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MEDITERRANEAN MEDIATIONS: LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL (EX)CHANGE IN BNF, MS FR. 19152

The version of *Floire et Blancheflor* attested only in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fr. 19152, fols 193^r–205^v, has enjoyed little of the critical attention lavished on its more popular relation, the 'aristocratic' strain contained in three codices, also held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[1] Critics differentiate the two forms by audience: the aristocratic strain on the one hand, and the 'popular' version on the other.[2] Alternatively, they are sorted by genre, with the aristocratic strain called a *conte oriental* or *roman idyllique*, and the popular a *roman d'aventures*.[3] Jean-Luc Leclanche considers the *roman* to be an early offshoot of the French variant of the *conte*.[4] Regardless of its exact temporal provenance, the *roman* is distinct from the *conte* in language, plot, and style. While the *conte* has been linked repeatedly to Mediterranean, specifically Arabic, literature,[5] the *roman* has evaded such celebrity, going largely unremarked upon. Yet the strain of *Floire et Blancheflor* found in BnF, MS fr. 19152 displays a deep anxiety about its own Mediterranean themes and tropes, attempting to disavow or displace them into a new framework. The scope and source of this tension come into focus, however, only when the *roman* is read in concert with the entire codex.

Viewed as a sustained literary project rather than an atomistic collection of texts, the codex emerges as a document fundamentally underwritten by the

[1] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 375, fr. 1447, and fr. 12562. For works considering the aristocratic strain see e.g. Patricia E. Grieve, *'Floire and Blancheflor' and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Norris J. Lacy, 'The Flowering (and Misreading) of Romance: *Floire et Blancheflor*', *South Central Review*, 9 (1992), 19–26; Huguette Legros, *La Rose et le Lys: étude littéraire du 'Conte de Floire et Blancheflor'*, Senefiance, 31 (Aix-en Provence: CUERMA, 1992); Megan Moore. 'Boundaries and Byzantines in the Old French *Floire et Blancheflor*', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 79 (2007), 3–20.

[2] The aristocratic vs. popular distinction is widely used. One of the earliest sources is Édélestand Du Méril, *Floire et Blancheflor: poèmes du XIIIe siècle, publiés d'après les manuscrits avec une introduction, des notes et un glossaire* (Paris: Jannet, 1856). Modern usage was established in Jean-Luc Leclanche, *Contribution à l'étude de la transmission des plus anciennes œuvres françaises: un cas privilégié. 'Floire et Blancheflor'*, 2 vols (Lille: Service de reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III, 1980).

[3] For a discussion of the *roman* vs. *conte* distinction see *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*, ed. and trans. by Jean-Luc Leclanche (Paris: Champion, 2003); Marla Segol, *Religious Conversion, History and Genre in 'Floire et Blancheflor', 'Aucassin et Nicolette', and 'Flamenca'* (Saarbrücken: Lambert, 2011); Marion Vuagnoux-Uhlig, *Le Couple en herbe: 'Galeran de Bretagne' et 'L'Escoufle' à la lumière du roman idyllique médiéval*, Publications romanes et françaises, 245 (Geneva: Droz, 2009).

[4] Leclanche, *Contribution à l'étude de la transmission des plus anciennes œuvres françaises*, pp. 80–82.

[5] Virtually every source since the late 1800s references *Floire et Blancheflor*'s 'Eastern' origins in one way or another. For a summary of the existing work see Grieve, *'Floire et Blancheflor' and the European Romance*, pp. 15–20, and Cynthia Robinson, *Medieval Andalusian Courtly Culture in the Mediterranean: 'Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ'* (London: Routledge, 2007), Chapter 4, 'Wandering in Babylon: The *Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* and the *roman idyllique*', pp. 171–212.

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relationship between an increasingly vernacularized French literary culture and its Mediterranean others at the end of the thirteenth century. Through the arrangement of its contents, BnF, MS fr. 19152 participates in what Sharon Kinoshita calls the 'active, even aggressive reformulations of both literary form and political vision' which take place during a 'period of rapid transformation in Latin Europe's relations to its external others'.[6] Faced with such 'rapid transformation', BnF, MS fr. 19152 struggles to create an illusion of 'French' linguistic and literary wholeness. To do so, the codex imagines and positions itself against a monolithic Mediterranean other, that is at turns Latin or Arabic, Saracen or Jewish. This double textual illusion defies the historical reality, where a rich dialectal and cultural variance between regions was the norm, and where no governing concept of 'French' culture was yet available.

To present the mirage of a unified 'French' literary culture, BnF, MS fr. 19152 uses its lengthy initial and final texts as a frame narrative, enclosing a selection of shorter *fabliaux* and religious texts between them. This frame narrative opposes two didactic texts (Marie de France's *Fables* (fols 15^{r}–24^{v}) and the *Châtoiement d'un père à son fils* (fols 1^{r}–15^{r})) with three romances: *Partonopeus de Blois* (fols 124^{r}–174^{v}), *Blancandin* (fols 174^{v}–193^{r}), and *Floire et Blancheflor*.

While previous critics have largely focused on the *fabliaux*,[7] the present essay centres on the role of the frame narrative, particularly *Floire et Blancheflor*, in the codex. I first consider the frame as an overarching structure which defines the codex's relationship to 'Frenchness' and textual authority, and then move to an extended close reading of key passages in *Floire et Blancheflor* which add further nuance to the manuscript's complicated relationship to vernacular literariness and authority.

By the end of the thirteenth century manuscript production in northern France was not only surviving but thriving.[8] As such, those responsible for compiling BnF, MS fr. 19152 were probably not severely constrained in their choice of exempla, particularly as the codex was most likely produced for a wealthy aristocratic or bourgeois patron. This textual availability, combined with the single hand of the manuscript, provides a firm basis for reading the codex as a sustained literary project.[9]

[6] Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 236.

