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Voices of Protest and Submission: Portraits of Women in *Partonopeu de Blois* and its Middle English Translation

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The anonymous, late twelfth-century *Partonopeu de Blois* must have been one of the most popular romances of the Middle Ages since it existed in several varying versions and was translated into seven languages, including English. It is a fairy mistress tale, drawing on both the Cupid and Psyche myth and Celtic folklore in order to unfold the story of Melior's love for Partonopeu, her use of magic to bring him to her kingdom, her imposition of a taboo which he violates, and finally the couple's long and painful period of separation and rehabilitation which will end in marriage.[1]

The French versions of the poem exist in seven more-or-less complete manuscripts, one fragment and an excerpt. They conform, with minor variations, to the above narrative pattern, although five have a 'Continuation' of the story after Melior's and Partonopeu's wedding.[2] The English poem exists in two versions, one a complete manuscript of a 12,000-line translation, the other a fragment of only 308 lines, also a translation but from a different source. No extant French source text can be traced for either. The longer version, with which we shall be concerned, is in a fifteenth-century manuscript written in both northern and southern dialects, and in couplets.[3] It follows the French poem closely and ends with the lovers' wedding.

General comparisons of the French and English romances, mostly to the detriment of the latter, have been legion over the past fifty years, and are so familiar as not to need repeating. More specific comparisons concerning love and marriage on the one hand and the

portrayal of women on the other are, however, pertinent to the present paper.

The English romances have traditionally been said to embody 'sounder morals' because they drastically changed French concepts of love, sex and marriage and were 'less lascivious'. Lippman praised Anglo-Saxon attitudes for emphasizing marital rather than extra-marital patterns of love. John Wilcox went to absurd lengths in his study of the composite English romances to claim that their greater sexual morality could be attributed to the 'sexual asceticism' of the English people themselves, being the product of a 'national temper'. Lanham distinguished the English romances from the French 'chiefly by a lively interest in physical chastity' and emphasis on marriage, while Van de Voot and Gist, uttering similar sentiments, claimed that the English romances were untouched by the code of *amour courtois*.[4] A more recent critic has similarly claimed that 'essential morality is the feature that differentiates English romances from their continental counterparts. The Middle English romances rarely tell of adulterous or extra-marital relationships and indeed exhibit little interest in the feverish, passionate love which so bewitched French and German writers'.[5] Yet as Kelly argues in *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, many such claims overlook the fact that in French romance marriage is also preferred, although it is not described in as much detail as other forms of love and is often used to end the romance. Moreover, there is most definitely a strict moral code of love that pertains, particularly in Chrétien de Troyes, for example, a view with which Peter Noble concurs.[6] Some of these rather sweeping comparisons of the French and English romances are no doubt based on an overview rather than a careful and detailed comparative study of the texts and an analysis of the translating and adapting methods used by the English authors.

The same can be said of several studies comparing women in the French and Middle English romances. Beginning her monograph, *The Heroine of the Middle English Romance*, with the statement that 'the morals of the English heroine are essentially sounder', A.E. Harris claims that in the French romances 'for the most part the moral issue is disregarded'. Moreover, the French heroine's scruples 'are concerned almost entirely with her reputation' rather than with sexual morality, while the English heroine has as her exclusive goal, marriage, even if it is 'anticipated' as in *Partonopeu of Blois*.[7] This would seem to disregard the fact that the French *Partonopeu* itself provides this very

pattern of 'anticipated' marriage. A similar disregard for the source text is reflected in Kane's comment that the *Partonopeu* Narrator's criticism of women's new-found chastity (9664-9705) might be explained by 'one late fourteenth- or early-fifteenth century point of view about courtly love';[8] the passage is in fact a close translation of its twelfth-century source. In a dissertation on the roles of women in the Middle English romances, Nanette Roberts actually argues that a distorted view of the romances - and particularly of the part females play in them - arises from an 'inadequate study of the English material and reflects the character of the continental romances rather than the English'.[9] As a result, she rarely if ever consults the French sources which, as in her commentary on *Partonopeu*, leads to some rather questionable claims. In a needed corrective to such views, Caroline Eckhardt points out that the role of woman as mediator in the English romances is inherited from Continental tradition rather than contemporary English reality, and goes so far as to query even the validity of speaking of a separate body of English romances, 'so pervasive are the similarities between them and the Continent'.[10] While perhaps stopping somewhat short of this rather radical view, I would argue that the English romances for which a French source served as model, and this means the great majority, must be examined alongside their Continental versions, and in detail. This of course is particularly true in the case of *Partonopeu of Blois*, a very close translation, in medieval terms at least, of its source.[11] Such a comparison is proposed in the present study, which it is hoped will modify a view like Spensley's, based on a small selection of very short passages and discussed in a brief four-page article, that the English poem offers a 'carefully modulated' presentation of the courtly lady.[12]

A study of the women in the two *Partonopeu* poems must also of course take into account certain developments in the field of medieval history and literature since the early works on romance heroines. Changes have occurred in the attitudes towards courtly love, the concept of the individual in the late Middle Ages, the nature and role of the narratorial voice in romance, and the interpretation of women's roles in medieval life and literature brought about by new trends in social history and feminist criticism. These are all reflected in the studies of women in the romances. Harris, although admitting that the role of the lady was usually subsidiary to that of the knight, saw it as central to the plot in the romances of love and concluded that women

'contribute a pictorial quality and refinement of tone'; the lady's 'chief justification' for existence is her 'inspiration for the best in man', but 'to it she still owes her charm'.[13] In *The Medieval Society Romances*, Sarah Barrow speaks of the 'continuous prominence' of the heroine's role, which she sees as one of the most important characteristics of medieval romance: to advance the plot, be the centre of psychological interest, and be responsible for the social problems of atmosphere. The woman is secondary to the hero but does more than 'show him off'.[14] Gist saw a dichotomy in the chivalric romances that reflected that of real life: women were protected by the tenets of the chivalric code, were idealized objects of man's devotion and inspirers of noble deeds, yet subjugated by fathers and husbands and seen as temptresses. In short, their literary presentation but echoed the 'pit and pedestal' attitudes found elsewhere in medieval life.

