

Ovid's Narcissus and Guillaume's Amant Two Sides of the Same Coin? The Reception of the Myth of Narcissus in *Le roman de la rose* by Guillaume de Lorris

*Dames, cest essemble aprenez,
Qui vers vos amis mesprenez,
Car se vous les laissez morir,
Dieus le vos saura bien merir.*

Guillaume de Lorris,
*Le roman de la rose*¹

The myth of Narcissus is one of the most widely received myths in history. This is due to the fact that it offers a vast array of interpretational possibilities: Narcissus is seen as the archetype of self-love, the embodiment of vanity and high pride, but his history is also an exemplification of human love for beauty and desire for self-knowledge. The most influential source of the myth are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (AD 8), whose author became so popular that the German medievalist Ludwig Traube (1861–1907) called the 12th and 13th centuries *aetas Ovidiana*.² In this period, Ovid's stories were not only extensively quoted, retold in modernized versions in various countries, inserted in greater works and translated, but also copied in Benedictine scriptoria. The paradox of Ovid's reception in the Middle Ages constitutes the fact that while being a morally and perhaps politically controversial writer in Rome, banished by the emperor Augustus, in the medieval perception his works fulfilled a pedagogical function and were included in school curricula. Ovid became a cosmological, philosophical and, after some corrections, moral *auctor*, whose works were adapted to the needs of medieval Christian ideology. As *Metamorphoses* raised important ethical issues, Ovid's themes could be interpreted as *exempla*, one of the genres which provided guidance and issued

¹ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 114, vv. 1504–1507.

² Cf. Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*, Lund 1967, pp. 55f.

warnings about the desirable and undesirable kind of behaviour. Many medieval writers offered explications of the myths to “protect” them from being misread. The pagan stories were read as having a double meaning – the literal and the moral one. This meant that they could be construed as allegories which, in the High Middle Ages, ceased to be connected solely with biblical exegesis. The use of allegory challenges the poet’s audience in the art of interpretation, for his readers are compelled to decipher the hidden meaning of the text. Such an allegorical interpretation has to be performed to comprehend the significance of the Narcissus myth as embedded in *Le roman de la rose*, a medieval French oneiric love poem, written consecutively by Guillaume de Lorris (1230) and Jean de Meun (1280).

1. Allegory

Guillaume’s work is an example of allegorical courtly literature. His aim was to expound the art of courtly love, in which he drew not only on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* (2 BC) and *Metamorphoses* but also on his immediate predecessor Andreas Capellanus and his treatise *De amore*, also known as *De arte honeste amandi et reprobatione inhonesti amoris* (ca. 1185), which codified the precepts of the doctrine. In the present paper, we shall concentrate on Guillaume’s inscription of the Ovidian myth of Narcissus in the concept of courtly love and on his attempt at Christianising the myth to offer a tropological reading of the fable, by which he reflects (on) the historical and social conditions of his times. In his book *The Critical Path* (1971), Northrop Frye defines the social function of myth as, first and foremost, educational, for it “cover[s] a society’s view of its past, present and future, its relation to its gods and its neighbours, its traditions, its social and religious duties, and its ultimate destiny.”³ The myth “comprises everything that it most concerns its society to know,”⁴ and hence Frye speaks of a myth of concern, the emergence of which he associates with religion, for a myth of concern as well as any religious doctrine fulfil a similar function with regard to a society: they hold it together. Frye states that the role of a myth of concern is to make literature “intensely traditional, repeating the legends and learning which have most to do with that concern.”⁵ Therefore, it is the role of the poet to participate in the transmission of such a myth. Arguably, one of the means by which it has been realised in literature is through the rhetorical figure of allegory which fulfils the same function as

³ Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path*, Bloomington, London 1971, p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

a myth of concern: it provides moral instruction and caters for a society's ideological integrity. Yet, it can also have a subversive potential. Analysing Guillaume's reception of the Narcissus myth, we shall venture to discover the hidden meaning behind the allegory as employed by the poet. This will help us to answer the question of the relation between Ovid's Narcissus and Guillaume's Amant. Are these equally vain and proud characters driven by self-love? Is Amant yet another version of Narcissus, or does he manage to overcome self-admiration to offer his love to another human being? How was self-love viewed by the society Guillaume lived in?

Guillaume de Lorris introduces the theme of Narcissus through his protagonist whom he christens Amant, and juxtaposes his history with that of Narcissus. The employment of parallel narratives enables him to generate yet another level of meaning beside the literal one; thereby he obliges his readers to search for an allegorical interpretation of his poem. Allegory works at two levels: it conveys a surface and under-the-surface meaning, to which Guillaume alludes in the onset of the poem. Introducing an oneiric dimension, he refers to a double "senefiance"⁶ of a dream vision. Amant, aged not yet twenty, reports on a premonitory *somnium* which, driven by love, he decides to commit to parchment. A *somnium* contains true contents veiled in allegory as demonstrated by Macrobius,⁷ and conveys the covered meaning which has to be uncovered via a hermeneutic process:

Maintes genz cuident qu'en songes
N'ait se fable non et mençonge.
Mais on puet tel songe songier
Qui ne sunt mie mençongier,
Ainz sont après bien aparant.
Si em puis traire à garant
Un acteur qui ot non Macrobes,
Qui ne tint pas songes a lobes,
Aïçois escrit l'avision

Many a man holds dreams to be but lies,
All fabulous; but there have been some dreams
Not whit deceptive, as was later found.
Well might one cite Macrobius, who wrote
The story of the Dream of Scipio,
And was assured that dreams are ofttimes true.
But, if someone should wish to say or think
'Tis fond and foolish to believe that dreams
Foretell the future, he may call me fool.

⁶ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 42, v. 16.

⁷ Macrobius is the author of *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* (ca. 430), in which he discusses Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," included in the sixth book of *De re publica* (51 BC). There he classifies dreams under five types: a *somnium* is "[...] an enigmatic dream [...] that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation of its understanding," a *visio* contains "a prophetic vision [which] actually comes true," an *oraculum* is "a dream oracular in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or to avoid," an *insomnium* (a nightmare) and a *visum* (an apparition) "have no prophetic significance" (Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl, New York 1952, pp. 88ff.).