[7] Tracy Adams, 'The Cunningly Intelligent Characters of BN f fr 19152', *MLN*, 120 (2005), 896–924; Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Narrative Verse in Manuscript*, 2 vols (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), I, 450–51.

[8] Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, 2 vols (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2000), pp. 10–24.

[9] Despite the manuscript's legibility, the scribe makes frequent transcription errors. As Margaret Pelan notes, 'le copiste, s'il a une belle écriture, est souvent négligent', in *Floire et Blancheflor: seconde version*, ed. and trans. by Margaret Pelan (Paris: Éditions Ophrys, 1975), p. 11.

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Moreover, the scribe's dialect suggests an engagement with the broader textual culture of central and north-eastern France, rather than a deep involvement with one centre of literary production in particular. Scholars cannot agree on the scribal dialect. E. Faral first commented on the scribe's tendency to insert elements from different dialectal regions in 1934.[10] Keith Busby localizes his dialect to the Aube or Haute-Marne, T. B. W. Reid to south-west Champagne, and Margaret Pelan to Picardy. Franklin Sweetser, in turn, labels the language *francien*.[11] Certainly, the codex was produced in what is now northern France, towards the end of the thirteenth century, or perhaps in the very early fourteenth. The copyist, for his part, hailed from north central or north-east France. This lack of dialectal specificity only strengthens the impression of a generalized 'vernacular' which the manuscript's contents in turn convey.

Tracy Adams and Keith Busby have dealt with the manuscript holistically,[12] but neither addresses the version of *Floire et Blancheflor* found in BnF, MS fr. 19152, nor do they pay much attention to the frame. Both, however, argue forcefully for reading the codex as a coherent whole.

Working from the recent critical literature on miscellany in French vernacular codices,[13] Adams suggests that we should read BnF, MS fr. 19152 as a book 'controlled by an ideology initiated in the set of framed tales with which the manuscript begins' (p. 898). Her analysis argues that the didactic texts which open the anthology—the *Châtoiement* and the *Fables*—set the tone for a particular species of moral instruction, one of 'cunning intelligence' or *mētis*, which is then exemplified by the *fabliaux* (p. 896). Despite her detailed analysis of the first half of the frame, Adams is less intrigued by the final romances: *Partonopeus*, *Floire et Blancheflor*, and *Blancandin*. She first notes, 'the manuscript ends with three long romances' (p. 902), and later comments, 'It would belabor the point to consider how the heroes and heroines of the other courtly *lais* and of the romances with which the manuscript closes exemplify shows of cunning intelligence' (p. 920). On the contrary, I argue

[10] E. Faral, *Le Manuscrit 19152 du Fonds français de la Bibliothèque nationale: reproduction phototypique publiée avec une introduction* (Paris: Droz, 1934), pp. 11–12.

[11] Busby, *Codex and Context*, pp. 528–29; Pelan, *Floire et Blancheflor*, p. 11; T. B. W. Reid, *Twelve Fabliaux* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), p. xv; *Blancardin et l'Orgeuilleuse d'amour: roman d'aventure du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Franklin P. Sweetser (Geneva: Droz, 1964), cited in 'Manuscript G', *Partonopeus de Blois: An Electronic Edition*, ed. by Penny Eley and others (Sheffield: HriOnline, 2005) <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/partonopeus/Gmanuscriptnotes.htm>.

[12] Adams, 'The Cunningly Intelligent Characters of BN f fr 19152'; Busby, *Codex and Context*, I, 450–51.

[13] Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Steven Nichols, '"Art" and "Nature": Looking for (Medieval) Principles of Order in Occitan Chansonnier N (Morgan 819)', in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 83–123.

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that only through careful consideration of both the initial and the final halves of the frame does the larger structuring of the codex become clear.

Busby attempts to do just that, beginning, like Adams, with the reasonable assumption that the didactic opening texts provide a controlling ideology for the entire work:

> This [opening] sets a serious tone for the whole manuscript and suggests that the group of two dozen *fabliaux* which follows, as well as providing a stark contrast with the opening sequence, could indeed be read with a view to the morals with which they usually conclude [. . .]. The theme of education qualifies these [final three romances] as *Bildungsromane*, and links them to each other and to the didactic pieces and the fabliaux. (pp. 450–51)

Busby takes the *fabliaux* seriously, as didactic texts rather than (or perhaps in addition to) mere farce. This aligns the *fabliaux* with the shorter religious texts interspersed between them, such as the *XV Signes*, as well as the opening, didactic texts.

While Busby makes a strong case for reading BnF, MS fr. 19152 as structured by 'the theme of education', one might continue by asking what, in fact, this education is geared towards. Adams's analysis offers a partial answer: the manuscript 'offers instruction in a particular kind of intelligence' which eschews black and white morality in favour of a practical cunning (p. 904). Building on Adams's and Busby's work, I broaden Adams's reading of *mētis* to suggest that BnF, MS fr. 19152 educates the reader in a specific vision of 'Frenchness', and that the practical cunning which Adams traces across 'high' and 'low' literary genres represents one aspect of that literary and cultural acculturation, under the aegis of the manuscript's relationship to literary authority.

The frame sets up that relationship with its opposition of didactic and romance texts, troubling the easy distinction between genres at the same time as it blurs the distinction between 'legitimate' literary authorities and the broader category of the foreign. The terms 'frame' and 'frame narrative' generally apply to a narrative structure within an individual text. In this article I use these terms to indicate the overarching structure within the codex formed by its initial and final texts, and view it as providing a powerful way to read the manuscript as an anthology loosely structured around the narrative set up within its frame. That narrative takes us from texts with an explicit moral *telos* to the decidedly murkier literary universe of romance. While the didactic texts are forced to confront the spectre of a specific author or set of authorities, the romances struggle to negotiate their place in the literary reclamation of *translatio studii*.

