quant ilz sont navrez, et puis les renvoient a la bataille tous haitiez. (1.1, p.493)

These marvellous medics make Perceforest and his knights practically invincible. After the battle, their robes are stained red with the blood of their patients, and they become known as the order of the *cainse vermeille*.<sup>85</sup> Liriope and Priande will carry on the tradition of medicine and surgery for the rest of the story.<sup>86</sup> When magic is used to heal, nourish, and protect, it is unquestionably virtuous, and also wondrous.

At the *Fête du Dieu Souverain* (4.1, pp.2-48), King Perceforest is treated to a magical display.<sup>87</sup> A grand procession emerges on the horizon, before a marvellous tent is seen, surmounted with an emerald green bay tree. The pavilion is lit with magical torches, and young men and women sing and dance inside. Dubbed a "paradis", this structure is like a benign version of Aroès' illusory projections:

Et que plus est, il y avoit dedens le tref telle clarté que les ymages et histoires qui estoient ouvrees a l'entour des pans s'amonstroient aux regardans comme parmy une voiriere, pourquoy c'estoit une merveilleuse chose a veoir et moult nouvelle. Car, a l'entour de ce tref qui avoit grant entrepresure pour les officines appartenans au lieu, il y couroit une terrible et grosse riviere, et a l'un des lez il y avoit ung pont tres hault et merveilleux a passer. (4.1, p.10)

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<sup>85</sup> On this order, and the symbolism of blood in *Perceforest*, see Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Le sang dans *Perceforest*: du sang real au sang du Christ', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 21 (2011), 153-167.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, (3.3, ep. LIV-LV).

<sup>87</sup> This sequence builds on the banquet at the end of Book One, at which magical entertainment memorably includes platters of rabbit meat coming to life and being chased round the palace by greyhounds (1.1, pp.725-727).

The images play on the fabric of the tent like a magic lantern. An illusory river flows outside. Such features are identical in type to those used by evil enchanters, but here are only as deceptive as those magic shows popular in the courts of the middle ages.<sup>88</sup> The audience know what they're in for, and the royal guests wonder how the magic was achieved:

Entre les bonnes odeurs ala tant celle tant noble compaignie qu'il leur sambloit qu'ilz montoient sus un grant pont fondé sur une grosse riviére courante. Mais il estoit tant merveillex a veoir que ceulx qui dessus passoient ne sçavoient s'il estoit ou d'or, ou d'argent, ou de fines pierres precieuses. (4.1, p.18)

The author is not above using multiple intensifiers – see the three uses of “tant” above – suggestive of wondrous excess. Four giant swans pull a flying crystal chariot, carrying the Scottish royal family. The narrator pays particular deference to Blanche, Lydoire's daughter: the “tante gente pucelle”. Perceforest is quite overwhelmed by the spectacle:

C'estoit une riche besoigne de la venue de ceste littiere et des personnes qui estoient dedens. Et au regard de la noble compaignie qui estoit en la sale du Franc Palais aux fenestres, elle estoit tant occupee a regarder ce triumphe qu'elle n'entendoit a autre chose. Le tres gentil roy Perceforest en estoit tant esbahy qu'il n'en sçavoit que dire, ains se taisoit tout quoy pour veoir la fin de celle merueilleuse noblesse qui approuchoit tousjours le Francq Palais en accroissant choses nouvelles. (4.1, p.14)

After all, this is a celebration of the aristocracy, the fineries of the court, and especially princess Blanche, who is of marriageable age. Fine music – down to the little bells on their clothes that chime as they process – reminds us that not every component needs to be magical. Magic provides a setting for a family occasion, and a celebration of the royalty, of the kingdom's blossoming chivalry, and of marriage. It is also a solemn occasion to honour the new God:

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<sup>88</sup> Jolly et al., pp.66-70.

Et quant la journee du tournoy et que les courtoisiez des honneurs acquerre seront passeez, adont venra la journee de devocion et de recognoistre et aourer son droit createur en renomçant a tous autres dieux. (4.1, p.21)

But the star of the show is the magic. In these displays everything is excess: the bay tree looks like an emerald, the roses like rubies, the water like precious metals, and the swans...well, enormous. In fact, there is nothing 'natural' about these displays at all. Rather, they are illusions. Like the swankiest of parties, guests delight in seeing something impressively artificial. This is enjoyable artifice.

### ***Benign Transmutations and 'Féerie':***

Sometimes, magical effects can be a little more confusing. The first time we see Lydoire's *Manoir des Fées*, Zephyr leads Thelamon and Anthenor through a rose garden to a wondrous banquet (2.1, pp.195-208). The place settings are sumptuous, and the King and Queen's faces are lit up as though "au ray du soleil pour la grant clarté que les pierres jectoient" (2.1, p.203). There is music after dinner, and their sleeping chambers are decorated "si bien et si richement que se ce fust pour le roy Alexandre" (p.205).

The knights wake up in a rose garden the following morning, and the befuddling fantasy of the episode is marked by a comical exchange:

«Anthenor, estes vous la? – Sire oÿl, dist Anthenor, pour quoy le distes vous? – Par ma foy, sire, dist Thelamon, je suys si transmué de ce que j'ay veu et que je voy que je vous vouldroie volentiers veoir pour sçavoir se je vous cognoistroie, car moy mesmes ne me congnoy, se m'est advis. – Sire, dist Anthenor, se vous estes transmué, aussi suy je.» (2.1, p.206)

Such benign 'transmutations', as Thelamon puts it, can be rather more dramatic than a magic show, yet still remain within a comic mode. Anne Delamaire has pointed out the humorous themes running through an episode where two knights are transformed into old men to

teach them a lesson on courtliness.<sup>89</sup> In the uniquely bizarre episode of the *sabbat des vieilles barbues* (2.1, pp.214-21), where Zephyr takes his protégé Estonné to see some witches,<sup>90</sup> Ferlampin-Acher highlights the author's theatricality and "esprit de burlesque".<sup>91</sup> 'Theatricality' is a fine term for understanding benign magic in its performative capacity. The spectators are being deceived by illusions, but knowingly, and once the spectacle is over, there are no repercussions. Befuddling though they may be, these are happy fictions.

### ***When the King's Away:***

In an unfortunate turn of events, the King's melancholy over the death of Alexander coincides with the death of the noble Trojan Gelinant du Glat (Lyonnel's father), who had previously kept the *Forêt Darnant* safe from the lineage. The Ladies of the Forest, talented magic-users, try in vain to rouse Perceforest from his melancholy. They meet and consult their oracles, and are relieved to find that he will eventually return to his senses, though not for some time: over twelve years, in fact (2.1, pp.244-6).

During this time, however, they must protect their *manoirs* from attack. To do so, they install magical bronze statues on their roofs that will sound their horns whenever an enemy strays within three leagues (2.1, p.246, §437). The word used for these automata is *ymaige*, and they offer magical reinforcement to more traditional fortifications: "Quant elles eurent ce fait et chacune eut le sien, elles se departirent et ala chacune en son lieu faire renforcer ses murs et ses fossez." (2.1, p.246)

Some residences – notably Lydoire's *Manoir*, Seville's castle, and later, Alexandre's – are, like Bruyant's *Chastel Desvoyé*, protected by illusions that render them invisible (or underwater in Seville's case). Between the virtuous and wicked magic-users, we see an arms race of enchantment, each side vying to magically outflank the other. Although magical defences like these are not given as much space as the author reserves for telling us precisely how each enemy is decapitated by Perceforest's knights, the 'Ladies of the Forest' are instrumental to national security for a significant period of time.

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<sup>89</sup> Anne Delamaire, 'Le roi s'amuse: célébrations officielles et divertissements privés' in *'Perceforest': un roman arthurien*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.177-185.

<sup>90</sup> This episode is comical in tone, and bears little resemblance to real-world accounts of the Witches' Sabbath. See Michael D. Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 76.4 (2001), 960-90 (p.979).

<sup>91</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Le Sabbat des vieilles barbues dans *Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Age*, 99.3-4 (1993) 471-504.

One reason for the relatively scant accounts of this type of magic is the obvious primacy of the chivalric orders when it comes to the defence of the realm. Magical defences are not a long-term solution: by the end of Perceforest's twelve-year melancholy, the ladies hardly dare venture from their homes for the lineage threat. Only a strong king will do when it comes to military matters, or, as the text has it: "Et pour ce dist vray le proverbe: «Quant le chief est malade, tous les membres s'en doeulent»" (2.1, p.245). Sarra consults her oracles to predict the approximate date of the king's return:

Et son sort luy dist: «Au Temple Perilleux ravra le roy son sens.» Et Sarra, qui desiroit a sçavoir l'heure, ala demander quant. «Je ne te doy pas tant», dist son sort. Adont dist Sarra, qui se trouva decue: «Par l'ame de mon pere, vous le me direz.» Lors ala rassembler ses conjurations, si destraint tellement la voix qu'elle revint et dist: «Quant ce poulain avra rompu son liecol de far, adont sera le roy en point de regner.» Sarra, qui ame ne veoit, eut grant merveille que c'estoit a dire. (2.1, p.246)

This is an early example of prophecy in the text, and is qualitatively different to later uses. In this example, the splendid horse that Sarra was raising for the king becomes an omen for his recovery. The humorous exchange above – where Sarra learns that prophecy is not all that specific – demonstrates that prophetesses are not in control of future events, but can be given some indication of them. Sarra's 'equomancy' lends a magical flourish to Perceforest's recovery, but also demonstrates her subservience to the king. The magic of the bronze *ymaiges* suddenly stops on his return.

This detail recalls an earlier episode (1.1, p.633) after the defeat of Malebranche, when the Ladies' hidden castles, now safe, become visible. The *Chastel du Lac* is renamed the *Chastel Vermeil* because its red brickwork can now be seen. In Book Four, after Passelion has eloped with Morgane's daughter, he becomes lord of her castle, and the invisibility spell that protected it from Roman invasion dissipates, opening it up to 'proper' non-magical rule (4.2, p.722). Protecting people from enemies is work best left to kings, and there is an obvious difference between hiding from one's enemies and fighting them head on. Later prophetesses will take a much more hands-on approach to the fate of the realm, but for now, magic is only a stopgap.

Lydoire is much less passive in her use of magic to protect the realm, administering magical judgement to wrongdoers. These judgement episodes stem from the same event: Gadiffer I (King of Scotland, Lydoire's husband) is gored by a giant boar, and his wounds poisoned by a witch belonging to Darnant's lineage (2.1, pp.44-59), leaving him crippled until the very end of the text. The boar is strong, but King Gadiffer is undeterred:

Adont ala dire le veneur au roy: «Sire, si vous plaisoit, je l'iroie occire en dormant, car il est sy puissant que par chiens que nous ayons ne peut estre arresté ne lassé de fuir, ainçois les occira tous au premier estal qu'il rendra. – Comment! maistre, dist le roy, se vous estes murdrier de bestes, pour ce ne le voulons pas estre. J'en vueil avoir le deduit de le chassier et de l'occire quant il sera bersé. – Sire, dist le veneur, vous ferez vostre vouloir, mais l'en dit par la forest qu'il est destiné que celluy qui l'occira en demourra mehaigné. – Taiz toy, dist le roy. Je ne croy en leurs sors ne en leurs devinemens.» (2.1, p.46)

The author draws attention to Gadiffer's hubris, and dismissal of local prophecies. He is an emblem for the flawed pagan king, bearing an open wound to the thigh which marks him as impotent.

Lydoire is thrust into a ruling position. Until her conversion to the *nouvelle foi*, she will rule using magic. She is a substitute for a weak pagan king, and, in her enmity with the lineage (embodied by the hag who poisoned her husband) she fulfils a similar role to King Perceforest himself. Jeanne Lods describes her rule as "un traité d'éducation des princes".<sup>92</sup> Certainly, much magic practiced by aristocratic ladies is charming and virtuous. In Ferlampin-Acher's words:

Magie noire et magie blanche ont la même source, mais les fées ne pratiquent que la seconde. Leurs pouvoirs reposent surtout sur des illusions optiques (elles créent de superbes féeries), l'usage des herbes et des breuvages (qui font dormir, servent d'aphrodisiaque, guérissent), et une habileté certaine à créer des automates comme ceux qui préviennent les demoiselles fées de l'arrivée d'un ennemi. Elles peuvent,

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<sup>92</sup> Lods, p.234.

comme Sarra, jeter un sort pour connaître une partie de l'avenir, mais jamais elles ne changent ni la nature ni le cours des choses. Elles n'ont donc guère plus de pouvoirs que de simples enchanteresses.<sup>93</sup>

Lydoire's reign is an opportunity to explore an alternative sort of authority to the chivalric narrative that otherwise dominates. But, in this sense, she is also more open to criticism: what can this enchantress offer the kingdom that chivalry cannot? Ferlampin-Acher comments on her portrayal as a thief of male power:

[Gadiffer] a l'illusion de prendre la décision, mais il est en fait soumis au désir d'enfant de la reine. Celle-ci a d'ailleurs acquis une partie de ses pouvoirs en soignant Aristote, victime traditionnelle des femmes, d'une blessure à la cuisse. Elle a dépossédé le philosophe de son savoir, le roi de son pouvoir: tous deux portent dans leur chair la marque symbolique d'une castration.<sup>94</sup>

The ethics of Lydoire's magic are questioned, including – in due course – by Lydoire herself. An early example of the well-intentioned, but dubious qualities of her magic can be seen when she administers a *beuvraige oublieux* to Gadiffer, which is an anaesthetic, but also leaves him rather 'drugged up'. In Jane Taylor's words, it is "a sort of medieval Prozac which masks pain and distress and promotes a state of benign good humour."<sup>95</sup>

### ***Condemning the Wicked:***

The witch who poisoned Gadiffer is punished without further ado (2.2, pp.88-95), set upon a rock surrounded by biting snakes and toads. Beyond the obvious symbolism of the serpents (treachery) and toads (evil sorcery), we also find a *contrapasso* in the Dantean style: the

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<sup>93</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Fées et déesses dans *Perceforest*', *Fées, dieux et déesses au Moyen Âge: actes du colloque du Centre d'études médiévales et dialectales de Lille III: Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille III, 24 et 25 septembre 1993* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Centre d'études médiévales et dialectales de Lille III, 1994), pp.53-72 (p.57).

<sup>94</sup> Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Le Rôle des mères dans *Perceforest*' in *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, ed. by Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 274-84 (p.276).

<sup>95</sup> Jane Taylor, 'La Reine Fée in the *Roman de Perceforest*: Rewriting, Rethinking' in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field* ed. by Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 81-91 (p.82).



witch's legs are (presumably magically) immobilised, and she has only her hands to defend herself, recalling the incapacitation of Gadiffer's lower body, and reminding us of the crime that inspired the punishment.

Importantly, we see this scene from Lyonnel's perspective, not Lydoire's. We can be in no doubt that the woman deserved her torment (she tells Lyonnel that she is loyal to the lineage even now), but the author chooses to foreground the observer's pity and – to an extent – the victim's contrition:

Quant Lyonnel veyt la vielle souffrir tel tourment, il en eut pitié. Et pour ce luy demanda pour quelle occasion elle souffroit tel tourment. (2.2, p.91)

To put a more modern gloss on the scene, we might venture that the author is keen to demonstrate Lyonnel's empathy. The description of the punishment is certainly vivid:

[...] sy n'est né de mere qui porroit croire les meschiefz et les tourmens que je seuffre chacune nuyt. Car quant tant me suys deffendue des mains que plus ne puis, adont s'en vient toute la vermine entour moy et me perchent la char et suchent le sang de moy tant que plus n'en veullent. (2.2, p.92)

The invocation "sy n'est né de mere" appeals to a basic impulse to pity. But we are dealing with a hardened villain here, and once Lyonnel has discovered her treachery, he loses sympathy:

Par ma foy, dist Lyonnel, a bon droit souffrez tel martire, car vous vouldistes murdrir le plus preux chevalier et le plus courtois qui vive. Or le portez en pascience, sy ferez que saige. (2.2, p.92)

Although the punishment is upsetting, it is also righteous, and no mercy must be shown. After indulging the witch's request to remove some of the vermin from her rock, Lyonnel's sword is covered in venom from the snakes' skins, which later make contact with *his* skin, causing painful swelling. His pity earns him a rebuke.

In a neighbouring episode, a different torture is applied to the cousins of Harban (2.2, pp.84-6), the wicked knight who had attempted to impersonate Lyonnel by stealing his lion and his shield (2.2, pp.21-30). This time, we see the events from the perspective of the twelve *Chevaliers aux Voeux*. Having followed “une merveilleuse fumee”, they see a fire:

Adont veyrent ilz qu’il y avoit une place et avoit emmy ung merveilleux feu qui jectoit une fumee noire et horrible, et autour de ce feu avoit trois estaches fichees en terre et a chacune estache avoit liee une femme nue fors de sa chemise qui luy couvroit le corps jusques au talon. Et la flamme qui estoit en la moienne d’elles et la fumee cheoit souvent parmy elles, mais c’estoit l’une après l’autre. Et adont jectoit celle sur qui la fumee et la flamme cheoit si douloureux plaintz que c’estoit une pitié a veoir et a oÿr. (2.2, p.84)

The knights all find this upsetting: “Quant les chevaliers eurent regardé la tourmente que les trois femmes souffroient du feu et de la fumee qui cheoit sur elles l’une après l’autre, ilz en eurent grant pitié.” (2.2, p.84)

The response of one of the women shows a sort of humble resignation to her punishment: “Or en est telle la vengeance prise par le sens d’une dame qui demeure en ceste forest.” (2.2, p.85) Her confession finished, she screams again: “A ces parolles cheyt le feu sur celle qui ce leur avoit compté et lors cria si angoisseusement que les chevaliers en furent tous esbahiz.” (2.2, p.85) We note the vivid adverb in this last phrase. So great is the knights’ concern that their immediate assumption is that the woman who imposed such a punishment must be *fae*. Again, there is an emphasis on the knights’ pity, which in this case, does not give way to vindication. On the contrary, it is a lineage knight who deems their punishment righteous:

Mais les mauvaises femmes le comperent maintenant si cruellement que quiconques les verra, il en devra avoir pitié par raison de nature, car le Dieu de Justice en a pris telle vengeance qu’elles sont tourmentees tous les jours cruellement de feu. (2.2, p.89)

These villains deserve to be punished, and their punishment takes an appropriate form. However, the author also demonstrates the contrition of the condemned, and the pity – even horror – of the knights who witness them. This magical judgement is righteous, but flawed.

Without knowledge of God, justice is a very difficult matter. Creating a magical version of Hell to punish dissidents may, in a sense, be laudable to a medieval audience. Even so, it isn't the same as the condemnation that truly awaits sinners after death. Only God can be arbiter of eternal punishments; the human author is inferior to the divine author.

### ***Condemning the Good:***

Those knights implicated in Gadiffer's hunting accident are also subject to the Queen's wrath. The most famous of these punishments is Estonné's magical transformation into a bear (2.1, pp.320-30). Perhaps rather mischievously, Zephyr deposits Estonné in – of all places – Lydoire's garden. As soon as she hears him haplessly greeting her daughters, she musters her magical powers to enact this strange transformation:

Toutes ces paroles ainsi que avez oï oït et entendit la royne, qui ne dormoit pas alors, et bien recongneut Estonné au parler. Sy fut trop courroucée de sa venue, car sur toute riens voulsist que jamais ne fussent retournez, en especial le Tors, et trop grant merveille avoit dont Estonné venoit dedens son encloz. Et non obstant elle s'advisa que bien s'en vengeroit. Lors ala assembler toute la somme de sa science de nigromancie et tourna et retourna ses experimens et ses conjurations et fist en telle maniere que Estonné, qui estoit au prael, fut mué en semblance d'un ours a la veue de tous ceulx qui le regardoient, et luy mesme le cuida estre vrayement et eut en luy grant partie de la nature d'un ours. Lors se mist a terre de piez et de mains, puis prist a muggier d'une voix oursine et a aler par le prayel a maniere de beste. (2.1, p.322)

Vengeance is the name of the game here, and she employs the *somme* of her *science* and *nigromancie* to perform this spell. Estonné looks like a bear, behaves like a bear, and is largely convinced that he is a bear.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> On the influence of the wild animal on identity and cyclicity in *Perceforest*, see Miranda Griffin, 'Animal Origins in *Perceforest*', *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes*, 21 (2011) 169-184.

This transformation is responsible for the hirsute appearance of Estonné's descendants, including the aptly named Ourseu, in accordance with the theory that what the mother observes or thinks about around the time of conception can change the physical form of the child in supernatural ways. But other than providing backstory for Ourseu's hairiness, we might wonder why the author chooses a bear. Bears were considered dim-witted, and were domesticated and used for entertainment – dancing bears – throughout the middle ages, and it is just such an animal curio that Estonné becomes: demeaned, we may say, to the status of a performing animal.

In Isidore's *Etymologies*, he recounts that a bear cub is born as a formless lump of flesh, and its mother – by licking the cub – shapes it into a recognisably ursine being.<sup>97</sup> Lydoire does physically re-form Estonné, but certainly not out of any sense of 'motherly' duty. Rather, she is intent on avenging his role in her husband's injury. Both Estonné and Le Tor are transformed into docile versions of aggressive beasts, poetic justice for having led Gadiffer into the lair of the giant boar.

Nevertheless, in his vigorous defence of Priande and Liriope (Lydoire's wards) from two lineage knights, he shows his knightly virtues even whilst inhabiting an animal body and mind. Lydoire relents at this juncture:

Adont souvint a la royne comment il luy avoit rescoux ses .II. damoiselles de la main des .II. chevaliers qui ravies les eussent, s'il n'eust esté. Et puis luy souvint comment elle l'avoit tenu grant temps en grant misere et sans raison, ce luy fut advis, fors tant que par son pourchas porroit Estonné faire, s'il estoit delivré, que le Tors reviendrait en Escoce, ce qu'elle ne vouloit pas. Et puis s'advisa que pour ce n'avoit elle pas a tenir le chevalier en telle chetiveté, car bien feist tant Estonné que le Tors revenist en Escoce, sy estoit elle bien si saige que pour luy faire a souffrir en son royaume aussi bien que dehors, s'il s'embatoit entre ses las. (2.1, p.328)

The reason for ending Estonné's transformation is less compassion than expediency. Estonné had returned to Britain to muster ships before returning to the continent to retrieve

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<sup>97</sup> *Etymologies* Book XII.2.22. See *The 'Etymologies' of Isidore of Seville*, transl. by Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.253-4.

Le Tor. Having proven his worth, Lydoire decides to let him fetch Le Tor – like another spider to her web – so that she can mete out his punishment next! The final line of the quote above is rather sinister, and she cuts an imposing figure throughout this episode. For the modern reader, the detail of her regular use of the cane to discipline her daughter and wards even lends a touch of the wicked headmistress (although such practices were, of course, totally normal for their time).

There is something positively ‘reforming’ or ‘transformative’ about Estonné’s punishment, as the ‘platonic’ relationship he develops – in bear-form – with Priande prepares the ground for their eventual marriage:

Ainsi que avez oï fut mué Estonné en nature de beste, et plus en samblance d’un ours, par la hayne que la royne avoit sur le Tors, qui pas n’avoit tant meffait que la royne tenoit. Sy demoura en maniere d’ours avecques la royne plusieurs annees. Mais sur toute riens l’ours sievoit Priande et avoit chier sa compaignie, dont tous ceulx de l’ostel l’appelloient Priant et a tel nom il venoit et non par autre. Et la pucelle Priande luy faisoit tant de bien comme elle pouoit, car elle et tous ceulx et toutes celles de l’ostel l’avoient moult chier, car a luy avoient plusieurs deduitz et l’ours se gardoit moult bien de faire aucune chose dont il fust aucunement haï. (2.1, p.325)

Virginity was an important part of erotic and courtly love, so this relationship is an excellent precursor to marriage, wherein Estonné’s animal form precludes any sexual activity, emphasising instead the couple’s emotional rapport. In accordance with most of the Estonné episodes, this one is broadly comical and light-hearted. But it also has a moral tone, recording Lydoire’s quest for revenge against Le Tor on the one hand, and also the delightful (if somewhat surreal) renewal of Estonné and Priande’s romance after he first found her – in an inversion of this episode – a wild ‘savage’ in Scotland, and sent her to be educated at court.

So, where Lydoire exhibits her wrath in her capacity as the vengeful pagan Queen, we also see – as it were, in the background – the gentle operations of love working their magic on Estonné/Priant the bear, and Priande. Marriage is hugely important in *Perceforest*, particularly in the later books, and is used not only to secure a chivalrous kingdom, but to ensure the conception of future kings, queens, knights and heroes. Estonné and Priande are an especially important union, as Merlin is among their descendants.

Of course, this wasn't Lydoire's motivation for Estonné's transformation. The happy outcome of their marriage is – if not a by-product as such – somewhat of an afterthought. This opens an interesting line of thought, wherein even the slightly-misguided author can use artifice in a way that is virtuous even if not initially intended as such, an idea that is echoed in Le Tor's punishment.

This opens with a comical Estonné sequence. Having reflected on the *lai secret* (3.1, pp.260-79) – which cryptically tells of his love for Priande – he is so lovelorn that he rides through the night into thickets of thorns, getting quite cut to ribbons. He then meets another knight, and they decide to lament together. The tone is light, exemplified by Estonné's cynical remark: "J'en aime [...] une qui je tiens pour la meilleure du monde, mais elle m'a fait tant a souffrir en ceste nuit qu'elle et toutes autres je recommande a tous les dyables, car il n'est point de tant penible enffer que de amer femes par amours!" (3.2, p.25) They find Le Tor sitting beneath a tree (also lamenting) and trying to work out the verses in the *lai secret* that pertain to him.

This opening is important, as the knights show their virtue in their philosophizing on love; the tongue-in-cheek description of their melancholy exposita a naïve sincerity. It is this portrait of the virtuous pagan ingénu that allows us to consider the punishment that follows with a moral eye. The reader will inevitably question whether it was fair-handed.

The knights enter the *Manoir des Fées* through doors so wide they can pass through on horseback, to find a scene of classic *féerique* elements:

[...] ilz veirent entreouvrir le huis d'une chambre ou il avoit grant lumiere. Adont les deux chevaliers commencerent a regarder celle part et veirent que dames et chevaliers se pourmenoient aval la chambre, et leur sambloit bien qu'ilz ne touchoient point de leurs piez a terre, ains leur estoit advis qu'ilz ambulassent tant proprement sus leurs personnes sans eulx remouvoir qu'il sambloit qu'ilz fussent portez en l'aer. Et leur sambloit qu'ilz veirent au parfont de la chambre une royne assise sus ung moult riche siege noblement aourné, et avoit une belle couronne sus son chief. Et disoient l'un a l'autre que oncques n'avoient veu plus riche, car la chambre toute resplendissoit des pierres precieuse qui y estoient. (3.2, p.30)

The *Manoir* is a space of pure *merveille*, and much like the festival magic discussed above, appears completely benign.

But Le Tor is quickly overwhelmed by the magical surroundings and – we suspect by Lydoire’s design – can hardly stand up, let alone *faire ses reverences*. The room begins to spin, and he appears drunk on magic. Wonder turns to disorientation: “Et que plus est, ilz ne sçavoient quel part ilz estoient ne qu’il leur estoit advenu, ne encores ne leur souvenoit de nulles choses passees.” (3.2, p.31) In this befuddled state, he faces the *Reine Fée*’s judgement:

Certes sire, dist la royne, dont estes vous le chevalier du monde que tous ceulx du royaume d’Escoce doivent plus haïr, car vous fustes cause de son inconvenient, qui est au jour d’hui le plus grant dommaige et meschief qui advint en ces parties depuis la destruction de Troyes. (3.2, p.33)

This indictment is particularly cutting: Le Tor is of Trojan descent, so Lydoire invokes his villainous ancestry. The hyperbole continues: Le Tor is the worst thing to happen to Britain since the dawn of time (or at least since whatever horrors the giants got up to), and so on... But where she appears scornful, like a pagan goddess, he is humble and accepting of his punishment, receiving the cloak of penitence with good grace: “Mais il la receut joyeusement, comme celui qui cuidoit avoir legiere penitance, car la robe lui sambloit assez belle et sy ne la devoit vestir qu’a son vouloir.” (3.2, p.35)

Estonné also agrees that the punishment is generous... at least until he actually sees the monstrous transformation take place at the *Maison de Penitance*. Le Tor will be a nine-headed bull by day, returning to his human form at night. Liriope, his beloved, offers to accompany him in his penitence, and will herself take the form of a greyhound at night, and her human form during the day – as it were, working opposite shifts. To take the form of a bull with nine leonine heads is – beyond the irony of Le Tor’s name – a fitting punishment, as he is forced to stomp around the forest just like the monstrous boar itself; the alleged perpetrator must take a form not so dissimilar to the beastly culprit. As Ferlampin-Acher remarks:

À cause du Tor, le roi a été métaphoriquement castré: il est blessé aux cuisses, placé sous la domination de sa femme et impuissant à exercer le pouvoir politique. Le

châtiment du coupable sera du même ordre que la faute: transformé en taureau, créature fortement sexuée, incarnant le désir dans toute sa violence, il croisera son amie Liriope sans pouvoir la rencontrer.<sup>98</sup>

Monstrosity is the mark of pagan crimes, but also of pagan justice, and the author paints an intimidating picture of Lydoire:

Sire chevalier, replicqua lors la royne, se vous vouliez emprendre par accord une penitance que je vous bailleroie, je feroie franchement vostre paix par tout, car j'en ay tresbien la puissance. Sy advisez que vous voulez dire. (3.2, p.34)

But where the sentence is monstrous, and the judge is fierce, the outcome is once again beneficial. In a later episode, Gadiffer junior embarks on his quest to save Flamine from Aroès, but gets lost in the wilds, and takes shelter in the *Maison de Penitance* (3.2, pp.58-74). Having already seen the giant bull thundering through the forest, he is curious to know what sort of penance is being done. Just to distinguish this magical transformation from any evil magic, the housekeeper assures him that there are no demons here. Gadiffer announces himself, and Liriope invites him through to her chamber, where he sees her sad predicament:

Et quant la dame le vey au viaire, elle le recognut, car elle l'avoit autrefois veu. Lors commença a plourer tres tendrement en jectant souspirs par grant habondance, tellement qu'il sambloit que tous ses parens fussent mors. (3.2, p.65)

Liriope laments Le Tor's *espouventable penitance* and begs Lydoire to be allowed to join him, taking half of the burden on herself. Lydoire agrees to reduce the sentence to a single year:

[...] mais je vous diray que je feray pour l'amour de vous, combien que par la voulenté des dieux il convient que le chevalier face sa penitance. Mais, pour vostre allegement, les sept ans seront reduis a ung an par tel sy que vous vestirez une chemise de lin toutes les fois qu'il vous en prendra voulenté. (3.2, p.67)

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<sup>98</sup> 'Aux frontières du merveilleux', p.103.



We note that it is the pagan *dieux* with whom she is concerned at this point. Le Tor, by contrast, discovers the *Souverain Dieu* during the course of his penitence:

Sire chevalier, vous soiez le bien venu en ma povreté. Je vous requiers, pour l'onneur du Souverain Dieu, que vous ne soiez sus moy point mal content de l'inconvenient qui est advenu au roy, nostre chier sire et vostre tresamé pere, car, moiennant la penitance que j'en fay, j'ay ma paix envers madame la royne vostre mere. (3.2, p.70)

This episode closes with a poignant portrait of Le Tor and Liriope fulfilling the penitence together. Le Tor is delighted to have the greyhound for company:

Certes, sire, dist le Thors, vecy une levriere que j'aime tant qu'a merveilles, car elle me monstre sy grant amour qu'on ne peut plus. Et vous advertis qu'elle m'est ung joyeulx passe temps tous les soirs, quant je reviens de faire ma penitance. (3.2, p.71)

All the more so once he realizes that it is in fact his beloved Liriope! Again, their animal forms encourage a sort of 'virginal' love that paves the way for their eventual marriage. The virtuous love that we saw in the lamenting knights at the beginning of the sequence shines through, in spite of the penitence. Lydoire, the pagan judge, inadvertently creates an idyll of proto-Christian marital virtues.