More recent critics are unanimous in seeing the woman's role as subsidiary to the hero's. Moreover, they question the idealization of woman found within the courtly love frame of reference, as indeed they question the very existence of courtly love itself.[15] In several studies, Joan Ferrante has shown how courtly literature, both lyric and romance, is concerned with male actions and emotions, while the woman represents the force of love through which man can be awakened to 'a new sense of himself'.[16] Woman's role, although important, is usually to inspire a male poet, lover, or hero, and women are usually presented as 'projections of the male ideal or the male fantasy, rarely as independent personalities'. Yet counterbalancing this idealized image of woman is another, that of the 'real' woman who will 'debunk' those fantasies, although she too, as the creation of a male poet aware of the weaknesses of his sex, is a projection of the man's self-image. She will nevertheless force the hero to face reality and teach him to deal with it,[17] although because she is never at the centre of power, she will have to rely on 'subtle and devious methods' by which to do it.[18] Upholding the view that while romances could not exist without women, 'female characters are attendants to the central drama of the stories rather than participants', Penny Gold Schine contends that the romance hero pursues his goals - both prowess and the discovery of a personal identity - alone, with women as one object of the pursuit, identified through love with the personal realm of the hero's quest. A woman cannot be at the centre of romance because she is part of the hero's personal, inner development, part of his conflict between personal and social concerns, which is the 'central experience

of romance'.[19] These views concerning the centrality of the male hero in Continental romance are shared by Roberts in her dissertation on English romance, where she convincingly demonstrates the 'satellite relationship' of the females to males and argues that even female success is different from male: the virtues of fidelity, or passive endurance replace those of physical courage and heroic prowess.[20]

If this introductory section on Continental and English romance heroines has been rather extended, it is because the presence of women in the *Partonopeu* poems is particularly strong. It is manifested both in the variety of female characters involved in the narrative of Partonopeu's quest - five in the French poem and six in the English - and in the person of the Narrator's Lady, who is referred to at intervals throughout the poem. Moreover, it is reinforced by the Narrator's many general comments on women and love. In order to discuss the nature and function of this female presence in the French and English poems, and thence to test previous claims concerning the differences between them, I shall firstly compare the descriptions of the female characters and their roles. They fall into three groups: Melior, the heroine; three women who in different ways help Partonopeu; two women (three in the English poem) who wish to deter him from marrying Melior. In the second part of the article I shall compare the comments on women provided by the unusually strong voice of the Narrator.

The relationship of Melior to the fairy mistress of folklore and romance is suggested in the very first scene in which she appears. All the supernatural trappings of her city and palace have been described by the Narrator, who has twice hinted that they might be the work of the devil. The terrified Partonopeu, crouching in a sumptuous bed and hearing something approaching in the darkness, is of like opinion; he is afraid it is a 'maufé' (1124), a word used three times in the scene and translated variously as 'evyll thynge', 'deuyll or ffynde' and 'fowle thynge'.[21] We do not learn until line 1133 that it is in fact a 'damoisele', a 'yonge mayde' (1193). Thus the Narrator foreshadows the dual nature of the heroine. In the first part of the poem, she exhibits the traits of the fairy mistress who casts a spell over the young man she wants to seduce to her kingdom and keep in her power. Her brand of magic however is necromancy, not fairy enchantment, acquired after years of study but limited in its power. Thus in the second part of the poem, bereft of her magic, she is reduced to being an ordinary young

woman who, unlike a fairy mistress, suffers equally with the hero after he leaves.

This first scene reveals other traits of Melior's character and also provides further information about her treatment at the hands of the translator. Having brought Partonope to her city by magic, she is horrified at finding him in her bed - or protests that she is, for the French Narrator adds slyly, 'Et quant l'a sentu, si tressaut/Escria soi et nient trop haut' (1145-46). The scene is handled somewhat differently by the translator. While his Narrator preserves the tongue-in-cheek tone of the French, he makes it clear to his audience that he is echoing his source: 'Myne auctor seyeth hyt was not lowde' (1304). Eight lines later he underlines the French Narrator's scepticism with his own: 'As in anger tho she sayde thus' (1312).[22] In between, he spells out - as he does elsewhere in the poem - what the French simply implies: Melior is concerned, not with preserving her maidenhead, in which case she would have screamed loudly and made 'gret affray', but with protecting her reputation, 'For þhat euer was here most ffere' (1311). The English author's emphasis on the heroine's reputation is singled out by Spensley as being one means by which the character of the Courtly Lady is modified: Melior's motivations and feelings spring from her desire to have Partonope as husband, her concern for her reputation and her sense of shame, all of which are made more explicit in the English poem.[23] As this opinion concerning women's reputation occurs in several critics, both with regard to *Partonope* and English romance in general, the subject is worthwhile examining in detail.