The *Châtoiement d'un père à son fils* is the first of these didactic texts. The *Châtoiement* is one of two French verse translations of the *Disciplina clericalis*,

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a Latin text written by Petrus Alfonsi, a *converso* of al-Andalus, and later of Aragon, England, and France.[14] The *Disciplina* draws its inspiration from a plethora of Arabic and Hebrew sources, rewoven into thirty-four short, didactic stories presented as a framed dialogue between teacher and student. There is no one, easily identifiable source for this text composed, to quote its author,

partim ex prouerbiis philosophorum et suis castigacionibus, partim ex prouerbiis et castigacionibus arabicis et fabulis et uersibus, partim ex animalium et uolucrum similitudinibus.[15]

in part of the proverbs and admonitions of the philosophers, in part of the proverbs, admonitions, fables, and verses of the Arabs, and in part of likenesses drawn from the world of animals and birds.

Folklorists have identified pieces of these 'proverbs and admonitions' as having been drawn from the Talmud, al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dahab*, the *Kalīla wa-Dimnah* cycle, the *Kitāb al-Sindibād*, and the *Alf Layla wa-Layla*.[16] Still, as Lourdes María Álvarez notes, any attempt to outline Alfonsi's sources definitively is 'a fruitless task: the "chain" of transmission is more like a web or tapestry of versions'.[17] Even before the Old French translation, the *Disciplina* is overdetermined, weaving together multiple textual traditions under a single rubric. As the first text of BnF, MS fr. 19152, the *Châtoiement* offers a *mise en scène* for the structure of the codex as a whole: first, in that like BnF, MS fr. 19152, it is a series of short texts held together by a frame narrative. Second, the *Châtoiement* pulls together multiple sources, in multiple languages, to create a coherent whole, while at the same time effacing the narrative specificity and linguistic origin of those sources.

The translation of the *Disciplina* attested in BnF, MS fr. 19152 retains the patchwork source material while disavowing its origin. There are two French verse strains of the *Châtoiement*, A and B, dating from the thirteenth century, and two later prose versions. In total, seventeen manuscripts are extant, of which three are prose and fourteen verse. BnF, MS fr. 19152 contains the second verse strain, B. It is slightly more complete than A, with thirty-two of thirty-four tales present. Both A and B elide the Arabic influences on the *Châtoiement*; B, however, does not even mention Alfonsi as the original author, cutting the translator's prologue entirely in order to begin with the following lines:

[14] For an overview of Alfonsi's life and work see John Victor Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

[15] *La Discipline de clergie: introduction, texte latin et traduction nouvelle*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Genot-Bismuth (Paris: Éditions de Paris, 2001), p. 200. English translations from Latin and Old French are my own. Free translations are sometimes preferred over literal ones to capture better the spirit of the texts.

[16] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, p. 80.

[17] Lourdes María Álvarez, 'Petrus Alfonsi', in *Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. by María Rosa Menocal and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 288–91 (p. 288).

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Li perres son fill chastioit,
Sen et savoir li aprenoit:
Beaux filz, dit il, a moi t'entent:
Ne laisse pas coler au vent
Ce que ton perre te dira!
(ll. 1–5, fol. 1^{r})[18]

The father counselled his son; knowledge and wisdom he taught him. 'Good son', he said, 'Listen to me: do not fritter away what your father will tell you!'

The father's desire to teach 'sen et savoir' is foregrounded here, emphasizing the primary function of the *Châtoiement* as wisdom literature, but losing the authority, preserved in A, of a well-known author and scholar. Yet, unlike A, B does not change place names or the identity of characters to make them appear more familiar to the reader. For example, A's translator changes the names of nearly all the text's many foxes to Renart, and in doing so instantly regrounds the tale in the network of European Renart stories. In refraining from this kind of adaptive move, B preserves a thematized exoticism which is also highlighted in the romances, allowing the reader to take pleasure in the textualized 'Orient' while effacing the identity of its Andalusian Jewish author.

In addition, the first tale preserves the origin of the narrator in B and loses it in A, so that B reads as follows:

Un preudons estoit en Arabie,
Si avoit a non Lucanable.
Il estoit du siecle molt saige
Et si estoit de grant aaige.
(ll. 106–09, fol. 1^{v})

There was a worthy man in Arabia; his name was Lucan. He was very worldly wise, and was also very wizened.

In A, the 'preudons' is introduced in the following way: 'Uns sages hons jadis estoit | Qui a fil sovant disoit [. . .]' ('Once, in ancient times, there was a wise man who often said to his son [. . .]').[19] The A strain removes 'Arabie' entirely, but keeps the lengthy translator's prologue and clearly attributes the text to Alfonsi at its very beginning. In BnF, MS fr. 19152, then, we find a versified strain of the *Châtoiement*, one which stresses the text's foreign setting while simultaneously erasing the reality of its Jewish-Andalusian author, Arabic authorities, and Latin language, replacing it with a vernacular polyglot that implicitly performs and works out the mediation between Self and Other, Frank and Saracen, which the final three romances explicitly thematize.

[18] *Étude et édition des traductions françaises médiévales de la 'Disciplina clericalis' de Pierre Alphonse*, ed. by Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and others (Geneva: Université de Genève, 2006) <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/mela/recherche/disciplina.html> [accessed 4 March 2012]. All subsequent quotations from the French manuscripts of the *Disciplina* come from this edition.

[19] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 12581, ll. 115–16.