It is not only the knights involved in the fateful boar hunt who fall under her watchful eye. Lyonnel, the finest of Perceforest's knights, has fallen in love with her daughter, Blanche (not to be confused with Blanchette, who is Blanche's daughter, and Lydoire's granddaughter). The following episodes are much more domestic in character, and show an altogether less vengeful side of Lydoire, focussing on her as a mother rather than a queen. After Lyonnel passes the various tests of Lydoire's *Temple de la Franche Garde* (see below), he eventually sits down to dinner with the King, Queen, and Blanche, where his carnal desires get the better of him:

Quant Lyonnel eut beu a la coupe que Blanchete luy avoit presentee et il luy eut rendue, il fut si desirant de baisier son doy qui avoit atouchié a la pucelle qu'a

merveilles, et sy tempté en fut que, quant il veyt son coup, il ala baisier son doy de sy grant voullenté que la doulceur luy en descend jusques au coeur. (2.2, p.133)

After this erotic turn, he is startled to discover the guilty finger has turned black, and quickly alights on the reason behind this magical stain:

Lors luy souvint que la royne luy avoit deffendu que a Blanchete sa fille n'atouchast ne a luy ne parlast, mais assez la regardast. Or se tint pour deceu et dist a soy mesmes que ce meschief luy estoit venu pour son pechié, car trespasé avoit son commandement que promis avoit a tenir. (2.2, p.134)

Lyonnel is mortified: this is a betrayal of his knightly ethics. Lydoire's reaction is a little more complex:

[...] elle s'advisa que aucune chose luy estoit avenue de nouvel. Lors le regarda et perçoit son doy noircy, sy sceut tantost qu'il avoit atouchié a sa fille, sy en eut grant riz dedens son coeur, car elle se perçoit que le chevalier repost sa main affin que la tache ne fust perceue. (2.2, p.134)

She is pleased to see Lyonnel's shame, an indicator that he may be a worthy husband for her daughter, and we may also discern a touch of enjoyment at having caught him in the act! As Jeanne Lods comments: "Elle ne s'interdit pas de s'amuser aux dépens de ceux auxquels elle donne une leçon."<sup>99</sup>

Lyonnel brushed Blanche's hand with his finger quite by accident, but with a wry smile, the author shows the ancestor of amorous Tristan struggling to contain his desire. This episode shows the Queen using her magic in a more deliberate effort to instil virtue in British chivalry (embodied by Lyonnel). Such instances of magical staining recur in the later books as a test of knights' romantic qualities: in Book Six, Sorus is devastated to be stained by the magical blood of a dead serpent because he is unfaithful in love (6.1, pp.176-210). Such shaping of British chivalry finds its origin in Lydoire's stern, motherly protection of Blanche.

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<sup>99</sup> Lods, p.131.

Perhaps magical authority can be properly compatible with the proto-Christian faith of the *Souverain Dieu*.

To round off this analysis of Lydoire's use of magic in the government of the realm, I will consider an interesting exchange on Lyonnel's return to the *Temple de la Franche Garde* later in the story. The episode opens – much like the Le Tor sequence above – with a consideration of chivalric theory: Lyonnel and Troÿlus are discussing what it means to be a *leal amoureux*. Later, as Lyonnel is drifting off to sleep, the two shields emblematic of his success in tournaments (one battered from combat, the other given to him by Blanche) are stolen. He is distraught, as he had intended to present the shields to Gadiffer and Lydoire as proof of his loyalty and prowess. He believes some invisible spirit of envy must be dogging his heels:

Et samble proprement que ce soit une maniere d'envie invisible qui se tiengne en l'aer ayant despit en sa personne quant elle me voit avoir aucun bien de plus haulte valeur en amours que a mon estat n'appartient, et se traveille de moy donner a souffrir afin que je dye aucune villonnie a Amours pour moy desavancier et reculer de toute ma plaisance. (3.1, p.300)

On his return to the temple, he accomplishes all the tasks set out for him only to discover to his surprise that the two shields are already mounted on the walls. The 'invisible spirit' who stole them was, of course, Zephyr (on behalf of Lydoire). Lydoire takes this opportunity to berate Lyonnel:

Pourquoy il convient dire que se vous estiez Lyonnel du Glat, vous ne fussiez point icy venu sans l'escu. Et comme je pense, se ainsi estoit, je cuide sçavoir de vray que vous eussiez aporté encores autre chose. (3.1, p.308)

He is mortified, but Gadiffer senior intervenes:

«Ma dame, vous surquerez trop le chevalier.» Et pour ce commanda il a Lyonnel qu'il s'en venist vers lui et lui dist: «Sire chevalier, ne creiez ces femmes, car sachez que la perte qui vous est advenue des deux escus vous est venue a leur cause, et ne leur

souffist point s'elles ne font de vous comme d'un chevalier mescogneu. Pourquoi venez icy et laissez la royne, car elle tout pour vray cognoit bien que vous estes Lyonnel du Glat.» (3.1, p.309)

Though Lyonnel says that she can do with him as she pleases, as he is her loyal knight, Gadiffer steps in to correct his queen's excessive behaviour. Lydoire protests that she had nothing but good intentions: "Sire chevalier, ne vous desplaise, car en ce point esproeuvent les dames leurs amis." (3.1, p.309)

Here we see in miniature the nature of good magic in the first generations of the dynasty. However well intended, it pushes the boundaries of what might be considered just. Where chivalry has an inherently theological framework – the *Franc Palais* is dedicated to the *Souverain Dieu* – it takes Lydoire some time to see the error of her magical ways. 'Good' magic is nevertheless different – and even inferior – to kingly and chivalric rule.

### ***On the Purpose of Temples:***

The *Temple de la Franche Garde* (2.2, pp.46-146) – the *pièce de résistance* of Lydoire's magical rule – gives us further pause for thought in our appraisal of the *Reine Fée*. The purpose of the temple is ostensibly a good one: to encourage young knights by commemorating Lyonnel's inspiring victories. Like many other temples in pre-Christian Britain, it is dedicated to Venus, reminding us that Lyonnel is accomplishing his quests to demonstrate his worthiness to marry, Blanche (Lydoire's daughter).

Laudable as these goals may be, the temple remains a place of magical artifice. As such, it may be symptomatic of dubious pagan attitudes. This becomes particularly apparent in comparison with other temples in the text.

The *Temple de la Franche Garde* houses trophies of Lyonnel's heroic exploits, including the shield he used to fight the sea serpent in the waters off the Hebrides (2.1, pp.339-43), the lion of the *Estrange Marche* (2.1, pp.279-300), and the severed head of the *Geant aux Crins Dorez* (2.1, pp.333-65). Murals depict these adventures, with space left on the walls for future heroic deeds. It appears a sort of secular church, dedicated to its knightly saint, depicting his life and displaying his relics. There is also an aspect of the museum, as those same 'relics' are carefully curated and intended to inspire wonder as much as devotion. The author describes the ideology behind the temple:

Quant la royne eut considerees les proesses du chevalier qui pour l'amour de Blanche sa fille estoient achevees, elle se pensa que, quant elle seroit saisie du chief, elle le mectroit en tel lieu que le chevalier qui conquis l'avoit par sa proesse en avroit honneur et maint autre chevalier se mectroient encore en queste pour trouver le chief et veoir la merveille. Et pour ce fist tantost la royne encommencer ung temple moult bel et autour de ce temple fist ung theatre encloz de murs de la haulteur de .VII. piez a une seule entree. Sy estoit ce temple en la moienne d'un espinoy qui avoit bien de parfont le quart de une lieue et sy n'y avoit que une voie assez estroicte pour ung homme a cheval, et celle voie s'adreçoit au temple. (2.2, p.47)

It is designed to be special (*moult bel*) and secret, hidden within a thicket and surrounded by a high wall.

Such exclusivity makes Greco-British knights eager to get inside. To enter, one must defeat the temple guardian: the wicked knight Harban, captured by Lydoire for stealing the very trophies displayed within. Then, the claimant must dislodge a key from the top of a pillar, and finally fight Lyonnel's lion (which has already killed one challenger). Obviously, these tasks are built in such a way that only Lyonnel could ever accomplish them; there is even a spell cast on the key which will only permit him to dislodge it (2.2, p.63). They function not like the dangerous 'real-world' quests that the knights embark on, but as a self-contained game.

The interior is a place of worldly delights, with damsels singing and playing the harp, magical light, and other *féerique* elements. It is also purpose-built for preserving and presenting Lyonnel's knightly relics. The very name of the temple – *Franche Garde* – is linguistically cognate with *regarder* as well as the English 'guard'. Certainly, the temple is all about observing and protecting: visitors marvel at the intriguing objects, and in doing so, help to commemorate Lyonnel's prowess, and the chivalry that he represents. The giant's head is displayed on a pedestal:

Adont commencerent a regarder sur ung pilier d'argent de la haulteur de .XII. piez le chief au Gueant aux Cheveulx Dorez, dont les cheveux pendoient aval jusques a la

moienne. Si clers estoient et sy luysans qu'il sembloit que chacun cheveil fust ung fil d'or, et tant en y avoit que c'estoit une merveille. (2.2, p.78)

Lydoire explains to her guests that "c'est le chief vrayement," and that "... au chief pouez vous veoir quel le gueant estoit, et au gueant quelle la proesse et le hardement du chevalier qui le conquist." The other exhibits are met with similar wonder, especially Lyonnel's lion.

For Ferlampin-Acher, the temple is an example of a particular kind of theatricality that the text seems to endorse:

On peut aussi déceler dans ces épisodes l'opposition entre un théâtre à l'antique, valorisé (référé à Lidoire, dame de haute dignité) et le théâtre «contemporain», plus présent, mais nettement plus inquiétant (voire diabolique) car jouant sur l'illusion.<sup>100</sup>

This is a neat assessment of how artifice can be valorised as well as condemned, and the temple is not without its problems.

For instance, although the temple serves the important purpose of confirming Lyonnel's identity – only the real owner of these relics will be granted entry – the way in which this is carried out can appear gratuitous and bewildering. Brooke Heidenreich Findley comments on how little agency Lyonnel has in this process:

L'impuissance de Lionel est soulignée lorsque le temple s'avère être un piège: une fois entré, Lionel ne peut pas en sortir sans l'accord de la Reine Fée. Il ne peut pas non plus récupérer ses trophées, ni changer quoi que ce soit à l'intérieur du lieu. [...] Le temple est donc un espace qui résiste et qui remet en question la capacité du chevalier à déterminer sa propre identité.<sup>101</sup>

This may be a minor point, and we might imagine that Lydoire is understandably more concerned with verifying Lyonnel's prowess (as suitor to her daughter) than hurting feelings.

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<sup>100</sup> 'Perceforest' et Zéphir, p.167. See also pp.150-155 on the technicalities of the temple's theatrics.

<sup>101</sup> Brooke Heidenreich Findley, 'Interpréter le paysage du *Perceforest*: forêts, jardins, monuments.' in *'Perceforest': un roman arthurien*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.203-211 (p.208).

We may nevertheless see another touch of the *Reine Fée*'s rather stern – and we may say pagan – ferocity.

Interestingly, the author offers proto-Christian counterexamples to the *Temple de la Franche Garde*. The *Temple Inconnu* and the *Temple du Dieu Souverain* are constructed by Dardanon the hermit and King Perceforest respectively. Both are dedicated in different ways to the *Souverain Dieu*, rather than a mortal knight. Here, we will focus on the *Temple du Dieu Souverain*. Unlike Lydoire's temple, it is a place of reserved decoration (3.3, pp.1-8) and sober ambience (3.3, pp.18-29). This comparison helps us to understand why Lydoire's magical practices constitute a divergent and, crucially, inferior narrative to the emergent discourse of the *Souverain Dieu*.

The *Temple du Dieu Souverain* is founded at an important point in the text, in the midst of the various marriages and tournaments that make up Book Three, and coinciding with the news of Estonné's and Lyonnel's victory against the first Roman invasion in Scotland. It also marks a new stage in King Perceforest's religious journey. His melancholy now vanquished, he becomes the first Greco-British convert to the faith of the *Souverain Dieu*. When Perceforest's son, Betidès, sets out questing, Queen Ydorus is very anxious. Whilst contemplating this problem, the king is struck with a new idea:

Et combien que le roy la confortoit a son pouvoir, sy estoit ce pour neant. Lors s'appensa le roy Perceforest que cest inconvenient lui venoit pour ce qu'il n'avoit point accompli la promesse du Dieu Souverain, car il lui avoit prommis de fonder ung temple en son nom affin qu'il lui sauvast son filz, lequel, de tant jenne eage qu'il estoit, il avoit emprins les paines, les travaux et les aventures perilleuses. Pourquoi il manda les plus subtilz ouvriers de massonnerie de son royaume et puis leur commanda faire ung temple tout ront, le plus riche et le plus noble qu'il leur estoit possible de faire, car aussi bien que le Dieu qu'il y vouloit faire aourer passoit tous autres dieux en puissance, vouloit il que ce temple passast tous autres en grandeur, en beauté et en noblesse. (3.2, p.54)

The temple is simple in its circular design, perhaps recalling the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Its decoration is rich, but lacks any iconography, favouring beautiful materials and shapes rather than images. Jane Taylor remarks on the "austerity" both of this temple, and the

*Temple Inconnu*,<sup>102</sup> and also notes how unusual such criticism of church practice was in the late middle ages.<sup>103</sup>

The temple houses an unusual altarpiece. Perceforest realises that although he has named it the *Temple du Dieu Souverain*, there is nothing that obviously indicates the temple's dedication to God:

Sy maintient l'istoire que le noble roy avoit deliberé de soy mesmes que, puis qu'il ne plaisoit au Dieu de Nature que encores ne fust sceu ne cogneu gendre de la façon de lui ne de son estre fors en puissance et en vertu qui estoient apparans au monde par ses oeuvres, il s'appensa qu'il se aideroit de ses plus especiales oeuvres qu'il avoit ja pieça en terre laissies, ce fut des quatres elemens. Car il print premierement de la terre, qui est le plus pesant des quatres, et en mist dedens le creux du pilier de cristal. Après il y mist de l'eaue, et consequamment il y encloït de l'aer, puis mist de l'oelle especiale dedens l'ampoule qui estoit sus le pillier. En ceste oille mist de la mesche, puis l'aluma. Ce fait, il s'eslonga ung petit, puis regarda le riche reliquaire, car il lui pleut a merveilles, car l'en y veoit assez clerement les quatres elemens.

(3.3, p.2)

His best goldsmiths construct a reliquary for the elements. This consists of a gold base made up of myriad serpents holding each others' heads and tails, on top of which there stands a crystal pillar with a hollow top, and finally a golden phial.

This reliquary could be considered a sort of 'iconography', but it lacks the artifice of representation: it presents the actual building blocks of God's creation, rather than using them as materials to represent something else. In this sense it is a fine addition to what is in many ways a temple of unknowing, a humble artistic expression of the limits of Perceforest's knowledge of God, which begins – and ends – with the elements.

It is no less potent for this: Ydorus' anxiety and melancholy at the beginning of this episode reminds us of Perceforest's own period of absence, but the new temple cures them

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<sup>102</sup> See 'Reason and Faith', p.316.

<sup>103</sup> Jane Taylor, 'Faith and austerity: the ecclesiology of the *Roman de Perceforest*' in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, ed. by Alison Adams and others (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1986), pp. 47-65.



both of their worries. The temple provides Perceforest a place to pray for the safekeeping of his son, and to meditate on God's mystery:

Regardant dont cest ouvraige et le mistere qui estoit dedens et que la remembrance en estoit belle, car Dieu les avoit tous fait de neant, il pensa a la magnificence et puissance du Souverain Createur, tant que en fin il y applicqua tout son entendement pour le plaisir qu'il y avoit. Et fin de compte, il se mist a genoux devant le grant autel qui estoit au chief du temple vers orient, puis dist: «Dieu tout puissant, ou n'a fin ne commencement et qui avez tout fait de neant, pour ce que je croy ce fermement je vous aoure humblement». (3.3, p.2)

This emphasis on humility and mystery stands in contrast to the items in the *Temple de la Franche Garde* which are intended to be impressive.

Like Lydoire's temple, this one has high walls, but instead of ensuring exclusivity, these serve a practical, defensive purpose: "afin que personne n'y entrast sans congé pour doubte des malfacteurs." Where the challenges to enter the *Temple de la Franche Garde* were largely artificial, this temple provides a meaningful challenge: later in Book Three (3.3, pp.18-28), Perceforest and Clamidés must defeat the guardians of the temple to demonstrate their worth before they are allowed in to pray. Moreover, Queen Ydorus' suggestion that an annual festival be held in the temple for the people to better understand the *nouvelle foi* is met with warm approval by Perceforest (3.3, p.53). It is in this sense that it becomes the truest antidote to Perceforest's long melancholy as he opens himself up to God and also to his subjects: a far cry from the exclusive, high-security museum of the *Franche Garde*. The King is shown to be that much closer to God than other royals, even Lydoire. This temple, and its altar of the elements, prefigure her conversion process, for which an awareness of the wonders of nature plays a central role.

### ***From Magic to Faith:***

Lydoire's conversion occurs in the *Temple Inconnu* (4.1, pp.549-79), where the virtuous Trojan hermit Dardanon leads her through the process. These events lead to several important plot

developments, most notably the prophecy of the destruction of the realm by Cerse la Romaine, who has corrupted Perceforest's heir, Betis. Lydoire's conversion also leads her to seek out the miraculous *Île de Vie* (4.2, pp.980-1008), which will serve as resting place for the handful of royals who survive the battle at the *Franc Palais* at the end of Book Four.

This conversion is vital to the longevity of the dynasty, and involves the abandonment of her magical practices. Her reasons for abandoning magic are simple, as she confesses to Dardanon:

Et me poise moult que je me suis tant appoiee et delictee a enquerre a ceulx et celles qui se meslent de sçavoir conjurations et enchantemens pour acomplir ma voulenté, pour enchanter autrui et desvoier de sa veue et de son sens par l'espace de grant temps, ne plus n'a de bien en moy que je n'en ouvray oncquez sur personne pour le decepvoir du sien ne de sa vie, ains en ay tousjours ouvré a bonne intencion. (4.1, p.558)

Towards the end of *Perceforest*, the ancient Lydoire, wrapped up in sheepskins, old age finally catching up with her, confesses her earlier crimes in similarly stark terms:

Touteffois en morant elle recongneu son benoit Sauveur et appella Nathanael et lui dist: «Saint pere, priés pour moy, peceresse envers mon Createur, car trop ay usé ma vie en ma jennesse en esperimens et en conjurations, dont j'ay a maintes personnes donné a souffrir sans mort. Trop en fis, trop y ay creu, si m'en repens et en crie merchy a celluy qui pour moy daigna morir en l'arbre de la croix.» (6.2 p.891)

She assures Dardanon that she only ever acted with good intentions, which is certainly true: Lydoire is a force for good within the story, and one of the most illustrious royals. But her confession tallies with the assessment of her magic thus far: well-intentioned, yes, but nevertheless subject to human caprice, and fundamentally reliant on misleading the senses. The confession continues:

Syre, dist elle [...] je ne suis digne d'aler plus avant pour les mauvais dieux que j'ay aourés jusques a present et qui sont mors, lesquelz le Dieu Souverain avoit créés de

neant, comme tout puissant qu'il est et cellui que vous commandés a croire en vostre hymne et lequel je voeil croire et aourer doresnavant, car tous biens et toutes vertus sont en lui, et tous ceulx qui croient en autres dieux sont deceus comme j'ay esté par mon fol sens. Car je tenoie que le soleil, qui donne nourreture et lumiere a toute humaine creature, fust le dextre oeil du Dieu Souverain, et que par cest oeil regardast, nutriast et eschauffast toute creature; aussy que la lune fust son oeil senestre, qui de nuit par sa simplese donnast a toute creature moisteur et atrempance contre la chaleur du jour, parquoy toute creature peust trouver repos. Mais vostre dittier a destruit tous mes folz cuidiers. (4.1, p.559)

The concern here is with her worship of pagan gods. Before the cult of the *Souverain Dieu*, the Greco-Britons worship Venus in their temples, wherein important rituals take place, including the naming of Perceforest's children. Venus, as goddess of love, is an appropriate 'gateway deity' for the *Souverain Dieu*; Lydoire certainly wasn't worshipping some blasphemous god, as the lineage worship Darnant, or setting herself up as a deity, like Aroès. But as with Aroès, Lydoire's main error is described as an error in reason. We know that magic is – demons aside – essentially scientific, and Lydoire confesses that her paganism was the result of mistakes in logic. As she deceived others with her illusions, so was she deceived by her own *fol sens* which had ignored the rational process that leads to belief in the *Souverain Dieu*.

The author gives a quaint, fantastical example of her false cosmology: that the sun was the right eye of some deity, and the moon his left. Lydoire's *science* failed to recognise the falsehood of this corporeal theology. Despite her excellent rational credentials, she doesn't understand God's role in natural processes. In Dardanon's words: "Et se la chose est telle que Nature n'y ait pouvoir et que raison ne sens humain ne la puissent comprendre, rendre graces en devons au Souverain Createur." (4.1 p.563) That which is beyond the grasp of reason (*sens*) is God's work. This is a real-world medieval belief; the author is interested in demonstrating how a virtuous pagan might easily take the step towards Christian *science*. And it is not so drastic a change, after all. Lydoire already believed in a prime god within a pantheon – because it is just such a god that she refers to in her ocular cosmology – but also believed in other gods, notably Venus whom she invokes throughout the first two books as part of her *anciennes croyances*.

The reader might justifiably ask why the text's fullest consideration of the conversion process should be attributed to Lydoire rather than Perceforest. In many ways, it is the King's conversion that is the most important, leading as it does to the foundation of the *Franc Palais* and the temple of the *Souverain Dieu*. But chivalry is already a system of faith, striving towards an ethics of respectability and civilisation, whether it is inspired by Venus or the proto-Christian God. By contrast, the conversion from magic to faith relies on reason, rather than miracle.<sup>104</sup> In Jeanne Lods' words, Lydoire transforms from *Reine Fée* to *sage dame*: "jugée digne de prophétiser la naissance du Fils de Dieu et de comprendre l'ordre du monde."<sup>105</sup> A pagan queen armed with little more than a good education may overcome her folly. We remember that Lydoire studied under Aristotle, and this conversion is very much a transition from the Aristotelean materialism of magic to monotheism following – at least in spirit – the scholastic tradition, and relying on a new appreciation of natural creation.

Dardanon shows Lydoire how to read natural phenomena in the *Temple Inconnu*. Atop a small tower, the pair observe a comet, whose mysterious smoke trail offers Lydoire a prophecy, as it transforms into a she-wolf (transparently Cerse the wicked Roman who seduces and betrays Betidès), before essentially acting out the entire sequence of the battle of the *Franc Palais* at the end of Book Four (4.1, p.560).<sup>106</sup> Lydoire and Dardanon take it in turns to sleep as they grow tired of stargazing, each in turn dreaming one half of the vision of Nature's lament at the Virgin Birth. Two prophecies emerge. The first is: "De vierge chiere naistra la lueur qui nous enluminera." (4.1, p.566). The second is: "Amours de son sang lavera ce que Eve nostre premiere mere ordoya." (4.1, p.567)

Both characters' visions are inspired by – or even feature a personification of – Nature. Dardanon's vision contains images inspired by observation of animals, for example:

[...] il [Dardanon] encommença a regarder ou ciel pour voir le signe qui alloit courant par l'air puis a l'un cousté puis a l'autre ainsy comme la cerue praine qui quiert lieu secret pour soy delivrer. Mais tant estoit le signe de haulte matiere que le saint

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<sup>104</sup> See Taylor, 'Reason and Faith'.

<sup>105</sup> Lods, p.132.

<sup>106</sup> On the historical use of astrology to predict disaster, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-58), III (1934), pp.585-601.

preudhomme n'en sçavoit que jugier, car la signifiante passoit sens humain. (4.1, p.566)

Nature controls the same four elements that Perceforest's altar represents: "[...] c'estoit Nature a qui le Souverain Createur a mis les quatre elemens en main pour reformer toutes creatures humaines et terriennes" (4.1, p.568).

She also appears as a similar figure to Lydoire. In her vision, Lydoire sees Nature as a person of great nobility, and addresses her with deference. Nature informs Lydoire that she knows her well, being, as she is, one of her finest creations:

[...] je suis Nature, maistresse et ouvriere dessoubz le Souverain Createur pour continuer generation humaine [...] Bien vous cognois desdout que je vous feis de la plus pure, de la plus nette et de la plus subtile matiere dont je ouvrasse pieça. Et tant la trouvay bonne et able a ouvrer que volentiers en eusse fait un homme, mais j'avoye pou de matiere, sy ne l'ouzay tant esprouver ne espurgier en la forge qu'elle fust able a ce que deffaulte n'y eust. Mais bien sçay que tant empourtastes de la nature a l'homme que vous devés estre constante, saige, subtile et de tresgrant engin avecques le tresor de memoire. (4.1, p.574)

Nature, like Lydoire, is an artificer of great talent, second only to a greater male figure (God/Perceforest) to whom she is subservient. She also functions in this vision as a necessary proxy figure for the pagan experiencing God: in Lydoire's vision, Nature herself cannot bear to look at a bright light, representing the Virgin Birth, which is then shaded by a *pot en voirre*.

According to Nature, Lydoire is quite literally "made of good stuff", a fine work of art shaped from divine matter. But just as Nature's outrage at the unnatural Virgin Birth is overcome in this vision (which follows Alain de Lille's *De Planctu*) so Lydoire's reliance on reason – *sens humain* – is overcome. From this point she will be less like Nature at her forge – shaping knights into bears, old men, and nine-headed bulls – and more concerned with shaping the fate of Perceforest's dynasty, and *generation humaine*, in preparation for the miraculous Christian future.

Her scientific heritage is not forgotten, however. These images in the sky are viewed from a work of engineering in Dardanon's temple: "Sy monterent tant qu'ilz vindrent sus une

tourelle ou il avoit une roe tournant ou l'ancien preudhomme seoit quant il estudioit es besongnes du ciel. Sur celle tournelle se sey le roy, la dame et l'ancien preudhomme." (4.1, p.564). In a rather charming detail, Lydoire takes a few minutes to adequately memorise Dardanon's vision for later study (4.1, pp.571-2; ll.678-696): her rational credentials are far from eroded. This is not a radical change, but a logical progression. Lydoire has transitioned from *Temple de la Franche Garde* to *Temple Inconnu*; from a preserved giant's head to the discovery of a miraculous island that preserves all life; from the four walls of the temple, to the prophecies of the night sky; from magical ruler to witnessing Nature the artificer overcome; from magical artifice to the miracle of the Virgin Birth.

This is not just a conversion from paganism to Christianity, but also from artificer to reader. Where previously Lydoire indulged in not ill-intentioned but, we may safely say, imperfect practices of magical artifice to influence events and govern the realm, she now understands that she is part of the grand narrative of God, with all the sacred mysteries that entails. Earlier, whilst observing the punishment of Harban's cousins (who were burned in magical fires), one of the *Chevaliers aux Voeux* concludes that this must be the work of the *Reine Fée*:

Seigneurs, or soyez tous certains que la dame qui a ces trois femmes ainsi tourmentees pour leurs meffaiz est celle qui nous monstra le temple [...] Mais la dame [...] est faee, **sy ne peult sçavoir de son estre fors ce que il luy plaist a demonstrier.** (2.2, p.85, my emphasis)

This bewilderment in face of the *Reine Fée* is a fitting description of the understanding Lydoire herself now has of God.

### **Part 1: Summary**

It seems magic has a pretty bad review. Although certain benign forms exist (as entertainment, as medicine), illusion magic is predominantly the emblem of pagan hubris. This presents an intuitive problem for the writer of artificial history: Aroès is *not* a god, Darnant's lineage are *not* the rightful inhabitants of Britain, Lydoire is *not* a divine judge, and the *Perceforest* is *not* the actual pre-history of Britain, but a fantasy of what it might have been like.

Perhaps the text's dim portrayal of magic is the author's way of expiating his own illusions? After all, Lydoire's dramatic conversion makes it clear that the *Souverain Dieu*, and

His Creation, are the proper path for the virtuous pagan. Is *Perceforest* – to use a flagrant anachronism – a ‘politically correct’ text, anxious to demonstrate its conformity to the mores of its age? Moreover, is that box now checked, having asserted magic’s immorality in the ‘first half’ of the text?

Several elements present themselves against such an analysis. Firstly, we find an obvious delight in magical artifice, no matter how wicked, which might tally with the author’s delight in the artifice of his own pseudo-history. It would be a peculiar assertion, after all, that the author of a text as long as *Perceforest* didn’t enjoy his work. Even Aroès’ blasphemous paradise receives an enthusiastic exposé. Secondly, *Perceforest* is very much a text of two halves, and magical artifice continues to be used in the later books, albeit in a subtly different mode. Why would this be so, if such artifice is immoral?

In the second part of this study, I hope to demonstrate that there may be some reconciliation between suspicion and enjoyment of artifice, both magical and literary.

## **Part 2**

### **Artificial History under the Microscope: Techniques and Evaluation**

#### ***Cyclicity, and the Writing Process:***

The *Perceforest* has a two-part structure, and the later books of the text are about the rebuilding of the nation after the Roman invasion, and subsequently laying the historical foundations for Arthur and Christ. This fits into a cyclical view of history, but the author seizes the opportunity to explore the idea of artificial (fictional, or imaginary) history as well. That is, as the kingdom is recreated, and the march towards the Arthurian future begins, we see the author’s ‘artifice’ laid bare.

This is accomplished initially through a series of undead beings, and portrayals of the aftermath of the battle of the *Franc Palais*.

#### ***Prophetic Artifice<sup>107</sup> and Literary Artifice:***

There is no lack of magical activity in the later books. In fact, it experiences a revival. Magical characters like Alexandre *fin de liesse* and the *Déesse des Songes* use dreams, vision, and magical artifice to make sure the right historical beats are struck, often through the manipulation of dreams and visions. In this way, they are avatars for the author, overtly directing plot and genealogies using their artifice.

#### ***Reflections on Reading and Writing:***

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<sup>107</sup> The practice of various ‘prophetesses’ in *Perceforest* bears little resemblance to real-world divination. Their sibylline access to the future may be a sign of demon-usage (probably Zephyr, although we cannot know what the author had in mind), or it could use other means. Unlike illusion magic, the author doesn’t go into great detail on these processes. On historical prophetic techniques, see Jolly et al., pp.53-8.

So, having exposed the dangers of magical artifice, the author then lets us in on his own artifice. Even if there is no overt narratorial worry over the artifice of composing pseudo-history, we may nevertheless infer it in a series of episodes that return to the question of the 'dangerous image' previously considered under the umbrella of *magical* artifice.