The 79-line interpolation in the English poem that describes Melior lying 'all night' at Partonope's side (in the French it is simply 'a grant pose'), musing whether to make an advance or not, would seem to support such a view. 'A-shamed she ys for wommanhede' because she realizes that having brought the 'lusty' Partonope to bed, she is now likely to lose her maidenhead to him. She admits she has been plotting to have him as husband, 'and so to saue/Here worshyppe' (1223-24). In an address to lovers, the English Narrator asks their opinion of this 'hyghe born' lady who has jeopardized her 'honowre'.[24] Yet he goes on humorously to depict Melior wondering how best to get 'acquontede wyth here geste' (1257) while not appearing wanton. 'Shamefastness' keeps her motionless in bed, he tells us twice. This long passage, entirely original to the English poem, does indeed underline the importance of reputation to Melior; on the other hand, three references to her dishonour in the surrounding French text are all

omitted (1449, 1486, 1493), while Melior's explanations to Partonope that she must not be seen with him by her courtiers is present in both the French (1524, 1569) and English (1877, 1917). Spensley bolsters his case by giving two other instances where the English poet adds references to Melior's fear of losing 'womanhede': in the dubbing scene (9073-74) and one of the tournament scenes (10467-69). In the latter, however, as Spensley himself suggests, the French (8767-68) might be merely suggesting what the English states explicitly. He does not mention an omission in the final reconciliation scene of the French Narrator's statement that all shame and dishonour are now forgotten (10525); nor does he say that in at least eleven places the heroine's reputation is referred to in both texts and in similar terms.[25] Most important, he selects only one comment from Melior's long complaint of roughly one hundred lines (F4672-775 and E5976-6067) to illustrate differences in the heroine's attitude: the French Melior thinks her loss of Partonopeu worse than her loss of reputation and virtues (4731-34) whereas the English one places her 'maydenhede', 'honowre' and 'name' at the top of the list (6043-45). Even this Spensley suggests might not be a '*deliberate* change' for the French text provides a difficult reading.[26] In fact, a careful analysis of the whole passage reveals the following: the French Melior refers to her honour, reputation and fear of reproach eight times and the English Melior nine; she states that although she has lost her magic powers, 'ma honte vaint mon damage/Qui molte tormente mon corage' (4679-80), which is omitted from the English; both heroines end with the cry that it is dreadful to lose worldly goods but worse to lose one's love. Overall, then, it is difficult to make a case for the English poet's greater emphasis on reputation.

In both poems, Melior's concern with honour is an ironic reflexion of her immaturity. In bringing Partonope to her and letting him make love to her every night while depriving him of friends and family, she is structuring a world that is in fact set apart from that of honour. The secret world of love that she creates represents an evasion from responsibility and an escape from reality. Although operating within the code of courtly love - secrecy being often an essential ingredient of a liaison in order to preserve the lady's honour - Melior goes beyond it in not allowing even Partonope to see her. It is part of her 'double standard'. In public she will preserve an appearance of respectability and even indifference to love; in private she will enjoy love, and on her terms. She protests that the secrecy is necessary to obey

conventions, yet her behaviour is a flagrant flouting of them. This aspect of the heroine's character is presented in the same way by both poets.

In discussing Melior's manipulation of Partonopeu, Ferrante claims there is 'no need for all her secrecy, except to create the illusion, the fiction, of an impossible and therefore more appealing love'. Since Melior is an empress she should not need to operate secretly 'as if she were totally dependent on the will of others, or as if she were trapped by her culture's expectations of woman's role'.[27] The poet however gives two reasons for her fear. Partonopeu is only thirteen when Melior seduces him (543); his youth is emphasized repeatedly in the initial bedroom scene and later.[28] Secondly, because of his youth he has not yet been dubbed, which makes him an unacceptable husband for an empress. The lovers must wait two and a half years, during which time he will prepare for knighthood (F1451, 1492 and E1804, 1835). His youth and inferior social rank (for the moment at least, despite his being the King of France's nephew and Hector's descendant) are emphasized in the following lines where Melior, like many a fairy mistress, instructs him on how to behave with 'gentillece' and 'noblece' (1513-14); this is spelled out for the English audience as 'curtesy' and being 'lowly to smale as welle as to grete' (1854-55). Partonopeu's youth and inferior station are again stressed when the women of the court discover him in bed with Melior. They call him 'vallet' and 'garcon', and in the English 'lewed knave', and contrast him with the knights and squires Melior might have taken (F4823-60 and E6110-37). Melior's reasons, then, are rooted in social concerns in both poems. Her queenly power is limited by the opinions of her subjects, as her magic is limited by the rival powers of Partonopeu's family, country and church, which are also social in nature. Nor will she be able to exercise outright power or magic over the outcome of the tournament her courtiers organize in order to choose a husband. The final scene presents a picture of Melior vacillating between assertion and obedience, protest and submission. Clarin tells her she must take the Sultan and she feels she must comply: the French has 'tenir les esgars' (10108) whereas the English explicitly says 'obey' (11743). Yet when Ernouls prefers Partonopeu, she regains courage and says her final selection will be made on the basis of beauty and the kings will not be able to impose their will. The French and English statements are couched in similarly strong terms (F10328, 10400-1 and E11941, 12004-09) but the English adds a reminder of a social

nature: 'I am your lady and your quene'.[29] Despite this, Melior displays one final act of capriciousness and feigning: she pretends to prefer the Sultan after all. In the French she says more explicitly, 'Mais por vos lairai mon espoir/Si ferai tot vostre voloir' (10499) but both the French and English Narrators warn the reader that she does not mean it. Thus Melior wins the knight of her choice, not by protest and assertion of her right as queen but by deviousness, that traditional female virtue, as each Narrator is quick to point out; moreover, she lets the men think that they have made the choice.