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Moving from the *Châtoiement* to the *Fables*, Adams discusses the possible Arabic origins of Marie's text at length, drawing on Saher Amer's monograph *Ésope au féminin*,[20] to argue that the collection 'derives from Arabic tradition as opposed to the Latin tradition of Aesop's fables'.[21] Amer suggests *Kalīla wa-Dimnah*'s extensive manuscript tradition as a potential source for the *Fables*.[22] While I agree with Amer that *Kalīla wa-Dimnah* probably had some effect on the *Fables*, a complete consideration of Marie's sources is beyond the scope of the present article. For BnF, MS fr. 19152 the salient issue is that, like the *Châtoiement*, the *Fables* draw on multiple forms of authority, blurring the lines between what is Latin and what is Arabic, and then re-create and transmit that knowledge in the vernacular.

Further, the strain of the *Fables* found in BnF, MS fr. 19152 has never been edited, due to its relatively short length (sixty-six tales) and textual errata. However, as Bernadette Masters points out, these 'errors' assume that the scribal goal was always to produce as faithful a copy as possible. In her careful linguistic analysis of the fables preserved in BnF, MS fr. 19152 Masters shows that the scribe introduces creative changes which highlight his role as 'story-teller [. . .] achieving his end by using his writing implements, written language, and his power to distort the traditional tale'.[23] This active scribal intervention foreshadows the claims of *Partonopeus*'s narrator later in the codex. Where the *Fables* shrug off not only their potential Arabic and Latin heritage, but also that of their immediate exemplar, *Partonopeus* continues this working-out of difference at the level of language in its introduction.

Here, the narrator justifies his use of vernacular at length (ll. 63–133). In the middle of his introduction he claims:

Cil clerc dient ce nest pas sens
Descrire estoire dencians
Quant ge nes escrif en latin
Et que gi pert mon tens enfin
Cil le perdent qui ne font rien.
(ll. 77–81)[24]

These clerks say that it makes no sense to write the history of the ancients when I am not writing them in Latin, and that I am ultimately wasting my time. Those who waste their time [however] are those who do nothing.

[20] Sahar Amer, *Ésope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 243.

[21] Adams, 'The Cunningly Intelligent Characters of BN f fr 19152', pp. 909–10.

[22] Amer, *Ésope au féminin*, p. 243.

[23] Bernadette Masters, 'Li lox, lililions, and their compaig: Exemplary Error in the Fables of BN MS, f. fr 19152', *Parergon*, 13.2 (1996), 203–22 (p. 209).

[24] All quotations are from the edited transcription of BnF, MS fr. 19152 found in '*Partonopeus de Blois*': *An Electronic Edition*, ed. by Penny Eley and others (Sheffield: HriOnline, 2005) <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/partonopeus> [accessed 1 March 2012].

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'Sens' and 'dencians' are paired here, with the imagined clerks declaring that history contains meaning, 'sense', only when written in Latin. Our narrator retorts that, on the contrary, doing 'nothing' is the true waste of time. *Perdre* retained the sense of 'to lose one's way' in Old French, giving the couplet the sense of not only wasting or losing time, but of being lost outside or within one's own time, '*mon* tens'. In this way, those who insist upon Latin are figured as permanently behind the times, excluded from the avant-garde represented in '*mon* tens'.

Further, the narrator does not specify *which* language clerks believe is such a waste of time. Instead, it is the undifferentiated mass of not-Latin which threatens to unmoor the 'history of the ancients' from the historical and temporal anchor of the Latinate tradition. Like the translator of the *Châtoiement*, *Partonopeus*'s narrator scrubs the proper name of any specific authority from his text, claiming only that he found his material in 'li livre grieu et li latin' (l. 133: 'Greek and Latin books'). As the narrator stakes a claim to the authority of these texts, while simultaneously 'losing' or forgetting them, he reinscribes the nascent Anglo-Norman literature of the 1150s[25] in a lineage which lays claim to Latin material while disavowing its language.

When this twelfth-century passage is read in the early fourteenth-century context of BnF, MS fr. 19152, the narrator brings the reader or listener back to the *Châtoiement* and its expurgation of Alfonsi's name. Further, the pairing of 'sens' with 'dencians' recalls the opening of the *Châtoiement*, where the father claims to teach his son 'sen et savoir' (ll. 1–2). By placing these two texts at either end of the frame narrative, enclosing no fewer than twenty-three *fabliaux*, BnF, MS fr. 19152 demands that its reader question the construction of meaningful knowledge, and the relationship of that knowledge to hierarchy and authority. In the *Châtoiement* this authority is represented by the father, and overlaid by the absent present of Alfonsi which haunts the text. In *Partonopeus* the weight of the clerkly tradition carries that same filial authority.

Hence both texts make way for a new kind of vernacular creativity which must forget or actively erase its parentage in order to proceed forward. This thematization of forgetting occurs at diverse levels in the tales. In *Partonopeus*, as in *Floire et Blancheflor*, scenes of education do this allegorical work. Partonopeus de Blois is thirteen years old when he becomes lost while boar-hunting in the Ardennes. Separated from the group, he boards a mysterious boat ('nef') which leads to an amazing castle. In this castle he meets Mélior, the conveniently Catholic Empress of Byzantium, who wishes

[25] The earliest extant example of *Partonopeus* is probably Vatican City, MS Vat. Pal. Lat. 1971: see Brian Woledge and Ian Short, 'Liste provisoire de manuscrits du xii siècle contenant des texts en langue française', *Romania*, 102 (1981), 1–17. Busby and Nixon agree that the text is Anglo-Norman in origin: Busby, *Codex and Context*, p. 496; Terry Nixon, '*Amadas et Idoine* and *Erec et Enide*: Reuniting Membra Disjecta from Early Old Manuscripts', *Viator*, 18 (1987), 227–51.