## **Chapter 3: Narrative Renewal, the Undead, and** **'Prophetic' Artifice**

### ***Narrative Desolation:***

In Book Four, the Roman forces of Julius Caesar launch a devastating attack on the *Franc Palais*, almost entirely annihilating the British aristocracy (4.1, pp.579-651).<sup>108</sup> Perceforest's son Betidès is betrayed by Cerse la Romaine (4.1, pp.587-592), who gives information to her compatriots that allows them to catch the Britons off guard. The battle is nothing short of a massacre. Only a handful of the royals survive, thanks to the intervention of Lydoire and the surgically talented Liriope (4.1, pp.645-646). As we will see, 'survive' may be overstating the case. Perceforest and Gadiffer are – not entirely inaccurately – presumed dead, and the flower of British chivalry along with them, including both Kings' heirs. The trauma of this event has long-lasting implications. While the kingdom will eventually recover its former glory (as indeed it must, for we know that these characters are the ancestors of Arthur), the author writes a slow recovery, exploring the open wound of the Battle of the *Franc Palais*.

Ourseu (one of Estonné's descendants) arrives in Britain from Rome, hoping to learn more about his ancestors (4.1 p.651). The country that greets him is not quite what he was expecting. If ever it seemed that Perceforest's rule was monumental and permanent, now Britain's destiny is lost in the rampant undergrowth of the forests, and the fading hope of the survivors. We have entered an age in-between.

One of Ourseu's early adventures sees him run into Julius Caesar, perpetrator of the British defeat. Ourseu saves his life, warning him of the dangerous *fontaine venimeuse* (4.1, p.680) that he was about to use to water his troops and horses. Caesar is grateful for his

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<sup>108</sup> On this episode's relation with the *Mort Artu*, see Jane Taylor, 'Guerre et fin des temps: lecture intertextuelle de la Bataille du Franc-Palais dans le *Roman de Perceforest*', in *Guerres, voyages et quêtes au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Alain Labbé, Daniel W. Lacroix, and Danielle Quérueu (Paris: Champion, 2000), pp.413-20.



honesty and is persuaded to leave the country, as Ourseau humbly explains that the people have accepted their defeat. Interestingly, he has nothing but praise for the Roman:

Julius le preu chevalier est tant noble et courtois que toute gentillesse habonde en lui, et si a le cuer tant francq et advisé qu'il ne fist oncques gaster païs ne homme mettre a mort qui a lui se humiliast. Dont je tiens, et aussi font tous ceulx qui le cognoissent, que oncques par lui de cuer aïré ne fut prins vengeance, parquoy il samble de la destruction de ceste terre que ce soit pugnition divine. (4.1, p.688)

It is a curious implication. The man responsible for the British defeat appears so virtuous – at least from Ourseau's outsider, and admittedly Roman perspective – that we must surmise a cosmic purpose. We might reasonably consider Cerse and Betidès' betrayal as the cause of defeat, but the author has deeper concerns. Whilst individual characters – Lydoire in particular – may express their burning hatred for Caesar and Rome, the authorial attitude is that the defeat was divinely ordained.<sup>109</sup>

There is an inescapable irony to this, as the reader knows that this defeat – and the subsequent Sicambrian conquest – are bound to happen because Perceforest's dynasty does not appear in the history books. These gestures to the divine author on the one hand, and the *Perceforest* author on the other, set the metanarrative tone for subsequent events. Ourseau is dumbfounded:

Et Ourseau monta sur son cheval tout seul, puis pendy son escu a son coul, print sa lance, puis se mist au chemin comme desirant de trouver quelque personne qui aucunement lui sceust a dire s'il avoit ou païs aucune ville ou gens se fussent rassamblez après leur destruction, car a grant paine pouoit croire que toute la terre eust esté sy destruite que aucun ou pluseurs n'en fussent eschappés par avoir fuy es

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<sup>109</sup> Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika note that such rationalisations were a common feature of disaster writing in the middle ages, particularly in the 15<sup>th</sup> century: "First, the initial impact of a disaster brings major individual and collective loss and horror, and with it suffering, pain, confusion, shock, chaos, trauma. Second, the disaster needs to be understood through its location in a broader interpretative cosmological model that provides cultural meaning, identifying origin and cause as well as the appropriate human response." Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, 'Rethinking Disaster and Emotions, 1400-1700' in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400-1700* ed. by Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.1-17 (p.5).

forests. Seul chevaucha le preu Ourseu tout cellui jour sans trouver personne; aussi fist il tout l'iver ensieuvant. Et sachiés qu'en dedens ce terme il fut contraint d'apprendre a mengier les chars crues, car dame Famine les lui faisoit trouver delictables car il ne trouvoit point de feu pour les cuire ne creature qui lui adoubast. (4.1, pp.653-4)

The Britons have reverted to a wild existence. Whilst we remember Estonné proudly explaining the method for preparing raw game in the wilderness (1.1, p.300), this is not a matter of field cookery, but of survival. Ourseu did not expect to find such a barren, depopulated country. Later, when he continues his journey to Scotland, the waifs and strays he encounters on the way mistake this armed man for a Roman returned to finish the job:

Sy encommença a trouver gens qui se tenoient par les forests, mais tant estoient sauvaiges et douteux que quant ilz voioient le chevalier monté sur son cheval et armé de ses armes, ilz tenoient que ce fussent les Rommains qui les venissent mettre a mort, sy se mettoient a la fuite. (4.1, p.674)

There are clear echoes here of those Scottish savages who mistook the armed Greco-British forces for devils generations ago (2.1, pp.1-23). The kingdom has regressed. Ourseu wanders alone through the seasons until he meets an old hermit (*d'estrange habit et d'austere vie*) who laments his long solitude in this *desert paÿs* :

Adont l'ancien preudhomme parla et dist: «Sire chevalier, oncques tant grant joie n'eus au cuer que j'ay a present de ce que je vous voy, car je ne cuidois point de voir jamais chevalier ne autre personne du monde. J'ay icy demouré auprez de ceste fontaine depuis la destruction de ceste terre qui fut vingt ans a passez, durant lesquelz je n'ay veu ne homme ne femme, ne jamais ne pensoie de voir. Dont il m'est advenu aucunefois que je m'entroubloie comme une beste qui n'a aucun sens ne discretion, et quant je revenois a moy, je cuidois non sçavoir parler. Lors crioye a plaine voix: «Souverain Dieu, createur de tout, aidez moy!» Et pour ce, quant je vous voy, n'aiés aucune merveilles se j'en suis bien joyeux. (4.1, p.655)

Life in post-war Britain is extreme. The invasion has catapulted the remaining Greco-Britons back to a feral condition, and it may only be reunited by the figure of the knight, which so moves the old *preudhomme*.

Nor is this a passing phase in the history of Britain. When Ourseu arrives, his progress is limited by impassable forests – *anuyeuse[s] a cheminer* (4.1, p.661) – and widespread overgrowth on the roads. Later, Nero and Clamidette take a group of wild Britons under their wing (5.1, pp.211-8). Such tidying up and re-establishment of the aristocracy is no speedy process, even with the help of Zephyr. Even worse, dangerous beasts are seen to return to the land. Ourseu defeats a venomous serpent in the very ruins of Lydoire's castle (4.1, pp.662-7). The build-up to this combat reads like a modern monster blockbuster:

Quant le chevalier se fut mis au chemin, il n'eut gueres chevauchié quant il trouva un chevalier occis assés nouvelement, mais vilainement estoit despechié ainsi comme de bestes [...] Sy n'eut pas chevauchié loing quant il vey devant lui murs et machonnerie de maisons destruittes et gastees. (4.1, pp.662-3)

The author takes clear delight in the ensuing fight. Even here, however, the exciting combat plays out on a tragic backdrop: the crumbling masonry of the *Reine Fée's* castle. Another raw reminder of how the times have changed. During the interregnum, the ruinous landscape harks back to the defeat at the *Franc Palais*, but it is also a metaphor for the horror of 'kinglessness'; the scattered subjects of ruined Britain cry out for the salvific figure of the knight, and a Greco-British sovereign.

### ***An Age In-Between:***

As Taylor notes: "In the first cycle, the author emphasizes particularly and repeatedly the collective danger represented by a lack of authority".<sup>110</sup> The defeat creates an apparently insurmountable interregnum, and Britain faces a directionless period, embodied by Gallafur, the *damoisel aventureux*, who roams the land in search of someone noble enough to dub him a knight. This lack of authority spurs even the dead to demand action.

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<sup>110</sup> Taylor (1979), p.213.

In this ungoverned Britain we see a proliferation of strange happenings relating back to the battle. From traditional medieval tropes of unsatisfied ancestors to more unusual territory, the author creates an immersive landscape where narrative uncertainty is embodied in the text's fictional constructs. We see a catalogue of living dead – from ghosts to undead gods – that creates a visceral and challenging sense of in-betweenness.

When it comes to matters of liminality, many critics turn to psychoanalysts like Lacan. I do not intend to embroil myself too much with this tradition, as an overuse of psychoanalytic terminology can lead to circumlocution and a potential 'upstaging' of the source material. That said, a moderate use of critical theory is certainly a useful tool for talking about ideas that may otherwise appear ineffable. I am particularly indebted to Jane Gilbert's recent work on the living dead: with its exposition of a large body of critical theory pertinent to my subject matter and a sensitive working knowledge of the specifically medieval portrayal of death, her work is doubly relevant here. To begin with, Gilbert's assessment of the undead gives us a flavour of this unsettling period in *Perceforest*:

[...] even when playing their proper role by warning or advising, revenants depart from the norm for death. Others are deliberately obstreperous and obstructive. Welcome or unwelcome, the dead possess authority, agency and urgency; they threaten the living, making explicit or implicit demands or heralding imminent demise.<sup>111</sup>

In *Perceforest*, though all undead fit this description, there is another layer of meaning, as the text uses undead beings to think about *narrative* liminality: the process of bridging the first 'cycle' of Greco-Britons with the second, and even gesturing beyond that to the pre-existing Arthurian canon (which, of course, takes place in the intradiegetic 'future'). This means that while some undead are fairly 'classic', following Gilbert's description, others take more surprising forms.

### ***Body Horror:***

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<sup>111</sup> Jane Gilbert, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.3.

To begin with those more classical undead, the bodily remains of those knights who were slain in the battle linger in the British landscape.<sup>112</sup> Their defeat is horrific: facing overwhelming odds, Perceforest and his knights are either obliterated or severely injured. The mutilated form of Lyonnell is described in particularly graphic detail:

La rouyne Blance seoit après, qui tenoit entre ses bras le mirouer et le tresor de tout chevalerie, mais tant nettement l'avoit alors despendu en cas de toute necessité qu'il ne lui en estoit demouré que la bourse platte et esvuydee: c'estoit Lyonnell du Glat, roy de Lionnois, quy n'avoit tenant ensamble ne nerf ne vaine, par ou la force, la prouesse et toute la chevalerie lui estoit du corps tant nectement departie entre ses ennemis que rien ne lui en estoit demouré. Ainsi se gisoit entre les bras de sa mouillier desnué de toute aide de membres. (4.2 p.821)

Several such bodies, including the barely living Perceforest, are transported to the *Île de Vie* by Lydoire, Blanche, and Liriope in magical white chariots (4.1, pp.645-6; 4.2, pp.820-1).

Later, Ourseu finds his way to the island to meet his grandmother, Lydoire, and to learn more about his ancestors (4.2, pp.980-1015). The island sits in the middle of a lake in the land of *Mamonye*, off *Islande*. It is a beautiful place, but strange. Ourseu takes a golden apple from a tree, but finds it hard as crystal. The fruit must be washed in a fountain of *eaux vives*, bubbling over a rainbow of gemstones, to be made edible. When he does take a bite, the effect is remarkable: "Atant en goustâ Ourseu, et quant la douceur l'en vint au cuer, il se trouva tant conforté que jamais fut mieux a son aise." (4.1, p.986) The place is marvellous, but we should not let the *locus amoenus* trope distract us from its in-betweenness. The magic apples capture this dichotomy of a place in-between life and death: they are simultaneously nourishing and euphoric, yet also petrified and inedible.

It is in just such a state of, on the one hand, abundant life, and on the other, lifelessness, that Perceforest and Gadiffer now exist: only the magic of the island sustains their bodies (Gadiffer was not injured in the battle, of course, but by the mythical boar). Perceforest is – in his own words – living on borrowed time: "tous [les Bretons] y moururent

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<sup>112</sup> For a thorough typology of the dead in *Perceforest* (and indeed their spirits), see Michelle Szkilnik, 'Les morts et l'histoire dans le *Roman de Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Âge*, 105:1 (1999), 9-30.

fors moy qui ne vis que par emprunt, comme vous verrez." (4.2.p.1005). The *Île de Vie* is like a life-support system: sustaining but nevertheless reminiscent of the death it prevents.<sup>113</sup>

Housing Perceforest and Gadiffer, the *Île de Vie* protects Britain's heritage for posterity, but in this same quality is a stark reminder of its present interregnum. Perceforest explains the double-edged purity of the island to Ourseu:

«Beau filz, en la terre dont vous venés, qui son amy y receveroit a lie chiere et le menast voir or, argent, pierres precieuses, belles dames, beaux chevaulx, chasses, volleries et tous deduitz terriens, deffaillans excellens boires et mengiers, ne se loeroient amis de amy. Pour ce le vous dis, beau nieps, que tout ce deffault cy endroit, car nulles richesses n'y ont lieu ne delicieux boires ou mengiers n'y ont mestier. Car le createur a cy endroit les quatre ellemens mys sy d'acort que les ungs ne guerroient les autres, ains sont paisibles enssembles comme l'amant avecq l'amie, dont nous qui sommes cy avons l'air tant attrempé et de telle substance qu pou nous est mestier de mengier; et se mengier voulons, le fruit de ceste isle est tant vertueux que d'une pomme avons assés ung mois. – Syre, dist Ourseu, cest isle est de grant valeur; c'est grant dommaige qu'elle n'est habitee. – Beau nieps, dist le roy, la nature de l'isle est contraire a jennesse et pour ce n'y vient nul demourer.» (4.2, pp.1006-7)

There is no death here, but nor is there youth (and so procreation): eternal life, and yet no life.

The island and all its grim memorials also mirrors the Britons' long, unknowing anticipation of the birth of Christ: their own position in-between the old world and the new. As Gilbert notes: "The living dead present an ethical challenge to the ordinarily living" and this is certainly true in *Perceforest*.<sup>114</sup> She marks the difference between 'bodily' and 'symbolic' death after Lacan:

[...] symbolic death concerns whether or not someone is considered to exist as a

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<sup>113</sup> Anne Berthelot sees the Island as an inferior, and ultimately hollow appropriation of Avalon, necessary, perhaps, for a text that masquerades as a 'prequel'. See 'Le Paradis de la Reine-Fée dans le *Perceforest*: une utopie incertaine', in *Discours et figures de l'utopie au Moyen Âge: 5<sup>e</sup> Congrès annuel de la Société Reineke*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1994), pp.1-14.

<sup>114</sup> Gilbert, p.6

person. There is a potential confusion here. On the one hand, 'symbolic death' can refer to the rites by which a person moves from the society of the living to that of the dead, a process which keeps that person within society's remit. [...] On the other hand, there is a more radical sense, in which death under its symbolic aspect appears as non-personhood, manifested either by social placelessness (the Wandering Jew, the Flying Dutchman) or conversely by too-perfect assimilation of, or into, the symbolic order. Fantasy figures corresponding to this latter condition include the living doll, the zombie, and figures of possession or hollowness. Metaphors rather than figurations of death, these figures refer to the symbolic, structural aspects of death.<sup>115</sup>

As we have seen, the *Île de Vie* is, in a sense, placeless: it is on the mainland that the restoration must occur, not here, and it is a place that resists life as much as it sustains it. There is more than a hint of the zombie to Perceforest's body; his injuries are still as fresh as the day he received them, and even if the island eliminates his pain, the following passage is shocking:

Adont il descouvry ses plaies et lui moustra la pitié que les Rommains eurent de lui en la bataille. Lors vey Ourseau le bon roy tel atourné qu'il n'est homme vivant, tant ait dur cuer, qui n'en eust eu pitié, car tant estoient nouvelles ses plaiez comme le premier jour qu'il les reçut, fors tant qu'elles ne segnoient plus. Adont fut Ourseau moult esmerveillé comment il avoit la vie au corps, car il avoit au chief douse plaies ouvertes et vermeilles comme rose, et avoit le dextre bras sans poing, le senestre coppé en trois lieux sy avant que le plus fort ne tenoit qu'a un nerf, et lui paroient ses entrailles en quatre lieux, et estoit affolé du dextre piet. (4.2, p.1005)

Perceforest is the open wound, a memorial to the trauma of the battle. Body horror is the name of the game here, and Ourseau later describes the bodies of other slain knights lying on their alabaster plinth, just off the coast of the *Île de Vie*:

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<sup>115</sup> Gilbert, p.10

Pour ce, chier pere, et vous, mes frères, qui avez le couraige de le vengier, je vous diray en quel point je trouvoy le jenne Gadiffer. Car la ou il gesoit ainsi comme nouveau mort je regarday que c'esoit le corps d'un homme qui se gesoit illec, mort ou autrement, car lui et les autres sambloient mielx pieces de char rassamblees a l'esguille que ce que Nature les eust formez. Car Gadiffer n'avoit par tout son corps ne sus ses membres d'entier que n'y pendissent pieces de char destachies au trenchant des espees. (5.1 p.69)

'Bodies' may not be an accurate description. Ourseau witnesses the strange contrast of – on the one hand – an alabaster plinth, with all its implications of the memorial, perhaps gesturing to those statues of Perceforest (5.1, p.570) or Estonné (4.1, pp.661-2) which are also rediscovered during Britain's revival, and – on the other – chunks of raw human flesh, sewn together in a loose semblance of the body's previous shape.

This body horror bears a clear political message: the realm must be stitched back together, the body of the fractured nation reassembled by knights just like Ourseau. The sight also inspires Ourseau's revenge against Caesar, later assassinated with twelve blades forged from the head of the spear that pierced Gadiffer junior's heart (5.1, pp.63-86). The narrator gestures to Ourseau and Lydoire's emotional response to these bodies with the simple line: "Tous les parlers qui furent entre la Rouyne Faee et Ourseau ne sçay je point recorder [...]".

The bodies are a manifestation of an in-betweenness that cannot be allowed to continue. The memorial marks and honours the lives of the deceased, but its reassembly of their bodies is imperfect, and ultimately horrific. When the kingdom is reassembled, it cannot be like this macabre monument on a far-flung island; it must be re-born, organically, in the fresh youth of Britain. These bodies inspire, even silently demand action, a new generation of Greco-Britons, and a few more tomes of the *Perceforest*!

### ***The Livid Dead:***

It's not all doom and gloom; some of the deceased demand action in rather more comic episodes. One night, Benuicq and friends are sleeping near the ruins of the *Franc Palais* - waiting for Gallafur's coronation at the *Perron Merveilleux* - when they are awoken by the crash of battle, though the source of the commotion is nowhere to be seen:



En ce vergier entrerent les trois chevaliers, puis se coucherent auprez d'une masiere. Mais un petit devant minuit, comme ilz estoient au prumier somme, une tempeste sourdy entre la Forest Darnant et le pallais tant grande que les trois chevaliers s'esvillerent et euerent grant merveille de celle noise. Lors commença a dire Benuicq: «Ouez vous point ce que je oy? -- Sire, dirent ilz, ouy, car il nous samble que hors de ceste muraille ait la greigneur bataille qui oncques fust, sy alons voir que ce peut estre.» Atant se leverent et ramperent amont un mur pour regarder en la prairie, ou ilz ne veirent riens, mais ouoient la greigneur noise du monde. Longuement dura celle bataille, mais quant elle fut finee, les trois compaignons retournerent ou devant avoient jeu. (4.2, p.925)

There is no horror here, but rather fascination, and the sequence takes a comic turn when Passelion is roundly beaten by an invisible phantom on a subsequent visit. The spirit eventually succumbs to his cries for mercy and explains himself:

Or me dittes, sire, dist Passelion, pourquoy avés vous ferus sur nous? -- Je m'y fioie, dist la voix, combien que je n'y feroie pas seul, car tous les freres de Marmona y freoient, et pour ce que tu as engendré en ma fille ung hoir terrible et de mauvaise foy. [...] ferés vous longuement de nuit tel service en ceste plaine? -- Tant, dist la voix, que un damoiseau du lignage Perceforest sera fait chevalier par merveilleuse aventure, et qui ce meismes jour establiera ung tournoy en ceste place par lequel nous lairons nostre emprinse de nuit et ceulx la le maintendront de jour a certains termes.» Atant la voix se parti et la noise commença a cesser. (4.2, p.938)

Passelion's specific infraction is a story for another time. But these tourneying spirits have a clear mission, and they receive a clear answer:

Mais il me samble que se nous souffrons aux amez de nos peres avoir tel paine de nuit en nostre deffaulte, veu que sommes pourvus de santé et de belles pucelles, tourné nous devra estre a grant recreandise. Or faisons pour le mieulx a ce matin ung tournoy devant les pucelles qui cy sont et en delivrons les amez de nos peres. (4.2, p.965)

These ghosts - whilst of course recalling the tragedy of the *Franc Palais* in the most straightforward sense - have pressing goals for the present. In this sense they are quite traditional medieval revenants: the 'unquiet dead,' to borrow Gilbert's terminology.

Another crowd of spirits have a rather more elaborate home. Passelion's descent into Hell (which, as we know, existed long before the birth of Christ) is also couched in comedy (4.2, pp.741-764). Passelion is somewhat lunatic; his juvenile delinquencies include throwing a cat into a fire, burning his cousin Benuicq's face, burning off his nursemaids' pubic hair, cutting off and eating live pig ears, killing a servant with an improvised lance whilst riding a calf, and ultimately seducing Morgane's daughter. You might say he's in need of a good education, and Zephyr is always keen to help.

The spirit leads Passelion to a version of limbo called the valley of *deffaulte de mal et de bien*, in order to recover the arms of his father Estonné, Zephyr's old friend and long-time prank victim. Predictably, Passelion behaves rather erratically. Shortly after meeting the spirit of Bruyant sans Foy, his father's killer, Passelion becomes enraged, chasing the apologetic and miserable spirit and pelting him with rocks. In the valley of *deffaulte de mal et de bien*, he finds a temple, where he is asked his name. He refuses, instead knocking so loudly and rudely at the door that he is transported to the treacherous Island of St Patrick – future site of the Purgatory – where he would have been torn to pieces by malevolent demons were it not for Zephyr's intervention.

As usual in the Zephyr episodes, there is an educational bent,<sup>116</sup> and he tries to explain to Passelion that his anger and pride are not chivalric qualities. Passelion concedes, and his father's spirit greets him warmly on his return to the valley, granting him his arms, and imparting his own lesson:

Beau filz, d'icy assez tost vous convient partir, sy vous prie en la parfin que n'aiés creance qu'en un seul Dieu, c'est au Dieu Souverain qui crea toutes choses, car sachiez que fort sont tourmentez ceulx qui meurent en autre creance; et soyez juste, leal et

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<sup>116</sup> On which see Corinne Denoyelle, 'Le Roman de Perceforest. De l'humiliation à l'humilité', in *L'Humiliation: Droit, récits et représentations (XII<sup>e</sup>–XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. by Lucien Faggion, Christophe Regina and Alexandra Roger (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), pp.383-406.

preudhomme en tous vos fais, preu et hardy en droiture soustenant, et desirant de remettre le païs en prospérité. (4.2 p.763)

These spirits have similar motivations to their colleagues at the *Franc Palais*: reclaiming the kingdom *and*, in this case, conversion to the *Souverain Dieu*.

Like the bodies on the *Île de Vie*, these 'unquiet dead' are another link with the violent past. Passelion confronts the tormented soul of his father's killer, and the knights of the *Franc Palais* engage in combat on the very battlefield where they were slain. But the tone here is light-hearted and comical, and we glimpse the author's healthy sense of irony, as these spirits rather bluntly demand the continuation of the dynasty... and, by extension, the text.

### ***The 'Dieu des Desirriers': Artifice and Authorship***

The *Dieu des Desirriers* is rather genre-defying, but can be described as an undead god. He is part object – contained in crystal and wielding the sword that will eventually be planted in the stone – and part undead knight. We are dealing with another preserved body, in this case the body of Sador, also known as the *Chevalier au Dauphin*.

Sador first made his name in life at the tournament at the end of Book One, where he showed extraordinary prowess in fulfilling the desires of no less than twelve damsels throughout the mêlée. Subsequently, he fulfilled another damsel's cry for help, defeating Hollande the giant who was holding his son (her lover) captive on his island. He also features in a rather cheekier episode (4.1, XX) involving a young maiden: the *fille de Nerve*, hearing of Dauphin's desire-fulfilling pedigree, implores him to give her "ce qu'oncques n'eustes ne avoir ne poués" (4.1, p.464). This not-entirely-opaque request is fulfilled as he visits her castle, fights off her jealous husband, has a wonderful evening, then goes on his way. Everyone has a good laugh about it back at the *Neuf Chastel* where the King asks the knights to truthfully recount their adventures. A comic tale, but one which nevertheless cements his reputation as one who grants damsels their wish. He was the best of the twelve *Chevaliers aux Voeux* and so sits apart from them where they lie preserved near the *Île de Vie*.

Ourseau discovers that the *Dieu des Desirriers* is being worshipped as a god by a group of maidens. These maidens are all without husbands and have become so despondent that they capture any eligible noblemen who pass by. An old man explains the desperation not only of the women in their society, but also the men:

Et tant nous trouvasmes en celle praerie que, ains qu'il fust demi an, nous fumes bien soixante que hommes que femmes, dont la merveille fut telle que l'un par l'autre nous sceumes que l'omme n'avoit cogneu la femme naturellement depuis la destruction du païs, tant estoient reffroidiés par la doute des Rommains. (4.2, p.86g)

In subsequent accounts of these kidnappings the author allows his wry humour to shine through, as the knights in question are not entirely unhappy in their predicament.

Nevertheless, a lack of copulation is a serious situation in terms of rebuilding the realm, and one that merits supernatural intervention. Dache (daughter of Dache, the sorceress queen of Péléon) goes on pilgrimage to the temple of the *Dieu des Desirriers*. She tells Ourseu about her remarkable experience:

Mais tant veuil je que vous sachiés que ce temple est bel a merveilles, car le gentil dieu, lequel au tamps qu'il regnoit au monde fut nommé le Chevalier au Delphin, est sur son autel en char et en os, armé de ses armes fors du chief vermeil et coulouré viaire, telle que les pucelles qui le servent ou temple tiennent aincores bien qu'il soit en vie et point n'est aincoires monté au ciel avecq les dieux pour l'amour qu'il a aux pucelles desconseillies. – Damoiselle, dist Ourseu, cellui dieu que vous clamés Delphin, comment peut il estre en char et en os? – Seigneurs, dist la pucelle, je ne sçay sinon qu'il lui plaist ainsy, car il est enclos en une tour de cristail ronde tresnoblement aournee, et la siet en une chayere armé comme je vous ay dit, tenant l'espee au poing reposant sur son dextre genouil, et parmi ce cristail l'aourent les pucelles qui son aide requierent. (4.2, pp.871-2)

This deity is, in one sense, another preserved body, maintained, we assume, by the crystal cylinder that surrounds him, and which he never leaves. He recalls medieval relics – and saintly bodies in particular – which did not decay, and were thought to move from time to time, as Sador does.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Charles Freeman records that "When Pope Nicholas V made a visit to Assisi in 1449, over two hundred years after St. Francis's death, he ordered the tomb of the saint to be opened. The body apparently stood straight upon its feet and 'the eyes were open as if of a living man, and moderately lifted up to heaven. The *stigmata*

Marriages are his main business, and Dache explains how he helps damsels find husbands:

Et sachiés que quant le dieu a esté ou aucunement est oppressé par les requestes des pucelles si fort que par pitié conforter en veult les aucunes, on le voit mouvoir dedens sa tour de cristail. Adont scevent les pucelles qu'elles seront confortees la nuit ensieuvant, comme je fus: car quant j'eux servi au temple un mois et ce vint au jour derrain, le dieu commença a faire signes de son espee. Alors toutes les pucelles commencerent a dire a haulte voix: «Dieu des Desiriers, souverain conforteur aux pucelles, eslevé soiés vous au siege plus haultain auprez du Dieu Souverain.» (4.2, p.873)

Sador seems to have some consciousness, although these mysterious gesticulations are clearly not a regular occurrence, witnessed only when he is satisfied by the damsels' prayers. Still, not bad for a dead body.

Of course, the author makes sure their prayer places him as the highest authority *after* the *Souverain Dieu*. Nevertheless, this is a cult, with rituals and a temple, responding to marvellous events. Huot notes this happy combination of sublime being and efficient operator as commemorated in a *lai* composed by his followers:

Embracing the accomplishments of the Dieu des Desiriers both in life and in death, the lai in effect erases the distinction made by his death to posit him as a sublime, transcendant figure, the very principle by which maidenly sexual desires can be articulated in a form that allows them to be both regulated and fulfilled.<sup>118</sup>

The next day, as expected, he gives his prophecy:

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[...] were still bleeding.' [...] The 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic Mary of Oignies cut off her hair while alive – and it was soon bringing miracles – but she ordered that the rest of her body remain unmolested. When a prior tried to take her teeth out after she had died, her jaw apparently clenched. [...] So saints might have a continuing 'life' of their own." Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p.142. Macabre visions of animate relics were also popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on which see the entertaining Rosemary Pardoe, *Strange Tales of Saints & Relics* (Great Britain: Haunted Library, 1983).

<sup>118</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.108. On the socio-political implications of this character, see pp.105-109.

Atant commença a dire le dieu d'une voix savoureuse en telle maniere: «O mes doulces pucelles, j'ay pitié de vous, car bien voy que Nature vous monstre et vous mestrie par l'ardeur de jeunesse et vous a les cuers raemplis de desiriers raisonnables. Souffrés un pou, car temprement avrez vos desirs raemplis et aiderez au païs restorer de noble lignie. Et vous, Dache, retournez en vostre païs, sy prenés le prumier chevalier qui vous requerra de mariage.» (4.2, p.873)

A direct request. And while we may be amused at the blanket instruction "take the first man you see", it gets results: the first man Dache sees is Pallidès, and their union is another important one for the genealogy. More important still, the *Dieu* is custodian of the sword that – via a rather elaborate game of pass the parcel between Alexandre and Gallafur – will eventually be set in the *Perron Merveilleux* to await King Arthur.

Indeed, might we think of the *Dieu des Desirriers* as a rather literal 'plot device'? Isn't there something strangely automatic, even artificial about this deity, who is reified as much as deified? He so resembles a statue, or even an idol, that Ourseau describes the damsels kneeling before an *ymaige merveilleux*.<sup>119</sup> The *Dieu des Desirriers* is quite the work of 'artifice' himself (we assume that he was preserved – like the other bodies we have seen – by the surgical talents of Liriope, and perhaps even Lydoire's magic). Arranging those marriages integral to *Perceforest's* genealogy, he represents an important tool in the author's own 'artifice'. Indeed, as a 'figure for the author', one wonders how far the comparison might go: did the *Perceforest* author himself feel 'half-dead' as he embarked upon the second half of his gargantuan opus?