Qui avint au roi Scipion.
 Quiconques cuit ne qui que die
 Qu'il est folece et musardie
 De croire que songes aviegne,
 Qui ce voudra, por fol m'en tiegne,
 Car androit moi ai ge creance
 Que songe sont **senefiance**
 Des biens au genz et des anuiz,
 Que li plusor songent de nuiz
 Maintes choses **couvertement**
 Que l'en voit puis **apertement**.⁸

Now, as for me, I have full confidence
 That visions are significant to man
 Of good and evil. Many dream at night
 Of obscure forecasts of imminent events.⁹

Guillaume's method of deciphering the hidden meaning of a dream can certainly be seen as a precursor of the psychoanalytic approach to dream investigation proposed by Sigmund Freud. In his book *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (1916–1917), Freud distinguishes between the unconscious latent dream-thoughts and the consciously remembered manifest dream-content,¹⁰ i.e. between the covert and overt meaning of a dream. It is only in the process of interpretational analytic work that the latent dream-thoughts can be discovered, for they become distorted in the course of the dream-work through condensation (the latent dream-thoughts are condensed to form the manifest content) and displacement (an element of the latent dream-thoughts is replaced by another remote element, or a significant aspect is displaced into an insignificant one). Jacques Lacan relates condensation to metaphor and displacement to metonymy. Since metaphor is defined as a word-for-word connection, it allows for the emergence of signification, whereas metonymy as a word-to-word connection resists signification.¹¹ I postulate that the relation between the manifest content and the latent dream-thoughts allows for a generation of the second-level meaning, i.e. for the emergence of an allegorical signification. The following miniatures contained in two illuminated manuscripts of *Le roman de la rose* aptly illustrate the work of allegory in Guillaume's love poem:

⁸ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 42, vv. 1–20 (emphasis mine).

⁹ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 3, vv. 1–13.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Die Traumarbeit," in: *Die Traumdeutung und andere Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, pp. 828ff.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud," in: *Écrits I*, Paris 1999, pp. 502ff.



1. The Fountain of Narcissus,
BnF, Ms fr. 1558, fol. 12 v.



2. The Fountain of Love,
London, B.L., Royal 20A XVII. 15c

The first miniature comes from a 14th century manuscript and presents Narcissus at the fountain, regarding and admiring himself, whereas the second one shows Amant overlooking his image and adoring another object than himself. Narcissus' and Amant's histories only seemingly refer to the same experience of looking at a reflection in a pool of water. By making his protagonist bypass his own image, Guillaume reveals the existence of yet another world on the other side of a mirroring surface of water, thereby opening a space for the emergence of an under-the-surface meaning. Amant crosses through to the other side of the mirror which Jean Frappier identifies as the "lieu privilégié [qui] capte les reflets d'une réalité supérieure et cachée."¹² What constitutes this "hidden and superior reality" in the context of Guillaume's work? What is its significance for the Narcissus theme as undertaken by the author?

2. *Locus amoenus*

Amant is a wandering poet voyeur who, in his dream vision, explores another world, "a superior reality," which he has discovered. One day, while taking a spring stroll, he comes across a pristine river in which he washes his face. This symbolic act of purification allows him to cross through to the other world. There he comes across an enclosed garden on whose walls he sees the sculpted personifications of human vices – *haine*, *felonie*, *vilonie*, *convoitisse*, *avarice*, *anvie*, *tristece*, *vieillesce* and *papelardie*. Amant is investigative and persistent enough to finally force his way inside where he is shown around

¹² Jean Frappier, "Variations sur le thème du miroir, de Bernard de Ventadour à Maurice Scève," in: *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 11 (1959), p. 134.

by *oisseuse*. Her name indicates a leisurely and placid atmosphere, presiding over the place. With its square structure the garden embodies a terrestrial paradise, modelled on the *consonantia* governing the prelapsarian Eden. It looks as if it were formed according to the *numerus*, *pondus* and *mensura*: “Li vergiers par compasseüre/ Fu faiz par droite quarreüre,/ S’ot autant de lonc con de large”¹³ [“The enclosure was a perfect measure square/ As long as it was broad”¹⁴]. Wandering through the garden, Amant is a witness to an overwhelming concern for harmony of nature and culture: the place abounds in the Eden-like flora and fauna, creating at the same time an exemplary *locus amoenus*,¹⁵ where people enjoy singing and “carolling,” i.e. harmoniously and orderly dancing to the music; it is *deduiz* who has taken charge of the pleasant place. An important aspect of the garden is its methodically organized character. Guillaume’s *hortus conclusus* is a place destined for the entertainment of courtly society, and hence the above-mentioned vices are not allowed to enter. The garden has clearly an exclusive character, reflecting the medieval fondness for the separation between social classes. There Amant can only encounter the personifications of such courtly virtues as *cortoisie*, *leesce*, *biautez*, *richesce*, *largesce*, *franchise* and *joenesce*. All of these, if correctly employed, are to help the courtly lover win the lady of his heart. In creating this catalogue of courtly qualities, Guillaume draws on Capellanus’ *De amore*, in which the latter defines the true nobility of a perfect lover as follows:

Well then, the man who would be considered worthy to serve in Love’s army must not be in the least avaricious, but very generous; [...] he should show himself humble to all and should stand ready to serve everybody. He ought never speak a word in disparagement of any man, since those who speak evil may not remain within the threshold of courtesy. [...] He should not be a lover of several women at the same time, but for the sake of one he should be a devoted servant of all. He should devote only a moderate amount of care to the adornment of his person and should show himself wise and tractable and pleasant to everybody [...].¹⁶

Admiring *deduiz*’ pleasant place, Amant strays to a picturesque fountain, located under a pine tree – the most splendid tree in the garden. The

¹³ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 106, vv. 1320–1322.

¹⁴ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 27, vv. 35–36.

¹⁵ In his seminal work *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), the German philologist Ernst Robert Curtius defines the *locus amoenus* as a literary topos which contains such basic elements as trees, grass, water, usually a spring or a stream, and can be traced back to classical literature (E.R. Curtius, *Literatura europejska i łacińskie średniowiecze*, Kraków 2009, p. 202).