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to marry him. She insists that for them to be together, he must not look upon her for the two years until their marriage.[26] When he asks permission to return to France, Mélior tells him that his father has been killed and his country invaded by Saracens. She grants his request, but first insists on instructing him in the ways of effective and honourable knighthood.[27]

This 'lecon', as Mélior calls it, draws on none of Mélior's extensive education in what Bruckner calls 'the entire encyclopedia of twelfth-century learning'.[28] Mélior is not only educated, she is brilliant, surpassing her tutors by the time she turns fifteen, and using her knowledge to appear as an invisible fairy creature to Partonopeus:

Maistres oi de grant escienz
Par foiees plus de·ii·c·
Diex me dona grace daprandre
Et descriture bien entendre
Les ·vii· arzz toz premierement
Apris et soi parfitement
[. . .]
Ainz queusse ·xv· anz passez
Oi toz mes maistre sormontez.
(ll. 4562–4567, 4580–4581)

I had masters of great wisdom, over time more than two hundred. God gave me the grace to learn and to understand writing well. The seven arts first I learnt and knew [them] perfectly. [. . .] Before fifteen years had passed I had surpassed all of my masters [in knowledge].

Mélior excels at the twin pair of 'aprandre' and 'entendre', of learning and comprehension. Specifically, she understands writing 'escriture' and learns the seven liberal arts 'les ·vii· arzz', entering into a position of learned authority paralleling *Partonopeus*'s narrator, who, having read and understood his 'livre grieu et li latin', chooses to educate the reader in a different idiom altogether. For Mélior passes on none of her learning to her young lover. Instead, she emphasizes chivalric and religious norms[29] which enable him to succeed as a young lord of France who must retake his country from Saracen invaders and defeat a litany of 'Oriental' figures in a three-day tournament for Mélior's hand, represented by such diverse and interchangeable signifiers as Sultan, Saracen,

[26] The basic premiss draws on both the Cupid and Psyche narrative and the Matter of Britain. Further, one immediately hears clear echoes of Marie de France's *lai*, *Guigemar*, linking *Partonopeus* back to the *Fables* through the *lais*.

[27] For an excellent treatment of Mélior's pedagogical role in the Middle English *Partonopeus* see Amy N. Vines, 'A Woman's "Crafte": Melior as Lover, Teacher, and Patron in the Middle English *Partonope of Blois*', *Modern Philology*, 105 (2007), 245–70.

[28] Matilda Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 123.

[29] Namely, how to attract and keep good knights (give them gifts and clothing), and when to praise God (frequently), ll. 1919–47 (fol. 131^{r}).

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Pagan, Persian, Almerian, Byzantine, and Syrian (ll. 6990–7185). In this way, Mélior's deep textual engagement with the Latin tradition of liberal arts gives way to the 'lecon' the romance endeavours to teach: to be French is to engage in the French language, and to engage in that language is to vanquish all others.

Unlike the narrator of *Partonopeus*'s prologue, *Floire et Blancheflor*'s narrator never deals directly with the weight of the Latin 'estoire dencians'. Rather, the way in which the *roman d'aventures* displaces, alters, or deletes elements from its sister story, the *conte oriental*, underscores for a final time the codex's complex relationship to literariness and authority.

Leclanche, in his 2003 edition of *Floire et Blancheflor*, argues that the *roman* is a 'negative' of the *conte*, replacing the clerkly hero with a courtly one and enacting the iconic thirteenth-century debate between *clerc* and *chevalier*.[30] Yet, Leclanche himself has discussed the porosity of plot and detail between the narratives: the scene where Floire throws himself into the lion pit, for example, migrates wholesale from the *roman* to the version in BnF, MS fr. 375, itself compiled in late thirteenth-century Arras. Even as the text struggles, and largely succeeds, in becoming a *roman d'aventures*, it fails, falling back into the pattern of the *conte*: the description of the golden cup is cut short, but the cup remains. A battle scene on the road to Babylon is added, but the road, and the bourgeois families that Floire stays with on his journey, remain.

Moreover, Floire never takes up arms against the Emir of Babylon, failing to enact the 'conversion by the sword' which the chivalric topos demands. This violence is instead diverted into the battle with Jonas de Handres, in which Floire fights *for* the Saracen king. Thus, the *roman* stands between the clerical idea of 'conversion by ideas' and the chivalric 'conversion by the sword'. As such, it mirrors the frame of the larger codex, which, in its efforts to erase or efface its classical and Arabic heritage, can never fully expel their influence. Nowhere is this so clear as in the changes the *roman* makes to *Floire et Blancheflor*'s pedagogical scene.

In BnF, MSS fr. 1447 and fr. 375, the main representatives of the aristocratic strain, the children are educated together, leading to this passage:

> es les vos andeus a l'escole
> molt delivre orent la parole
> cascuns d'aus deus tant aprendoit
> pour l'autre que merveille estoit
> [. . .]
> Livres lisoient paienors
> u ooient parler d'amors
> en çou forment se delitoient
> es engiens d'amor qu'il trovoient

[30] *Le Conte de Floire et Blancheflor*, ed. and trans. by Leclanche, p. xxv. All quotations from the *conte* are from this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

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[. . .]
Ensamle lisent et aprendent
a la joie d'amor entendent.
(ll. 215–18, 227–30, 235–36)

There they were, both of them at school. They spoke to each other there with great ease, each one from the other learning so much that it seemed a marvel. [. . .] They read pagan books, wherein they heard talk of love, taking a great delight in the instruments of love that they found there. [. . .] Together they read and learnt, gaining great knowledge of the joys of love.