### ***Narrative Resurgence:***

When Ourseau first arrives in Britain, he remarks on the beauties of the month of May:

Ce fut en may que l'esté entre et que l'yver s'en part, que tous oyseaulx tendent a refourmer nouvelle generation samblable a leurs plumages, que le preu chevalier

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<sup>119</sup> On the peculiar relationship between bodies and art in *Perceforest*, see Noémie Chardonnes, 'Marquer la vie, montrer la mort: les statues de chair du *Perceforest* et leurs antécédents dans la *Première Continuation* et la *Vengeance Raguidel*', *Les lettres romanes*, 69:3-4 (2015), 311-328.

nommé Ourseu se mist au chemin pardevers la Grant Bretaigne, la ou il lui couvint rassembler l'oysel qui pour refourmer son samblable refait son nyt et rappareille, et pour gaieté naturelle aucunement il recognoist sa femmelle tant qu'en la fin voit son pareil voller, dont il a joie pleniére. [...] Et pour entrer en nostre matiere plus liement nous doit souvenir du saige qui dist que personne ne se doit trop douloir ne lamenter pour perte ou maladie, s'aucunement lui survient: car après la maladie revient la santé, et après la perte le gaing, et après le plour le ris, qui donnent saveur et congnoissance des biens que Dieu nous apreste. (4.1, pp.651-2)

It is not long since the destruction of Britain, but already Ourseu – emblem of chivalry – is described as an instrument of regeneration comparable to Nature's own cyclical processes. Immediately after the above description, the narrator apologises for the tragic subject matter, assuring us that things will get better, and that sometimes God sends great loss to help us appreciate good things. Britain will recover just like the 'cyclicity' we see in nature, and the later books display an unerring commitment to this recovery. Much of this process involves enchantresses and prophetesses, who use magical (or, at the very least, 'artificial') means to mould the new kingdom.

Gallafur, heir to the throne, is knighted at the *Perron Merveilleux* and inserts the sword that will one day be drawn by Arthur. Blanche *la Fée*, Lydoire's daughter, and heir to her magical powers, establishes a series of tournaments at the *Fontaine aux Pastoureaux* to encourage prowess in the new generation of knights, and offers rewards of steel armaments (scarce since the destruction of the *Franc Palais*) to those who prove themselves worthy. The *Dieu des Desirriers* and – increasingly – the *Déesse des Songes* will mould the country to its destined shape in preparation for Arthur and the age of Christ by ensuring correct genealogies, and historical events are achieved.

The marriages organised by the *Dieu des Desirriers* pay homage to the new wildness of the landscape, but this is now invigorating rather than tragic, as we see at the pastoral wedding of Dache and Pallidès:

Le preu Pallidés print a femme la pucelle selon l'ancienne coustume de adont, qui n'estoit autre que: «Je te vueil. – Et aussi fay je toy.» Sy vueil bien que vous sachiés que les nuepces ne furent point trop orgueilleuses de boire ne de mengier, de salles

ne de chambres poinctes de couleurs, ne de lits engourdinés ne couvers de draps d’or ne de soie. Car tout prumierement au noepces n’y eut point de pain ne plus chier boire que d’eau, et la chambre ou la mariee jeut celle nuit ne fut que de rains d’anglantiers et de rosiers tous chargiés de roses, qui ne fist pas a blamer. Et la plume du lit et les linsceuz furent de poulieul et de muguet et de toutez herbez amoureuses dons les deux amans se devoient bien resjouir, comme ilz firent plus que ne face a present le roy françois entre ses draps d’or et de soie. (4.2, p.875)

The sparseness of the new Britain is precisely its potency. In the new kingdom, food, drink, love and sex are purer and headier than ever before. (We also note an implied condemnation of contemporary medieval marriage practices in favour of this simpler, more rustic model).

The benign, *féerique* magic of Queen Lydoire’s reign makes a return in the figure of her daughter, Blanche. At the ninth tournament of the *Fontaine aux Pastoureaux* (5.1, pp.400-7), the search continues for an appropriately valiant husband for Blanche’s daughter, Blanchette. The mysterious *Chevalier Flamboyant* excels in the mêlée and Exillé once again claims the tournament and a ninth *rose vermeille* (given as trophies at the tournaments; it is decreed that only the knight who wins all twelve will be a suitable husband for Blanchette).<sup>120</sup> Blanche and Blanchette look wonderful, as ever:

Assez tost vindrent chevaliers sans nombre sur la place, montez et armez pour le tournoy, qui tous regardoient pardevers le noble hourdis pour veoir la beauté de la pucelle que celui gagneroit qui emporteroit le pris des douse tournois. (5.1, p.401)

This is not mere showboating, but sets the keystone of their authority through marriage. The banquet is magnificent: “qui apparoit grande et pleniére par les enchantemens de la dame.” (5.1, p.402) All those knights present are in awe of the tournament and its hostess. After the tents and feast have disappeared, Blanche invites Ponçonnet the minstrel to follow her:

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<sup>120</sup> On the importance of marriages in Book Five, see Michelle Szkilnik, ‘La casuistique amoureuse dans le livre V du *Perceforest*’ in ‘*Perceforest*’: *un roman arthurien*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.151-61.



Ponsçonnet la sieuvy tant qu'il entra en ung chemin soubzterrinn qui moult lui sembla merveilleux. Mais il n'eut gaires alé avant quant il se retrouva en ung moult bel gardin. La descendirent la damoiselle et Ponsçonnet, et puis lui dist la damoiselle qu'il prenist sa harpe et la sieuvist la ou elle le merroit. (5.1, p.404)

These are properly *féérique* tropes, recalling Marie's *Yonéc* in particular, and the secret garden feels snug and familiar. Ponçonnet sings a selection of *lais*: the *lai de Pergamon* first; subsequently Lyonnel's *lai de la complainte*, which greatly moves Blanche, his widow; finally Blanche's own *lai de confort*. These nostalgic pieces all hark back to the legendary adventures of King Perceforest's reign. As Lionnel (son of Lyonnel and Blanche) comments: «Madame, moult font a recommander les anciens et leurs fais, car toute proesse estoit en eulz.» (5.1, p.404) This is the history that they must revive: from the old 'cycle' will emerge the new.

Lionnel laments that the land is now *destruit*, but Ponçonnet reminds him of the prowess of many of the new generation of knights. Huot comments that such nostalgia is only a necessary step towards a whole new narrative process looking not backwards, but forwards:

Rather than the Temple de la Franche Garde, which commemorates past deeds and the spread of civilisation against wilderness as an act still alive in its significance, Gallafur's Britain is centred on the temples of the Dieu des Desirriers and the Deesse des Songes. Both of these deities promote movement into the future, the former by fostering marriage and the continuation of lineage and the latter by offering guidance, in the form of revelatory dreams, to the political and military future of the realm. The central point in the landscape is no longer the tomb of Darnant or the *pillier Estonné*, with their commemoration of past events, but the Perron Merveilleux, which looks to the future and holds the sword in readiness for the king who will some day draw it forth.<sup>121</sup>

The kingdom will recover. But this future is only partly inspired by the rediscovery of the past. The reforging of the nation is complex, and defined by new forms of magical practice.

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<sup>121</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.190.

### ***Self-fulfilling Prophecies and 'Alienating' Narratives:***

We, as readers, already know the story of Arthur. So does the author of *Perceforest*, and this seeps into the narrative itself: a feverish busyness about destinies, swords, and the *Perron Merveilleux*. What is curious about this 'prequel' to the famous 'Sword in the Stone' story is its metanarrative tone. That is, where the Arthurian moment celebrates Arthur's glory, the focus in *Perceforest* is not so much in the glory of Gallafur's moment, but in preparing for that external Arthurian moment located in a distinct, pre-existing Arthurian canon. Likewise, the Christian age is ushered in with a translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus (6.2, pp.830-74), inserted directly into the pages of the *Perceforest* itself.

This gesturing beyond its own plot to an extradiegetic one means that author and reader are necessarily aware of *Perceforest* as a literary text, and 'artificial history', in the later books. This is not to say that Gallafur – around whom the flurry of preparation for the Arthurian future centres – is not worthy of his eventual role as king, but as I will demonstrate, the ultimate significance of his actions are known to the reader, but unknown to Gallafur. In this sense, the later portions of *Perceforest* may seem alienating: to its characters, and to its own content, which pale in significance compared to the chronologically and literarily external Christian/Arthurian history.

The *Perron Merveilleux* is not so much the locus of heroic deeds but rather a bookmark in history. The important plot points of the final two books are fully – if obliquely – disclosed in the verses on its surface:

Moult fus ja pierre esmerveillable,  
Mais aincoir suis sus ce vaillable,  
Car j'actens a faire merveilles  
Dont ne sont venue pareilles.  
Ours sus moy fera chevalliers.  
Dedens moy ert mis ly achiers  
Qu'homs vivant ne pourra sachier.  
Jusques cy s'y vendra lachier  
Qui ert chief du lignaige au Roy  
Mehaignié. Cil par son arroy

Me sachera hors des entrailles,  
 Ja soient fors des repustailles.  
 Le fort royaume de Bretagne,  
 Qu'orendroit nul vivant ne daigne,  
 Dont montera en tel honneur  
 Que autre a lui n'avra couleur. (4.2, pp.924-5)

Here, Ourseau knighting Gallafur (the only knight in Britain with the right genealogy to do so) and the future Arthurian episode are both referenced fairly obviously. Inscriptions and prophecies of this sort are a motif in the later books. We are thereby placed in a narrative that is deeply significant in one sense, as it prepares for vital moments in Arthurian history, yet in another sense 'insignificant', as it cannot explain or justify its own significance intradiegetically.

In the text's own version of another traditional trope of chivalric narrative – Gallafur crossing the *pont a l'espee* – he is presented with two inscriptions on black marble pillars at both ends of the bridge:

Sage fut la dame faee	Damoysel, filz de grant dame,
Qui trouva le Pont a l'Espee.	Va t'ent sonner ce cor par t'ame,
Ung damoiseau y passera	Sy nous fay sçavoir la nouvelle
Qui pucelles confortera	De ta venue la nouvelle,
Et damoiselles ensement.	Par qui Bretagne yert restoree
Dieu doinst qu'i viengne temprement,	Qui tant a esté desolee.
Car lors revendront en honneur	
Les damoiselles de valleur,	
Et ainsi fera chevalerie	
Qui long tamps a esté perie.	(4.2, pp.947-8)

These inscriptions are prophetic, but also inescapably instructive. Gallafur doesn't have much choice in the matter, and promptly blows the horn after he has crossed the bridge. Mysteriously... and rather cinematically, other horns sound in the distance.

When he looks back, the bridge wasn't razor sharp at all, and he hasn't received a single scratch: "le varlet, qui paravant vey le pont trenchant comme une espee, le vey de planche après tant large qu'il passa oultre et mena a son maistre son cheval, qui monta sus, puis se mist au chemin." (4.2, p.948). We later discover that it was Sarra – a.k.a. the *Déesse des Songes* – who created the bridge and the *cor de joye*. The other horns that sounded are bronze devices mounted on the roofs of various noblewomen's castles.

There is zero threat here. A useful comparison might be made with Chrétien's Lancelot,<sup>122</sup> who acquires painful stigmata when crossing his own *pont de l'épee* to fulfil his amorous desires. There is no such motivation here, nor psychological or moral concern.<sup>123</sup> Rather, this is a pre-determined event: firstly because the inscriptions do, as noted, *anticipate* the adventure, and secondly, because they *narrate* the adventure (Gallafur would have been hard pressed *not* to cross and sound the horn).

This is not the first time such techniques of narration have been used: there are earlier precedents for knights being led through challenges with physical signposts. For example, in Book Two, Péléon must defeat the twelve *Chevaliers aux Voeux* to show himself worthy to marry Dache. She prepares messages on a stone pillar near her castle advertising the *trésor* of the *Chastel de l'Estain* (2.1, pp.396-7). In this example, the signposting achieves its desired effect, bringing the lovers back together even after Péléon has lost his senses. However, where Dache's magic is a relatively unusual scenario in the early books, the later books see a profusion of such events. Furthermore, where Péléon is cured of his temporary madness at the end of his quest, and marries the woman he loves, Gallafur and other characters don't get such pay-offs, frequently appearing less like characters than mechanical components of wider plots. Brooke Heidenreich Findley has noted a certain alienation concerning characters' experience of monuments in the text:

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<sup>122</sup> On the author's relationship with Chrétien, see Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Perceforest et Chrétien de Troyes' in *"De Sens Rassis": Essays in Honor of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. by Keith Busby and others (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 201-17. On the possible sources for the *pont a l'espee* episode, see Chardonnens, *L'Autre du même*, pp.92-4.

<sup>123</sup> Jane Taylor, speaking of the knight Estonné (but more than applicable to Gallafur as well) contrasts him with the innately heroic Lancelot of the *Charrette*: "Estonné may *be* heroic, but he does not *seem* heroic, so that the hermeneutic code which the reader had thought he recognised is disconcertingly remodelled." 'Fourteenth Century', p.326.

Aliénation, car les monuments hermétiques à la lecture pour les personnages sont ceux qui traitent de l'identité chevaleresque. Le chevalier le plus perplexe est également celui qui est le plus concerné, et qui se voit aliéné devant un objet qui est censé commémorer l'un de ses actes.<sup>124</sup>

We see this not only with regard to monuments, but the very quests themselves, which will have their outcome in a different age, and which are less directed by the knights involved than by those female magic-users who set them up. Just as monuments to chivalry are seen by the characters to be of primary importance but also impenetrable or hermetic, so Gallafur is told by various inscriptions and characters how important his deeds are, and yet he has little control over how they happen, and even less understanding of why they are important. Chardonnens talks in similar terms of the often cryptic instruction knights receive in their quests:

...l'incompréhension et l'étonnement qu'expriment les destinataires d'emprunts cryptés, illustre le fait que ces passages ne sont pas véritablement destinés aux personnages du *Perceforest*, mais bel et bien au lecteur.<sup>125</sup>

Taylor, speaking of Ourseau, notes the de-emphasis of the individual knight in favour of the text's grander plot developments: "Ourseau [...] will meet with a number of *aventures*, but while they may ultimately add to his own *gloire*, the prime focus is the collective and not the individual destiny".<sup>126</sup> Indeed, for Taylor, one of the features of the text's cyclical view of history is that: "the central figure [be] viewed not as an individual but as a personification of authority itself".<sup>127</sup> Seymour Chatman's description of what he calls an 'apsychological narrative' is a useful tool for understanding the Gallafur plot. He defines the term as follows:

If the narrative statement "X is jealous of Y" occurs in a psychological narrative, X may (a) become a hermit, (b) kill himself, (c) court Y, (d) try to harm Y. In an apsychological

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<sup>124</sup> Findley, p.203.

<sup>125</sup> *L'Autre du même*, p.133.

<sup>126</sup> *Perceforest: première partie*, p.214.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214.

narrative like *The Thousand and One Nights*, however, he can only try to harm Y. What was only implied before (as a potential, hence a property of the subject) is reduced to a subordinate part of the act. The “characters” are deprived of choice, and become in a real sense mere automatic functions of the plot. In apsychoical narratives, the character is himself the “virtual story that is the story of his life”.<sup>128</sup>

This description could certainly be applied to Gallafur, but rather than being entirely ‘apsychological’, characters in *Perceforest* sometimes seem frustrated by their own cluelessness. Such narratives demonstrate the necessity of moving the plot towards its ‘hyperfactual’, genealogical goals, but do so in a rather uncompromising manner: the author shows his heavy hand in the narrative.

#### ***Historical Set-Dressing and the 'Author's Workshop':***

Dreams, courtesy of the *Déesse des Songes* show Gallafur that he will cut the chains attaching the two dragons to the *Perron Merveilleux*, leaving the sword held fast until Arthur removes it. This moment is meticulously planned out, although a little authorial licence allows Alexandre, the owner of the dragons, to worry momentarily that the quest will not be accomplished:

Trop m'esmerveille qu'il n'y a chevalier en ceste place qui puist ceste adventure acomplir. Toutesvoyez ne se passera le jour sans accomplissement, car les dieux mentiroient, ce que faire ne se puet. (4.2, p.1121)

Thanks to a conversation in which Zephyr explains one of Ourseu's dreams that predicts his quest to murder Caesar, we discover that the author had in mind a particular physics of time. It seems there are windows in the timeline of an individual's life whereat that person's destiny may be changed. If Ourseu follows Zephyr's instructions, Caesar will be slain. But if he fails, the window for Caesar's murder will have been missed and he will go on to die a natural death or *belle mort* (4.2, p.1098). Perhaps some events in time are fixed (like, we might imagine, the Incarnation), but it may be that the dynasty's future prosperity is not. This would certainly

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<sup>128</sup> Chatman, p.114.

go some way to explain Alexandre's concern for the placement of the dragons, as well as the insistence on appropriate marriages (e.g. Benuicq and Lionnelle, *not* Benuicq and Sarra, 4.2, pp.1053-85) and the narrow margins for error in knightly quests.

The text ostensibly offers what Chardonnens calls *un futur ouvert* : "L'avenir se donne dans le *Perceforest* comme malléable, évoluant au gré des fluctuations de Fortune et des envies de certains personnages clés du texte".<sup>129</sup> Beyond providing some realistic justification for why the various magical and prophetic engineers of destiny in *Perceforest* are so fastidious, I also see this vision of malleable narrative future as another way of looking at the process of the text's composition. We might surmise that there were certain events the author had to include – the *Perron Merveilleux* and the marriage of one of *Perceforest*'s descendants to the Sicambrian king, for instance – but he was largely a free agent in the way these plot threads were tied together.

Guided by dreams over several days and nights, Gallafur follows Alexandre to Mt. Snowdown, where she buries the dragons beneath the mountain with the help of Zephyr and a convenient team of builders (5.1, pp.2-13). Gallafur is perplexed, and particularly miffed about losing his sword. Zephyr explains that *Perceforest* and Gadiffer themselves decreed the destiny of the sword in the stone. Similarly, the dragons are intended to be freed by Merlin, descendant of Estonné's lineage. All these confusing events are ultimately "pour avoir plus grande occasion et plus grande renommée" (5.1, p.11). The actual Arthurian moment is necessarily distant. In this way, the narrative moment of the burial of the dragons is both momentous and dislocated, contributing to a sense of the literary artifice inherent in such 'historical' scenes.

Sometimes I feel that in the author's mind, he was writing what we today might call 'fan fiction': all the Arthurian stories have already been written, and any imaginative project can only circulate around these 'sacred' literary texts. Either way, the author takes narrative self-awareness to extremes, and such moments in *Perceforest* witness the extent of the author's 'experiments' with meta-fiction.

### ***Competing for Destiny:***

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<sup>129</sup> *L'Autre du même*, p.126.

The *Espee Vermeille* sequence (5.1, pp.240-320) plays with notions of destiny, and those 'fixed' or 'necessary' strands of Arthurian pre-history that the text is bound to include. Cersora, Canonés, Cahaus and Capraise are nieces of Morgane la Fae. They cast a spell to find out which knight accomplished the *Aventure du Perron*, and discover – if not his name – that he is of Gadiffer's lineage and will one day be king.<sup>130</sup> They quite like the idea of having children by royalty, and so set up the *Espee Vermeille* challenge:

Lors s'aviserent elles qu'elles establiroient aucune chose nouvelle en celle marche pour attirer les chevaliers errans devers leurs manoirs, disans que se celui qui avoit accomply l'aventure en ouoit parler, qu'il estoit de sy haulte emprinse qu'il ne se deporteroit jamais de venir celle part. Atant elles firent faire a l'entree de la forest et assez pres de leurs manoir ung beau pillier de pierre auquel elles pendirent une tresbonne espee. Mais elle estoit artificee tellement qu'elle estoit toute vermeille comme une rose et avoit telle vertu que chevalier nul ne la pouoit despendre s'il n'estoit du lignaige au bon roy Gadiffer d'Escoce. Quant l'espee fut pendue au pillier, elles escrivirent lettres au dessus qui disoient en telle maniere: «O tu, chevalier trespasant, se tu peulz ceste espee despendre et la porter parmy ceste forest sans perdre sa couleur, tu avras la greigneur aventure de la Grant Bretagne» (5.1, pp.23-4)

Although the sisters have somewhat nefarious intentions, their challenge becomes the quest *par excellence* for the knights of the realm, and they come from far and wide to try their hand. Several fail in the attempt. Blanor is unable even to remove the sword from its pillar. Utram, possessed of royal blood, manages easily, but is seduced by Cersora; the sword turns black and is taken away. Nero and Gadifforus meet with similar failures – succumbing to the sisters' advances – and the challenge remains open.

Now it's Gallafur's turn. He comes to a glade of hazel trees, a heady woodland scent in the air. The four sisters appear, lamenting their absent lovers, for Canonès, Cersora and Cahaus are all now pregnant. Capraise, however, still longs to foster a fated, royal lineage.

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<sup>130</sup> On the sisters' plot to control the Arthurian dynasty, see Sylvia Huot, 'Amorous Performances: The 'Aventure de l'espee vermeille' in *Perceforest*' in *Cultural Performances in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado*, ed. by Eglal Doss-Quinby and others (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 91-98.



At the whinnying of Gallafur's horse, she is certain a knight of Gadiffer's lineage is present, for:

Venus, qui de ce fait se mesloit, lui eschauffa tous les membres pour ce qu'elle pensoit que aucun chevalier du lignaige au bon Roy Mehaigné avoit despendu l'Espee Vermeille. (5.1, pp.246-7)

Capraise discovers that Gallafur is really in love with Alexandre. She is frustrated, but takes some comfort in her sisters' advice:

Quant le cuer d'un amant est vray et estable, c'est forte chose de le changier, combien que celui l'a a merveille estable qui a l'encontre des laz d'une belle dame se peut garder sans faire change. (5.1, p.251)

Indeed, Gallafur is only human!

Quant Gallafur vey la pucelle tant belle et plaisante a regarder par la grant fleur de jenesce qui en elle regnoit et aournee de parfaite beauté, le corps l'en commensça tresfort a eschauffer. Mais je ne m'en donne quelque merveille, veu qu'il estoit homme naturel comme ung autre et elle estoit en son premier boullon et en l'ardeur de jouvence, ou Jennesses demande ses droitures a la semonce de Nature. (5.1, p.256).

This passage is followed by a description of Capraise's nude body as she is bathed by her handmaidens, with uncompromising detail.

Cue several transparent attempts to seduce Gallafur. First, the sisters convince him to come to their manor to celebrate the arrival of the goddess Venus, mentioning casually that they all hope Capraise will become pregnant with a noble child. He'll fail the challenge – they lie – if he doesn't do Venus' will:

[...] car la ou elle [Vénus] cuidera le mieulz avoir soulas et ayde de vostre service, lors pourra venir autre qui le vous deffendra, et par ainsi elle sera deceue de son cuidier. Mais elle, qui est de ce souveraine, vous renvoyera hors de ceste forest atout l'espee

noire comme encre, deshirité et dechassé de la creature au monde que vous amez le mieulz, sy comme il vous est desja promis. (5.1, p.269)

Gallafur is very upset, as he doesn't want to disobey Venus, but is already in love with Alexandre. He is told that he will get three chances in total to do what Venus wants: three chances, rather, for the sisters to get their way. Things are looking up for them when Gallafur becomes convinced that the beautiful Capraise is an incarnation of Venus. However, the first two attempts are ultimately thwarted thanks to a helpful vision of a very angry Alexandre, and the intervention of: "Nature, qui dedens lui estoit appareillie de le deffendre et de garder son honneur" (5.1, p.295).

The sisters have one final trick up their sleeves, and are confident that it will work:

Par ma foy, bien va nostre conjuracion, car le chevalier tient que vous soiez celle qu'il appelle la Pucelle aux Deux Dragons, dont tant est enamouré que deceu n'a peu estre. (5.1, p.302)

Cersora – the eldest daughter – tells Gallafur that he has been so faithful that he has won the *aventure* "qui est de son droit [nom] appelée l'Espreuve des Vrais Amans." (5.1, p.304). She magically disguises herself as Alexandre and congratulates him on his victory, promising that if he consummates their marriage, she will finally reveal her true name and lineage, which Gallafur is desperate to know.

Even this ruse fails, however, as Gallafur remembers that the real Alexandre had told him he could only win her favour once he had a) accomplished this *aventure*, and b) cleared the *Forest Darnant* of its wicked magic. So he sets off to do so, much to Capraise's frustration. He is attacked by three knights who live in the manor, as a *desnaturel chevalier*. He wins, of course, and the final knight (who is actually Exillé) reveals that none of the sisters is the goddess Venus, but rather these visions have been *cauteleuses decepcions* and *conjurations*.

This enjoyable sequence is a wry take on the knightly lover: if ever we thought the knight was in control of his amours, after the *Espreuve de l'Espee Vermeille* we must surely question our preconceptions. The sisters were calling the shots. Unfortunately for them, their efforts come back to bite them, as they place themselves in an impossible situation: the quest can only be completed by one of Gadiffer's lineage who is completely true in love, and

Gallafor would have to be untrue in love to be seduced by them. The Arthurian destiny is incontrovertible, but the author reminds us not to judge the sisters too harshly for their deceptions: "S'en devoient les quatre sereurs estre excusees se aucun en vouloit mal dire, car chascune selon nature peut convoitier a estre mere de bon fruit!" (5.1, p.292).

A comparison with the earlier prose romance tradition presents itself on this topic: the *Espee Vermeille* sequence, with its competition for destiny, is reminiscent of Galehot the half-giant's attempts to alter the destiny of Arthur's kingdom in the prose *Tristan*, which the *Perceforest* author certainly knew. Galehot falls in love with Lancelot, then Tristan. In his desire to be with them forever, he proposes "his own "master narrative" of three kings reigning over each other's lands in a kind of feudal triumvirate, rivaling Arthur in chivalric and courtly preeminence".<sup>131</sup> This scheme, "[...] which would have altered Arthurian legend beyond recognition",<sup>132</sup> could not be allowed to come to fruition by the author, who, like ours, only toys with this idea before it is appropriately circumvented. Huot comments that whilst Galehot does have some lasting effect on the Arthurian world, his ambition to rival the *proper* "master narrative" must ultimately be avoided:

Effectively boxed into a present moment that allows him little room for movement, Galehot catapults Tristan into the Arthurian limelight and identifies him as the equal – or the rival – of Lancelot, then meekly effaces himself in death, leaving the two young knights as the star performers in the Arthurian world.<sup>133</sup>

Galehot is an interesting counterpart to Capraise and her sisters. Being a half-giant, he perhaps doesn't fully understand the implications and effects of his desires on the "master narrative", or destiny of the text. He later dies of a broken heart after Lancelot leaves him, a tragic victim of his impossible love. Capraise, on the other hand, is a talented enchantress, with prophetic access to the future. She *does* know that her actions pertain to the "master narrative" of the *Perceforest*, which she tries to become a part of.

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<sup>131</sup> Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), p.210.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

The crucial difference between these two Arthurian episodes is that, in *Perceforest*, the hyperfactual text, the author is always working within the limits of history; by contrast, the character of Galehot opens the possibility for a true 'counter-history' to have happened. In this comparison with the *Tristan*, we see that *Perceforest* is less radical in its narrative play (there are no characters as monomaniacal, nor events so epic as Galehot's story), and yet also more overt, its characters knowingly taking part in the preparations for an inevitable 'future' history.

### ***Visions and Dreams in the 'Hyperfactual' Mode:***

Many visions and dreams are remarkably simple, and contribute in this way to the 'hyperfactual' project, prefiguring key events in the pre-history of Arthurian Britain.<sup>134</sup> In Book Two, a *sortier* informs the treacherous Branius of Alexander's death, leading him to rebel against the crown (2.1, p.69). Later, Estonné's murder is predicted (4.1, pp.192-3), as is Cerse's treachery (4.1, pp.560-1). Visions such as these are a neat narrative device, creating suspense, and in some cases driving knights on in their quests. Ourseau, incensed after witnessing the bodies of his relatives, is spurred on to assassinate Caesar by two dreams in the temple of the *Déesse des Songes* (4.2, pp.1096-7). In the first, the Roman senate is informed of Caesar's death and one of Ourseau's brothers proclaims their family avenged. In the second, he is standing atop a tall pine tree and sees twelve robbers steal a lance head and divide it up between them. (This represents the lance that pierced Gadiffer's heart, and indeed his widow had it smelted down into twelve needles). The dream is so real that he wakes in a feverish state: "Et de paour qu'il [le fer] ne fust emblé, il s'esvilla et yssi du temple, puis ordonna de s'en retourner mais que le jour fust venu." (4.2, p.1097)

Dreams such as this are simple enough... we might even say unremarkable. They drive the narrative on, and show the author's hand in guaranteeing certain key events. Dream interpretation – or oneiromancy – was popular in the middle ages, and books for all intellects circulated on the topic.<sup>135</sup> In *Perceforest*, dreams are more often than not fairly

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<sup>134</sup> In Book Three, Néronès fabricates stories about dreams in order to reveal her identity to her beloved. It is tempting to see her as a positive figure for – in this instance – overtly 'literary' artifice, but Michelle Szkilnik observes that Néronès, like so many 'figures for the author' is viewed with suspicion. Michelle Szkilnik, 'Des femmes écrivains. Néronès dans le *Roman de Perceforest*, Marte dans *Ysaye le Triste*', *Romania*, 117 (1999), 474-506.

<sup>135</sup> See Kieckheffer, pp.85-90.

transparent, offering a glimpse of some reality that has either already happened or will soon come to pass. As Lods notes: “il n’y a pas seulement seconde vue dans le rêve, mais une sorte de vie double, parfois plus vraie que la réalité et dont il reste des preuves palpables au réveil.”<sup>136</sup> A more central example of such ‘transparent’ prophecy is Gallafur’s dream of the sword in the stone, and the British crown. On this point, Lods comments: “L’auteur s’efforce de souligner le caractère énigmatique du songe, qui ne sera expliqué pour Gallafur et pour le lecteur que lorsque la réalité le reproduira fidèlement; on comprendra alors que c’était un pressentiment venu de Dieu”.<sup>137</sup>

Gallafur’s vision is ‘hyperfactual’ – so real, in fact, that it may be seen as divinely ordained, particularly given its subject matter: the restoration of (proto-) Christian Britain.<sup>138</sup> By this same token, it is another prophecy which, even before the reader sees it fulfilled, can be understood as a certainty, along the same lines as Estonné’s almost cinematic vision of his own murder (4.1, pp.192-3). For Gallafur, such dreams come thick and fast. Shortly after he first visits the temple of the *Déesse des Songes* he is visited by a dream whilst sleeping near the ruins of the *Franc Palais*:

Mais quant il fut endormy, il lui sambla qu’en ce mur avoit une aulmaire bien ouvree et qu’en icelle avoit une couronne d’or richement avironnee de pierres precieuses, et auprès estoit un livre de piet et demy en quarrure et d’une paulme en espaisseur, moult gentement lié et couvert de drap d’or. Et quant Gallaphur s’esveilla, il estoit jour, sy print a regarder autour de lui. Mais aucune apparence de son songe n’y vey, sy le tint a fable, pourquoy il se mist au chemin devers le perron. (4.2, p.1019)

The implication here is clear. This dream has come to Gallafur to incite him to write the treasured history recording the later generations of Perceforest’s dynasty, an important point for the text’s frame narrative, and its imaginary place in history.

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<sup>136</sup> Lods, p.110.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>138</sup> Boudet notes that divination magic *can* be linked to more typically evil forms of elemental magic: “Selon la conception isidorienne, divination et magie sont donc intimement liées. Or toute magie est maléfique: les magiciens sont appelés [...] *malefici* car ce sont des criminels qui «perturbent les éléments, dérangent l’esprit des hommes et provoquent leur mort sans avoir besoin d’utiliser le poison mais par la seule force de leurs incantations».” Here, as elsewhere in *Perceforest*, it appears rather opposed to those other forms of magic. Boudet, p.15.

When it comes to death, visions are mercilessly accurate. The *Teste Vermineuse* is a gruesome trophy that hangs on a chain from the ceiling of the *Franc Palais*, to commemorate the crimes of the knight Verminex, to whom it belonged. When the knights are in residence in the palace, this dessicated head begins to move of its own accord, and prophesies the downfall of Britain, announcing that the she-wolf (Cerse) will be its destruction. A black eagle flies in through the window, knocking floral wreaths from the knights' heads, and causing the *Teste Vermineuse* to fall from its chain, spilling forth serpents which devour these same wreaths as they slither off (4.1, pp.394-396). This elaborate event indicates exactly which knights will perish in the battle of the *Franc Palais*, as only Perceforest, Lyonnel, Gadiffer and the *Chevalier Doré* are left with their wreaths intact.