¹⁶ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry, New York 1941, p. 59f.

symbolism of the pine is pregnant with meaning in almost all European cultures and has a long tradition, going back to ancient times. In his book *The Golden Bough* (1922), James George Frazer points out that, in ancient Rome, the pine was a sacred tree worshipped during the spring festivals organised in honour of Attis and Cybele, the protagonists of a Phrygian legend.¹⁷ Beloved by Cybele, a goddess of fertility, Attis, a young shepherd, is said to have castrated himself under a pine tree, as a result of which he bled to death on the spot. The reason for his doing so remains unexplained. According to one of the versions of the legend, Attis metamorphosed into a pine tree after his death. His tragic end and the alleged resurrection were celebrated during the so-called Blood Day of the festival, where the pine symbolised both death and resurrection. As an heir to Roman culture, Guillaume must have been acquainted with the cult of Attis and Cybele, especially that Christianity inherited some of its symbolism pertaining to the pine tree. In the Christian tradition, an ever-green pine, frequently associated with paradise, spreading over a fountain or a brook stands for the tree of eternal life (*vita aeterna*), and hence symbolises immortality.¹⁸ Guillaume alludes to both traditions. His pine is a shade-provider and as such it casts a shadow. Both in Latin and in Old French “umbra”/“ombre” denoted a shadow as well as a reflection; it was also associated with death, especially when one regarded one’s image in a pool of water.¹⁹ According to Carl Gustav Jung, the shadow is an archetype of the human psyche and stands for its dark side. The acknowledgement of its existence is an indispensable step to attaining self-knowledge.²⁰ Guillaume’s *locus amoenus* affords such an opportunity; it is a place where one can come to terms with one’s shadow and gain self-awareness. With its symbolic attributes, i.e. the pine tree which signifies immortality as well as death and the fountain which allows for an insight into one’s soul, the *locus amoenus* is a place of ambivalent nature. When Amant approaches the fountain, he sees an

¹⁷ Cf. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, London 1957, pp. 457ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 322; Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imaginary*, Amsterdam, London 1974, p. 397; Hans Biedermann, *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole*, ed. Gerhard Riemann, München 1989, p. 236; Udo Becker, *Lexikon der Symbole*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien 1998, p. 147.

¹⁹ Tobler and Lommatzsch provide a multitude of possible meanings of the word “ombre:” “Schatten, Schutz, Spiegelbild, Schein” and, last but not least, they speak of the “ombre de mort” (Adolf Tobler, Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 6, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 1082ff.).

²⁰ Cf. Carl Gustav Jung, “Der Schatten,” in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (2), Zürich 1968, p. 17.

inscription: “Se mori li biaux narcissus”²¹ [“Here t’was that Fair Narcissus wept himself to death”].²² As we know the story from Ovid, Narcissus died having recognised his shadow in a pool of water, i.e. upon “knowing himself,” as Tiresias would have it.²³ Recounting Narcissus’ history, Amant ponders whether he should actually approach the fountain, for he would not like to share the fate of the Ovidian protagonist.

3. Narcissus

Guillaume’s courtly version depicts Narcissus as a “damoisiaus” who refused the love of Echo, “une haute dame,”²⁴ which, again, reflects the medieval penchant for social hierarchy and feudal relationships, also intrinsic to the doctrine of courtly love but in a reversed order: it is the lady who stands above her suitor and so she is due love service. The courting instructions are provided by *dieu d’amors* in a form of the commandments of love:

Toutes fames sers et honore
Et en aus servir poine et labore.
[...]
Après tout ce, d’orgueil te garde,
Car qui entent bien et esgarde,
Orguiaus est folie et pechiez;
Et qui d’orgueil est entechiez
Il ne puet son cuer employer
A server ne a souploier.
Orgueilleus fet tout le contraire
De ce que fins amanz doit faire.²⁵

“In ladies’ service labor and take pains;
Honor and champion them
[...]
“Then guard yourself from pride. If you judge well,
You’ll find that it is but a foolish sin.
One stained with vanity can not apply
His heart to service or humility.
Pride nullifies the aim of Lover’s art.”²⁶

No service of this sort is, however, offered by Narcissus. Guilty of *superbia* – one of the seven deadly sins, and failing to recognise his flaw, he is the cause of

²¹ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 112, v. 1435.

²² The modern English translation interpolates Narcissus’ weeping, which the Old French original does not mention at all. Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 29, v. 121.

²³ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge (Mass.) 1971, p. 149.

²⁴ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 112, vv. 1436, 1441. Unfortunately, the modern English translation loses completely the author’s intended inscription of the myth in the doctrine of courtly love. Narcissus is just “a youth” and Echo “a fine lady” (Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 29, v. 1, 4).

²⁵ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 144, vv. 2113–2114, 2123–2130.

²⁶ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 45f., vv. 82–83, 89–93.

Echo's death and so has to die in consequence. To avenge her unrequited love, Echo prays to the Christian God on her deathbed as follows:

Qu'ele ot trove d'amer si lache,
Fust asproiez .i. jour encor
Et eschaufez de tele amor
Dont il ne poiist joie atandre:
Si porroit savoir et entendre
Quel duel ont li loial amant
Que l'en refuse si vilment.²⁷

[...] that whom she'd found
Disloyal to her love, Narcissus' self
In his hard heart should someday tortured be
And burn with such a love that he would find
No joy in any thing; thus he might know
And comprehend what woe a loyal maid
Had felt when she so vilely was refused.²⁸

God thought that Echo's prayer was just and reasonable and so he answered it: Narcissus fell unhappily in love with his own image as reflected in the fountain, thinking that he sees a beautiful young... boy or girl. A modern French translation rightly renders this ambiguity of the sex with the feminine article "une enfant,"²⁹ for the word "enfant" in Old French, like in any other language, also denotes a female child.³⁰ Moreover, such a rendering adds some plausibility to Narcissus' delusion. In Pausanias' version of the myth, Narcissus had a twin sister with whom he fell in love.³¹ After her death at a young age, he went to the spring and, in mourning of her, regarded his own reflection, imagining to be looking at his sister, even though he knew that the image belonged to him. Using the word denoting both male and female child, Guillaume escapes the confrontation of a possible homoerotic association, discredited in the Middle Ages, which is, however, present in the Ovidian narrative. Yet, in Ovid's version as well as in Guillaume's, Narcissus falls prey to the *imago mendax*.³² Recounting the received myth, Amant offers an

²⁷ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 112, vv. 1457–1463.

²⁸ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 30, vv. 15–21.

²⁹ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. H. Herluison, trans. Pierre Marteau, vol. 1, Orléans 1878, p. 101, v. 1548.

³⁰ "Enfant – das männliche Wort für ein Mädchen" (Adolf Tobler, Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 3, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 320). The majority of modern translations lose the original ambiguity of the sex by rendering the word "enfant" with a "youth" (Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 30, v. 38), "Knabe" (Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Der Rosenroman*, trans. Karl August Ott, München 1976, p. 149, v. 1488), "un jeune homme" (Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 115).

³¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, ed. G.P. Godd, trans. W.H.S. Jones, London, Cambridge (Mass.) 1995, p. 311.