Floire and Blancheflor *heard* ('ooient') of love from their books, and *learnt each one from the other* ('cascuns d'aus deus'). 'Ooient' is not merely a rhetorical flourish on the part of the scribe, but a literal description of the scene: the children read aloud, teaching each other through that reading. This dialogic act of reading aloud to each other thus becomes a pedagogical performance, one shot through with the possibility of danger from both foreign books ('livres lisoient paienors') and forbidden carnal love: Blancheflor is both a slave and a Christian, and thus doubly unfit to marry Floire.

Reading this passage, Roberta Krueger observes that the *conte* is 'more than a love story', and 'inscribes the activities of reading, writing, storytelling and interpretation as critical'.[31] But Krueger dismisses the *roman* as lacking in 'literariness', and as failing to 'invite the audience to reflect on its own role as reader' (p. 66). On the contrary, the *roman* is hyperaware of the power of reading, and manipulates scenes from the version of *Floire et Blancheflor* predating both the *conte* and the *roman* in order to create a specific political and cultural effect when the *roman* is read as the final text in BnF, MS fr. 19152.

Foreign books become mixed up with foreign bodies in both the *roman* and the *conte*, and the status of 'pagan' texts vacillates uneasily between foreign invader and reclaimed cultural patrimony. For example, while the texts in BnF, MS fr. 375 are simply 'livres [. . .] paienors', in BnF, MS fr. 1447 the children specifically read Ovid. In Boccaccio's *Il filocolo* Ovid plays an even greater role, his writings serving as the children's 'holy book' and standing alongside Dante as one of the two writers admired by the narrator. Patricia Grieve argues that the tension between the Christian figure of Dante and the classical one of Ovid never approaches a 'graceful merging', but is rather a 'jarring shift in the text' and a kind of 'radical discontinuity' between Christianity and its pagan, literary others (pp. 176–77). For Grieve, *Il filocolo* grapples with 'the ongoing dilemma of how to deal with ancient literature in a requisite contemporary Christian framework' (p. 176). I argue that Grieve's observations extend to the narrative tradition of *Floire et Blancheflor* in French as well, rather than being particular to the *Filocolo.* Historically,

[31] '*Floire et Blancheflor*'s Literary Subtext', *Romance Notes*, 24 (1983–84), 65–70 (p. 66).

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critics of *Floire and Blancheflor* fall into one of three camps: those who think the romance is Byzantine in origin, those who think it is Arabic, and those who dismiss both of the first two camps, arguing for a purely French text. This critical confusion over influence and authority mirrors back the fraught status of language within the *conte*'s pedagogical scene.

In *Floire et Blancheflor* the textual instability over what the children read, and if they read it at all, reflects the 'ongoing dilemma' of integrating classical and Arabic texts into the European tradition, and the false binary separating 'good' pagan influences from 'bad' ones. Within BnF, MS fr. 19152, this binary overlays another: a mythic, unified 'French' language and literature in need of a monolithic, exoticized Other against which to define itself. In *Floire et Blancheflor* these two structuring principles drive the generic shift away from the *conte* towards the martial world of the *roman*.

The *roman* handles this collapse into binary oppositions through erasure: rather than name a particular text or author, the narrator never allows Floire and Blancheflor to read together at all. This deletion is unique in the French, Spanish, Italian,[32] and English manuscript traditions of the narrative. As soon as the possibility of this literary, pedagogical engagement with 'foreign' texts arises, the pagan king orders Floire to leave for sixty days for school, separating him from Blancheflor:

> A l'escole velt [l]'envoier
> Por dessevrer icel amor
> Qu'il avoit a Blanceflor.[33]

He wished to send him to school in order to sever this love which he had for Blancheflor.

Sending Floire away creates both a geographic and an educational gap between the children, working to 'dessevrer' their love. To 'dessevrer' something can simply mean to cut off or extinguish it; however, when said of the soul, it indicates the separation of body and soul, unified during life on earth, after death. When said of a married woman, it indicates living apart or separation from one's spouse. The king's desire to leave Blancheflor out of the pedagogical scene, then, speaks to his desire to completely destroy their connection to each other, to the point of death. Indeed, the king views only Blancheflor's death as a suitable substitute for sending Floire away to school, highlighting the joint risk and power of allowing the couple to be taught together.

Floire reluctantly agrees, but soon returns to beg for Blancheflor's inclusion in his schooling, pleading for his teacher to intercede with the king on his behalf:

[32] As the *roman* is traditionally seen as the source of the Italian texts, this is even more surprising.

[33] *Floire et Blancheflor: seconde version*, ed. and trans. by Pelan, ll. 267–69. All future quotations from the *roman* are from this edition.

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Ambedui sont venuz au roi
Dist li maistres: Entendez moi
Ge vos veuil demander un don
Ne vos en venra se bien non
Faites amener la meschine
Qui sert es chanbres la roïne
Aprenrai la por amor Dé.
(ll. 317–23)

Both of them went together to the king. The teacher said, 'Hear me, I wish to ask you for a gift. Nothing but good will come to you on its account. Order the young lady who works in the queen's chambers to come. I will teach her, for the love of God.'

The king initially appears to agree, claiming that he will send Blancheflor within four days; yet, as soon as Floire leaves his presence, the king begins to plot Blancheflor's execution. In the *conte*, the queen successfully intercedes on Blancheflor's behalf, persuading the king to 'merely' sell Blancheflor into slavery. Here, however, the king first tries to poison her (l. 341), then sends men to kill her (l. 452), then attempts to have her executed before the court on trumped-up charges (l. 503). The queen unsuccessfully attempts to intercede after the second attempt, and it is only as a last resort that the king, unable to rid himself of Blancheflor, sells her to slavers. In this way, the primary scene of scandalous reading shifts from the sublimated danger of writing and reading in the *conte* to the blatant violence of seigniorial murder. At first glance, the reader might assume that the resistance to the children's love is provoked by Blancheflor's Christianity and low status. However, the text never gives an explicit reason for the king's objections, and, even in the *conte*, the decision to kill or sell Blancheflor always comes just at the moment the children have become fully literate. Literacy becomes mixed up with carnal knowledge here, just as books become mixed up with bodies.