To take another, more dramatic example, Sarra (who has now become the *Déesse des Songes*) is terrified at the downfall of the *Franc Palais*, and is faced with a gruesome decision.<sup>139</sup>

Le plourer ne me poeut aidier, mais se je sceus oncques de nigromantie, a ceste fois je l'esprouveray. Et se mon sort tesmoingne le deshonneur du païs et de mes filles, je hasteray leur mort. Mieulx vault qu'elles soient devant le Dieu Souverain nettes et blanches que ordoiees soyent par le mauvais lignaige de Darnant; sy y metteray remede. (4.2, p.955)

Mercifully, her spell predicts not only the survival of Perceforest's dynasty, but also the destruction of Darnant's lineage. It is little wonder if, in her new incarnation, she wishes to bring this future about.

Sometimes, magical ladies use dream-visions to engineer situations within the text. Such occasions often concern marriage. When Passelion and Morganette's relationship grows turbulent, Passelion is visited by intriguing dreams about another knight, the jealous Norgal. He goes to the *Déesse des Songes* to ask for a clarification. She tells him – in a dream, and somewhat counterintuitively – to leave Morganette in pursuit of his own destiny:

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<sup>139</sup> Ferlampin-Acher reminds us that it is largely their advanced age that has led many of these women to become revered as goddesses: "toutes sont ou ont été des femmes remarquables, souvent des enchanteresses, les unes sont mortes et l'imagination a eu le temps de les transformer en déesses, d'autres, souvent encore en vie, ne sont que des fées." 'Fées et déesses dans *Perceforest*', p.63.

Sire chevalier [...] vostre songe a grant seigniffiance, car advenir convient ce qui est ordonné par les menistres du Dieu de Nature sur chascune personne. Toy en ta personne en as ta part selon ce que les constellacions ordonnerent a ton naistre. [...] Mais va ton chemin sans le sceu de ta femme au vouloir de Fortune qui t'a prins en gouverne. (5.1, p.388-9).

Morganette is left in the lurch because it is not her destiny to be Passelion's wife. Indeed, Passelion gets through so many ladies during the course of the text, it is often difficult to keep track. This short sequence results in Passelion being transported to Sicambria, where he will meet Dorine (imprisoned by her jealous husband), whom he will fall in love with and marry, creating a lineage that will result one day in the birth of Merlin, and also triggering the Sicambrian invasion necessary for Arthurian history.

### ***Taking it to the Limit:***

Dreams and visions can even change that most immutable of elements: the heart of a knight in love. Norgal is in love with Blanchette, creating a rivalry between him and Exillé (who will later marry her, having won all of the tournaments set up by her mother, Blanche). Norgal is also daggers drawn with Gallafur, who claims that Alexandre, the *pucelle aux deux dragons*, is more beautiful than Blanchette. Norgal is a 'problem knight' and something must be done about it. That process will involve a tumult of visions so potent that they blur the line between dreams and reality in the downright crazy episode of Norgal and the *Reine des Bergieres*, Gorloès (5.1, pp.406-463).

The episode centres around a mysterious magical purse, which Norgal received at a tournament, that may only be opened by the damsel who loves him. Norgal's first dream – which occurs in that 'twilight zone' of consciousness between sleep and waking – bears nightmarish features, and leaves him with a phobia of shepherds (5.1, p.414).

Quant il fu en ce point, comme pour dire ne veiller nor dormir, il lui fut advis qu'il vey venir par devers lui une compaignie de bergierottes et de bergiers menans moutons, brebis et agneaux. Lors qu'il vei celle compaignie, trop lui en desplaet pour la raison de la bergerotte qui son aumonniere avoit ouverte. Et pour ce qu'il ne vouloit que de

lui s'approussassent, il se leva pour s'enfuir sa voie. Mais bien lui fut advis qu'il estoit en ung gras terroir et glutineux ou ses jambes entroient jusques au gros d'en hault. Et pour les tirer hors l'une après l'autre, il y mettoit sy grant paine que la sueur lui sailloit du front et de tous les membres. [...] tant lui pesoient les jambes et tout le corps, a son advis, que bougier ne se pouoit. (5.1, p.410-11).

Norgal is sent quite mad by his encounter, as the damsel he saw open the purse was not his beloved. Moreover, the emerald ring she put in the purse in the dream has appeared inside in real life, proving her inconvenient existence. He laments his ill fortune:

Haa! Treschiere amie, rose des roses, souveraine entre les pucelles du monde, comment me peut estre advenu ce que je ne puis nullement noier, que tant vous amoie et encores fay, fors par yvresse ou par enchantement? Par enchantement est ce, car je n'avoie ne beu ne mengiet quant ceste follie me advint. Dieu, dist le chevalier, je l'ay songiet, car tant que je fusse en ma bonne memoire ne me fust jamais advenu pour y laissier la vie! [...] malle aumonniere, comme de maulz me sont advenus depuis que tu me fus presentee, car oncques puis je ne feis fors songier mon contraire! (5.1, p.423)

He is so angry that he throws away the offending magical purse (which only Gorloès can open, not Blanchette) and – unable to remove the ring she has put on his finger – attempts to cut off the offending digit with his sword (5.1, p.424). He is stopped only thanks to the timely intervention of a *chevalier estrangier*, who also perceptively remarks that: “les aventures sont au jour d’hui moult merveilleuses en la Grant Bretaigne.” (5.1, p.429). Still in despair, he finds his way to the Temple of Venus. He prays that he may continue loving Blanchette, the damsel he is already in love with, and that people will stop introducing him to Gorloès. A mysterious voice responds:

Sire chevalier, acquerez le plaisance de la pucelle, je livreray chaleur pour amer. Et sy faittes que Fortune ait sa roe retrogarde jusques a vostre naistre. Adont requerez a venir sur terre en autre constellacion et lors se taira le peuple de ramentevoir vostre honneur. (5.1, p.435)



He is dismayed, and falls into melancholy. His constellation won't change. He begins to fall for the shepherdess, and, in another vision, pledges his service to her. She gives him a crown of roses to symbolise this pact, which he must protect with his life. She also requests that he think of their meetings not as dreams but as reality:

Or nous dittes, dist Gorloés, cuidez vous dormir? Advisez vous, regardez le soleil, regardez par tout, parquoy ne tenez que soiez deceu. (5.1, p.440)

Norgal's dreams and visions have merged into the reality of his destiny, just as his former, apparently serious love is now transmuted into love for Gorloès. The mystery of the magical purse is also resolved:

«Sire, sachiez que j'ay fait l'aumoniere a la subtive ouverture pour ce que advenu en est ce que advenir en devoit, mais je vous apprendray l'ouverture.» Lors lui aprent la subtivité, ce que le chevalier vey volentiers. (5.1, p.442-3)

The purse simply had a mechanism all along. Ingenuity and artifice are responsible for this discombobulating sequence. Magic – or artifice – is used to make sure that whatever may already have been in Norgal's stars comes to pass, and in the process transforms him entirely, even in the matter of whom he loves.

Norgal defends the crown of roses with aplomb, against all comers. We end the episode with him forbidding Gorloès from leaving her manor. She is happy to oblige. The narrator adds, wryly, that Norgal is "emprisonné de son gré" (5.1, p.463). This episode is a humorous meditation on the power of prophetic 'artifice', but also constitutes a 'transformation' in the character of Norgal every bit as potent as those magical transformations performed by Lydoire. A reminder, perhaps, of the slightly sinister quality of all forms of artifice, including, we may surmise, the literary kind.

### ***A 'Master' of Literary Artifice?:***

Chardonnens sees prophetic artifice as a comment on the author's command of his medium:

En faisant de ses personnages des «demi-prophètes» qui ne connaissent pas l'avenir dans toute son étendue, mais sont capables de l'influencer par leur volonté, l'auteur du *Perceforest* paraît exhiber le statut fictionnel de son oeuvre et donner à quelques-uns de ses personnages l'une ou l'autre des prérogatives habituellement réservées au narrateur. [...] Il propose de fait plusieurs figures de l'écrivain, toutes incomplètes. L'auteur du *Perceforest* se donne ainsi comme le maître du récit, seul apte à tout décider.<sup>140</sup>

'Mastery is hardly the word I would use. If anything, the author seems in two minds about his role as a writer of fiction.

In an analysis of magical artifice, we observe a dichotomy between condemnation and enjoyment. When it comes to the author's own literary artifice, we observe a similar dichotomy, albeit a little more nuanced. On the one hand, there is an element of that 'politically correct' sentiment: in the 'hyperfactual' mode, undead beings and prophetesses make sure the *Perceforest* does right by its Arthurian forebears, even to the extent of alienating its own characters and appearing somewhat 'self-effacing'. On the other hand, one can scarcely believe this is done in total innocence, or piety, as alienated characters, along with other more playful episodes which take the notion of narrative direction almost *ad absurdum* indicate delight, rather than anxiety, in the imaginative process.

## **Chapter 4: Endings and Evaluations**

### ***Resolution or Revelation?***

As the text waxes gross, the evaluation of literary artifice comes to the fore. Surely, in the later books, the text will 'resolve' itself. Following this strand – which Chatman styles the 'resolution' narrative – we find evidence of the 'self-effacing' humility of *Perceforest* as meta-Arthurian (and, in the later books, meta-Biblical) text.<sup>141</sup> In its later parts, it may appear that the text's entire project was one of deference to external, pre-existing works of Arthuriana.

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<sup>140</sup> *L'Autre du même*, p.129-130.

<sup>141</sup> Humility is a word I have used often, and it forms an integral part of the text's political and theological attitudes. On which see Corinne Denoyelle's excellent study, 'Le *Roman de Perceforest*: un chemin politique vers l'humilité', *Le moyen français*, 80 (2017), 19-52.

As Huot notes: "Unlike Perceforest and Gadifer, Gallafur and his companions have a British past, and they have to negotiate their position as a bridge between that past and the future that must be produced."<sup>142</sup> The eradication of the past is a necessary part of this process:

One aspect of Books V and VI is their narrative of what we might call a managed oblivion, a careful relegation of the past into a form that allows it to be safely accessed but also safely removed from the present. In this sense *Perceforest* illustrates Certeau's assertion that the construction of history 'aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs.'<sup>143</sup>

The future is created through a generative oblivion: 'self-effacement' is important for the literary and Biblical futures to which *Perceforest* acts as imaginary 'prequel'. In the later books, the gradual eradication of Perceforest's dynasty from history makes way for this future. In this sense, *Perceforest* displays a proper 'resolution' narrative. But, as ever, it isn't quite so straightforward. There is a tension between this notion and the ebullient imagination and originality we find so often elsewhere in the text, suggestive of a narrative in the 'revelation' mode.

### ***Inevitable Resolution:***

In a very simple sense, the entire text could be interpreted as a long period of Advent. The prophecies of the Virgin Birth come to pass, and the mysterious *nouvelle foi* that has existed and been practiced by Dardanon since as early as the Trojan era is finally brought to Britain in its proper form by Alain le Gros, along with the bowl from the Last Supper that will eventually serve as the Holy Grail (6.2, pp.813-25).<sup>144</sup> I will not delve too deeply into these parts of the text's finale, though the reader may wish to navigate these pages, in order to see

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<sup>142</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.183.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>144</sup> For an analysis of the sources and particular identity of the *vaissell*/grail in *Perceforest* see Chardonnens, *L'Autre du même*, pp.247-252. On its peculiar relationship with the *Queste* see pp.280-283. On the Gospel of Nicodemus cf. pp.296-300 and pp.320-322. On re-writing the *Queste* with a wounded Mordrain appearing alongside Josephé at Corbenic, see pp.439-444. See also Noémie Chardonnens, 'De l'apocryphe à la fiction: l'intégration de l'Evangile de Nicodème dans le *Perceforest*' in '*Perceforest*: un roman arthurien', ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp.87-100.

exactly how King Mordrain converts to Christianity (6.2, pp.899-907), dovetailing *Perceforest* into the Arthurian canon.

The city founded around the graves of the ancient royals by the sailor Spertenhem becomes a bustling trading port (6.2, pp.896-8), giving us a tangible feeling of the end of the pagan age of magic and legend, and the beginning of the 'modern' Christian era.<sup>145</sup>

Before Alain le Gros comes to Britain preaching the word of Christ, Gallafur purifies the land of evil and converts Gallafur junior – the *bon astronomen* – to the faith, baptising him Arfasen, “qui estoit a dire en leur langage rengeneré” (6.2, p.822). Subsequently, the whole kingdom is baptised and converted. Alain le Gros announces Christ’s birth, and the royals on the *Île de Vie* are also baptised before their death (6.2, pp.875-96). The reader could be forgiven for finding the conclusion of this long saga rather prosaic at some points. Certainly, the author is concerned with coupling his narrative to the existing Arthurian canon, and much as it opens with a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*, so here a translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus (6.2, pp.830-74) aids in plugging *Perceforest* into a wider literary and historical world.

### ***Humility and 'belle mort':***

In the previous chapter I suggested that a lack of narrative direction is expressed through notions of undeath. Conversely, when writing in a most certain direction – towards the Arthurian/Christian age – mortality takes centre stage. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Gallafur’s visit to the ancient *Temple du Dieu Souverain* (5.1, pp.565-97).

After a tournament in the old *Nervois* style at the newly rebuilt city near the *Perron Merveilleux*, Gallafur slips away to the temple. He sees it on the horizon in the East, as the sun is setting. The author goes to great lengths to communicate the passage of time since its former occupancy, with a truly archaeological, even proto-Romantic description of Gallafur’s exploration:

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<sup>145</sup> Mercantile trade has been sought throughout the text. Traders are permitted to set up on Hollande Island after Sador has slain the eponymous twin-headed giant, the slaying of the sea serpent nearby likewise allows merchants access to those waters, and Pedrac wishes to see his new town reconstructed near the *Perron Merveilleux* precisely for this reason: “Sire, dist Pedrac, et mon intencion est d'aller vers le Perron Merveilleux, car depuis un an le peuple y a restoré une grande cité la ou l'en treuve de toutes choses, car la marchandise d'estranges terres et du paÿs y commence a repairier.” (5.1, p.569). The resurgence of trade in the new city marks its success.

Tant regarda le chevalier que il vey pardevers Orient entre grans arbres un temple reont moult bien ouvré de l'ancien ouvrage, couvert au dessus de plates pierres. [...] Lors chevaulcha avant tant qu'il trouva fossez qui enclouoient une place, laquelle environnoit un temple. Viez et deceus estoient les fossez, combien qu'ilz fussent parfons et plain de roinses tant que les chevaulz n'y pouoient devaler. Adont pensa le chevalier qu'il ne pouoit estre que jadis n'y eust eu aucune entree, si se mist au chemin a l'entour tant qu'en la fin il trouva ouvrage de pierre qui monstroient bien que jadis y avoit eu pont levis. Mais orendroit n'y avoit que une planquette. (5.1, p.573)

Far from being perturbed by these ruins, he is fascinated, observing the crumbling stones and masonry to determine how the building may once have functioned. Passing through to the old *teatre* he finds more interesting pieces: "Si treuve a l'un des lez murailles et anciens edifices dont la couverture estoit pourrie par deffaulte de retenue." (5.1, p.573).<sup>146</sup> The door is open, so he goes inside, to find "le plus devot lieu que oncques es jours de sa vie eust veu." (5.1, p.574). He sees the altar, facing East, and a lamp, which is extinguished. He is dismayed to see that the deckings of the altar are rotten and neglected. Before him, a mysterious body sits in a throne:

Le soleil, qui estoit sur le couchier, jectoit par l'huis du temple un simple ray au dessus de la chaire, pourquoi il la voioit plus a plain. Et sachiez que le chevalier se print moult fort a esbahir, car il vey seant en la chaire un corps sans vye, le plus viel qu'il eult oncques veu, et si tenoit ses deux mains sur les deux pommeaux pardevant. La barbe avoit longue, jusques a ses piedz gesans, et blanche comme nesge, et les cheveux blans qui par derriere le vestoient. Le viaire avoit fronchié et noir et les yeulz effonsez. Vestu estoit de peulz de mouton, dont par vieillesse les mines avoient le poil rez et tondus, tant que le veurre en gesoit a ses piedz, et du cuir estoit ancoires le corps vestu. Les bras avoit nulz [*sic.*], d'une couleur noir traiant sur le roux. Et quant il eult ce corps assez regardé, il eult grant merveilles dont il pouoit venir la endroit, car il

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<sup>146</sup> Huot also notes that the landscape of the later books is littered with increasingly mysterious markers of ages past: "What was once a triumphant gesture of appropriation is rapidly becoming little more than a museum piece." *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.186.

deust fort puir et de sa moisteur deust estre sa chiere soullie. Merveilles eult le chevalier, car il ne scentait flaireur qui au corps peust desplaire. Adont il dist a soi meismes: «Pourquoy t'esbahis tu? S'il estoit vif, tu pourroies avoir cause de le cremir, mais veu qu'il est mort, il ne peult nuire ne a toy ne a aultrui. Sens s'il a en lui nulle moisteur.» (5.1, p.574)

He investigates the body: beneath the sheep skin, there are only bones and dust, the remaining skeleton held together by dried-out ligaments. He interprets this monstrosity of mortality as a divine mystery:

Dieu de Nature, dist le chevalier, comme telz euvres sont merveilles! Ce corps yci eult jadis ame, vescu, parla, ala et vint pour ses pourveances faire. Quel chose est ce orendroit fors un sacq plain de pouldre et d'oz? Que est ce de l'home? Cy vit, cy ne vit mie! A qui est ce bon, fors a Dieu, qui a son delit ou faire et ou deffaire, comme il samble? Se pour autre chose est, bien en conviegne Dieu, car je ne sçay que c'est! (5.1, p.575)

The body is one of Perceforest's old tutors, who came here to end his days in contemplation. Gallafur notices that the body has aged well; there is no rot, and the parts exposed to the air are miraculously well-preserved. Zephyr explains that this is because virtuous people live such pure lives that, rather like saints, they avoid those unappealing aspects of decomposition:

Quant l'ame fu hors du corps, il demoura sec et si vuit que pourreture ne sceult a quoi aherdre ne nature ne peult en lui engendrer vers, sicques oncques flaireur ne puanteur de son corps n'issi, anchois fut tout parsechié, que nature n'y peult faire mauvaise engendrure. [...] Chevalier, dist la voix, la male gouvernance de la personne le maine a puante mort, de quoi cestui chevalier se sceut bien garder. (5.1, p.577)

This *memento mori* instils a certain macabre fascination, but also a sense of wonder, as the old temple, emblem of a bygone age of virtue, is gently illuminated by the setting sun. Gallafur arrives at a new understanding of the mysteries of life and death under the *Souverain*

*Dieu*. Indeed, such was Zephyr's educational plan: "Entens pour sçavoir se il t'i advendra chose qui te puist pourfitter, car si saint lieu comme cesthui est ne fut oncques edifié que mainte adventure n'y doive advenir." (5.1, p.575).

It is important, just before his future reign as king of Britain is revealed, that Gallafur should have some encounter with the *Souverain Dieu's* mysteries. This episode is wholly different to the weird events and characters of the interregnum that I discussed in the previous chapter. Here, death is not at all liminal, but final, and beautiful precisely in this finality. The dead body is not a grim commemoration, but prefigures the *belle mort* of the royals. There is no sense of unease or the uncanny; during the night, Zephyr lends a touch of humour to the episode by using his powers to animate the dead body like a puppet, startling Gallafur, but also demonstrating the thorough finality of death. Here we see no open wounds, mutilation, or preservation in crystal; where the *Temple de la Franche Garde* sought to immortalise and preserve the tales, trophies and trappings of a knight's life, the *Temple du Dieu Souverain*, itself fallen into romantic ruin, houses a peaceful diorama of death. It is in this way that God and the future are to be communicated. This understanding of the beauty of finality, and death, may have occupied the author's mind as he writes the deaths of what must surely have been beloved characters, but this is a necessary part of the 'hyperfactual' project: nothing can remain of Perceforest's dynasty in this imaginary history of Britain.

This sentiment continues in a more tragic vein. Gallafur's night of vigil in the temple is directly followed by a prophetic dream of his royal destiny. He imagines he is enthroned on a mountain, from where he can see all of Britain. He sees trees, some growing taller and stronger than others. The trees become people, and the taller ones then build wondrous cities and populate the land. Then his body seems to turn to crystal, and he sees three drops of blood in his heart. A beautiful lady takes the blood, and returns with three children – two sons and a daughter. The first (Olofer) holds a pitcher, for the ointment that will cure Gadiffer I's wounds; the second (Gallafur II) holds a book, the Gospel of Nicodemus that will bring the new religion to Britain; the third (Ygerne) holds a sceptre, for her lineage will include Arthur, sixth of her line. They are then spirited away by a giant bird, one son to distant lands where he will slay the boar, the other to a hermitage, and the daughter locked away in a tower by his own hand, fearful that she too would be taken. Then, a huge army arrives seeking the destruction of Perceforest's lineage. Gallafur tries to spur his horse, but it won't move, and

the more he tries, the smaller he seems to become.<sup>147</sup> This is a far-from-cryptic analysis of the fate of the nation: its repopulation, destruction, and eventual continuation through the Sicambrian bloodline. As Lydoire had already explained, their lineage will be forgotten, but will also continue:

Car ilz [the Sicambrians] trouveront tant de belles pucelles de nostre lignage et de nostre sang que pour leur beaulté ilz seront si deceupz qu'ilz ne ouseront demander de quel sang elles seront venues, ainchois les prenderont a femmes les gentilz hommes, et ainsi se continuera nostre lignie. (5.1, p.591)

His vision also reveals the premature death of his eldest son Olofer at the hands of the *Beste Glatissante* (6.2, pp.790-813). The author allows a moment to reflect on this:

La roine fu moult joieuse de la venue du roy son seigneur et lui de sa presence, et plus de son aisé filz Olofer, qui couroit par la salle comme ung enfant de deux ans. Le roy le print entre ses bras, puis le cognouy. Et en ce faisant, il lui souvint de la Sage Roine qui de l'enfan l'avoit prophetisé selon la vision qu'il lui avoit contee. Lors eut en memoire tout ce que la roine lui avoit dit sur son songe. Adont abaissa le menton, si print a lermoier. (6.2, p.673)

Yet, as we have seen, the text is ultimately content in the idea of endings: all traces of Perceforest's dynasty must be erased. It would follow that, as magic is gradually abandoned by the Greco-Britons, so fiction reaches its zenith in humble self-effacement.

The baptism and death of the royals (6.2, pp.875-96) strikes a similarly solemn tone. Gadiffer I has been immobile for many years (possibly centuries) since his run-in with the monstrous boar. Likewise, Perceforest bears horrible wounds from the battle of the *Franc Palais* where he was all but killed by the Roman forces. They have been preserved in uncanny stasis on the *Île de Vie*. Their fortunes improve when Olofer – great-grandson of Gadiffer – slays the boar and brings an ointment made of its tusks to the *Île de Vie* to cure his

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<sup>147</sup> Lods notes that the shrinking of his body is reminiscent of mystic writing, and that the whole sequence has a biblical tone. Lods, p.111.



grandfather's wound, as was prophesied (6.2, pp.770-86). Gadiffer's wound is healed, and the injuries to Perceforest's body – including his exposed bowels and missing arm – are all cured, as if they had never happened. The two old men, enveloped in their long white beards, go with Dardanon to pray in their chapel. The tone is initially joyful and lighthearted, with the two ancient men stripped naked and rubbed with tusk-ointment dancing for joy and praising God. But the scene quickly returns to serious prayer and contemplation, and Perceforest reflects on what life now remains to him:

Si tost que le roy Perceforest son frere vey le beau miracle que le Dieu Souverain avoit fait en son frere par la vertu qu'il avoit donné a l'ongument, il fu esmeu a dire en telle maniere: «Ha a! Createur de toutes creatures, Dieu Souverain a qui chose qui te plaise a faire n'est impossible, si vraiment que j'ay tousjours désiré a veoir ceste noble visitation dont tu dois visiter tes creatures, estens ta grace et ta misericorde jusques a moy, que celluy unguement me vaille tant que je puisse ma fosselette faire de ma propre main ou ma charrongne puist reposer après ma mort, qui sera briefve. (6.2, p.783)

Death, long prolonged, is now imminent. But this will be a beautiful death in the light of God. A little later on, Gallafur/Arfasen and one Nathanael head over to the *Île de Vie* to baptise the newly cured royals. This is done in short order, though not before they are read the Gospel of Nicodemus, which bears a particular emphasis on the Passion (6.2, pp.825-74). This is no coincidence, of course, and the reader will surely notice that the *Île de Vie* is a kind of prolonged Passion. The boatman who takes them off the island, called Spertenhem (as yet unbaptised) has a dream of Christ:<sup>148</sup>

[...] au destre costé avoit apparant une grant plaie aussi que de nouvel. Et les deux paulmes avoit percees aussi que de clouz, dont le sang decouroit. Et en pareille maniere il avoit les piés, dont j'euz grant merveille comment il pouoit marchier sur la terre. (6.2, p.878)

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<sup>148</sup> For Lods the appearance of Christ to Spertenhem is a uniquely moving, non-derivative religious sequence: "Notons que ce qui nous touche ici, ce n'est pas l'apparition miraculeuse, mais l'aspect humain de la scène: la douleur de Jésus, devant l'égoïsme et la grossièreté, les regrets de l'homme". Lods, p.113.

The dead, and undead bodies on the island were, I have argued, quite deliberately strange, and served as an embodiment of the nation's fears of kinglessness. But their strangeness is now replaced by a new understanding of the *Souverain Dieu* as we realise that they prefigured the Passion. Perceforest no longer reflects on the past, and the loss of his dynasty, but rather on the future, of his death in the full knowledge of Christ. In the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Archangel Michael speaks of the Second Coming (in 5,500 years' time) when Adam will be resurrected and baptised in the river Jordan (6.1, p.859). For the royals, as for Adam, baptism allows a sort of resurrection through conversion; a new life at the end of their long years. The narrator reassures us on this point:

Or tent la charrogne a retourner de la ou elle vint. Or n'est quy empesce ces choses a demander. Or leur est bien le temps changié, car ilz ont Celluy avec eulx le quel ilz ont de moult long temps attendu. Or est tout leur desirier de aler ent avecques Luy, car leur devotion le demande. (6.2, p.875)

The death scene itself may strike the modern reader as rather odd, as the royals descend into second childishness, though the author describes it as *grant merveille*:

Le tresanchien pere Dardanom, qui des le temps de la destruction de Troies avoit vescu, fu si adit de faim et si afoibly pour l'air corrompu et d'aulture condition qu'il n'avoit apris de long temps qu'il ne se peult aidier ne mouvoir, et avec ce il perdy son sens et revint en enfance et prist a plourer. Et sachiés que en pareille maniere advint du Roy Mehaigné et du roy Perceforest son frere et de la Sage Roine pareillement, car de tout le grant sens qu'elle avoit acquis n'eut memoire ne souvenance ne de son sens naturel ne l'en remest fors autant qu'elle en avoit a l'eage de trois ans. (6.2, p.885)

The ancients are no longer sustained by the *Île de Vie*. The miraculous fruit and fountains were so nourishing that the inhabitants lose the use of their stomachs, to the extent that they cannot eat earthly food, and the corrupted air of the world causes them to lose their senses.

But this helps along the death they all await. Eventually, all they can say is “Aler a Dieu”. They don’t have long: “Et comme ilz sont hors d’illec, leur vie va a neant dedens pou de jours, comme la fumee de la chandeille quant le feu s’en est party.” (6.2, p.886). In an oak grove, a heavenly light shines over five tombs, placed there by miracle to receive their bodies. Arfasen is moved to tears to see his ancestors die, but the event is also glorious. Ferlampin-Acher comments that the light that awaits the dying royals in the forest contrasts with the dark, diabolical nights in earlier books, thus contributing to the “dimension eschatologique de *Perceforest*”.<sup>149</sup> *Perceforest* officially ends at the climax of this episode, where the author considers his work done, as all memory of the dynasty has passed out of history.

### ***The Theology of the 'Self-Effacing' Text:***

The royals forget the events of their lives, lose their senses, and become emblems not of *Perceforest*, but of the newly-discovered Gospel of Nicodemus. Reading retrospectively, we realise that they were, in their prolonged life, always pre-figuring the story of Christ that they awaited, their existence an homage to events that had not yet occurred. Such displacement of meaning from the narrative to epochs and histories beyond the bounds of the text has characterised the author’s narrative project. It is also in a sense the highest expression of *Perceforest*’s theology: a life is not its own story but a story in the image of Christ.

This supports the reading of *Perceforest* as a pious text, which I think is partly true. Just as the dynasty will be erased from history, it may seem that *Perceforest*’s narrative goal is its own obliteration.

### ***Gallafur: Exorcist or Ghostbuster?***

That said, within an ostensibly punctilious and finicky historical account, we find moments of wit and mirth. Often, when it appears that an episode is simply checking off another event – be it a coronation, the exorcism of some lineage tomb, a baptism etc. – the text also questions, even satirises its own ‘resolution’ narrative .

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<sup>149</sup> ‘La nuit des temps’, p.423.

Alexandre instructs Gallafur that he must exorcise lineage spirits from various haunted sites.<sup>150</sup> When he meets Frase, an ancient lady from Perceforest's era, and tells her of his quest, she warns him that it is perilous:

[...] Vous alez querant les advetntures telles ou force de homme ne chevallerie n'a son lieu. Je le dis pour ce que vous n'estes que ung homme et que se vous aviez la force de vingt jaians, si ne vous pourriez nullement deffendre a l'encontre des mauvais esperitz qui repairent de nuit a l'entour des adventures que vous alez querant. (6.1, p.20)

She recalls that in her day, such adventures were commonplace: Betidès was spirited away to the island of the *chevaliers de mer*, the *Chevalier Doré* was taken to the *Estrange Marche* and the *Bossu de Suave* ended up on an island of apes (6.1, p.20). She goes on to explain the five *decepvances* of the *Forest Darnant* (6.1, p.21), all of which will require the exorcism of some hive of lineage ghosts who have taken shelter in the magically-preserved remains of their forebears.

These episodes also serve an obvious narrative function. With each successful exorcism, one fifth of the vermillion sword that Gallafur received from the *Aventure de l'Espee Vermeille/des Vrais Amans* will turn white, signifying his virtue, and the methodical march of his destiny.

Those knights seeking Darnant's tomb and other haunted sites must be foolhardy, as no-one has ever returned. In such ways we are led to believe that this will be the greatest of all adventures. Yet, whilst these episodes are billed as epic, they also exhibit deliberate melodrama, and often outright comedy. A number of signs written by the spirits themselves direct unwary knights to these haunted sites, goading them into deadly combat:

Ho! chevallier, garde ou tu vas!  
Ne passes point oultre ce pas  
pour ceste adventure aciever  
se ne veulx ton corps desciever

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<sup>150</sup> Exorcisms as practiced historically often involved biblical pronouncements. See Jolly et al., pp.50-1.

ou mettre a mort par aultre voie.  
Forche n'y vault c'un fil de soie  
vauldroit a ung grant vent abatre.  
Fol est qui se y vient debatre! (6.1, p.34)

The knight Blanor (who is accompanying Gallafur) believes this particular sign to have been put there by the *anciens* to protect future generations from danger, and takes its meaning seriously. Stalwart Gallafur insists they press on and defeat the demons within. En route, a series of increasingly contradictory signposts spark a debate between the two knights as to which messages are true, and whether the author had good or bad intentions. Some claim again that peril awaits, others accuse previous signs of lying, whilst some openly accuse the knights of cowardice: "Ce sont moisnes, ce croy, de cloistre/ qui laissent icy tant l'erbe croistre!" (6.1, p.63).