³² Karl D. Uitti associates Ovid's *imago mendax* with Guillaume's "ombres" (Karl D. Uitti, "«Cele [qui] doit ester Rose clamee:» Guillaume's Intertextuality," in: *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose. Text, Image, Reception*, eds. Kevin Brownlee, Sylvia Huot, Philadelphia 1992, p. 55).

instructive commentary on the deceitful nature of the “ombre,” playing on the polysemy of the word, as Narcissus leaves both his shadow and his soul behind:

Icil maintenant s'esbaï
 Car ses ombres tout le traï,
 Qu'il cuida veoir la figure
 D'un enfant bel a demesure.
 Lors se sot bein amors vengier
 Dou grant orgueil et dou dongier
 Que Narcisus li ot mene.
 Bien li fut lors gueredone
 Qu'il musa tant a la fontaine,
 Qu'il ama son ombre demeine.
 Si en fu morz a la parclose:
 Ce fu la some da la chose.³³

The sight dismayed him, and he found himself
 By his own loveliness betrayed; for there
 He saw the image of a comely youth.
 Love knew how best to avenge the stubbornness
 And pride Narcissus had displayed to him.
 Well was he then requited, for the youth,
 Enraptured, gazed upon the crystal spring
 Until he fell in love with his own face;
 And at the last he died for very woe.
 That was the end of that;³⁴

The service of love neglected by Narcissus requires due vengeance: he dies unable to satisfy his desire, in folly of love for the fleeting image. In this context, the moral of the myth as received by Guillaume may come as a surprise to the reader. Amant has recourse to the fate of the vain and proud Narcissus to threaten women with God's chastisement if they let their lovers die of unrequited love:

Dames, cest essemble aprenez,
 Qui vers vos amis mesprenez,
 Car se vous les laissez morir,
 Dieus le vos saura bien merir.³⁵

You ladies, who refuse to satisfy
 Your lovers, this one's case should take to heart;
 For, if you let your loyal sweethearts die,
 God will know how to give you recompense.³⁶

This conclusion is the more surprising that after all it was Echo – a woman who was neglected by a man and left to die. Yet, if one reads Amant's moralising statement in the context of courtly love, it becomes transparent. According to the doctrine, women were supposed to be unattainable. They were to arouse men's desire, but withhold its fulfilment.³⁷ Hence they became the embodiment of cruel femmes fatales, dames sans merci. *Fin'amor* was

³³ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 112, vv. 1482–1493.

³⁴ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 30f, vv. 36–45.

³⁵ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 114, vv. 1504–1507.

³⁶ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 31, vv. 54–57.

³⁷ Niklas Luhmann sees the sources of this precept of courtly love in the increasing “aristocratisation” of certain social strata in the Middle Ages, which required that man

allowed, whereas *fals'amor*³⁸ condemned, which reflected the medieval cult of virginity. Such a stance was obviously appealing – it was supposed to guarantee the wife's staying somehow faithful to her husband. This was, however, only a theoretical assumption – Amant seems to be arguing, and wishes to reverse the model, as, according to him, the unattainability of women is definitely a serious defect, for it brings about their lovers' death. The Dark Ages frequently associated women with such major sinful inclinations as *superbia* and *vanitas*, and hence their narcissistic attribute – a mirror. Following this line of thought, a respectable poet of the epoch could not refrain himself from urging women to correct their behaviour. Amant's piece of advice can therefore be read as belonging to a popular medieval genre of the *sermones ad status*.

4. Amant and the Crystals

Remembering the history of Narcissus, Amant refuses to follow into the footsteps of his Ovidian predecessor: he will not look into the fountain. His position is somewhat privileged over that of Ovid's Narcissus, for he enjoys what Christiane Kruse in her book *Wozu Menschen malen* calls an awareness of the medium (*Medienbewußtsein*).³⁹ This knowledge not only enables him to

conduct himself in accordance with the non-vulgar principle: "Für die Liebeslyrik und speziell für die höfische Liebe des Mittelalters scheint das Hauptanliegen gewesen zu sein, als *nicht vulgär* auftreten zu können. Deshalb die Marginalisierung des Bezugs auf Sinnlichkeit, deshalb Idealisierung, Sublimierung, gebundene Form und erst dagegen sich wieder profilierende Freizügigkeiten. Die viel diskutierte Frage, ob die Minnesänger nun auf Erfüllung hoffen konnten oder nicht, betrifft ein durchaus nebensächliches Problem. Die Hauptsache war: sich im Zuge der zunehmenden Aristokratisierung der Schichtungsstruktur des Mittelalters von der vulgären, gemeinen, direkten Befriedigung sinnlicher Bedürfnisse distanzieren zu können" (Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität*, Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 50).

³⁸ In his book *De amore*, Capellanus distinguishes between *fin'amor* (pure love) and *fals'amor* (mixed love): "It is the pure love which binds together the hearts of two lovers with every feeling of delight. This kind consists in the contemplation of the mind and the affection of the heart; it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted to those who wish to love purely. This is the kind that anyone who is intent upon love ought to embrace with all his might, for this love goes on increasing without end, and we know that no one ever regretted practicing it, and the more of it one has the more one wants. [...] But that is called mixed love which gets its effect from every delight of the flesh and culminates in the final act of Venus" (Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry, New York 1941, p. 122).

³⁹ Cf. Christiane Kruse, *Wozu Menschen malen. Historische Begründungen eines Bildmediums*, München 2003, p. 310.

consciously try to evade the trap Narcissus fell into, but it also allows for a deeper self-reflection contributive to self-knowledge: “Die Medienerkenntnis geht folglich der Selbsterkenntnis voraus.”⁴⁰ Following Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472),⁴¹ Kruse sees Ovid’s Narcissus as the inventor of painting. He may draw aesthetic pleasure from observing his own reflection as if he were looking at a work of art, yet, as he is unaware of the agency of the medium, he cannot attain self-knowledge: the icon-image is simply a *simulacrum*, and hence a source of *méconnaissance*.⁴² Only after recognising that the surface of water reflects his own image is he able to acknowledge that the beloved other does not exist as an independent human being. Unlike Ovid’s Narcissus, Amant is aware of the existence of the world of illusion and the *trompe l’oeil* effect afforded by the sense perception. Yielding to the medieval distrust of senses, he dreads idolatrous self-love and its consequences. Nevertheless, he overcomes his initial and, as he puts it himself, irrational fear, and finally gazes into the fountain. On his leaning over the brim, he sees two magical crystals at the bottom. Due to the intensive sun, they offer a fine spectacle to the onlookers: the marvellous crystals reflect the garden, or half of it, depending on their position, in the way comparable to a mirror:

Auis comme li mireors mostre
 Les choses qui sont a l’ancontre
 Et i veoit on **sanz couverture**
 Et la color et la figure,
 Trestout ausi vos di de voir,
 Que li cristaus **sanz decevoir**
 Tout l’estre dou vergier encuse
 A ceaus qui dedanz l’eau mused
 Car touz jorz quel que part qu’il soient,
 L’une moitie dou vergier voient

Just as a mirror will reflect each thing
 That is placed, and one therein can see
 Both form and color without variance,
 So do these crystals undistorted show
 The garden’s each detail to anyone
 Who looks into the waters of the spring.
 For, from whichever side one chance to look,
 He sees one half of the garden; if he turn
 And from the other gaze, he sees the rest.
 So there is nothing in the place so small

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 313f.