Other qualities of the heroine are presented in almost identical terms in the two poems: generosity in providing the hero with clothes, arms, money and a horse (another trait borrowed from the fairy mistress type); education, which as Ferrante suggests, might be a subtle warning concerning over-educated females;[30] pride, which she confesses in a long, very closely translated passage (F6999-7030, E8527-68). Similar, too, is the emphasis placed on both her enjoyment of love-making and her desire to marry Partonopeu. They are clearly stated in both poems on several occasions.[31] Thus, as regards *Partonopeu of Blois* at least, it cannot be said that the heroine is more moral, more chaste and more marriage-oriented than her French model. Melior's progress from a young, wilful girl able to love, but on her terms, and able to forgive, but only once, to a woman who can recognise her faults, accept her responsibilities and understand the true nature of love, is also charted in similar terms in the French and English poems. She progresses from protesting her innocence as victim of male treachery (F4706-12, E6010-20) and refusing to forgive Partonopeu (F5039f. and E8131f.) to imploring her sister for help in repairing her folly (F6675f. and E8131f.), then finally to admitting it is her 'fel cuers', 'las cuers' (9055, 9073), 'fell herte' and 'ynkynde herte' (10707, 10723), that has caused her to lose Partonopeu. This is rendered very faithfully and with no significant changes by the English poet.

During the course of her gradual enlightenment, Melior nevertheless several times blames her unhappiness on the plight of lovers in general but in particular of women. The first comment, that there is no peace for lovers because love works its own will (7150f.), is translated carefully (8701f.) but another on the good and bad effects of love on women is omitted (F7065-72). A long passage unfavourably comparing a woman's situation with a man's is developed into one twice its length in the English poem (F9087-9126,

E10748-10800). Women, Melior laments, have to keep silent or be shamed whereas a man can declare his love and keep on declaring it until he gets his way. The English poet successfully develops the French line 'O par sa boche ou par son brief' (9105) into a forceful comparison of the man's and woman's plight: 'Men mowe speke and sende with penne and Inke/What they wole, and women mow but þinke' (10783-84). The English also adds a social comment, as so often, to the effect that a lady cannot divulge her feelings to any man, regardless of 'estate', together with a moral one, repeated later, that she must at all times 'govern' herself. If she does not, a man might feel encouraged. Although the French Melior ends by saying that were she to join Partonopeu after the day's battle she would be called 'fole/Trop a ligiere et a vent vole', whereas the English heroine fears only accusations of folly and madness, enough emphasis has been placed throughout the passage on her fears of being thought frivolous and light to more than compensate for the loss. The English is in fact a much stronger statement on the unfair necessity for a woman to keep silent. A third comment by Melior deplores men's infidelity: once they have seduced a woman they turn to another (4707-12). Like many of the Narrator's remarks, this is surely intended to be ironic since it is Melior who seduced Partonope and not vice versa. It is translated faithfully (6010-20). Lastly, Melior speaks of the necessity of choosing a husband wisely, which would suggest that medieval women did have some say in the matter. Since marriage is permanent, she says, a lady must be careful to whom she 'doit si donner' (10313-16); the English, by referring more explicitly to virginity, which is no longer Melior's to give to anyone, has a heightened ironic tone: the lady gives her husband 'hir honoure/Of hir Garlande fairest is þat floure' (11934-35). Melior's comments on love, and specifically on women, are therefore carefully rendered (there is one small omission) but if anything expressed more strongly.

Melior is not the only woman to exercise power over Partonopeu's life. The other female figures in the poem form two contrasting groups. In the first are Melior's sister Uraque, her cousin and lady-in-waiting Persowis, and the wife of Armant the tyrant, who all three exert a positive force in the hero's fortunes; in the second are Partonopeu's mother, helped in the English poem by his grandmother, and the King of France's niece, who on the contrary represent a negative force. Of all these figures, Uraque is by far the most important.

In his overall description of Uraque, the English translator follows his source closely, although this is not true of the introductory portrait. Rather, he seems to be playing tricks on the reader. First, he reverses the classic order of presenting a catalogue of female charms by starting with her clothes rather than her face and body; he then dismisses such description as being a waste of time because everyone knows what ladies of 'hye Degre' wore (6176); finally, he mocks the French poet's detailed description of her face and body, preferring a simple statement that she 'Was holden one off the ffayreste/That was on lyue, and þer-to þe goodelyste' (6184-85). Although his refusals to give detailed descriptions are conventional dismissal topoi of the kind found at various points in both the French and English *Partonopeu* poems, as well as in many another romance, the English Narrator is also perhaps consciously downplaying Uraque's physical attributes in order to emphasize her virtue; the claim that she was the 'goodelyste' is not in the original. Other descriptions of Uraque are followed closely. She is full of 'franchise' (5110), 'curteyse and debonayre' (6372), and 'cortoise et proz et sage et bele' (5848): 'A fayrere, a semelier no-where was' (7152) and 'Right curteise and þer-to fre' (7155). The unexplained 'N'a nul ami ne n'est amie' (5850), which seems curiously curt and detached in the French, is expanded and explained in the English: 'For of hir love was neuer man sure/Ne paramours loved hir no creature' (7159-60). The English poet is perhaps implicitly comparing her with Melior, who has had 'joy in love' and has been loved. At the same time he might be foreshadowing the scene in which Melior accuses Uraque of basing her advice on lack of experience to which Uraque retorts that she will never love anyone if it means surrendering her independence. At the end of the poem, Partonopeu's friend Gaudin will find her more beautiful than Melior and enter into 'la riote'; as the translator says in Chaucerian vein, he will 'hoppe' into the 'ringe' (11485). We are not told in this version of the poem whether Uraque reciprocates.[32] We do learn however that she is strongly attracted to Partonopeu once she has helped him recover his beauty and strength. She resists falling in love with him. Spensley uses this example to illustrate what he calls Uraque's 'heightened moral stature'. He wrongly asserts that the French says simply 'Mais n'i ose torner s'amor' whereas the English gives as her reason her loyalty to Melior.[33] In fact so does the French: 'Uraque en feïst son ami/Si li l'ewist por sa seror' (6316-17). The English is simply more explicit: her 'wisdome restreyned corage' (7723) when she remembered

how much Partonopeu loved her sister. Uraque has 'high moral stature' in both poems; she is held up in contrast to Melior in every way, being reasonable and resourceful but also loyal and unselfish, compassionate and tolerant.