The comedy of this episode is an appropriate illustration of the persistent wickedness and deception of Darnant's lineage, even beyond the grave, but it also plays with the notion of authorial direction. Where previously knights have been kept firmly on track by various sorceresses, at this point, the advent of Christianity and the holiness of Gallafur's cause are so concrete that no amount of obfuscatory signposts can stop the adventure's trajectory. The power of history, and God himself, are driving events to their conclusion *in spite* of writerly trickery.

The exorcisms themselves are, in fairness, genuinely dramatic. After being hounded by vicious spirits, the Tomb of Darnant is shattered and reduced to ash by Gallafur's holy sword – extinguishing the fire which had burned within since the early reign of Perceforest – and the mysterious pronouncement «*faites voie au Filz de la Vierge*» causes the spirits within to flee in terror.<sup>151</sup> Blanor is captured during the second *aventure*, and the duo are saved multiple times only by the power of Gallafur's holy shield with its crucifix emblem. The significance of the cruciform design is not fully understood, of course, often described instead along the lines of "ung escu blanc a une estache de vermeil et une barre de travers d'autel couleur." (6.1, p.32).

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<sup>151</sup> Medieval readers would have been familiar with such exorcism formulae. See Kiekhefer, pp.70-75.

The lineage ghosts are stubborn, particularly Darnant himself, who – presumably on day release from Hell – threatens Gallafur for destroying his dominion over the forest. But the shield overcomes the spirits, who cannot bear to approach: “les mauvais esperitz [...] ne pouoient [approchier] par la vertu du signe de l’escu, qui representoit tres merueilleux *mistere* a venir.” (6.1, p.52). They grow wise to this fact, and during the fourth *aventure* a group of lineage women trick Gallafur into disarming, proceeding to throw his sword and shield down a well which the spirits seal with a huge stone. The spirits take him to Brittany where Darnant’s lineage has been re-established. He is imprisoned, and will be burned at the stake, but is rescued by Zephyr and proceeds to complete the fifth and final *aventure*.

During the fifth *aventure*, the demons who have taken refuge in the four *chevaliers sans vie* make some remarkable offers to persuade Gallafur to spare them. Gallafur will a) never be bothered by the lineage whilst he is in the Forest Darnant, b) be transported wherever he likes within the forest at any time, c) will gain the power to become invisible at will, and d) be given riches beyond his wildest dreams. The spirits even agree with him when he tells them they must “make way for the Son of the Virgin”. Their fate is determined by God, Gallafur’s destiny is unstoppable, and the ghosts of the lineage run scared from this first crusader of the *nouvelle foi*, ancestor of Perceval.

We find a decidedly comic tone in Gallafur’s confrontation with the cantankerous spirit of a *vieille*: “Et quant ce vint a l’approchier, il ouy que par dedens le corps de celle vieille faisoient barbeter la bouche de ce corps, et menoit la plus terrible noise du monde.” (6.1, p.307). She refuses to budge – Son of the Virgin or not – and threatens that the ladies of her lineage will chop him to bits if he doesn’t leave them alone. The longer he stays, the more insulting she becomes: “Va t’en, que ne soies desembré et deschirré aux ongles! [...] Va ton chemin, la puanteur qui de ton corps part me crieve le coeur pour le despit que j’ay de ta presence!” (6.1, pp.308-9). We are told that secretly she is just as afflicted by the presence of the shield as the other spirits, but she manages to conceal it. Naturally, she is vanquished in short order.

Such details provide humorous commentary on the narrative direction of the later episodes. The completion of these adventures seems, in many ways, entirely guaranteed, but the tongue-in-cheek humour accompanying them points to a playful capacity on the author’s part for self-satire. If the text is a ‘resolution’ narrative, it isn’t one that the *Perceforest* author takes *entirely* seriously.

### ***Destiny and 'Alienating Narrative':***

In a similarly comic vein, we are treated to some of the lineage spirits' feeble attempts to prevent Gallafur's success. Before the second *aventure*, they put up a sign falsely claiming that the adventure ahead has already been completed (6.1, p.68). During the third, Gallafur is frustrated as the spirit he is facing keeps running away. The ghost complains that Gallafur is "ung malleureuz chevallier qui ne fait prouesses fors par enchantemens." (6.1, p.89) I am tempted to agree with the ghost in this last instance, as Gallafur's advantage is total, though he responds that he may joust honourably with any *preudomme*, shield or not. The lineage, fully aware of God's plan, and the inevitable demise of their era, resort to false writing and false words, whereas Gallafur's words – «*faites voie au Filz de la Vierge*» – are a real representation of God's truth... even if *he* doesn't fully understand their meaning.

Even as the curse is lifted from the forest, and ancient Seville's prophecies are fulfilled, the bravery and derring-do of our hero is, in a sense, subordinate to those items and words he possesses. Gallafur's adventures are enabled more by his sword, shield, and mysterious prayers, than his own strength. Earlier, at the time of his coronation, the matter of *his* bloodline is of relatively little importance. The main bloodline to be considered is Alexandre's, as she is the granddaughter of both Perceforest and Alexander. The focus is not on Gallafur so much as on those adventures Alexandre has created for him, which demonstrate his eligibility, as the other knights of the realm recount as they deliberate before electing him king (6.1, pp.416-20).

Gallafur's adventures continue the motif of 'alienation'. Tasks are appointed him, and he is given the tools to easily accomplish them; he is crowned not just as Gallafur the knight, but as Gallafur the knight who accomplished the tasks. As Huot comments: "The significance of the sword itself, in fact, is now less to whom it once belonged – Perceforest – than to whom it someday will belong: Arthur."<sup>152</sup> On the way to the Tomb of Darnant, a sign hangs from a tree, which reads:

Chevallier, bien dit t'a esté  
que ja, ne d'iver ne d'esté,

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<sup>152</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.190.

ne passasses oultre le pas  
se tu n'as qui tantost te pere  
de la baniere au Filz sans pere.  
Par cellui ert le feu estains.  
S'autres y vient, je suis certains,  
sans parler a pere n'a mere,  
il souffrira la mort amere. (6.1, p.36)

In a rather amusing turn, Gallafur doesn't understand what this could mean, and is dismayed that he cannot undertake the adventure, not recognising that he already has the "*baniere au Filz sans pere*" in the form of his shield. Thankfully, his great-grandmother Lydoire explains this to him.

We may wonder exactly what faith means when one is possessed of a magical sword and shield that can reduce all adversaries to piles of ash... perhaps ignorance is bliss! Such details as these – moments of comedy, irony or alienation – question, and even gently poke fun at, the idea of the 'resolution' narrative, and the accomplishment of the 'hyperfactual' project at all costs.

### ***Artificial History: Serious Duty or Imaginative Genesis?***

Some episodes offer us an ostensibly sober assessment of the writing of history. In *Perceforest's* frame narrative (1.1, pp.69-73), the author claims to have adapted his manuscript from an ancient tome he discovered in an abbey. This fictional manuscript also appears within the text itself, and consists of two parts: the initial chronicles of Perceforest's generation, and the continuation by Gallafur that documents all post-invasion adventures (6.1, pp.429-31). The discovery of the first half of the manuscript is an important one, marking the transmission of the old text to – and the continued recording of history by – the later generations of the dynasty.

This tome forms part of the fabled treasure of the *Franc Palais* that is revealed to Gallafur in prophetic dreams, and which he discovers in a secret chamber in the ruins of the palace on the day of his coronation. This manuscript quite literally supports Perceforest's crown, which sits atop the manuscript, and we may infer from this the importance the author places on the recorded history. After all, what would Perceforest's glorious reign have been



if none of his descendants knew the first thing about it? Before Gallafur's reign, as the legendary old kingdom is gradually rediscovered, Ourseau stumbles upon the *pilier Estonné*. He is initially perplexed by this monument, and thinks that it commemorates a bear attacking damsels, rather than defending them. Thankfully the inscription on the *sarcus* at the base of the pillar sheds some light on the diorama: «Cy gisent deux chevaliers du lignaige de Darnant que le comte Estonné mué en ours a mis a mort pour ce qu'ilz vouloient enforcer deux jennes pucelles.» (4.1, p.662). History must be remembered correctly, and written testimony is vital for such a project.

On the day of the coronation, the ancient minstrel Ponçonnet – one of the few eyewitnesses to the events of Perceforest's rule – humbly defers authority to the written volume over his oral accounts of the tournament of the twelve vows:

Sire, dist lors Ponchonnet, ce que je vous ay recordé n'est que peinture contre la paroît au regard du contenu du noble livre que le bon roy Perceforest en fist faire, la ou tout est declairé par ordre des le commoncement qu'il fu couronné roy de la Grant Bretagne jusques a la destruction du roiaulme. Car il avoit ung clerc nommé Cresus, auquel tous les chevalliers du roiaulme, en especial ceulx du Franc Palaiz et le roy meismes [...] venoient dire sur leur serement chascun an tout ce que advenu leur estoit en leurs adventures. Si ne feroit plus de biens ne d'exaulcemens en chevalerie comme d'ouir lire le livre. Certes, je tiens qu'il n'est pas perdu, car le roy le tenoit plus chier que sa couronne. (6.1, pp.429-30)

In addition to a fine explanation of the fastidious recording process, we hear that this volume was more treasured than the king's own crown. Indeed, the book must be continued, and the tome will be expanded with the adventures of Gallafur's generation even more feverishly than before. The expanded manuscript will be sealed up in the walls of the rebuilt palace once it is completed, to be found by some future *preudhomme*, as we know. The narrator offers a wry intervention at this point, commenting on just how exhausting such a writerly undertaking must be: "Et pour abregier et mettre a fin nostre matiere, dont l'ouvrier est las, le jour de couronnement vint, qui fu plain de grant joie et de grant noblesse selon le temps." (6.1, p.431).

But the 'end' of *Perceforest* is not exactly 'final'. Rather, it is part of a historical

continuum, exhibiting a repeated, cyclical pattern. Indeed, writing in *Perceforest* is often directed towards some other time, or some other text. Anne Berthelot contrasts the conclusion of *Perceforest* with the *Mort Artu*:

Enfin, en aval dans le texte, ce sera par la répétition que le *Roman de Perceforest* échappera à la tentation d'une apothéose certes spectaculaire, mais aussi désagréablement radicale, et parviendra à se muer en un roman-Phénix, capable de renaître de ses cendres et, pourquoi pas, de se prolonger presque indéfiniment: la répétition, judicieusement modulée, représente l'antidote presque parfait à la fascination fatale de la *Mort Artu*.<sup>153</sup>

Repetition – a series of endings and beginnings – is the primary structure of *Perceforest*, rather than epic. If the text satirises and questions its own 'resolution' narrative, this is because it forms part of a symbiotic generative process with other histories. In this sense, we may begin to consider it less a narrative of 'resolution' than 'revelation'. Indeed, whilst it may reasonably appear to readers that the conclusion is characterised by a sort of self-effacement that would tally with that 'austere' theology Taylor has noted,<sup>154</sup> such a sentiment is at odds with *Perceforest's* otherwise highly *generative* qualities: the repetition, satellite narratives, and whimsy that run *alongside* its 'hyperfactual' project. It is hard to imagine that Estonné's misadventures at the hands of Zephyr and his pranks are part of some theological prescription, for instance.

Now, it is entirely possible that the author considered his work to be *both* a well-behaved Arthurian prequel, *and* a generative work of imagination. One synthesis of these two faces of the text – which appear at first glance to be somewhat contradictory – would be the notion that *Perceforest* is simply very successful meta-Arthuriana. That is, it balances its imaginative qualities with its more serious, historical concerns as Arthurian prequel. This analysis, whilst tempting, ignores the author's continued concern with the dangers of artifice

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<sup>153</sup> Anne Berthelot, 'Répétition et efficacité narrative dans le *Roman de Perceforest*', *Le Moyen Français*, 30 (1992) 7-17 (p.17).

<sup>154</sup> Though it is important not to overstate the author's religious zeal, on which see Taylor, 'Faith and Austerity' and 'Reason and Faith'.

in the later books, which suggests a continued investment of thought in the status of artificial history beyond – so to speak – ‘having one’s cake and eating it’.

### ***False Paradise:***

In Book Six, we find a return to the theme of the false paradise earlier explored in the Aroès episode. When Gallafur sets about exorcising the first lineage site (6.1, pp.31-57), he is challenged by phantoms. At midnight, a tempest heralds a supernatural tournament. The spirits (of Darnant’s lineage) are aware of the threat posed by Gallafur’s shield, so their leader comes up with a ruse. Disguised as a knight *pour le mieulx decepvoir*, he tempts Gallafur: those who are successful at the joust may pass beyond to the *Roiaulme de Faerie*, where marvellous adventures await them. Gallafur is fascinated by this news:

Quant le vaillant Gallafur eut ouy ce que le tres mauvais esperit lui disoit pour le decepvoir, il eut trop grant merueille ou celluy roiaulme seoit et quelles estoient les adventures qu’il convenoit ainchois aciever que l’on y peust aler. (6.1, p.45)

The spirit explains that if a knight is victorious here and at four other *espreuves*, he will personally lead them to the *Roiaulme*, of which he is king:

[...] et la voit il et treuve prouesses et deduiz telz et si nobles et patens que ceulx de la Grant Bretaigne n’y seroient par comparroison fors ombre. [...] Et s’aucune chose vous ay dit de cestuy roiaulme qui face a convoitter le user, la ou l’on prent, le savour passe ou double, dont pou sont de chevalliers qui a cest honneur puissent parvenir par leur prouesse qui jamais en veuillent issir, car ilz dient qu’ilz sont en *paradis terrestre*. [...] Si est vray que en celluy roiaulme est tousjours challeur atempree et si ne se y couvient couvrir en quelque temps pour le froit ne se desvestir pour le chault. Les arbres y sont vers en tous temps et les jons ne la verdure n’a mestier de pluie, la rousee y souffist, ne pluie nul temps n’y chiet. [...] Les eaues des fontaines y sont si miellees et assavourees et si nourrissans que le fruit de la vigne en est refusé se n’est en aucuns hommes qui sont plus puissans de nature [etc.] (6.1, p.46)

The trees ever bear fruit, there are no towns or cities, and the grass is soft as a feather bed. Should they wish to hunt, the forests are overflowing with game. The *Fontaine de Jouvent* lies in the centre of the kingdom, returning those who bathe in its waters to their *prime age*, and they live with neither sadness nor pain. Should they desire damsels, virgins emerge from sweet-smelling flowers, well versed in the ways of love, and for eight days they may enjoy the delights of the flesh together. Indeed, the knight may repeat this experience whensoever he desires, if he is not too busy tourneying (6.1, pp.45-50).

This promised land may bear certain similarities to the miraculous *Île de Vie* – life-sustaining waters and fruit, ambient anaesthesia, evergreen flora etc. – but the ravishing nymphs are a dead giveaway. Gallafur won't fall for it, and charges into the spirits, who flee at his approach *tous braians et tonnans comme ung orage ou tempeste* (6.1, p.52). Although this episode constitutes a fairly simple moral tale of temptation (especially as Gallafur is a kind of proto-Galahad), knights must nevertheless be careful about imaginary, fantastical worlds.

### ***The 'Beste Glatissante' and Dangerous Images:***

We see a similar warning against alluring promises – and specifically, alluring images – in the form of the barking, many-legged, mirror-necked, *Beste Glatissante*. Claude Roussel explains the creature's interesting evolution from earlier romances.<sup>155</sup> In the *Perlesvaus* the Beast is smaller (bigger than a rabbit but smaller than a fox), exudes a marvellous scent and has twelve barking puppies in its belly. It approaches a red cross – where two maidens in white hold golden vases – and is torn to ribbons by its own offspring, thus representing Christ slaughtered by the 'Old Law'. It is then transmitted through the *Continuation de Perceval*, and various *Merlin* texts, gradually losing its Christ-symbolism. Indeed, for Roussel, the unique decision of the *Perceforest* author is to remove the pups altogether, and give supernatural hypnotic power to its multicoloured neck.

*Perceforest's* Beast may not be an emblem of Christ, but it certainly represents a continued meditation on the moral value – and dangers – of artifice and image. This creature

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<sup>155</sup> Claude Roussel, 'Le jeu des formes et des couleurs: observations sur la Beste Glatissant', *Romania*, 104 (1983) 49-82. See also Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'Le monstre dans les romans des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Écriture et modes de pensée au Moyen Âge (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. by Dominique Boutet and Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1993), pp.69-87.

has been of interest throughout the text, and knights are invariably amazed by its appearance.

In Book Six, it takes a more prominent role. Maronex is in love with the *Pucelle au Cercle d'Or*. He rides out in search of her *confort*, and one beautiful morning, the grass glistening with dew, he meets the most marvellous creature he has ever seen:

Si tost qu'elle eut beu, elle emprist a recepvoir la challeur de l'attempré souleil qui au dessus du corps lui raioit. Adont encommencha celle beste a lever la teste et a drescer le col et estendre tant que le soleil se fery es couleurs qu'elle avoit a l'entour du haterel. Si ne pourriez croire comment la diversité des couleurs se print a entrecontrer par la forche du soleil et a enexer les unes couleurs dedens les aultres et a reverberer les unes encontre les autres. Et sachiés que tant multiplia la reverberation des couleurs que la beste en fu toute advironnee. Et tant estoit delitant aux regardans et merveilleuse car quiconques s'i delitoit, il y figuroit toutes les choses delicieuses ou son coeur estoit le plus enclin. (6.1, p.109)

Like the glistening dew on the grass, the sunlight diffracts on the beast's prismatic neck, creating a wondrous conflux of images that are delightful to the particular beholder. It is as though the mirrored surface of its neck encourages the mind to impose what it most desires. Maronex sees his beloved:

Lors print moult fort a fantasier en celle plaisance, et comme plus y fantasioit, tant plus voioit il de merveilles dedens les couleurs et entre les differences aussi comme l'on fait en ung feu de dur charbon de nouvel alumé, car il fu advis au chevalier qu'il voioit la pucelle sur ung hault siege. (6.1, p.110)

We note the use of the verb *fantasier* here: this is clearly an alluring vision. But the beast's neck is not so much deceptive as prophetic, showing his beloved looking melancholy (which indeed she is at this point in the text) and his jealous rival Salfar.

This is also a helpful vision, then, as well as intoxicating. Perhaps such pleasant daydreaming isn't all that bad? But the images the beast conjures are fundamentally perilous. It is a deadly apex predator, and Maronex has a lucky escape on this occasion, as

today, the beast is more in the mood for deer than knights. The colours stop radiating from its neck, and it returns to its lair to devour its prey.

The beast is frequently described as wicked, but it goes without saying that it is not evil in the same way as a human; it is consistently and realistically animal in its characterisation, much like the Giant Boar. Indeed, it is hard to describe the Beast as an emblem of 'artifice' for the same reason: if anything, it is, at least intradiegetically speaking, part of God's creation. Nevertheless, it is clearly another tool for the author to explore his own artifice, as, like a writer, the Beast creates fantastical visions for its audience. The way in which knights interact with such images – often against their better judgement – can be perilous: a warning of the dangers of gazing too long at images, or, we may infer, getting lost in *romans*, as Dante famously warns against (*Inferno* 5, ll.133-8).

Olofer falls foul of the beast's alluring display, resulting in his death (6.2, pp.794-813). This encounter is prophesied some time before it happens. In this sense, it is akin to those formative events of the new, Christian age such as the healing of Gadiffer's wounds, and the bringing of the grail to Britain. But this is no joyful occurrence, with particular emphasis given to the court's grief at Olofer's demise. His brother Gallafur II had warned him to be careful:

[...] le message de Gallafur le bon astronome [...] lui dist que peril estoit de luy en cel an jusques au morir se il ne se gardoit des plaisans regars qu'il pourroit faire sur aucunes creatures. (6.2, p.794)

Olofer's response is hubristic:

Gallafur mon frere n'est pas si sage comme il cuide ne je ne le tiens pas si familier aux dieux que ilz lui aient dit leurs secretz. Non pourquant vous le me salurez et lui direz que j'ay espoir de me si bien garder de tous regars que ma vie n'en sera ja acourcee. (6.2, p.795)

Olofer refers to the plural, pagan *dieux*, and doesn't heed the advice; instead, he and King Scapiol go out of their way to find the Beast precisely because it is so *merveilleuse*. We are not actually told what Olofer sees in the Beast's neck, but simply reminded of its wondrous colours whilst it basks in the morning sun, lying in wait for prey... only this time Olofer is on

the breakfast menu. He is disembowelled by the creature, which then runs off barking, fearfully remembering the blow it received from the *Chevalier Doré*, who knocked out four of its fangs. Olofer is buried with ceremony, along with his wife, who dies in childbirth shortly after learning of his death. Their tomb is contained within a specially-built temple of Venus and the epitaph reads:

Cy gist le duc Olofer de Cornubie qui moru par plaisant regard. Et la duchesse sa moullier qui moru par la destresse qu'elle souffry pour la mort du duc son mary. (6.2, p.807)

Olofer did not die a *belle mort*. In contrast with earlier statues to Perceforest (5.1, p.570) and Estonné (4.1, pp.661-2), no emphasis is placed on the heroism of the deceased, but rather on the effects his death had on the realm. The inscription on his tomb emphasises the tragedy of his death, and the author describes his family's grief:

Si tost qu'ilz eurent leutes les lettres, il n'y eut si dur coeur qui de tendreur ne plourast. Mais pour ce que l'en ne peut pas tousjours plourer ne faire dueil, ilz se conforterent et queillierent coeur. [...] Adont se font appareillier de simples vestures comme gens de dueil [etc.] (6.2, p.807)

So is Olofer just another pagan king whose foolhardiness and old *croyances* lead to his comeuppance? There is certainly such a moral element to the tale. Olofer did not die a *belle mort*, because *plaisant regard* cut his life short. This event is a warning against hubris, and may be instructive to the Sicambrian King Scapiol, first of the new line that will produce Arthur. Furthermore, the fact that this event was prophesied marks it as historically significant, and it is no coincidence that the episode immediately precedes the reading of the Gospel of Nicodemus that introduces the *nouvelle foi* to Britain.

The age of pagan knights and their exploits is drawing to a close, and the new age is beginning. Olofer's death is a moral *exemplum* warning against hubris. Ferlampin-Acher finds an interesting theological symbolism in the Beast. It is a "Buisson Ardent pervers" – a

dangerous sort of burning bush following the biblical passage (Exodus 3. 1-6).<sup>156</sup> She comments:

...dans les deux cas il y a une apparition surnaturelle et lumineuse, une voix (celle de Dieu ou, moins mélodieuse, celle de la *Beste*) se fait entendre, la vision est captivante, Moïse se voile la face car il craint de regarder Dieu, tout comme les admirateurs de la *Beste* devraient détourner le regard de ce monstre dangereux.<sup>157</sup>

In the biblical story, God is the creator and guarantor of meaning, and his monstrosity is too much for Moses to interact with; he must avert his eyes. From her comparison of the Beast with this myth, Ferlampin-Acher concludes that "la rhétorique est condamnée comme *deception, illusion*".<sup>158</sup> And so we return to a familiar notion: does the Beast represent the danger of fiction as a vessel for (divine) meaning which may nevertheless be dangerous? One wonders if the Beast, with its tendency to hypnotise, is an emblem for medieval readers of Arthurian fantasy who foresake their other duties in favour of ephemeral worlds.

In a separate study, Ferlampin-Acher arrives at a more forgiving assessment: "La *Beste* [...] concrétise le pouvoir double de l'imagination, mortifère quand elle enferme le sujet dans ses désirs, positive quand elle pousse les héros au dépassement."<sup>159</sup> She notes that this marks the increasing contentment of romance to consider itself fiction, rather than chronicle. The status of the dangerous image changes: "passer de la *deception* à la création."<sup>160</sup> Perhaps the creative side of the Beast is its wonder – its predominant descriptor is *merveilleux* – running alongside the inherent danger of its content when it leads to obsessive reading. We might even think of it as an emblem for all those myriad *merveilleux* side-quests and carnivalesque episodes in *Perceforest*. In view of this, what does 'good' creative writing look like, and – following the author's emphasis on the interpretation of image – how should one read it?

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<sup>156</sup> This assessment is based on two tangential references to the bush: "il sembloit de ceste beste ung buisson par leur couleurs qui entour elle s'entrelachoient [...] ce sembloit a veoir aussi que ung buisson espris de toutes couleurs." See Ferlampin-Acher, 'Fleurs de rhétorique'.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p.220.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230.

<sup>159</sup> 'Perceforest et ses miroirs aux alouettes' in *Miroirs et jeux de miroirs dans la littérature médiévale*, ed. by Fabienne Pomel (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), pp.323-338 (p.338).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p.338.



### ***Divine Light:***

Whilst the Beast's reflective neck is potentially dangerous, light can, of course, be divine. At certain points in the text, the *Souverain Dieu* is manifested as light through glass. In particular, we recall Lydoire's vision of God and her meeting with Nature (4.2, pp.571-9). After the appearance of the comet which prophesies the destruction of the kingdom by the Romans, she sees a *merveilleuse signe*: a glowing light in the sky, so bright as to be unbearable at times. This heavenly image then transforms into a *juste* or *pot en voirre* (4.2, p.576), concealing the form of the Virgin, who is pregnant and robed in white for her purity. Where the lineage and Aroès used vases of liquid to create false images by refracting light outwards, here, inversely, truth is hidden inside such a container.

The Virgin is contained within the glass container "pour aucun pou empeschier sa clarté" (4.1, p.576). This, then, is a good way of reading the image: not looking directly, but rather through translucent matter. The light of God's truth can only be glimpsed when it is dimmed, and requires shading by other substances. The tricolored glass lamps that adorn altars in the temples to the *Souverain Dieu* (1.1, p.345) mimic this celestial vision: they do not create delightful, dancing colours and images to please the eye, but rather conceal, dimming light in deference to its potency.

Light was an important concept for the scholastics, and considered by Bonaventure, Aquinas and Grosseteste to be a divine influence on matter. For instance, in Grosseteste's *On Light (De Luce)*, it is light that perfects matter, giving it its final form. The treatise is highly complex in its logic and mathematics, so I bow to the editor's assessment:

When we come to consider the meaning of act and actualization in the treatise *On Light* we find that the actualization of matter is practically synonymous with extension. To actualize matter completely, perfectly, leaving in it no potency to further actualization, is to extend it to the utmost of its capacity, to rarefy it in the highest degree. [...] The concept is not restricted to metaphysics as in the treatise *On Light*. In other works the principal is extended to different fields, such as psychology where light is brought in to account for the union of soul and body, or knowledge, where light serves as the means whereby the soul gets knowledge from sense data. In these applications and in others of a mystical nature the influence of St. Augustine

is very prominent.<sup>161</sup>

*Perceforest* is not a text that engages in any scholarly way with metaphysics, but we may see an element of this light metaphysic in certain treatments of the *regard* as ethical and spiritual concept. We remember in particular that when the royals transcend the mortal world, dying in the *nouvelle foi*, heavenly light shines over their graves, as though their bodily matter is perfected, and they might live on in the eternal element: the light of the *Souverain Dieu*. In this sense, light and optics – abused by others with malicious intent – can in fact enter the eyes as evidence of the wonder of God’s creation. So, it follows that the image can hold important significance, provided it is approached with appropriate deference.

### ***Interpreting Visions:***

Olofer died because of *plaisant regard*, and two related episodes earlier in the text explore the notion of interpreting images, both focusing on reflective surfaces. First, Gallafur’s vision of Alexandre in a fountain (5.1, pp.486-90), and subsequently the *Chevalier Vermeil* and *Chevalier Vert/Meffait* who see their beloveds in a magical mirror (5.1, pp.494-538). Fabienne Pomel comments on the significance of mirrors in medieval literature:

[...] fondamentalement, le miroir pose la question de l’«être comme» qui est au coeur des réflexions sur l’identité, sur la connaissance et sur la représentation de soi, du monde ou de Dieu, qu’elle soit intellectuelle, visuelle ou plus généralement artistique. Dans le reflet, le miroir conjoint l’identité et la différence, selon le principe de l’analogie, fondamental au Moyen Âge pour penser l’homme, le monde et l’art.<sup>162</sup>

In these episodes, we see such questions of artistic representation running alongside questions of knightly identity and divine destiny.

Gallafur is morose, mulling over his defeat by Norgal in front of Alexandre, and after he had performed so well in his quest for the *Espee Vermeille*. Fortunately, Alexandre’s

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<sup>161</sup> Robert Grosseteste: *On Light (De Luce)*, transl. by Clare C. Riedl (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1942) p.4 [...] pp.7-8.

<sup>162</sup> Fabienne Pomel, *Miroirs et jeux de miroirs dans la littérature médiévale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), p.18.

messenger hears Gallafor's account of the quest, and sees that the sword is bright red, indicating his faithfulness. So an exchange begins between the two lovers. A fountain is used as a magical intermediary: "[...] la trouverez une fontaine ou la pucelle va aucune fois jouer, car la pourrez vous avoir plus tost nouvelles de moy, s'il est mestier que je retourne vers vous." (5.1, p.486). What Gallafor sees in the waters astounds him:

Et ainsi que le chevalier regardoit en celle tant belle et plaisant fontaine, il ne se donna de garde quant il vey apparoir en l'eau plusieurs viaires roisins de couleur sur blanc poly et nettement ouvrez au plaisir de Nature, car tous ceulz qui la veissent ces viaires n'y sceussent que amender fors tant que la beauté d'iceulx viaires apparoit trop eschauffant aux bacheliers regardans. Et quant le chevalier vey les viaires apparans en l'eau qui tant estoient plaisans a regarder, il en eut grant merveilles et ne sceut dont ce pouoit venir. Non pourquant bien lui estoit advis que les viaires apparoyent aux fenestres d'une moult noble tour. Mais ce le fist trop esbahy, car bien lui fut advis qu'il en y avoit une en la moyenne des autres la plus belle que oncques eust veu a son advis. Mais longuement ne fut en doubance, car en pou d'heure sceut de certain que c'estoit la Pucelle aux Deux Dragons, qu'il aimoit sur toutes les pucelles du monde. (5.1, p.486)

He is overwhelmed, and looks around for the cause of this *demonstration* but finds nothing. Soon after, he is delighted to see the messenger bring Alexandre the sword, which she accepts after the messenger testifies to his faithfulness. "Et pour ce estoit il a ce point aussy comme en paradis." (5.1, p.487).

The vision certainly contains alluring images: young men will surely be *eschauffés* by the rosy faces of the damsels in the tower, and Gallafor feels like he is in paradise. Indeed, it risks falling into the category of *plaisant regard* (a description we find in the passage above), but for certain details. Like the Beast, the fountain shows real events, and, in this instance, they appear mundanely factual. Gallafor does not see a particularly enrapturing vision beyond Alexandre's innate beauty, instead seeing those events as selected by Alexandre herself, author of this vision, that keep him informed of the progress of their amours.

Importantly, Gallafor avoids gazing too long at the images in the waters, thanks to a small, but instructive miracle. A snake swims across the water, disturbing the surface;

Gallafur frightens it off with a stick and the waters calm. Then he sees Alexandre forgiving him his actions, and blaming Capraise's lies: an important development. But the snake comes back again.