⁴¹ As a truly Renaissance humanist, the *homo universalis*, Leon Battista Alberti was an architect, painter, poet and philosopher. Apart from his theoretical works on architecture, he wrote the first Renaissance treatise about the theory of painting. In his *Della pittura* (1436), Alberti formulated the rules of determining perspective, based on classical optics. He was the first painter to do so in history.

⁴² The term “*méconnaissance*” is used by Jacques Lacan in his paper “Le stade du mirror comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique” to denote the subject’s false knowledge about the self, which has its origins in the mirror stage as the child identifies with his mirror-image (Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du mirror comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique” in: *Écrits I*, Paris 1999, p. 98).

Et s'il se tornent maintenant,
 Puent veoir le remenant.
 Si n'i a si petite chose,
 Tant soit repote ne enclose,
 Dont demonstrance ne soit faite,
Com s'ele ere ou crystal portraite.⁴³

Or so enclosed and hid but that it shows
 As if portrayed upon the crystal stones.⁴⁴

Amant compares the fountain to a mirror and comes to the conclusion that both media reflect the world as it is, "sanz couverture" and "sanz decevoir." In this sense, the "speculum" is "sine macula"⁴⁵ and could be perceived as a source of true knowledge. It is a significant departure from Ovid's version, according to which Narcissus fell prey to the deceptive nature of the *fons mortis*. What Guillaume offers his readers is a reflection of the "speculum mundi:"⁴⁶ in rays of the sun which is symbolic of a superior reality, the garden and its inhabitants can be seen and admired in minute detail from both sides. The overall image is permeated with Christian symbolism: the square garden, containing the number four as its symbol, stands for the terrestrial world, whereas a round fountain-mirror transfers us to another superior dimension. We therefore receive here an image of a man inscribed in a square as well as in a circle,⁴⁷ which bespeaks his physicality as well as spirituality. For the

⁴³ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 118, vv.1552–1567 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁴ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 32, vv. 90–101.

⁴⁵ In his article "Narcisse, la fontaine d'amour et Guillaume de Lorris," Erich Köhler argues that self-knowledge lies at the roots of the knowledge of the world. The latter could be attained as a result of the knowledge of God through the impeccable mirror of wisdom. To support his thesis, Köhler quotes from the Book of Wisdom: "Candor est enim lucis aeternae, et **speculum sine macula** Dei majestatis, et imago bonitatis ejus" (Wis. 7, 26, emphasis mine) (Erich Köhler, "Narcisse, la fontaine d'amour et Guillaume de Lorris," in: *L'humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romaines du XIIIe au XIVe siècle*, ed. Authime Fournier, Paris 1964, p. 161).

⁴⁶ Armand Strubel, ed., *Le roman de la rose. Introduction*, Paris 1984, p. 66.

⁴⁷ This picture is reminiscent of the *homo quadratus*, as described by the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius, who, in his treatise *De Architectura* (15 BC), drew parallels between the ideal human proportions and the proportions of a temple: "Similarly, in the members of a temple there ought to be the greatest harmony in the symmetrical relations of the different parts to the general magnitude of the whole. Then again, in the human body the central point is naturally the navel. For if a man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centred at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described therefrom. And just as the human body yields a circular outline, so too a square figure may be found from it. For if we measure the distance from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and then apply that measure to the outstretched arms, the breadth will be found to be the same as the height, as in the case of plane surfaces which are perfectly square" (Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan, Cambridge (Mass.), London 1914, p. 48). The Vitruvian man

medieval man, the visible world was a mirror of the invisible one; material objects were mirrors in which spiritual objects were reflected.⁴⁸ Following this line of thought, Amant does not at all perceive himself in the mirror: he does not describe his eyes, face and posture, but is jubilant about the spiritual world as mirrored by the crystals whose precision resembles that of a painting. Kruse observes that Guillaume's parallel between reflection and painting had been one of the first such juxtapositions from antiquity.⁴⁹ Undeniably, it allows for a mimetic duplication of the world or even for its beautification and spiritualisation. The neo-platonic overtones⁵⁰ of Guillaume's description cannot be overlooked here: his world is clearly reminiscent of Plato's world of ideas, rendered in a famous allegory of the cave.

5. Plato's Cave

Depicted in book VII of *The Republic* (ca. 360 BC), Plato's allegory of the cave has been construed in Western thought as a paradigm of the human soul's striving for the good and true. Juxtaposing the transient world of visible things and the world of intelligible ideas, Plato depicts man's transformation from a "caveman," governed by the sense perception and bound by his passions, into a rational human being capable of applying reason and understanding. Hence he wishes to see man's earthly existence as a passage from captivity to freedom. Plato's prisoners know nothing else but the shadows, i.e. they can only see the idols – semblances of reality – projected onto the wall of the cave. Like Amant, who regards only the reflections of the objects from the garden, so the prisoners watch the shadows of the real objects. Plato interprets man's laborious ascent out of the cave as attaining gradually higher degrees of knowledge: he commences with the sense perception, the least respectable form of knowledge, by means of which one can get to know only the shadows of the objects, or their reflections in water. The highest degree constitutes the knowledge of things in their own existence, outside of any medium, for which one needs to apply the understanding. The overall picture of the cave Plato translates into an allegory:

was popularised by Leonardo da Vinci in his drawing known as *Homo Quadratus* around 1487. In an attached note in mirror writing, he explains that the drawing is an illustration to the Vitruvian treatise.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mieczysław Wallis, *Dzieje zwierciadła i jego rola w różnych dziedzinach kultury*, Warszawa 1973, p. 34.

⁴⁹ Christiane Kruse, *Wozu Menschen malen. Historische Begründungen eines Bildmediums*, München 2003, p. 315.

⁵⁰ Cf. Jacques Ribard, *Du mythique au mystique. La littérature médiévale et ses symboles*, Paris 1995, pp. 315ff.

[...] if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise [...] my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this.⁵¹

In a dream-like vision, the philosopher depicts the soul's ascension to what Frappier would inevitably call "une réalité supérieure et cachée:" the soul strives for good, impalpable in man's direct experience of the visible world but perceivable through beautiful objects. These produce light which stands for truth and reason in the intelligible world of ideas. Man's goal should be to lead his/her soul upwards to the world of truth and reason, i.e.