Uraque's actions in the second part of the poem parallel yet contrast with Melior's in the first. She finds Partonopeu, half-mad with sorrow and determined to die after betraying Melior, in the forest of the Ardennes, where Melior had first cast her spell over him; she takes him to a secret place, the island of Salence, which in its simple, natural setting contrasts with Melior's sumptuous Chef d'Oire, in order not to enjoy him but to nurture him; she persuades him to start a new life, as Melior had, but a life of freedom not thraldom, and helps him find his own identity rather than imposing one on him; lastly, she will use her knowledge and abilities to influence Partonopeu, as had Melior, but these belong to the world of *engin* rather than necromancy and will succeed where Melior's failed.[34] Underlying the differences in the sisters' behaviour is the contrast in the nature of their love for the hero. Uraque is motivated by strong affection based on compassion, friendship and humanity and is restorative; Melior's love is rooted in sexual desire, possessiveness and what the English poet calls 'mastery' and is destructive. In none of these aspects of Uraque's character does the English poet deviate from his source.

Uraque's second function in the poem is to act as counsellor and friend to Melior, helping to rehabilitate her as well as Partonopeu. In response to Melior's voice of self-pitying lamentation Uraque raises a voice of protest: Melior is immature, too harsh, too proud, above all too unforgiving (F6377f, E7803f). The English follows the French closely, sometimes adding a line that is a little harsher, like 'Hidder ye hym brought full cursedly' (7893). In response to Melior's voice of complaint that women cannot choose in love and must submit to betrayal, Uraque also raises a voice of protest: she will not submit to love's sovereignty if it makes one hate the man one loves. And in response to Melior's anger and helplessness in the face of her failed necromancy, Uraque practises yet more *engin*, this time perhaps less 'benign'.The first time that Uraque tells Melior that Partonopeu is dead, it is in order to smuggle him, incognito, into Melior's dubbing ceremony; once a knight, he will be able to compete in the tournament for her hand. Both the French and English Narrators blame Uraque for her cruelty in lying to Melior, although her reason is a purely practical one (F7110-18, E8659-69). The second time her lie

seems gratuitous, which is why perhaps she confesses her guilt to Melior immediately and sets her sister's mind at rest. The scene ends rather differently in the two poems. The French Uraque asks Melior to stop hating Partonopeu and seeking vengeance for the pain he caused her (8600-02); her English counterpart confesses she lied for his good but also 'His peyn to avenge it did me good' (10283). As there are no other references to Uraque's desire for vengeance in the French or English poems and no other real character changes in her English portrayal, this could either be an attempt to explain her cruelty or, of course, a simple mistranslation.[35]

Far more important, and this time obviously conscious, changes are made by the translator to the person of Persowis, Uraque's lady-in-waiting who helps her rehabilitate Partonopeu. Spensley's claim of 'heightened moral stature' is in this case certainly justified, for although he provides only two lines as evidence, there are in fact several passages which support his interpretation.

The French poet has created in Persowis a love-sick girl whom he treats with irony and even at times sarcasm. The English portrait has been toned down considerably. If Persowis has not known love yet she will soon, for 'nel fait pas por chasteé/Ains est de trop petit aé' (6255-56). The English poet, in familiar fashion when he is about to change the text, says: 'As seith myn auctour, full hardely she/Did it not oonly for chastite' but for 'tendirnesse of age' (7626-29). The change is significant. He later refers to her chastity and self-control by making three additions to his source: the image of her 'herte of stele' which almost melts on seeing Partonopeu (7731); the statement that her love was so strong that 'almoste for-yete was chastite' (7735); the moral comment that although she burnt with hopeless love, 'With wise abydyng þe fyre she queynte' (7741). Again, the translator follows the addition with the false claim, 'Thus seith myn auctour after whome I write'. Other changes to the source reflect the differences in the attitudes of the French and English poets. Uraque does not want to leave Salence for Chef d'Oire because she will miss Partonopeu but the French Persowis does not care how long she stays (6331); in the English, Uraque is not afraid to leave for 'Of Persowis she wote no perell/For she is wise, redy and stedfaste' (7763-64). When Uraque returns everyone rejoices but, the French poet says sarcastically, Persowis would have preferred her to be in paradise (6803-04); this is changed in the English, where Persowis comes 'To welcome hir lady be good avise' (8292-93). Of the six other references to Persowis'

suffering in love the translator omits four. The two he does keep are very brief and occur in the early scenes, when Partonopeu is dubbed and brought back to Salence. Whereas the French poet leaves us with a picture of a weeping, hysterical Persowis at the end of the tournament, 'fole d'amor' because of the hopelessness of her situation, his English counterpart hides her sentiments beneath a veil of silence. Her role is therefore reduced but also modified. An incurably love-sick maiden of questionable virtue who represents all the pains of love and with whom the Narrator-Love identifies, as we shall see, becomes a young woman who, despite her great love for the hero, serves as an example of moderation and self-control.