Quant le chevalier ot oï ces parlers, il tressailly tout de joye. Mais tantost lui sourdy chose nuiseuse, car le serpent, qui trop en sa repostaille s'estoit tenu et qui desirant estoit de conjoÿr la saison delittable, resailly de son creux, puis print a nagier tout chantant selon sa voix parmy l'eau qui estoit plainiere, et en nagent engendroit ondes nouvelles, qui fist entremesler les figures des viaires dont le chevalier avoit prins son deduit. (5.1, p.488)

The snake is chasing its mate across the fountain. After another segment of vision, they make another appearance:

[...] les deux serpens, quy tappis s'estoient pour le debatement du chevalier, issirent de leurs repustailles, car Natures les en semonnoit. [...] «Dieu, dist lors le bachelier, comme sont ores les biens de Fortune muables, car la ou je cuide le mieulx jouir d'aucun bien, lors vient qui le me empesche, et honte m'est quant souffrir me convient pour telle vermine.» (5.1, p.490)

Huot notes that this episode is symbolic of the sexual desire that Gallafur – as proto-Galahad – must repress on his newly religious quest (brandishing a shield emblazoned with the cross and uttering the name of the 'son of the virgin').<sup>163</sup> The serpents, whose mating behaviour is described as natural, provide an amusingly frustrating obstacle. Like a slap on the wrists, the snakes teach Gallafur how to read these watery visions. They are not purely for pleasure, but must be interpreted. And they have a purpose: rather than gazing longingly at Alexandre, he must perform to earn her love, and is instructed not to return to her until his magic sword has turned from red to white. Only then will he be able to perform his natural duty, like the serpents in the pool, by providing an heir. Gallafur cannot fall to doe-eyed affection, but is gently (and comically) nudged towards reading, to understand what instruction the visions

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<sup>163</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, pp.209-212.

may hold.

At the end of this episode, Gallafor is riding through the *Forest Darnant*, and finds two knights in a meadow transfixed by a mirror. They refuse to joust him, and ask to be left alone in contemplation. He watches them until nightfall when a mysterious damsel brings food, water and a lantern. It seems that the knights have been sustained in this way for some time (5.1, pp.495-6).

Both are in romantic quandaries. The *Chevalier Vermeil*, son of the *Bossu de Suave*, has come to Britain to become a knight, but has been dismayed to learn that Exillé will not dub him as he does not yet love a woman truly. The *Chevallier Meffait* was recently shamed in front of a group of noblewomen for claiming that he would never love unless it promised some personal gain for him. In this sense, both have committed an error of interpretation: a misunderstanding of the knightly code they wish to follow. Both have fallen in love, and – much like Gallafor – seen visions of their beloveds in a fountain, as the *Chevalier Vermeil* recounts:

Grant piece atendy a sçavoir s'il isteroit de son penser. Mais tant continua l'affaire que jou meismes m'embronçay et entray en une fiere merancolie, regardant la fontaine, dont l'eau estoit clere a merveilles et la gravelle reluisant pour les rais du soleil qui se lançoient ou fons. La me vint souvenance de la pucelle qui en veillant ou dormant m'estoit venue au devant, ou par faerie, ne sçay lequel. Mais touteffois en celle merancolie ou j'estoie entré j'aloie fachonnant son viaire au vif ou fons de la fontaine selon l'ondoïement de l'eau et les raiz du soleil qui flamboioit entre le gravier. Ainsi m'estoit advis en ma fantaisie et me delitoie, cuidant veoir le viaire de la pucelle vraiment. Car pour moy plus decevoir, une pierrette de la gravelle s'estoit transmuee, car ou front du viaire elle representoit la cousture d'une plaie que la pucelle a ou front, qui tresbien lui advient. (5.1, pp.505-6)

He is astounded. Was this vision inspired by his own desires and thoughts, combined with the natural shapes and suggestions of the water in the sunlight? Or was it fairy magic? The luminous images on this reflective surface are mysterious, and perhaps even dangerous: the *Chevalier Vermeil* is concerned that they may *decevoir*. The knights are snapped out of their rapture by Exillé, who challenges them to joust. They journey together, and are advised by a

damsel to head for the *Mont au Miroir*. When they arrive, they find the mirror, in whose reflection they see their damsels in a tower.

[...] perceusmes que c'estoient les deux pucelles dont estions si enamourez, pourquoy nous fusmes si esbahis qu'il n'y eut cellui de nous qui parlast ne mot ne ver l'un a l'autre devant le soir que par faulte de jour nous perdins d'elles la veue. (5.1, p.522).

They know that these images are inspired by true love: "[...] si cogneu chascun qu'il avoit veu s'amie *par amours* et que trop lui pesoit que la nuit estoit si tost venue, car onques n'avoit eu tel joie." (5.1, p.522). They stay here in this way for eight days, abandoning their knightly ways, and unresponsive to anyone who may approach. During this time, they turn to contemplation, and are amazed at their restless *amour*: "C'est grant merveilles de nostre fait, car tant cordealement amons que nous ne nous en pouvons saouler" (5.1, p.523). Eventually, Gallafur stops by the mirror, and offers a valuable gloss of their un-knightly situation:

Par ma foy, sire, dist la Tout Passe, vous m'avez racompté la plus estrange adventure dont j'ouisse onques parler ne je n'ouiz jamais parler d'amours si adventureuses, combien que j'ay ouy parler des amours Passelion et des amours de Norgal qui furent bien merveilleuses, mais les vostres me semblent trop fieres, car en voz amours n'a nulle certainté. De legier puet estre aussi comme la fumee d'une chandaille de nouvel estainte. (5.1, p.523)

As they have become lost in these images, their love, like the images themselves, has become ephemeral, thin as candle smoke. The *Chevalier Vermeil* invokes the *Souverain Dieu*, bemoaning their condition: "Sire, dist le chevalier, le Souverain Dieu vous en vueille ouir, car onques mais deux chevalliers ne amerent a si grant manandie." (5.1, p.523). This obsessive love is a fitting punishment for the *Chevalier Meffait*, who sought to love selfishly.

As they search in vain for the tower (which is invisible), they hear disembodied voices of the damsels delighting in his plight: "Bien en sommes vengiez quant il aime l'ombre du mireoir!" (5.1, p.524). And yet, this vision is ultimately transformed into the most potent form of love when, encouraged by Gallafur, the knights reflect on their state, and begin to *read* rather than *gaze*. Their obsessive melancholy is transformed into action. *Plaisant regard*

gives way to epiphany: from reflection to revelation. They win back their ladies' tokens, and proceed to set up their own tournament at the *Mont au Mireoir*, vanquishing all comers, thus proving themselves worthy and gaining the damsels' favour with their newfound, *true* love.

To symbolise *Meffait's* pardon, the damsels' invisible castle appears before them, and the mirror is shattered. These visions were intended to be instructive; they were not wilfully deceptive like Aroès' sorcery. The snakes disturbed the water Gallafur was gazing into, and he, in turn, disturbed the mirror knights' excessive contemplation. For Ferlampin-Acher, his dip in the fountain is on the one hand comical, but also prepares him to be an instrument against deception:

Purgé et lavé dans l'épisode précédent, Galafur est en effet prêt à repartir en aventure et à transformer un désir amoureux potentiellement mortifère en cet élan vital qui en fera un roi breton, ancêtre d'Arthur: il ne succombe donc pas au deuxième miroir.<sup>164</sup>

The knights learn to use the images not for *plaisant regard*, or to languish in melancholy, but for self-betterment: to accomplish their quests, and to fulfil their destiny. Image has potential for clarity as well as deception.

Indeed, As Ferlampin-Acher notes, *Perceforest* takes the moral goals of its quests quite seriously:

*Perceforest* [...] privilégie d'une part les mises en scène collectives, comme les tournois, et d'autre part les quêtes, dont l'enjeu n'est pas que l'exaltation théâtrale, narcissique et gratuite de la vaillance, mais vise à un but plus élevé, comme la sauvegarde d'un roi ou l'éradication du mal.<sup>165</sup>

Visions, however dangerous, can be instructive, truthful, and meaningful. Such may have been the author's opinion of artificial history.

### ***Zephyr, Deception and Truth:***

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<sup>164</sup> '*Perceforest* et ses miroirs', p.333.

<sup>165</sup> '*Perceforest*' et *Zéphir*, p.126.

When we consider the *Perceforest* as a whole (perhaps inevitably with such a large text), it can appear multifarious. The reader may wonder if the author ever made up his mind about the status of artificial history. In one sense, we can never know what his thoughts were, although it is clear these thoughts were many. That said, I would like to offer a reading which makes some sense of the matter of artificial history across the *Perceforest's* many sprawling volumes. For this reading, we turn to a familiar little devil.

Zephyr has the powers of foresight, shapeshifting, and, as his name suggests, the ability to fly all over Britain at great speed, which comes in handy when rescuing knights. He is a slippery character in every sense of the word: elusive, and a known prankster. Appropriately, he chiefly inhabits swamps, difficult terrain, and places that confuse the senses, where the victims of his pranks often meet a watery comeuppance.<sup>166</sup> We infer that most of his tricks are purely for his own enjoyment, as in any number of the *Estonné* episodes, or – memorably – when Passelion is in Norway helping Queen Néronès, and Zephyr drops a bucket of frogs on his head (4.2, pp.1021-37). Such amusing ribaldries are ten-a-penny in *Perceforest*.

Despite being a demon – one of Lucifer's footsoldiers during the rebellion – he is never truly wicked, as *Estonné* explains to his son Passelion on his journey into Hell:

Et vous prie que vous croiez Zephir de ce qu'il vous conseillera pour bien, car de lui ne vous vendra point de mal. Et se aucuneffois il vous fait aucune tromperie, ne vous en troublez pas, car il n'a plus de joie que de aucunement decepvoir son amy la ou il ne gist ne mort ne affoleure. (4.2, p.763)

In fact, he has a pedagogical function. His tricks typically revolve around *Estonné* and Passelion's penchant for beautiful women, subtly curbing or otherwise putting to good use their 'devotion to Venus'. On occasion, such tricks are of national importance, as when our sprite uses the old 'illusion of a beautiful woman' trick to convince *Estonné* to help in the fight against the Romans.<sup>167</sup>

At other times, he flies in to save knights from danger and death, just in the nick of

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<sup>166</sup> "Zephir [...] se tient es lieux aquaticques." (4.2, p.922)

<sup>167</sup> This is during the first invasion, which is successfully defeated, cf. 3.1, chapters .XXVII.-.XXIX.



time. For example, Passelion is saved from Marmona's enchantments in a swampy game of cat and mouse (4.2, pp.927-32). It is Zephyr who summons all the knights and noble ladies to meet at the *Perron Merveilleux* for the opening of the treasure of the *Franc Palais*. Perhaps most hair-raising is his rescue of Gallafur and Blanor from King Nagor's pyre, speeding them away from Brittany in his swan-drawn boat (6.1, Chapter III).

Towards the end of the text, Zephyr is the primary mechanism for securing the correct end to the history of the dynasty. We might say his purpose is to tie up loose ends, carefully and meticulously arranging the appropriate marriages, coronations, and adventures that will ensure the continuation of the royal bloodline into the Christian/Arthurian era.<sup>168</sup>

He is at his best as a matchmaker, forging those crucial marital alliances that will guarantee the Arthurian future. Estonné's lineage is particularly dear to him, as his literary inspiration and counterpart, Merlin, will issue from this line.<sup>169</sup> Accordingly, Passelion's conception is delayed until conditions are perfect. Zephyr leads Estonné on a wild goose chase, and demands a "bourse plaine d'aer oriental prins en l'Isle de Vie et plain ce vaissel d'eau de vie avecq trois pommes du chier fruit" (4.2, p.997) which will be used in a magical ritual to secure Merlin's birth. He also matches Ygerne (Gallafur's daughter) with the invading king Scapiol, and from them the first Christian king will be born.<sup>170</sup>

Although Zephyr is consistently mischievous, he can appear as a figure for successful authorship.<sup>171</sup> Whilst not all his activity in *Perceforest* pertains to this narrative zenith, his marital projects, rescues and other such guarding of important lineages are successful. In this sense, he is an instrumental part of the 'hyperfactual' narrative.

And yet, another of Zephyr's main features is to satirise authorly artifice. Nowhere is this humorous meta-narrative angle more apparent than in the *Teste Voir Disant* episode (6.1, pp.365-97). Just before Gallafur's coronation is to take place, an enormous bronze head

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<sup>168</sup> Though we note that *much* later in the text it is Christ himself who appears in this advisory capacity (e.g. 6.1, p.887 when he appears to the sailor Spertenhem).

<sup>169</sup> For a full consideration of Zephyr's sources, see Ferlampin-Acher, '*Perceforest*' et *Zéphir*, pp.263-344.

<sup>170</sup> Ferlampin-Acher notes that both Lydoire and Zephyr undergo structural 'conversions' in their character in the second half of *Perceforest*, shifting from older 'pagan' types of storytelling towards events that lay the foundations of the future. See 'Aux frontières du merveilleux'.

<sup>171</sup> In Anne Berthelot's words: "De façon très générale, Zéphyr fonctionne un peu (un peu trop...) comme un artifice narratif autorisant des changements de lieu rapides, et comblant les solutions de continuité qui menacent de rompre le fil du récit." Anne Berthelot, 'Zéphyr, épigone 'rétroactif' de Merlin dans le *Roman de Perceforest*', *Moyen Français*, 38 (1996), 7-20 (p.15).

appears, and speaks a prophecy: Perceforest's true heir will ride from the forest on the day of the assembly at the *Perron* hunting a stag with a damsel's *quainse* on its antlers. He will also know the location of the treasure of the *Franc Palais* (6.1, pp.367-8). This fantastical sequence is all organised by Zephyr, who inhabits the head, and will in due course take on his favourite form – a stag – to bring the 'prophecy' to a close.

The farce continues, as 'the head' busies itself correcting the elements of the plot that are not going to plan. First discovered on the day of the coronation by the assembled nobles, it reprimands Ponçonnet the minstrel for staring at it, and tells him to shut up when he questions its authority. When Gallafur forgets the dream he had that would indicate the location of the treasure of the *Franc Palais*, he is reminded in no uncertain terms.

An interesting exchange ensues, as Gallafur becomes suspicious, and wonders if there is some devil inside it.<sup>172</sup> The head responds: "Chevallier [...] je ne suis pas icy mise pour toy decepvoir ne aultrui, ainchois y suis mise par la subtillesse de la Sage Roine et pour dire verité." (6.1, p.375). The author is careful to remind us that the deception serves a good purpose, as Zephyr explains to Gallafur after his coronation:

Gallafur, franc chevallier, pourquoy vous celez vous tant? Toutes les merveilles qui depuis ung an sont advenues en ceste terre, dont vous en avez mis a fin plusieurs, de moy meismes, qui cy parle, n'ont esté faittes fors pour vous attraire au roiaulme de la Grant Bretagne et pour ajointre le droit sang du bon roy Perceforest au droit sang du sage Roy Mehaigné, par quoy le chief de leur lignaige ne soit empirié de pieur sang. (6.1, p.415)

How are we to understand this dual role of deceiver and truth-teller? This question applies as much to artificial history and fiction as it does to the character of Zephyr, who in this sense serves as an adequate emblem for literary artifice. Zephyr is a far less problematic character than, for instance, Lydoire, for he wears his deceptive nature on his sleeve.

Could it be that the overt artifice of *Perceforest* is not merely *tolerable* whimsy, but rather, a *necessary* condition for it to have any pretense to truth? Such is the sentiment of

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<sup>172</sup> Which there is, of course. Zephyr takes shelter in the head, because "[...] je n'y puis estre de jour, car la bateure pour mon pechié est telle que je ne puis souffrir le soleil." (6.1, p.370).

'post-modern' authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like Pynchon, Heller, and Kafka: the chaos and absurdity of their works is not exclusively whimsical, but is the means by which they communicate truth, which, after all, is what literature is for. The necessity of exhibiting textual artifice is certainly an attitude shared by the *Perceforest* author.

### ***Humility and Humour:***

The result is a text that is ultimately humble (and humility's corollary – humour – is also evident throughout the text), and displays its artifice for all to see. Just as Arthur's ancestors are virtuous, but with a limited understanding of the God they serve, so Zephyr is estranged from the divine author. He tells Estonné the story of Lucifer's rebellion:

Tu m'as conjuré, dist la voix, d'une si haulte conjuracion qu'il convient que j'obeisse. Saches que je suys des angelz qui furent tresbuchiez avec Lucifer de paradis pour ce qu'il vouloit regner par son orgueil et avoir siege et partie encontre Dieu, a qui il convenoit qu'il obeist, dont il advint qu'il eut tresgrant partie en paradis. (2.2, pp.73-4)

Zephyr is happy with his punishment, explaining that all damned spirits consider their punishment to be perfectly just, and God's judgement merciful. Yet the hardship of his estrangement from God is acutely felt. He describes how Lucifer is the most miserable of all creatures. No other spirit will approach him:

Vous devez sçavoir, dist la voix, que nul n'accroist volentiers sa peine et seul luy approchier est tourment sans pareil, ne d'autry approchement n'a talent, car s'il puet sentir tourment aultre que d'avoir perdu la veue de Dieu, l'oïe de ses compagnons condempnez sans plus le tourne a tourment quant il voit qu'il est le plus eslongié de Dieu. (2.2, p.75).

Though he accepts his punishment obediently, the reader might find more than a little tragedy in Zephyr's assessment: "[...] de tant que on fuyt plus le chault sent on plus le froit et de tant que on fuit plus le bien sent on plus le mal." (2.2, p.75).

Anne Berthelot notes that Zephyr assumes different forms – the wind, a stag, an old man in a black hood etc. – in order to mask the hideous appearance imposed on him as punishment for his crime. She is also sensitive to the undercurrents of tragedy in this otherwise comical character:

Zéphyr n'a pas l'air exceptionnellement porté à la mélancolie, quoiqu'on puisse considérer, évidemment, les farces qu'il joue à Estonné et Passelion comme des dérivatifs à une souffrance inavouable...<sup>173</sup>

As Ferlampin-Acher has noted, there is an aesthetic difference between the narrative chaos Zephyr represents, and that represented by the *Beste Glatissante*. Where the Beast is shimmering, polychromatic, and polysemous, Zephyr is most strongly identified with swamps and mud:

Polymorphe et métamorphique, il est malléable: il n'est donc pas étonnant que, bien qu'il porte un nom de vent, sa matière de prédilection soit la boue.<sup>174</sup>

The Beast's images are alluring and dangerous, whereas Zephyr's are – ultimately – earthy and harmless. The Beast is dangerous, but Zephyr, in his muddy austerity, is benign, even instructive, a strange sort of guardian angel. Unlike the Beast, Aroès, or Darnant and co., his deceptions have no lasting pretention to reality.

### ***An Evaluation of Artifice:***

Following the twists and turns of *Perceforest's* lengthy consideration of artifice, what conclusions can we draw? Whilst there are elements of piety and 'political correctness' to its treatment of artifice, I think the *Perceforest* author was fundamentally optimistic about 'artificial history'. Acutely aware of the foibles of literary artifice (we would not wish to get lost in the fantasies it creates), it is better for the author to exhibit his artifice throughout. Better to reveal your deceptions, than to hide them. This fantastical pseudo-history counts

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<sup>173</sup> 'Zéphyr, épigone 'rétroactif'', p.11.

<sup>174</sup> Ferlampin-Acher, '*Perceforest*: De l'entremets...', p.398.

firmly as 'meta-Arthuriana': it questions, satirises, and ultimately reconciles itself to the artifice of writing around the Arthurian canon, and, indeed, the artifice of fiction-writing in general. *Perceforest* may seem an "elephantine" and rather uneven opus, but beneath its lumpy surface lies a profoundly thoughtful discussion of the artifice of the literary medium.

Might we even go further, and suggest that – for literature to make any claims to truthfulness and meaning – it must, paradoxically, avail itself of a healthy dose of deception?

## **Conclusion: Writing on the Edge, Artificial History, Further Study**

Chardonnens notes that the author: "[...] bâtit son oeuvre entière sur la répétition et la variation et, en cette fin du Moyen Age où tout change, fait de son récit un terrain d'expérimentation fictionnelle".<sup>175</sup> So far, I have largely given lip-service to the notion of the text's experimentality, its literary 'magic'. To conclude, I will offer some key examples of fictional experimentation in the text, as one final witness to an author dedicated to exploring the landscape of writing.

I will then offer some final thoughts on the status of magic and artificial history in *Perceforest*. Finally, I will open the text to comparison with contemporary medieval works, and offer suggestions for further applications of this thesis.

### ***Writing on the Edge:***

The following readings further evidence the notion of the 'humorous/humble' text, as the capacity of fiction to communicate meaning is pushed to the limit, becoming either sublime or absurd.

By 'writing on the edge' I understand episodes a) in which characters find themselves in the borderlands of meaning, or amidst an experience that in some way defies understanding, and accordingly b) where the ability of fiction to render meaning is brought

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<sup>175</sup> *L'Autre du même*, p.683.

into question. The morsels I will consider fall into two broad descriptive categories: the sublime and the ridiculous. Kant's assessment of the sublime is a helpful introduction:

The mien of the human being who finds himself in the full feeling of the sublime is serious, sometimes even rigid and astonished. By contrast, the lively sentiment of the beautiful announces itself through shining cheerfulness in the eyes, through traces of a smile, and often through audible mirth. The sublime is in turn of different sorts. The feeling of it is sometimes accompanied with some dread or even melancholy, in some cases merely with quiet admiration and in yet others with a beauty spread over a sublime prospect.<sup>176</sup>

Kant's description allows us to identify – from a character's reaction, for example – when one is confronted with a sublime situation. This is often heralded in *Perceforest* by the verb *esmerveiller* and its variations – which is surely a close Old French equivalent to our 'sublime'. The characters in these episodes have experiences that are challenging on a conceptual and emotional level, and their reactions fall somewhere on the broad Kantian 'sublime spectrum' between wonderment and horror.

But I am not exclusively concerned with the characters' perceptions and experiences. I am also interested in the consideration of fiction's ability to communicate meaning. For example, it is one thing to consider the knight Betis' discombobulating sojourn with the *chevaliers de mer* on an intradiegetic level (as is well-represented in critical analysis), but another, complementary exercise to ask what this episode may have to say about the status of fiction. In this way, I follow my claim that the author is more acutely concerned with the workings of fiction than we may previously have realised.

In these brief case studies, we will confront the author at his most experimental. From the sublime to the ridiculous, through miracle and absurdity, he charts the limits of his medium, and tests its breaking point.

### ***From the Sublime...***

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<sup>176</sup> Emmanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings* transl. by Patrick Frierson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.16.

At the opening of the *Fête du Dieu Souverain*, guests are treated to quite the spectacle, and the reader to one of the *Perceforest*'s more charming passages:

Au gentil mois que le roy des planettes monte en son plus hault signe pour degaster toutes mauvaises moiteurs tant ou poeuple humain comme en tous fruis par sa tres grande chaleur qui a tant de vertus que tout seroit perdu et pourri se par ses rais n'estoit resuscité, a celle heure estoit le noble roy Perceforest aux fenestres de son Franc Palais rendant graces au Dieu Souverain pour l'attemprance des cieux et de l'aer qu'il veoit si ordonné et disposé qu'il sambloit que le createur de toutes choses l'eust pourveu par especial pour exaulcier sa feste adfin que personne ne se peust plaindre de sa chaleur, car l'aer d'entre le ciel et la terre estoit tant meurement entremeslé de vapeurs qu'il sambloit aux regardans que des petites nuees ce fussent blancs moutons pasturans les rais du soleil tres delicieusement et joyeusement; non pas sans plus moutons, car qui prenoit en ce regard plaisir, il y veoit toutes manieres d'hommes et de femmes, de bestes, d'oyseaulx, de valees, de montaignes, de bois, de forests et de signes merueilleux et de horrible façon, les aucuns ayans testes devant et derriere, rechignans les ungs a l'encontre des autres. Tout ce pouoit estre veu en l'aer qui estoit tant merueilleusement paincturé que tous ceulx qui le regardoient prenoient grant plaisir a le veoir et avoient tresgrant ensonne d'experimenter les merveilles qui pouoient estre veues et figurees. (4.1, p.2)

This display – contrary to the subsequent festivities – is miraculous rather than magical, the description of the formation of the clouds being meteorological. The clouds transform into variously wondrous and terrible creatures, and onlookers experience them as sublime, just as one might experience nature or art (and the passage gives a sense of nature *as* art, God being the greatest artificer).

It is a charming portrayal of pareidolia, but the shifting clouds are also an emblem of the text's narrative style. Pastiche and *entrelardement* are the author's dominant modes, and as such the text accrues a diverse menagerie of episodes: fantastic, marvellous, fearful. Is the author suggesting a sort of literary pareidolia? Does the reader project meaning onto even the most chimerical fictional display? More importantly, does such a process produce truth, or is it only *plaisant regard*?

As the *Roide Montaigne* (Aroès' island) sinks into the ocean depths, Gadiffer II and Flamine escape by boat. They witness a miracle:

Ainsi que la pucelle faisoit celle lamentacion, le preu chevalier et le marinier commencerent a regarder le lieu ou la Roide Montaigne souloit estre et veirent que la mer estoit comme toute appaisie et la terre pardessus l'eau decouverte toute onnye, non point haulte, ainçois basse et de couleur de sablon sans quelque couleur d'arbres ne d'herbes. Et quant ilz veirent ce, ilz en eurent grant merveilles et le monstrent a Flamine, qui en rendy graces au Souverain Dieu et dist que le hault Dieu ne vouloit point tout destruire, mais tant seulement ne vouloit planer que le pechié... (3.2, pp.120-121)

This episode is one of the few examples of the miracle in *Perceforest*, drawing clear inspiration from God's covenant with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9. 12-16). Of course, the *Souverain Dieu* does not speak to the characters, but the remade island is interpreted as a sign of peace by Flamine. She sees the body of her mother, Queen Flora, adrift at sea, and remarks: "a ce que je voy, il ne plaist point au Dieu Souverain que la mer soit sa sepulture." (3.2, p.122) Indeed, Flora had expressed a peculiar wish to be buried right in the heart of the mountain. Aroès had claimed no man could dig so far down, but God thought differently, and quite literally 'moved the mountain'. Flora's interment request is a rather clunky device for demonstrating the direct intervention of the *Souverain Dieu*.

The new island's white sands, amenable flatness, and lack of problematic forests inspire reactions of fearful trepidation, and wonder. The ship's crew is hesitant, but Gadiffer disembarks on horseback, his steed whinnying with pleasure to be on dry land again. In the centre of the island, he finds: "ung sarcus de pierre bise, moult gentement ouvré tant dedens comme dehors." (3.2, p.124). Flora's body is brought, and laid to rest. The tomb seals immediately, much to everyone's amazement, and an ekphrastic passage ensues:

Et sy tost qu'il fut fermé comme dit est, ilz veirent dessus ung ymage eslevé en maniere d'une royne, et sy avoit autour la lame en la bordyre lettres qui disoient en la maniere qui s'ensieut:



Le tombeau seigniffie merveilleuse aventure.  
 Il y couche Flora, qui eut creance pure.  
 De la Roide Montaigne fut en son temps roïne.  
 Aroés en fut roy, qui l'eut doulante et sure,  
 Car par sa subtillesse, ou n'eut sens ne mesure,  
 Com dieu se fist aourer a sa pute estrine  
 De ses gens qui estoient de mauvaise origine.  
 Mais le Dieu tout puissant, qui tous pechiez mastine,  
 Fondy lui et son poeuple en la caverne obscure.  
 La sont ensepvely ou nul traveil ne fine.  
 Aroés gist embas, enverse la poitrine,  
 Et Flora gist es cieulx, qui de son mal n'a cure. (3.2, p.125)

In contrast to the epic biblical tone promised, the inscription on the tomb is decidedly banal. The reader may reasonably be tempted to put this down to bad writing, with such underwhelming statements as "Le tombeau seigniffie merveilleuse aventure". The inscription is a prosaic, almost tired recapitulation and gloss on the saga of the *Roide Montaigne*. Any questions the characters – or reader – may have had are firmly put to rest.

In its almost legalistic simplicity, the inscription stands in contrast to the genuine *merveille* of the island and the tomb itself, which are divinely wrought and mysterious. When Gadiffer's horse crosses the sands, its hooves leave no imprint, the island itself physically resisting inscription: "Et sachiez que le sablon estoit illecq aussi dur que l'en n'y sçavoit dire ou le cheval avoit marché" (3.2, p.123). Is the implication here that the sublime is a *topos* that writing cannot contain? As the light of the sun should not be mediated by stained glass, nor images be displayed in churches, is the sublime an impossible vision through the filter of the written word?<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> The author's description of this island, which resists imprint, and is poorly represented by the tomb inscription, is akin to Lacan's notion of the *réel*: the reality which subsists in and of itself, and which we imperfectly – albeit inevitably – rationalise with symbols: "Nous supposons à l'origine tous les ça, objets, instincts, désirs, tendances, etc. C'est la pure et simple réalité donc, qui ne se délimite en rien, qui ne peut être encore l'objet d'aucune définition, qui n'est ni bonne, ni mauvaise, mais à la fois chaotique et absolue, originelle." Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre I: Les écrits techniques de Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.94.

Such notions return in an enchanting episode of magical matchmaking (4.2, pp.1053-85). Zephyr appears to the knight Benuicq and tells him that he must find a more suitable wife than Sarra, daughter of Sarra (the *Déesse des Songes*). This, as ever, in order that Zephyr can ensure the production of the correct Arthurian descendants (Lancelot, in this instance). When Benuicq wins the tournament of the *Espervier Gentil*, as tradition dictates, the eponymous hunting bird lands on his head with a dove in its talons. The dove has a gold ring round its neck, which falls into Benuicq's hand. The ring bears a prophecy: «Pren a femme qui doit puet en moy». There ensues the fairytale trope of 'the shoe that fits'; all comers fail the test, and Benuicq becomes known as the *Chevalier a l'Anel Faé*.

The ultimate goal of the episode is, of course, that Benuicq should fall in love with Lionelle, and marry her. It transpires that the ring was crafted by Blanche (Lydoire's daughter), to find an appropriate husband for Lionelle (her daughter, by the late Lyonnell). The sequence is marked by a pastoral aesthetic, and plenty of charming *féerie*. Blanche is revered by the local shepherds as a powerful *fée* – the so-called *Faveresse* – as she has assembled blacksmiths and metalworkers who charitably fix their tools: a rare commodity in post-war Britain. But the author takes aesthetic charm to new, experimental lengths, as the episode is punctuated by three excursions into the local countryside.

First, having strayed into the region to hunt game, Benuicq is enchanted by the landscape, and takes a pleasant hike through the valleys. He sees mountain goats hopping from rock to rock, and is amazed that they do not fall. After an unfortunate encounter with a stubborn ram that leaves his saddle broken, he arrives at the *Fontaine Faveresse*. Here, as the shepherds explain, any damaged metalwork may be left overnight, and knights must leave their rings as a token of good faith. Come morning, his equipment will have been mended by the *Faveresse* (Blanche), and the ring inspected and returned.

The next day, he takes another hike, and finds himself once again in beautiful mountains: "il y trouva le lieu tant delictable qu'il cuidoit estre en paradis, s'en oublia tout le remanant du monde." (4.2, p.1070). That night, he finds a temple by a fountain, where a sumptuous banquet has been laid out (4.2, p.1071). Later, the site hosts an array of suitors all offering rings to Lionelle. Benuicq falls immediately in love, but grows jealous of the suitors. His third excursion occurs the next day, as he heads out into the country again, lamenting his lot in a melancholy stupor.

That night, the temple appears again and with his ring he wins her hand, and marries her with her mother's blessing. Of course, it was a set-up all along, as Blanche explains: "Quant ma fille fut en eage, je feis esprouver ceste [chose], sy trouvoy qu'il n'estoit anel ou son doy peust entrer. Adont j'establis ceste coustume dont vous estes l'eureux, sy vous ottroy Lionnelle ma fille." (4.2, p.1080).