[...] the conversion from the shadows to the images that cast them and to the light and the ascent from the subterranean cavern to the world above, and there the persisting inability to look directly at animals and plants and the light of the sun, but the ability to see the phantasms created by God in water and shadows of objects that are real and not merely, as before, the shadows of images cast through a light which, compared with the sun, is as unreal as they – all this procedure of the arts and sciences that we have described indicates their power to lead the best part of the soul up to the contemplation of what is best among realities, as in our parable the clearest organ of the body [i.e. the eye – A.G.] was turned to the contemplation of what is brightest in the corporeal and visible region.⁵²

Man who looks directly at the sun does not watch the shadows but the truth; s/he gets to know the eternal things, not the fleeting ones. Plato encouraged people to embark on an educational path, leading not only to gaining the knowledge of the things in their existence but, arguably, further to attaining self-knowledge. He believed to have created an ideal state, founded on the ideas of good, truth and beauty. In rays of the sun, Amant finds another "superior reality" – the world rooted in the idea of (courtly) love, in which he hopes to find fulfilment.

6. Guillaume's "superior reality"

Like Plato's *anax*, Guillaume's Amant also follows an educational itinerary: he will be instructed in the art of love in the enchanted garden of *deduiz* on the other side of the "looking-glass." The transfer to another world will allow him to gain self-knowledge. Unlike Narcissus, however, he is aware of the danger a mirror can pose; here "li mireors perilleus" offers an instructive warning

⁵¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, London, Cambridge (Mass.) 1963, p. 129, 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 197, 199.

against the reliance on the sense perception, and hence becomes an appeal to the *prudentia*.⁵³ The crystals are only the intermediaries of experience and do not provide the viewer with an immediate knowledge of the things. The perception of the mirror as distorting has a very long tradition. In the Christian exegesis, it goes back to St. Paul, who regards only the *facie ad faciem* experience as true: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”⁵⁴ Reflecting primarily the eyes of the one who looks into the fountain, the crystals are nothing else but convex mirrors which render images in a distorted shape. Additionally, Amant sees things “where they are not,” as Jacques Lacan would have it, i.e. displaced. So they become unreal and illusory. In his essay “Les deux narcissismes,” Lacan describes the formation of an image in a concave mirror via a plane mirror. The effect is a virtual mirror-image. He mentions two features which are constitutive of an image production in plane, concave and convex mirrors, namely the object’s displacement and its virtual dimension: “Qu’est-ce que je vais voir dans le miroir? Premièrement, ma propre figure, là où elle n’est pas. Deuxièmement, en un point symétrique du point où est l’image réelle, je vais voir apparaître cette image réelle comme image virtuelle.”⁵⁵ A convex mirror is shaped like a hemisphere, and hence provides a wider field of vision than a plane mirror, thereby offering an illusion of the *mappae mundi*; the reflected objects are closer than they appear, which provides Amant looking into the crystals with a sense of participation in the “speculum mundi.” A convex mirror reflects the sun’s rays outwards, thus becoming symbolic, in the medieval mind, of a “superior reality.” Yet it produces an illusion of an inverted image, i.e. a mirror-image. Hence it comes as no surprise that Amant begins to perceive the mirror as an inevitable trap:

C’est li mireors perilleus
 Ou Narcisus li orgueilleus
 Mira sa face et ses yauz vers,
 Dont il just puis morz toz envers.
 Qui enz ou mireor se mire,
 Ne puet avoir garant ne mire
 Que tel chose a ses ieulz ne voie
 Qui d’amors l’a tout mis an voie.

The Mirror Perilous it is, where proud
 Narcissus saw his face and his gray eyes,
 Because of which he soon lay on his bier.
 There is no harm nor remedy for this;
 Whatever thing appears before one’s eyes,
 While at these stones he looks, he straightway loves.
 Many a valiant man has perished thence;
 The wisest, worthiest, most experienced

⁵³ Wallis observes that, in the Middle Ages, the mirror was a symbol of such contradictory attributes as *vanitas* and *luxuria*, on the one hand, and *prudentia*, one of the four cardinal virtues, on the other (cf. Mieczysław Wallis, *Dzieje zwierciadła i jego rola w różnych dziedzinach kultury*, Warszawa 1973, p. 37).

⁵⁴ *Holy Bible. The New King James Version*, Nashville, Camden, New York 1982, 1 Cor., 13, 12.

⁵⁵ Jacques Lacan, “Les deux narcissismes,” in: *Le séminaire. Livre I. Les écrits techniques de Freud*. Paris 1975, p. 144.

Maint villant home a mis a glaive
 Cil mireors, car li plus saive,
 Li plus preu, li plus agaitie.
 Si sort as genz novele rage;
 Ici se changent li corage,
 Ci n'a mestier sens ne mesure,
 Ci est d'amer volantez pure,
 Ci ne se set conseilhier nus,
 Car cupido li filz venus
 Sema ici d'amors la graine,
 Qui toute a teinte la fontaine,
 Et fist les laz en milieu tendre
 Et ses engins i mist por prendre
 Damoiseles et damoisiaus,
 Qu'amors ne viaut autres oissiaus.⁵⁶

Have there been trapped and taken unawares.
 There a new furor falls to some men's lot;
 There others see their resolution change;
 There neither sense nor moderation holds
 The mastery; there will to love is all;
 There no man can take counsel for himself.
 'Tis Cupid, Venus' son, there sows the seed
 Which taints the fountain, and 'tis there he sets
 His nets and snares to capture man and maid;
 For Cupid hunts no other sort of bird.⁵⁷

Owing to the alluring character of the mirror, Narcissus did not have any other choice but to fall in love with what he saw reflected. Likewise, Guillaume's fountain of love brings about Amant's metamorphosis into a lover, yet of a different kind: he gets struck with an uncontrollable fit of desire – "rage d'amors"⁵⁸ which is beyond measure. *Mezura*, constituting an integral part of the courtly manner of conduct, required of the lover to be "able to govern his sexual appetite through strength of character."⁵⁹ Yet the drive turns out to be much stronger than the prescribed code of conduct: the lover perceives rose bushes surrounded by the hedge, one of which is particularly beautiful. Amant falls in love with it and desires to pluck it. As it is out of his reach, he can only enjoy its pure smell. Here the mirroring crystals fulfil a more complex function than a mere reflecting surface, that of a limit, for their outer layer is impenetrable and Amant cannot come into a direct contact with the desired rose. In this context, it is also a socially imposed limit.⁶⁰ In his seminar

⁵⁶ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 118, vv. 1568–1591.