There is also a change in the presentation of the third woman in the poem who helps Partonopeu. This time however the English portrait is developed rather than reduced. In both poems the wife of Armant, the tyrant who imprisons Partonopeu without ransom and almost prevents him from attending the tournament, helps the hero in ways similar to Uraque. She shows him the same pity, compassion and encouragement (F7703-24, E9281-306) because she recognises in him both 'gentilesse' and 'semelyhode'. Whereas Uraque had freed him mentally to prepare for the tournament, Armant's wife now does so literally, and at great personal peril. Like Uraque she also arms him: she provides him with a horse - white rather than black - a fine shield, a spear with 'getone' and a sword. If there is any change in the English it is in her motive. Twice she says she is doing this for love of Partonopeu (9336, 9348) and refers to her fate if he is killed in the tournament in more explicitly personal terms: 'est il tot fait de moi' (7758) *for* Armant will kill me becomes 'My Ioy is gone' (9345) *and* Armant will slay me. The major change in her presentation occurs when Partonopeu returns to prison to announce that Armant is dead but also, as a good knight, to honour the conditions of his bail (F9707-12). The six-line French passage is expanded to forty-nine in the English (11241-90). The French tells us simply that she let Partonope go 'por onor et par De' when she learned her husband was dead. The English scene is lively, being told in direct rather than indirect speech, and detailed. Most important, the woman is given a fifteen-line speech in which she twice clearly states that she alone has the power to release Partonope (11276-11282) from her 'governaunce' and will do so, for

God forbede þat cruelte or vengeaunce
In any woman founde shall be;
A foule illusion it were to se,
For in hem moste euer be mercy and rouþe (11277-80).

The statement is clearly an ironic comment on Melior, whose power over Partonopeu was not as much 'governaunce' as tyranny and whose cruelty and vengeance are the reason for Partonopeu's predicament. Armant's wife in both poems represents, rather, a female ideal closer to Uraque and this ideal is presented more forcefully in the English poem. At the same time, she is a more lively and well-drawn figure than her French counterpart.

The remaining female figures in *Partonopeu de Blois* represent a negative rather than positive force in the hero's life. The most important of these is Partonopeu's mother Lucrece, who twice supplies her son with the means to betray Melior. As Newstead has suggested, she is the counterpart of Psyche's jealous sisters, although she is given a different motive; quite understandably fearing that Melior is a wicked fairy-mistress, she fears for her son.[36] She is in several ways the counterpart of Melior in the real world of Blois. She too imposes an identity on the young man, but a social rather than personal one: obedient son, beloved nephew, defender of home and country, husband to the King of France's niece, faithful member of the church. When he rejects this identity for that of lover, she reverts to 'crafte', another link with Melior. Her magic lantern that will reveal Melior's beauty but also cause Partonopeu to break the taboo represents what Ferrante calls her 'limited vision'; like Uraque she represents the real world, but unlike her she sees in Partonopeu's love only a threat, not any power of good.[37]

Changes in the English Lucrece are few but significant. The ties binding Partonopeu to his mother are made to appear much stronger. In the French, Partonopeu remembers his country, relatives and friends (1895-96) and later King Clovis (1902) but in the English he specifically mentions his mother (2366), for 'yn grete care/Stante hys moder ffor hys sake' (2370-71). Confessing his guilt at having left her without news, he announces he will go to see 'My moder, the kynge my Emme alle-soo' (2375). The French Melior tells him that Clovis and his father are dead but the English Melior adds, 'Your moder leuyth, an canne no rede' (2402). The scene of Partonopeu's reunion

with his mother is told in greater detail. Instead of simply kissing and embracing him, she swoons but then reproaches him for not writing, in what is perhaps an attempt to make her more natural. Her suffering is described at greater length and so too are her reproaches, which are far stronger than in the French. Thus her character is established at the outset: hers is very much a voice of protest.

As a result of the greater emphasis on the mother-son bond, the English Lucrece's concern is made more plausible and more excusable. Yet this also perhaps explains why Partonopeu's sense of betrayal and anger are greater in the English. Instead of simply cursing the King (F4086) for his part in the plot he curses his mother too (5328), and the English adds that the King also cursed the mother 'and hur Enchauwntmente' (5308). Partonopeu's confession to Melior is also far more critical of his mother. In the French she is called 'ma male mere' only once (4172) but in the English she is 'my euelle moder' (5440), 'full felle' (5449), who contrary to her French model is accused with the king of betrayal and about whose 'falsehood' Partonopeu now complains.

Similar changes are brought about in the English account of Partonopeu's second visit to Blois. Where no motive is given in the French for his desire to go home, the English says he is smitten with guilt at 'whatte care he had broghte/Hys moder and eke þe kynge of Fraunce' (5503-04). Melior's fear that Lucrece will use magic to keep her son with her all the time is borne out when the mother calls upon God to keep Partonopeu in Blois and the Bishop of Paris to combat the spell of the fairy-mistress. At this point a rather surprising figure enters the English text. Partonopeu's maternal grandmother is brought in by Lucrece because she is 'boþe olde and wyse' (5636). Perhaps the grandmother is a variant of the aunt or godmother who sometimes helps the mother in fairy-mistress tales.[38] Perhaps she was created in order to increase the sense of female intrigue, or simply to complement the other two trios of Lucrece, the King and his niece, Uraque, Persowis and Armant's wife. Her most important contribution however is to add a voice to the protests over Partonopeu's situation and elevate the issue from one of simple maternal possessiveness. Both women's speeches place greater emphasis on Melior's wickedness and witchcraft, again making their case more plausible. This plausibility is heightened by the English poet's greater use of direct speech.