There is an almost proto-Romantic sublime to this episode.<sup>178</sup> In the proto-*flâneur* Benuicq, we find a sort of tourism of the *merveilleux*. The three excursions do not advance the marriage plot (which, characteristically, is a 'rigged game'), but add a touch of pure, ineffable fantasy. This may be a meditation on the technique of *entrelardement*: does the author see one characteristic of fiction as similar to the theatrical fripperies that the author might have witnessed at court? And yet even these 'meaningless' excursions register, phenomenologically, to the reader. Just as Benuicq meanders awestruck through the rocky peaks and travails of love, so the reader of fiction may experience profound meaning in the meanderings of the *Perceforest*. The natural sublime is used as metaphor for the ephemeral sense of meaning that can arise from the wandering, at times aimless fantasy of the text.

### **...to the Ridiculous**

Sometimes, fiction deteriorates into absurdity. Betidès, son of Perceforest, has been in and out of combat with his cousin Nestor throughout Book Three, both competing to prove their valour. When arriving at the *pin de l'étrange merveille* for a joust, he finds instead the grim remains of Darnant's knights, and at midnight their spirits commence their attack. Darnant appears, burning like hot iron, to claim his right to this site. Betidès rails against the lineage's wickedness, and is condemned by the sorceror to exile on a high mountain. Zephyr rescues him from this predicament, returning him to sea level, but he finds himself on an island which is home to unusual fauna:

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<sup>178</sup> Jeanne Lods gets a sense of this: "Peut-être les lecteurs modernes, formés à l'école du romantisme de Wagner, sont-ils un peu déçus qu'il n'y ait pas plus de frissons et de profondeurs et que les chants d'oiseaux soient si discrets. Cependant, la forêt est toujours là, sa masse s'étale au milieu du royaume, menaçante et attirante à la fois" Lods, p.177. Other tropes of the natural sublime also occur frequently: tournaments end with a description of the night sky, knights wake in the crisp dawn after magical experiences etc. but these are largely stylistic.

Tantost que le chevalier fut a la rive de la mer, il vey saillir de l'eau a seche terre les poissons tresmerveilleux car entre les autres il y en sailly ung qui avoit la teste comme ung boef et grant corne, et estoit tout velu. Il avoit quatre piez et quatre gambes, mais elles n'avoient de haulteur que deux piez de homme. Toutesvoyes avoit il grant corps comme ung boeuf et la queue. Et y avoit plusieurs poissons samblables a moutons cornus et estoient tous velus, reservé la queue qu'ilz avoient comme ung poisson. Il y avoit plusieurs autres poissons qui estoient samblables a ung cerf et s'en y avoit plenté a maniere d'ours, mais ilz avoient courtes gambes. Et tous ces poissons icy yssirent de la mer et, en la presence du Blancq Chevalier, s'en allerent paistre l'erbe et mengier les rachines et les foilles des arbres, chascun selon sa nature. Et quant ilz se furent repeus, ilz se bouterent en la mer, dont le jenne chevalier eut grant merveilles. Et quant ilz se furent ainsi reboutez en la mer, il se print a querir au long de celle rive s'il trouveroit ame. Mais ce fut en vain, car il ne trouva homme ne femme ne beste sauvage ne privee. (3.1, pp.273-4)

This passage is like a surrealist painting. Everything is recognisable, yet different, supplanted from its proper context – following medieval notions that underwater civilisations would resemble terrestrial equivalents – and sets the tone for an encounter with the otherworldly. The island is also home to more intelligent life.<sup>179</sup>

[...] il vey venir sus lui quatre poissons de la grandeur d'un chien de chasse, qui n'avoient chascun que deux piez. Mais ilz estoient larges et membrus par les poitrines et avoient, au dessus, leurs testes en guise de heaumes. Et au dessus du comble de leurs teste, ilz avoient chascun une longue pointe, longue de une brasse et demie, en maniere d'espee. Et sus le dos, ilz avoient comme ung escu qui toute l'eschine leur couvroit depuis la teste jusques a la queue, et estoit ce a maniere de poisson. (3.1, p.274)

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<sup>179</sup> Ferlampin-Acher notes that from the initial fauna to the *chevaliers de mer*, the sense of otherness increases markedly: "Les premiers monstres pouvaient passer pour de simples fantaisies de la nature comme celles dont regorgent les encyclopédies: naturels, étranges, ils ne sont pas *inhumains* dans ce sens où ils n'entrent pas en conflit avec l'humanité. Au contraire les monstres du deuxième jour sont *inhumains* et scandaleux, marqués par une altérité qui ressort d'autant mieux que l'humain est transgressé." 'Aux frontières du merveilleux', p.96.

Having defended himself against these funny-yet-frightening fish, Betidès is gripped by hunger, and finds that beneath the hard shield-like carapace on their back is the finest white meat he has ever tasted, and he eats his fill.<sup>180</sup> Over a period of four days, he battles regiment upon regiment of *chevaliers de mer*, and also indulges their (surprisingly courteous) king with single combat. The latter sees to his victuals, providing his new sparring partner with water, and flesh harvested from his own soldiers, who are obediently beheaded for the purpose (though Betidès is reluctant to eat what is clearly a sentient being). The combat is exhausting, but the king provides a special red fish that will cure Betidès' wounds. Eventually a storm washes a passing ship towards the island, and he is able to escape as the *chevaliers de mer* hide from the tempest in their reefs. He exhaustedly tells his rescuers: "je ne desire tant chose au monde que moy trouver hors de ceste isle".

Several critics have noted the humour of this episode, and its bewildering effects.<sup>181</sup> For Huot, it completely inverses Betidès' role within chivalric civilisation:

In the case of Bethidés among the fish, who is monstrous? Bethidés, like some fairy-tale ogre who demands human sacrifice and against whom a people can test its would-be heroes, becomes that absolute limit that Gadifer's men also seemed to the Scots, and that the ghosts of Darnant and his cohorts are to Perceforest's knights. At the same time the fish – grotesque, relentlessly violent, static and inflexible in their unchanging ritualistic acts – remain alien in the extreme, providing only the outward semblance of chivalric life.<sup>182</sup>

Peggy McCracken wonderfully describes how 'at sea' Betidès finds himself:

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<sup>180</sup> In Huot's words: "The identity of the *chevaliers de mer* [...] is profoundly essentialist. Just as their armour is inseparable from their bodies, so their prowess is inseparable from their being. Their tournaments only seem to resemble those of the court, and are in fact a dark parody of human chivalry, both comical and horrific." *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.63.

<sup>181</sup> For Ferlampin-Acher, humour is inextricable from both the *fantastique* and *merveilleux*: "En fait, l'opposition merveilleux / fantastique est indissociable d'un élément tiers: le comique; elle est de plus instable. Sans cesse le fantastique s'apprivoise et se fait burlesque ou merveilleux, tandis que le merveilleux, trompeur, dérive vers le fantastique ou le comique." 'Aux frontières du merveilleux', p.92.

<sup>182</sup> *Postcolonial Fictions*, p.63.

During his reluctance to eat, Bethidès has been thrown, so to speak, into the ocean, and with him a host of certainties, now floating or drowning in a space of no solidity but of immense and always shifting weight.<sup>183</sup>

For both critics, this episode challenges the meaning of chivalric society and identity.

To my mind, the episode threatens to topple Betidès into an endless, repetitive cycle of tournaments not dissimilar, some may say, to the sprawling mass of just such tournaments we find clogging up the *Perceforest*. Anne Berthelot is astounded – not to say exhausted – by the technique of repetitions in the text. Commenting on the tournaments of Book Three, she remarks: “La mise en place de tout un jeu de répétitions autour des vœux des chevaliers est à la fois le signe du malaise d’un texte qui arrivait au bout de son rouleau et qui exploite jusqu’à la corde le moindre lambeau de matériau narratif sur lequel il peut mettre la main, et le moyen d’ancrer ces épisodes superflus, et dans quelques cas franchement saugrenus, dans l’épaisseur du roman.” Or, more charitably “[...] un an de fêtes, un an de cérémonies sans cesse recommencées, c’est en un sens l’idéal de l’espace enchanté présent dans tout roman arthurien qui se réalise dans le *Perceforest*. Les catégories spatio-temporelles sont miraculeusement modifiées pour permettre à chaque séquence de se rejouer indéfiniment, de manière chaque fois plus satisfaisante”.<sup>184</sup>

Significantly, the episode is bookended by the quest for one in a lengthy series of jousts that characterises Book Three. The comparison between the author’s technique of *entrelardement* and the relentless waves of *chevaliers de mer* is inescapable. This is the bottomless pit of artificial history, the dangerous possibility of imaginative narrative’s collapse into meaningless repetition and absurdity. This potential is ever-present, waiting in the wings, or lurking in subaquatic dwellings like the *chevaliers de mer* themselves.

And yet, this episode is not meaningless. Rather, it is one of the more memorable episodes of the text, and its enjoyment comes precisely in the joy of repetition. We may find a comparison here to modern science fiction writing: every episode of *Star Trek* operates along familiar lines, but they are enjoyable *because* of this familiarity, this repetition.<sup>185</sup> The

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<sup>183</sup> Peggy McCracken and Karl Steel, ‘The Animal Turn: Into the Sea with the Fish-Knights of *Perceforest*’, *Postmedieval*, 2.1 (2011) 88-100 (p.98).

<sup>184</sup> ‘Répétition et efficacité’, p.11, p.16.

<sup>185</sup> This thought is also reminiscent of the Lacanian *pulsion de mort*, the death drive which seeks to go beyond the pleasure principal and attain *jouissance* by means of the repetition inherent to language and the symbolic

author of *Perceforest* is aware that his structure is inherently repetitious, and in the *chevaliers de mer* episode, takes this notion to breaking point. When the boat comes to rescue Betidès, we certainly share in his relief,<sup>186</sup> as the reader may also experience on arrival at the end of this gargantuan text.

### ***On the Doorstep of Fiction:***

I returned recently to one of the episodes that first sparked my interest in the text. When Perceforest first arrives at the *Temple Inconnu* (1.1, pp.343-63) – hidden at the end of winding, brambled pathways – he stands at the threshold and gets quite a fright, as he sees a great pit of spikes mere inches away, and, on looking up at the ceiling, an array of lances waiting to fall on any unsuspecting visitor. Indeed, he is not the first to find the temple. Alexander was told that these lances defend against the unworthy (1.1, p.194).

Perceforest is understandably dismayed, and sits on the doorstep, as though waiting for inspiration. The reader may infer that this deadly trap is an optical illusion, the mirrored floor reflecting the lances that are suspended above. Unbeknownst to Perceforest, there is also a *second* mirrored surface, mounted on the wall, as yet hidden from sight. Ferlampin-Acher comments on these two sets of mirrors, which have different functions:

L'ambiguïté du miroir dans les imaginaires médiévaux apparaît donc clairement dans les scènes consacrées au Temple du Dieu Inconnu. D'une part le miroir, réfléchissant la lumière, est évoqué comme une source de clarté endogène et en quelque sorte dématérialisée dans la mesure où elle n'a pas la chaleur du soleil: le miroir participe alors à la mise en place d'une lumière qui symbolise Dieu et l'on atteint à cet idéal annoncé par saint Jean dans son Apocalypse au sujet de la Jérusalem céleste qui «resplendit telle une pierre très précieuse» et qui «peut se passer de l'éclat du soleil et de celui de la lune, car la gloire de Dieu l'a illuminée, et l'Agneau lui tient lieu de

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order. Lacan justifies his revision of Freud on this point: "Si tout ce qui est immanent ou implicite dans la chaîne des événements naturels peut être considéré comme soumis à une pulsion dite de mort, ce n'est que pour autant qu'il y a la chaîne signifiante. Il est en effet exigible en ce point de la pensée de Freud que ce dont il s'agit soit articulé comme pulsion de destruction, pour autant qu'elle met en cause tout ce qui existe. Mais elle est également volonté de création à partir de rien, volonté de recommencement." *Le séminaire, livre VII: l'éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil 1986), p.251.

<sup>186</sup> Ferlampin-Acher comments on Betidès' rescue: "De plus les merveilles dans *Perceforest* sont éphémères, ce sont le plus souvent des enchantements qui cessent d'eux mêmes." 'Aux frontières du merveilleux', p.98. In other words, the episode had become so excessive as to be unsustainable.

flamme» (21, 11-21, 23). D'autre part, on trouve à l'opposé le miroir qui entretient une illusion optique à laquelle succombent les hommes de peu de foi. En dépit de cette ambivalence, le miroir tend dans *Perceforest* à être associé le plus souvent à une *déception*, à une illusion, et au désir qui émeut l'imagination.<sup>187</sup>

A familiar dichotomy: the mirrored surface can deceive, and illuminate. *Perceforest* is still on the doorstep, unsure of how to proceed. Before long, Dardanon the hermit draws open the curtains to reveal the altar and tri-form lamp. Then, the second mirrored surface comes into play, casting a sober light through the temple. *Perceforest* proceeds, tentatively testing the floor with his foot, and thus seeing through the optical illusion. Dardanon reveals the mystery of the Sovereign God to him, and he is converted.

Here we find a figure for the reader on the doorstep of fiction. Faced with this dangerous illusion, he may yet enlightenment – through illusion, through glass – if he can understand its mechanisms, and bravely navigate its reflective surface. We might ask what drama there would have been to *Perceforest*'s conversion had it not been for this misleading reality, had he simply strolled up to the altar? Artificial History, imperfect, artificial, mirroring and misleading, is far from meaningless.<sup>188</sup> Fraught it may be, but for this impish author, the endeavour of writing contains, through veil upon veil, profound, even sublime significance, and evergreen enjoyment. In the words of wise old Dardanon to Alexander: "le lieu n'est pas fait pour gens decepvoir, ains est fait pour tous preudhommes recevoir, car c'est ung lieu saint". (1.1, p.194).

### ***The Verdict on Artificial History:***

Chronique, *Perceforest* se méfie donc des images; roman, il en avoue la nécessité; Evangile, il en expérimente la vertu. A lire *Perceforest*, on éprouve finalement les joies

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<sup>187</sup> '*Perceforest* et ses miroirs', p.329.

<sup>188</sup> Anne Berthelot, speaking of the various forms of Zephyr and of the *Beste Glatissante*, comments on the proliferation of significations that the text acquires as it runs its course: "des motifs brièvement évoqués dans la littérature antérieure sont repris, transformés, et élargis, toujours dans le sens d'une évolution vers le grotesque ou le caricatural: on a l'impression lorsque cela se produit que l'auteur du *Perceforest* joue délibérément sur un effet de pastiche, prenant un malin plaisir à pousser jusqu'à leurs conséquences absurdes les inventions de ses prédécesseurs." '*Zéphyr*, épigone 'rétroactif'', p.14.



et les vertiges de l'analogie, dans ce qu'elle a de risqué, de stimulant, de dépay sant et de fécond.<sup>189</sup>

I have argued that the *Perceforest* author is ultimately optimistic about artificial history. It is precisely in its exhibition of its own artifice, its own 'fictionality' that the text can comfortably maintain its 'hyperfactual' narrative. In Chatman's terminology, if it weren't for the text's 'revelation' narrative (effectively setting a theme of overt artifice), then the 'resolution' narrative would be prosaic to the modern reader, and, we imagine, immoral to the author himself. The ability of artificial history or, to use an anachronism, 'fiction', to communicate truth depends on its willingness to exhibit its untruth.

The resulting text may be gargantuan, uneven, and chaotic, but it is also marked by humour and humility. Humour, as the text is necessarily self-satirising, and humble, because it gestures always towards those monumental historical moments – of Arthur, and Christ – about which its narrative circulates. Within the medieval canon, *Perceforest* is not alone in these qualities, although it certainly stands out in the way it executes its project. I will offer some examples of medieval intertexts which may provide fruitful comparisons below.

First, though, I would like to suggest that *Perceforest* constitutes an important piece of literary 'DNA'. It helps us chart a defining characteristic of late medieval literature: an increasing concern with the status of fictionality as opposed to God's reality, and a tendency to gleefully push concepts into comic absurdity. Such chaos largely disappears from the French tradition after Rabelais, but continues in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. Swift and Sterne would have got on with the *Perceforest's* philosophy of writing, I think: a sustained Christian optimism coupled with a deep awareness of the tangling webs of absurdity that written documentation incorporates. Amidst the black comedy of the *chevaliers de mer* episode, Kafka's Josef K., or Joseph Heller's Yossarian would feel right at home. An extraordinarily compatible intertext – across the gulf of time – can be found in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*.<sup>190</sup> In this gargantuan, little read pseudo-history of the eponymous 18<sup>th</sup> century astronomers, filled nevertheless with impossible fantasies of golems, sentient mechanical ducks, and intradiegetic print serials about saucy Jesuits with futuristic technology, I see an

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<sup>189</sup> Ferlampin-Acher, 'Fleurs de rhétorique', p.231.

<sup>190</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).

uncanny (and surely unintentional) thumbprint of *Perceforest*. I wonder if Pynchon and the *Perceforest* author might entertain a similar philosophy of history: only God truly knows what happened, and the best we mortals can offer is imagination and fantasy, through which, at times, the reader may glimpse historical truth more potent than anything to be found in *bona fide* history books.

### **'Perceforest' and 'Ysaïe le Triste':**

*Ysaïe le Triste* is a fascinating intertext for *Perceforest*.<sup>191</sup> Where *Perceforest* functions as a 'prequel' to the Arthurian canon, *Ysaïe* is a sequel, presenting a sort of Arthurian 'post-apocalypse' wherein the titular Ysaïe, lovechild of Tristan and Yseut, must save the realm from the degeneracy and wickedness that has taken over since Arthur's death.

It isn't hard to see some immediate parallels: concerns with cyclicity, and an obvious status as 'meta-Arthuriana'. *Ysaïe* is also a famously hybrid, even 'monstrous' text, suggestive of an author eager to experiment with literary form.<sup>192</sup> But there are differences too: *Ysaïe*'s portrayal of magic, for instance, is not as idiosyncratic as that of *Perceforest*, instead favouring a more traditional approach. Tronc is a hideous dwarf, so hideous in fact, that people often flee at the mere sight of him. But he is also resourceful, cunning, and loyal. Much like Zephyr, this unlikely character is a strange boon to the knightly characters, and serves as companion, guide and mentor to Ysaïe, and later his son Marc. In fact, he is bound to this task by the four *fées* of the *Verte Forêt*, who have protected Ysaïe and his lineage since his tumultuous birth (§5). These *fées* are magical, of course, but there is little focus on this element of their nature; instead, *Ysaïe*, like other romances before it, uses the supernatural as a way of exploring aspects of character and plot.

Famously, when Ysaïe falls in love with Marthe, and sleeps with her out of wedlock, the *fées* show their displeasure, especially with their servant, Tronc, who was bound to protect Ysaïe from just such situations. Ysaïe wakes up to find Tronc crying uncontrollably (§180). When questioned, he spills the beans:

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<sup>191</sup> *Ysaïe le Triste: Roman arthurien du Moyen Age tardif*, ed. by André Giachetti (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1989). All subsequent quotations are taken from Giachetti's edition.

<sup>192</sup> Patricia Victorin calls it "un roman omnivore"; see '*Ysaïe le Triste*', *Une Esthétique de la Confluence: Tours, Tombeaux, Vergers et Fontaines* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), especially pp.215-86. See also Damien de Carné, 'Le roman dévorateur de formes à la fin du moyen âge', in *Metamorphoses du roman français: Avatars du genre dévorateur*, ed. by José Manuel Losada Goya (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 2010), pp.13-24.

Il avint que dez le premiere journee que je vous euch en garde, .IIII. dames que a vous m'envoierent, les quellez jou avoye servi lonch tamps, me trairent d'une part, autressy que ores avés fait moy. Et me dirent que bien vous gardaïsse que n'abitissiés a femme par nulle voye, car se vous y faittez abittation carnelle, a mallaisse vous en terrés desoremais. Et avoec ce, sui et seray batus laidement, a cascune fois que le faittez ou ferés. (§183)

Having neglected his duties, he is roundly beaten at the hands of the *féés*. This is magic in a more traditional mode, serving to exposit the central premise of *Ysaïe's* plot, and embodying a morality which will inspire so many adventures, as Ysaïe and Marthe atone for their sins through adventure, poetry and virtuous deeds. There is nothing gratuitous about magic in *Ysaïe*. Indeed, Victorin notes that *Ysaïe* is more prosaic than its forebears, both in terms of magic and *merveilleux*, with most of the text's 'magic' being found in the *perceived* magical abilities of Tronc, who, in fact, uses his cunning and deception – we may say, his non-magical 'artifice' – to gain the upper hand.<sup>193</sup>

Much later in the text — as we follow the exploits of Ysaïe's son, Marc — nothing much has changed. An enchantress called Orphée falls in love with Marc after he slays her wicked captor (§586), and uses her magic to ensnare him: "Et elle [Orphée] aparilla de sez herbes et en donna a Marcq; et tantost que gousté en eut, ama tant Orphee que toudis avoec lui volloit estre." (§586). Fortunately Tronc is wise to this scheme:

Et Tronc peu parloit a Marcq, et sceut bien Tronc de certain qu'il estoit enchantés [...] et disoit a par lui: «Femmes, pour avoir leur entente sevent trop de maliche et de tours trouver [...] sy en saray le verité.» (§586)

This is Arthurian magic at its most iconic: fairy seductresses, love potions, and knights who ought to know better!

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<sup>193</sup> Patricia Victorin, 'La fin des illusions dans *Ysaïe le Triste* ou quand la magie n'est plus qu'illusion' in *Magie et Illusion au Moyen Age* (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, 1999), pp.569-78.

*Ysaÿe* doesn't use magic to explore ideas of fictionality as *Perceforest* does, but it explores artifice through other avenues. Where *Perceforest* is, at times, anxious about its fictionality, *Ysaÿe* has no such concerns, wholly embracing its status as 'meta-Arthuriana'. We see this in its frequent use of pastiche: Marthe's love-letter to Ysaÿe (whom, at this point, she has never met) is a wicked piece of satire:

A vous, chevaliers parfaits, parfaitement amés d'amie, savoir vous fay que le grant grasse grasscieuse dont vous est raemplis m'a dechut et me decheut, car vostre amour est pis asseuree que le moie ne soit a la vostre, ne je ne sçay par quel vertu vostre amour m'est sy asprement et en soursaut entree en mon ceur, car qui vous estes ne sai ge mie fors par oïr dire. [...] Sy vous prie, veulliés y mettre remede ainsy que pittés vous aidera a ordonner, car il en est grigneur mestier que ne pensés, que quant je sui rappressee de le grosse malladie non malladieue, / moy samble que l'un de mes costés soit tout plons et l'autre s'envoleche. [...] Sy me rendés response de me mort ou de me vye par le porteur de ces lettres. (§96)

In the jackhammer repetitions of this passage, the author sets out his credentials in bold print: "I too am an author of repetition, and you have heard this story a thousand times before!"

But it isn't all bluster; *Ysaÿe* is thoughtful and innovative in its consideration of the 'meta-Arthurian' text. In its reference to source material, it creates a sense of distance from the Arthurian past – not dissimilar to *Perceforest's* distance from the Arthurian 'future' – that is variously humorous and moving. For example, during Ysaÿe's childhood, he visits Merlin's tomb, where the sage can be heard weeping, lamenting the loss of Arthur (§39-40). It is Merlin who encourages Ysaÿe to be knighted by Lancelot, but in the *Gaste Forêt*, all that remains is Lancelot's grave:

S'avint qu'il trouverent une maison petite et dedens avoit ung petit autel ; devant ot une lame ou lettres ot entour, lesquelles disoient : « Cy gist li fieux le Roy Baan de Benouic, qui ot non Lanselot, ly quelz fu boins chevaliers. Priés pour lui ! » (§23)

In a darkly comic turn, the best they can do is to dub the young Ysaÿe with Lancelot's skeleton.<sup>194</sup> Are we to understand from this rather shocking incorporation of the withered myths of the Arthurian canon, that they are, perhaps, no longer relevant to a much-changed world? A familiar question arises: what is the point of writing more Arthuriana? Can it be anything but gratuitous?

The author returns to this theme much later in the text: after arriving back in Brittany, Marc and Tronc find the *Chastel as Luittons*. It was once Merlin's home, but now houses the few remaining degenerate knights not slain by Ysaÿe, Marc's father. These knights are promptly exterminated, with no mercy! (§544-6). Tronc now takes Marc to Merlin's tomb (§547), and we feel yet further away from the Arthurian past: the four *fées* who allowed Ysaÿe to speak with Merlin during his youth now terrify the new interlopers with a fierce magical storm; even Marc, who was prophesied never to be afraid, succumbs to these effects. Moreover, Merlin is now silent.<sup>195</sup> We see another example of the changing times as the pair rediscover Lancelot's tomb. Driant, Ysaÿe's half-brother, is living there as a hermit, but doesn't recognise Marc as Ysaÿe's son. Tronc re-tells the story of Ysaÿe being knighted by Lancelot's skeletal hand. As in *Perceforest*, we observe a cyclical decay, which also demonstrates the text's artifice, as the Arthurian source material is presented as a distant, fading memory. And we cannot help but wonder, towards the end of *Ysaÿe*, how far from this material it is prudent to go – in short, what the limits of meta-Arthuriana might be.

But there can also be dignity, reverence, and beauty in the meta-Arthurian project. In the *Verte Forêt*, Tronc and Marc descend into a beautiful valley, and experience classic *féerique* tropes in the form of a magnificent banquet and *locus amoenus* (§548). In an ekphrastic passage, the text again exhibits the distant Arthurian past:

Et a l'autre les du vergier avoit ung lit, et estoit ly calix d'ivoire entaillés a grans ymaiges eslevees moult soutieument, et la estoit contenue l'istoire Lanscelot et le dame du Lac, et estoit couvers d'un grant drap de diverses couleurs moult

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<sup>194</sup> "[...] l'os, devenu relique, tendrait à montrer que le futur chevalier est un tard venu dans l'horizon littéraire." Victorin, *'Ysaÿe le Triste'*, p.440.

<sup>195</sup> "En ce sens, le silence décisif de Merlin marquerait la fin d'un cycle et d'une histoire déjà écrite et réalisée." Victorin, *'Ysaÿe le Triste'*, p.440.

soutieument entrelachies, et a tant de nobles istoires que ly oel en estoient tout estelly. (§548)

There are stories of Alexander, Arthur, Tristan, and Ysaÿe. No *Perceforest*, sadly! We note here that whilst the sense of the fading Arthurian past is moving, the stories Marc sees are nevertheless wondrous, and dazzling (*ly oel en estoient tout estelly*).

Whilst the author asks familiar questions on the nature of writing the meta-Arthurian text (questions of irony, distance, and the limits of the medium), the character of Marthe (Ysaÿe's lover, Marc's mother) presents a rather encouraging case for the creative arts. In her despair at Ysaÿe's absence, she turns to poetry for solace:

[...] les dames yssent de leurs cambres et viennent a leur maitresse et l'appaisent au mieux qu'elle pevent. «Or tost, fait Marte, bailliés moy l'escriptoire: je veul escrire un lay nouvel.» Lors ly apportent, et elle commenche a escrire longement et par loisir jusques bien pres du vespre. (§251)

This naturalistic portrayal of the 'writer's workshop' signals the text's appraisal of its own fictionality through the figure of Marthe, poetess.<sup>196</sup> Initially, poetry provides the solace she was hoping for: "Quant Marte ot lu tout son lay, si lui sambla moult bien fais." (§260). Subsequently, her disguise as a (variously male and female) minstrel will take her through different households, towns, orbiting around her forbidden beloved, Ysaÿe. During these adventures, her poetry is admired by all and sundry:

Quant les dames que la estoient orent oÿ Marte, sy dirent toutes qu'oncques mes n'avoient oÿ aussy avant parler d'amours ne aussy au vray, ne aussy soutievement. Que vous feray long conte? Par les beaux mos que Marte savoit dire fu tant amee de toutes qu'a mervelles. (§291)

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<sup>196</sup> Brooke Heidenreich Findley notes the range of Marthe's output: "The beloved of Ysaÿe and mother of his son Marc masters an impressive range of literary forms: the text quotes thirteen poems by her, ranging from *balades* to *rondeaux* to allegorical narrative, and she also writes prose letters and practices the art of didactic, expository speech [...]". *Poet Heroines in Medieval French Narrative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p173. See also Victorin, 'Ysaÿe le Triste', pp.385-411.

Indeed, for the dwarf Tronc – who functions very much as the ‘rival’ to Marthe as a figure for literary creativity – his lengthy *aventures* culminate in an astounding transformation, into the *petit roi de faerie* no less! Oriande explains:

«Ysaÿe, je sui Oriande le fee, qui vous nouris; sy est ainsy que Tronc a nostre requeste vous a loncq tamps servi, et tant que chevalier a trouvé qui lez condicions et coustumes a parfaittes et sourmontees, car Tronc debvoit estre le plus laide creature qui fust ou monde tant que ung chevalier seroit trouvés que le Chastel Envieux et ly Pont de Dolleur conquerroit, et espouseroit femme le journee que sez peres espouseroit se mere; et quant che serroit fait, Tronc serroit le plus belle creature que on peust trouver, mes ja plus grans ne serroit. Sy a Marc toutes ces choses faittes.»  
(§623)

It is hard not to see an allegory, even a justification for imaginative literature here: whilst these meta-Arthurian adventures may seem gratuitous, or at the very least, explicitly distinct from the Arthurian canon, they can effect miraculous change.

Anne Martineau sees Tronc as an emblem of the text itself: “l’auteur d’*Ysaÿe le Triste* n’aurait-il point fait du nain monstrueux la métaphore de tout son roman, qui est lui-même un assez étrange monstre hybride?”<sup>197</sup> She suggests that such hybridity may even be worthy of salvation:

Mais peut-être même est-il possible d’aller plus loin et, reprenant toutes les données du roman, d’y lire un sens anagogique d’une bien plus vaste portée encore: les tribulations de Tronc, nain hideux né avant le Christ et espérant depuis neuf cent ans un sauveur qui lui donnât sa beauté, ne seraient-elles point celles de l’âme humaine elle-même? Son histoire, n’est-ce point celle de l’humanité? Humanité précipitée par la faute des premiers parents dans le péché, qui est décheance (Laideur), et depuis lors péniblement en marche vers le salut (la Beauté), annoncé et préparé par les anciens prophètes (Ysaÿe), confirmé par les apôtres (Marc), et scellé par le baptême?<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Anne Martineau, ‘De la laideur à la beauté: la métamorphose de Tronc en Aubéron dans le roman d’*Ysaÿe le Triste*’, in *Le Beau et le Laid au Moyen Age* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER MA, 2000), pp.371-81 (p.377).

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p.379.

It is a similar sentiment, I feel, to that of *Perceforest*. I have argued that *Perceforest*'s willingness to exhibit its problematic – or even 'ugly' – fictionality is, in large part, a theological statement: not an apology for fiction, but rather showing fiction – in its humility – to be a virtuous and worthy enterprise in its own right. Both texts flaunt their fictionality, and are aware of the inherent potential for meta-Arthuriana to become immoral. And yet both texts, to my mind, alight on the same redeeming feature of imaginative writing: its capacity to transform.

There was clearly something in the water in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a zeitgeist of inquiry into the processes and value of artificial history, and meta-Arthuriana. Of course, I have only scratched the surface of a comparison between *Perceforest* and *Ysaÿe* on the question of fiction (and there are surely other worthy intertexts too) which could bear very interesting fruit. These texts, in their different ways, mark a fascinating time for literature in the middle ages, and a turning point in the way that writers of Arthuriana thought about their craft.



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