By the end of five years of schooling in the *conte*, the couple can 'bien [. . .] parler latin | et bien escrire en parkemin' (ll. 267–68: 'speak well in Latin and write well on parchment'). Such education, even among the elite, was rare both in romance and in reality;[34] for a young couple, specifically a young woman, to learn to this extent in a beautiful palace surrounded by gardens evokes the Edenic trope of dangerous knowledge. Thus the pedagogical scene ties sexual transgression to reading, and reading to sexual transgression.

While we are primed to view this transgression as miscegenation, Megan Moore astutely comments that while Floire-as-Muslim-Arab is strongly implied, it is never directly stated within the narrative (pp. 4–5). Instead, I argue that this connection between the carnal and the textual operates at the level of intertextuality, figured as incest.

[34] See *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. by Lydia Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 120–48, especially pp. 120–31.

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Such incest is both sexual and textual; Floire's and Blancheflor's forbidden physical intimacy mirrors the intertextual congress which the text and, in turn, the codex programmatically seek (and fail) to expel. Both the *conte* and the *roman* begin with raids on Christian convoys: Floire's father raids the pilgrimage road to Santiago de Compostela, capturing Blancheflor's mother and only later discovering her pregnancy. All versions of the text insist that Blancheflor's mother was pregnant by a Christian man before her capture, but only the *roman* gives him a name and rank: Henri, the Duke of Olenois.[35] But despite bothering to give him such a specific identity, the narrator seems to forget his existence, leaving us with a queen and her noble servant, both bearing children on the same day who look nearly identical. Even that birthday, 'pasques florie' (fol. 193^{v}), confounds any effort to disentangle the strands of 'Christian' and 'pagan': it may signify either Palm Sunday, or Eastertide, or a 'Saracen' (probably fictitious) flower holiday.[36] Through such convenient coincidences, the possibility of sexual mixing between half-brother and half-sister, as well as Christian and pagan, troubles the narrative.

The uncanny resemblance of the two children, their identical birthdays, their twinned names, and the too eager willingness of the king to have Blancheflor killed in order to avoid sexual congress between the couple all suggest the possibility of incest within both the idyll of the *conte* and the harsher world of the *roman*.[37] In the linguistic and literal relationship between master/slave and Christian/pagan, the potential for incestuous violence is always already present.[38] Thus, the king's repeated failed attempts to rid himself of Blancheflor in the *roman* should not be read merely as a monarch's desire to prevent his son from falling into an undesirable marriage or even an undesirable, incestuous marriage. By coding miscegenation as incest, *Floire et Blancheflor* articulates the literary process of *translatio studii* as both something foreign and something entirely too close to home. Instead, we may read the deletion of the pedagogical scene and the king's actions as the narrative's failed attempt to expel the trace of cultural exchange and learning from its very core. But because that exchange is essential to its narrative make-up or blueprint, the 'livres [. . .] paienoors' assimilated within the whole, the attempt to expel its trace is doomed to fail from the start.

[35] In BnF, MS fr. 1447 the pregnant woman's spouse is a dead knight, and her father is bringing her to Compostela. In BnF, MS fr. 375, she is a merchant's daughter, pregnant with her lover's child.

[36] Grieve, *'Floire and Blancheflor' and the European Romance*, pp. 95–96.

[37] For example, when Floire lodges with a bourgeois family on the road, they comment, 'el vos resanle, en moie foi | bien pöés estre d'un eage | si vos resanle du visage' (ll. 1294–96: 'By my faith, she looks just like you! You must be about the same age, and your faces look just alike').

[38] It is critical to note that this clean distinction between Christian and pagan, even Christian and Muslim, in the text reflects an imagined community rather than the historical reality. See in particular Christopher MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

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At the moment when Floire and Blancheflor are revealed as fully literate in the *conte*, the narrator relates:

> bien sorent parler latin
> et bien escrire en parkemin
> et conseillier oiant la gent
> en latin, que nus nes entent.
> (ll. 267–270)

They knew how to speak Latin well and to write well on parchment and to speak with each other, when they heard people coming, in Latin, such that no one understood them.

Latin is at once foreign, incomprehensible to anyone who might hear the children speak it, and intimate, a secret language between lovers or siblings. The children do not write on wax tablets, but on 'parkemin', skin scraped clean and prepared for the intrusion of Latin letters. The image of the blank parchment, forming a rhyming pair with 'latin', allegorizes Latin as letters written on the body, on the 'corpus' of vernacular literature. As with actual parchment, when BnF, MS fr. 19152 scrapes away the pedagogical scene, we are left with a palimpsest, a textual residue of this foundational scene in the form of Galerïen's three attempts to kill Blancheflor.

The importance of writing 'en parkemin' in the pedagogical scene captures its dual nature: Floire et Blancheflor enact a literary transgression when they read together, but also a physical one, as textuality here cannot separate from corporality. Corporality functions first at the level of bodies exchanged across porous geographic borders in both al-Andalus and Capetian France: as much of the historical work of recent years has shown, intermarriage, conversion, and geographic displacement were simply a fact of medieval life, and the clean lines between one ethno-religious group and another muddled and inconsistent.[39] I do not invoke the potentially problematic notion of *convivencia* here, but simply underscore that the degree of cultural and physical exchange across Europe was great, particularly in the Iberian peninsula, where the majority of the romance takes place. In choosing to end the codex with *Floire et Blancheflor*, the compiler of BnF, MS fr. 19152 thus symbolically finishes his book with an act of closure towards this literary heritage and rapid cultural (ex)change.