The third female enemy of Melior's is the King of France's niece, a willing partner in the mother's plot. She too is in some ways a counterpart of Melior. Eighteen years of age, the English tells us, beautiful and high-born (F3993-4006, E5142-69),[39] well-educated and, the English adds, 'connynge' and 'wyse' (5104), she desires to marry Partonopeu and participates in, although does not instigate, magic tricks to get her way. As with Melior, the *sens* and *engin* do not work. She is naïve because when she believes Partonopeu to be safely hers she becomes indiscreet, a typically female trait the Narrator tells us acidly. She boasts of her 'conquest' of Partonopeu and pronounces Melior's name, which restores Partonopeu's memory. Although it operates on a different plane, both Melior's and the niece's naiveté is responsible for the failure of magic to keep Partonopeu; each believes too strongly in her power to impose and maintain her will over a man.

The importance of women in *Partonopeu de Blois* and its translation is not simply manifested in the presence of the six (or seven) female figures involved in Partonopeu's quest. It is reinforced by the Narrator's many substantial comments - no fewer than thirty-six - on the women in the narrative, on women in general and on his own Lady in particular. The overall view that he presents is very complex. At first sight his expressions of love and admiration seem to be complimenting women as the greatest of God's creations; a closer reading resists such interpretation. It remains to be seen whether the English Narrator is equally complex or whether, as Spensley claims, he presents contrasting views as a corrective to the criticism offered by his French counterpart.[40]

Of the twenty general comments on women, the English author omits only five. Two of these were possibly considered too *osé*: the first advised noble women married to men of 'put lin' to have illegitimate children with men of their own class (F309-14), the other advised men to 'mount' virgins (*contresaillir*) rather than experienced women (F6955-66). The translator also omits the Narrator's opinion that he can understand why Partonopeu was 'si alumés' by the King of France's niece who would let him do what he wanted (F4023-30); his curse on men who spy on ladies, for the fewer the spies, the less they see and suffer (F8441-54); and his sarcastic dismissal of the expenses involved in Melior's wedding, since women are so courteous, noble and honest that there would be nothing to say (F10569-76). As the first two comments are immoral and cynical and the other three ironic, their omission naturally affects the tone of the poem. But to what

degree remains to be seen. The translator makes three additions. One of these Spensley uses in his claim for a less anti-feminist narratorial stance in the English poem. True, it is more 'moral' since it tells a lady she might refuse dishonourable propositions and occurs in a passage where the English Narrator turns the harsh criticism of his French model into gentle reproof (F3431-4, E4458-66). The other two additions rather weaken Spensley's argument. The first (5281) is a criticism of women's garrulousness, the second reposes on the common medieval topos of female capriciousness. It encourages men to persist in courting their hesitant ladies, 'For in longe service it may happe þat she/Wolde shew hym of hir benignyte' (12105-13). The tongue-in-cheek tone is reminiscent of the French Narrator's comments on women. Lastly, one passage has been slightly changed by the translator, but not its ironic tone: Melior is described as 'doing what women do well' - pitying and weeping floods of tears over men they have just reviled (F1255-62, E1508-18). The French Narrator's 'blessing' on women, that they love 'sans vilonie' and be faithful to one man, is replaced by 'praise' of women who, like Melior, are kind to 'Here serwandes trewe and stydfaste'. Partonopeu's 'steadfastness' amounts to his refusal to leave Melior's bed despite her commands.

As important as the omissions and additions in judging the overall tone of the Narrator's comments is the comparison of those passages that are closely translated. For reasons of space these can only be summarised here.[41] They contain 'praise' of women in love, or those who have granted favours (the Narrator never praises those who do not), and comments on women's infidelity and the injustice of slander. This last inspires a long passage which, ironically, provides an opportunity to catalogue all the traditional female faults found in medieval writings (F8397-424, E10121-40). It is faithfully translated without any loss of tone. The same is true of two long satirical passages on women and chastity. In his condemnation of chastity, copied faithfully from his French model, the English Narrator does not seem to be contributing greatly to the 'sounder morals' of the English romances (F8009-68, E9664-705); nor is there any loss of cynical tone in the assertion that only ugly women are chaste, for beauty is the natural enemy of chastity (F6261f, E7635f). Also closely translated is the paean dedicated to woman's beauty (F7125-38, E8677-89) in which the Narrator says that if women are refused a place in heaven - thereby implying that they are inherently unworthy - he will forego his.

One of the most impressive achievements of the *Partonopeu* poet is undoubtedly his creation of a frame within which to place his story of Partonopeu and Melior; this takes the form of the Narrator's account of his unrequited love for his Lady. It permits him to make comments on love and women by comparing himself and his Lady with characters in his fiction. He does so in no fewer than sixteen places in the poem. These undergo more modifications in the translation than the other more general narratorial comments. Only seven are translated and four are changed. The translator also adds two important disclaimers, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the poem, to explain that *he* is not the suffering lover, the lyrical 'je' of the French narrative (2331-34, 2347-49 and 10607-14). The result is a certain distancing of himself from his French model reminiscent of Chaucer's Narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* and Lydgate's in the *Troy-Book*.[42]

The Narrator comments on women by comparing himself with Melior and Persowis. He understands Melior's suffering because he has not seen his own Lady for a long time (F7545-52); he sympathises with Persowis because like her he has never enjoyed even a kiss or caress (F7609-16, E9141f); like her, he wonders what joy there can be in unrequited love (F8473-77, E10185-95); and like Melior seeing Partonopeu disappear after the tournament without being able to speak to him, he knows as few do what she is suffering because he too is in prison, silent and tormented, far from his Lady (F9015-30, E10679-82). His perceptions of women's emotions and his understanding of their plight should, then, be heightened by his own experience. However, his sympathetic comments are somewhat undercut by his negative and sarcastic descriptions of his Lady, whose cruelty kills him (F3435-48, E4467-73), whose treachery is akin to Partonopeu's (F4543-48), but whose principal faults are chastity (F6285-96, E7670f) and *dangier* (F9243-66, E10908-21).