⁵⁷ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 32, vv. 102–119.

⁵⁸ In the context of love, Tobler and Lommatzsch provide two possible meanings of the word: "Tollheit, tolles Gebahren, unsinniges Tun und Reden" oder "Verzweiflung" (Adolf Tobler, Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 8, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 175f.)

⁵⁹ Bernard I. Murstein, *Sex, Love and Marriage throughout Ages*, New York 1974, p. 149.

⁶⁰ In his book *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976), Michel Foucault postulates the thesis that sexuality is a historical construct and an effect of power relations. One of the mechanisms in which power is executed is by means of a law of prohibitions: "– *Le cycle de l'interdit*: tu n'approcheras pas, tu ne toucheras pas, tu ne consommeras pas, tu n'éprouveras pas de plaisir, tu ne parleras pas, tu n'apparaîtras pas; à la limite tu n'existeras pas, sauf dans l'ombre et le secret. Sur le sexe, le pouvoir ne ferait jouer qu'une loi de prohibition. Son objectif: que le sexe renonce à lui-même. Son instrument: la menace d'un châtement qui n'est autre que sa suppression" (Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, Paris 1976, vol. 1,

“L’amour courtois en anamorphose,” Lacan defines this supplementary role of the mirror as follows: “[...] un rôle de limite. Il est ce que l’on ne peut franchir. Et l’organisation de l’inaccessibilité de l’objet est bien la seule à quoi il participe.”⁶¹ As Amant’s object is inaccessible, he launches into a description of the agonies of love which he suffers from Cupid’s arrows. The arrows of *biautez*, *simplesce*, *cortoisie*, *compaignie* and *biaus semblanz* enter through the eyes and penetrate the heart without ever leaving the body, thereby opening the wounds of *jouissance*, i.e. the wounds which are the cause of simultaneous pleasure and pain; they inject the lover with the prescribed manner of the conquest of the beloved as exemplified by *fin’amor*.

7. The Rose

Reflected by the miraculous crystals, the chosen rose becomes a sublime object of Amant’s desire. Putting the heroine on a pedestal from which she is to be admired turns her into a passive object, and as such she becomes the embodiment of an ideal courtly beloved. In Amant’s dream vision, the rose emerges as a result of condensation and displacement in the Freudian sense. The personifications of *bel acueil*, *franchise*, *pitiez*, *honte*, *paor* and *dongier* are condensed into one person to constitute the heroine’s character: on the one hand, she is more than willing to accept the lover, on the other, however, she has to comply with the ideal of the unattainable courtly lady. C.S. Lewis calls these qualities the heroine’s moods: “Nor is it unnatural for a lover to regard his courtship as an adventure, not with a single person, but with that person’s varying moods, some of which are his friends and some his enemies.”⁶² Undoubtedly, the rose is a metaphor for the ideal courtly lady whose prescriptive virtues are to overcome the vices in a sort of *psychomachia*. According to Lacan, the same mechanism which is responsible for the formation of metaphor determines the emergence of a symptom. Metaphor

p. 110f.). This suppression is nothing but the renunciation of sexual pleasure, a very well-known postulate of the Christian doctrine: “Le héros vertueux qui est capable de se détourner du plaisir comme d’une tentation dans laquelle il sait ne pas tomber est une figure familière au christianisme, comme a été courante l’idée que cette renonciation est capable de donner accès à une expérience spirituelle de la vérité et de l’amour que l’activité sexuelle exclurait” (ibid., vol. 2, p. 26). According to Foucault, the sources of this idea can be traced back to antiquity: Ischomachus, a hero of Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, lists self-control (*enkrateia*) as one of the virtues which enable both men and women to co-exist peacefully within the household economics (cf. ibidem vol. 2, p. 178). As we have seen, the Middle Ages developed their own understanding of this notion.

⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, “L’amour courtois en anamorphose,” in: *Le séminaire. Livre VII. L’éthique de la psychanalyse*. Paris 1975, p. 181.

⁶² C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition*, New York, Oxford 1958, p. 118.

describes one thing by the name of another. Likewise, a symptom appears in the place of a trace of the subject's unconscious.⁶³ The heroine's culturally determined virtues are to substitute her so-called vices which, nevertheless, remain repressed in the unconscious, and hence are responsible for the emergence of a symptom which reveals itself in the heroine's inner struggle and her split personality. This substitution of the "vices" for the "virtues" which further allows for the substitution of the heroine for the rose I wish to call a normative metaphor, as it is socially constructed to produce the image of an ideal courtly lady. At the same time the rose is subject to a metonymic process: it gradually becomes a bud, which Amant desires to possess:

Lors si ai dit: "sachiez, biau sire,
Qu'amors durement me tormente;
Ne cuidiez pas que je vos mente;
Il m'a ou cuer .v. plaies faites,
Ja les dolors n'en seront trestes,
Se le boton ne me bailliez
Qui est des autres mout prisiez:
Ce est m'amors, ce est ma vie,
De nule rien n'ai plus envie."⁶⁴

Then I told all: "Fair sir, pray do not think
That I would lie to you. The God of Love
Torments me so severely that he's made
Five wounds within my heart, whose ceaseless pain
Will last until I gain that best-shaped bud.
Naught else I wish; for it I live or die."⁶⁵

Etymologically metonymy denotes a change of name⁶⁶ and, like metaphor, serves as a disguise for the unconscious thoughts. The rose is perceived through its part, a bud, and as such becomes meaningful for Amant: after all, it is not the rose but its bud that he aims at possessing. Having received a fair welcome from the rose, Amant realises that his desire is for something else.⁶⁷ One cannot fail to notice that if the rose is a metaphor for the ideal courtly lady, the bud as its contiguous part must metonymically refer to female genitals. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that *bel accueil* is outraged at Amant's wanting

⁶³ Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud," in: *Écrits I*, Paris 1999, p. 515.

⁶⁴ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel, Paris 1992, p. 182, vv. 2896–2904.

⁶⁵ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York 1962, p. 60, vv. 52–57.

⁶⁶ gr. *metonymia*, *hypallage*, *denominatio* = Namensvertauschung, Umbenennung, Setzung eines Begriffs oder Hauptworts oder einer Vorstellung für andere auf Grund des Zusammenhanges und der Verwandtschaft der Begriffe. Stellvertretung einer Vorstellung durch eine andere mit ihr assoziierte [...] (Leonid Arbusow, *Colores rhetorici*, Göttingen 1963, p. 84).