[39] See Elisabeth van Houts, 'Intermarriage in Eleventh-Century England', in *Normandy and its Neighbours, 900–1250: Essays for David Bates*, ed. by D. Crouch and K. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 237–70. For al-Andalus and Spain see S. Barton, 'Marriage across Frontiers: Sexual Mixing, Power and Identity in Medieval Iberia', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 3 (2011), 1–25; Louise Mirrer, *Women, Jews and Muslims in the Texts of Reconquest Castile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Jessica A. Coope, *The Martyrs of Cordoba: Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraksa Press, 1995); David Nirenberg, 'Conversion, Sex and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002) 1065–93; MacEvitt, *Rough Tolerance*.

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Second, corporality acts at the level of text written on parchment, handwritten on the (dead) body and physically carried from one location to another. The claim of an unbroken textual lineage reaching back to Rome rested on a particular linearity which drew the chain of transmission straight from Greece, to Troy, to Rome, and finally France. This was a valuable political belief, allowing Capetian France under Philippe le Bel to lay claim to a massive trove of literary, scientific, and philosophical knowledge. Such credence requires a kind of conscious forgetting, a purposeful erasure of non-linearity and the messy, often horizontal routes of human transmission that brought the classical texts to France, often through Arabic via al-Andalus.[40] In the *roman*'s refusal of the pedagogical moment, we may read in turn the contamination of this *muthos* with the contemporary reality, and thus with the fertile, incestuous intertextuality operating across Europe at the end of the thirteenth century. This peripatetic movement of bodies and texts underlies the pilgrimage road in *Floire et Blancheflor*, and the road Floire must follow to Babylon.

At the root of the rhetoric surrounding foreign textuality in both *Floire et Blancheflor* and BnF, MS fr. 19152 lies this embedded corporality: a distinct relationship between self and other, where the immediacy of the other is felt on or under one's own skin, carried within the self. A resonant echo of this relation arises in Levinas's description of 'avoir-l'autre-dans-sa-peau'.[41] Within this unsettling image lies a particularly useful way of visualizing how BnF, MS fr. 19152 treats 'foreign' texts as both inside itself and outside itself, and as profoundly embodied in both the skin of the page and the bodies of the men and women who copied, carried, and exchanged such texts. Our codex is keenly aware of that presence of the other which is felt 'comme une peau s'expose à ce qui la blesse, comme une joue offerte à celui qui frappe'.[42] In the excision of the pedagogical scene lurks the allegorized refusal of that radical vulnerability to the other, the three attempts to kill Blancheflor accreting around its absence like scar tissue on a wound.

At the beginning of this article I argued that Busby and Adams are correct in suggesting that BnF, MS fr. 19152 attempts to educate the reader, but

[40] In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the immense translation activity between Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic taking place in Toledo brought classical, Hebrew, and Arabic texts into Latin Europe. Following this period of intense cultural and intellectual exchange, the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw Arabic philosophy increasingly censored and banned. Of course, the very existence of items in the historical record condemning these books meant that they were highly popular and impossible to expel from learned culture. See e.g. Roland Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277*, Philosophes médiévaux, 22 (Paris: Louvain, 1977); Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Charles Burnett, 'The Coherence of the Arabic–Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century', *Science in Context*, 14 (2001), 249–88.

[41] Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 180.

[42] Ibid.

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questioned the objective of that 'theme of education'.[43] The choice and placement of the five texts making up the narrative frame refuse the presence of that diverse, intertextual other, instructing us in how to read a universal 'French' vernacular, constructed against an equally mythic foreign other. This opposition constantly cracks and crumbles around its own edges, as the codex seeks to expel thematic, authorial, and descriptive elements which are integral to its own literary identity. In doing so, both halves of the frame turn away from the Latin and Arabic authorities that created them: Alfonsi becomes a nameless 'wise man of Arabia', *Partonopeus*'s narrator explicitly disavows Latin, and *Floire et Blancheflor* frantically attempts to renegotiate its thematic relationship to foreign learning and difference.

Ultimately, the codex stages the education of the reader in a particular vision of what it meant to read in Old French at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Under Philippe le Bel Parisian manuscript culture grew exponentially, and vernacular manuscripts gained immense traction over the course of the century. Vernacular French literature had, over the course of the past two centuries, become part of the cultural discourse of the elite, edging out reading knowledge of Latin among the aristocracy. Still, as Busby notes, the presence of macaronic manuscripts across the century indicates that the overall picture was more complex than simple illiteracy in Latin (p. 53). BnF, MS fr. 19152 centres on one thread of this complex linguistic picture: the desire to position the multiple vernaculars of Old French literature as a whole entity, one which arises from the ashes of Greek and Latin *sui generis*, and denies its cultural and textual entanglement with the early medieval Byzantine[44] and Arabic literary cultures responsible for the transmission of much of the classical Latin and Greek material. Read liberally, even the scribe's tendency to insert multiple dialectal elements into his work becomes part of this totalizing literary project. Yet this process can never fully erase the complicated and rich itineraries of medieval literary texts across cultural and linguistic boundaries. They remain as an absent present, allowing us to envision the processes of erasure, exchange, and appropriation active between French literature and its Others, be they Greek, Latin, Hebrew, or Arabic, over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

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[43] Busby, *Codex and Context*, pp. 450–51.

[44] While I have focused largely on the routes of Arabic literary transmission in this essay, the importance of Byzantine manuscripts in preserving and transmitting classical texts cannot be ignored.

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