⁶⁷ In "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud," Lacan writes: "[...] l'instinct [est pris] dans les rails, – éternellement tendus vers le *désir d'autre chose* –, de la métonymie" (Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud," in: *Écrits I*, Paris 1999, p. 515f.).

to abduct the bud. Obviously, what he expresses is a social concern for female chastity. Amant can dream about the fulfilment of his wish and talk about it under cover of metonymic displacement, for it wards off the emergence of meaning: “[...] que trouve l’homme dans la métonymie, si ce doit être plus que le pouvoir de tourner les obstacles de la censure sociale?”⁶⁸ For transgressing the rules of the courtly game all the roses are enclosed within a square wall and *bel acueil* is imprisoned in a round tower under guard of *la vieille*, who will not allow Amant to reach his beloved. The rose’s final enclosure is an accurate metaphor for the social and political isolation of women in the Middle Ages. The place is undoubtedly constructed with the same symbolic principle in mind as the enchanted garden, forming thus its miniature: again, the terrestrial and divine elements are intertwined. Amant’s never ending quest for the constantly eluding bud of the rose makes him realise that he lacks in being and so he becomes a desiring subject. His desire is further reinforced by the fact that he meets incessant obstacles to its fulfilment. In this context, it becomes clear why Guillaume omitted Narcissus’ metamorphosis into a flower. As Amant courts the rose as his beloved lady, his potential metamorphosis into an ephemeral flower would turn him into an effeminate being.

Guillaume’s poem can be read at two levels: at the level of the manifest content, we simply have to do with a fable, depicting the lover’s adventures in an enchanted garden. Analysing Amant’s latent dream-thoughts distorted by the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy, we have discovered the significance of the rose in the poem, which altogether allows us to arrive at the under-the-surface meaning, i.e. at the poem’s allegorical signification: the enchanted garden of *deduiz* is simply an allegory of the medieval court, equated with paradise. In his dream, Amant comes across another world – the world of ideas, where he courts not the real woman, but the idea of (courtly) love. Therefore, according to the tenets of the doctrine, his desire is supposed to remain unfulfilled and so ends Guillaume’s poem *in medias res*. The anonymous conclusion added later to the existing lines depicts the relationship between the lover and his chosen rose as fulfilled. Did the anonymous author disregard the precepts of courtly love, or did he have some hints in the poem which allowed him to conclude it in this way? Like every allegory, Guillaume’s courtly allegory includes also a moral instruction: the lady should not follow the example of Narcissus and let her lover die as a result of frustrated desire. With this commentary Guillaume subverts the theory of courtly love. If we assume that Amant, like Narcissus before him, has set out on a quest for self-knowledge, Guillaume’s message is transparent in this context: arriving at self-

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 505.

knowledge is possible only in a relation with the object.⁶⁹ The court as a terrestrial paradise should allow for such fulfilment.

8. Conclusions

Guillaume's reception of the myth of Narcissus is deeply indebted to the culture of his times. He juxtaposes the histories of Narcissus and Amant, inscribing them in the poetics of courtly love. Both tales fulfil a didactic function, warning against the consequences of idolatrous self-love which excludes fulfilment and attaining self-knowledge; they are instances of a myth of concern. Frye argues that the abhorrence of idolatry or sin lie at the roots of "the greater myths of concern, the ones that have permanently altered the consciousness of man [...]."⁷⁰ The Ovidian myth of Narcissus as well as its reception by Guillaume, inscribed in the institution of courtly love, are undeniably such myths. Ovid's Narcissus fell unhappily in love with the imaginary other; his self-infatuation deprived him of the wished-for reciprocity and caused his death. As Amant has prior knowledge about his predecessor's fate, he knows how to avoid regarding his reflection. In his dream-vision, he concentrates on another object. Uitti argues that, in early Old French literature, mirrors were associated with couples. In Chrétien's *Érec et Énide*, Érec gazes upon Énide as if he were looking into a mirror, on which Uitti comments as follows: "Seeing the Other in the Couple just as one looks at a mirror thus constitutes a high degree of authentic self-knowledge and a key to self-realization, in love. The image reflected upon one by the Other is both perfect and entire."⁷¹ Narcissus' self-infatuation is replaced by Amant's desire for the other. Yet he does not achieve self-realization in love, for the mirror's mediation reveals only the inaccessibility of his chosen object and thus the impossibility of fulfilment. The woman as a rose is a cultural product that never becomes an active participant in a relationship, capable of reciprocating the love of another human being. Although the history of Narcissus reveals a longing for the satisfaction of one's desire, in Guillaume's rendering, it is burdened with a warning to the proud self-lovers who, as it happened in the Middle Ages, seemed to be predominantly women. Obviously, medieval culture was a patriarchal culture which did not produce many positive

⁶⁹ See also Erich Köhler, "Narcisse, la fontaine d'amour et Guillaume de Lorris," in: *L'humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romaines du XIIe au XIVe siècle*, ed. Authime Fournier, Paris 1964, p. 148.

⁷⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path*, Bloomington, London 1971, p. 53.

⁷¹ Karl D. Uitti, "«Cele [qui] doit ester Rose clamee:» Guillaume's Intertextuality," in: *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose. Text, Image, Reception*, eds. Kevin Brownlee, Sylvia Huot, Philadelphia 1992, p. 57.

examples of women: we rarely find any examples of men being straightforwardly accused of *superbia* and *vanitas* underlain by a narcissistic penchant. Yet, Guillaume's reception of the Narcissus myth provides us with an astute critical commentary on the social censorship of human sexuality. Under cover of allegory, Guillaume depicts the medieval court as a terrestrial paradise where sexuality is a top priority concern and as such is socially controlled and channelled. Guillaume inscribes his observations in the poetics of a dream that he claims to contain true contents, but which, like allegory, has two levels of meaning. Following Freud, we know that "[d]er Traum ist die (verkleidete) Erfüllung eines (unterdrückten, verdrängten) Wunsches."⁷² It is the wish to satisfy one's desire with an object of one's choice, disguised in courtly allegory. The practice of controlling human sexuality was also known to Ovid, whose Narcissus had to die, for he not only rejected the love of another human being, but also fell in love with an image which happened to be his own. Amant wishes to find self-realization in love with the chosen woman, but the rose, as she is called, is culturally and socially inaccessible.

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⁷² Sigmund Freud, "Die Traumentstellung," in: *Die Traumdeutung und andere Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 152.

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Illustrations

1. The Fountain of Narcissus, *Le roman de la rose*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms fr. 1558, fol. 12v
2. The Fountain of Love, *Le roman de la rose*, London, British Library, Royal 20A XVII. 15c

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