Of his five self-comparisons with Melior and Persowis three are translated, but two with significant changes. In one, the melancholy of the French Narrator-Lover becomes a humorous opinion expressed, not about the Narrator's own plight but about all men who love hopelessly: it would be better to be a 'recluse or elles a frere/Or elles be dede and leide on bere' (10190-93). In the other, the English Narrator uses a similar distancing technique. Not he, but women in love can sympathise easily with Melior; he can only suppose she is heavy-hearted and believes she could have found time to speak to her love had she wanted to (10678-82). Both changes undercut his French

model's sympathetic identification with his heroine. The translator is less free in his handling of the negative comments on the Narrator's Lady. Of the four substantial passages, three are translated. Omitted is the reference, not to her lamentable chastity, which might have been expected in a more 'moral' poem, but to her treachery. The portrait of this particular courtly lady is thus quite faithfully produced.

This article began by referring to previous critics' views on the women in *Partonopeu de Blois* and their sisters *d'outremanche*. It will conclude by returning briefly to these comments. Spensley's contention that *Partonopeu of Blois* presents very different views on women both through the portraits of the courtly ladies and the person of the Narrator is, I think, an exaggerated one; this is perhaps not surprising since its author bases his evidence on so little text. The English Melior is a little more concerned about her reputation and loss of virtue but this represents a slight shift of emphasis and not a major shift of focus, for the changes are so few. The claim for the courtly ladies' 'heightened moral stature' again hangs on a slim thread, except for Persowis. The same is true for the 'extremely contrasting' Narrator's views on women. The major difference resides not in the overall general opinions but in the toning-down of the Narrator-Lady relationship. It is also untrue to suggest that the French and English heroines and other female figures are presented in a radically different light. A careful line-by-line comparison of the passages relating to women reveals a translation faithful to an unusual degree in the English romances, although this does not mean that the translator never departs from his text. The women are cast in the same mould in the two poems; they function only in relation to the hero, as is usual in romance. This is not to say, as Roberts claims, that 'the woman's power is an illusion in every way' in *Partonopeu*.[43] The three main female characters - Melior, Uraque, Partonopeu's mother - influence him by each providing him with an identity: Melior imposes an identity of secret lover and thrall, expecting him to conform to her ideals of love; the mother imposes an identity of devoted son and subject, expecting him to conform to her world of social conventions; but Uraque empowers him to find his identity for himself, in a world in which love and social duty can co-exist. The minor female figures - Persowis, Armant's wife, the King of France's niece - are auxiliaries in the story of the hero's progress towards a new, independent self and union with the woman he loves. The female roles overlap and interlap. Melior, Uraque and Armant's wife provide him with a horse and arms

in order to pursue chivalry; Persowis clothes him, Uraque and Armant's wife arm him, but, appropriately, only Melior can dub him. The mother and the King of France's niece deter him from his quest, but only temporarily. Through their actions, he will attempt to break with his past and gradually come to see his errors under the guidance of Uraque. Both the women in the poem and women in general are treated with similar professed sympathy and affection by the two Narrators in some places and castigated in others. I am arguing, therefore, that unusual as this may be in the body of English romances, the *Partonopeu* poet's representation of women follows his source closely. Whether they be French or English, the voices of the women rise in a chorus of both protest and submission.

NOTES

1 Anthime Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste dans le roman courtois* (Paris 1960), p. 385-86, and Laurence Harf-Lancnér, *Les fées au moyen-âge: Morgan et Melusine, la naissance des fées* (Geneva 1984), p.317-28, discuss the dual influence of Classical and Celtic texts, while Helen Newstead, 'The Traditional Background of *Partonopeu de Blois*', *PMLA* 61 (1946), p.916-46, explores in detail the Celtic sources.

2 The manuscript tradition is discussed in the Introduction to *Partonopeu de Blois: A French Romance of the Twelfth Century*, edited by Joseph Gildea, O.S.A. (Villanova, 1967-68). All quotations from the French will be from this edition and line references will be given in parentheses in the text.

3 All quotations will be taken from *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, edited by A. Trampe Bödtker, EETS ES 109 (London 1912) and given in parentheses in the text.

4 Anna Hunt Billings, *A Guide to English Metrical Romances* (New York 1901), p.xx; Kurt Lippman, *Das ritterliche Personlichkeitsideal in der mittelengischen Literatur des 13 und 14 Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1933), p.56-72; John Wilcox, 'French Courtly Love in English Composite Romances' *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, 18), p.575-90; Margaret Lanham, 'Chastity: A Study of Sexual Morality in the English Medieval Romances' (Dissertation, Vanderbilt 1948); Donnell Van de Voort, 'Love and Marriage in the English Medieval Romance' (Dissertation, Vanderbilt 1938); Margaret Gist, *Love and War in the Middle English Romances* (Philadelphia 1947; repr. New York 1983).

5 Kathryn Hume, 'The Formal Nature of English Romance', *Philological Quarterly* (1974), p.158-80.

6 Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Ithaca and London 1975), p.22-23, and Peter Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chretien de Troyes* (Cardiff 1982), p.96.

7 Adelaide Evans Harris, *The Heroine of the Middle English Romance*,

Western Reserve University Bulletin, n.s., vol. XXI (August 1928), 1-43. In an interesting article comparing the treatment of women in pre- and post-Conquest English chronicles, Betty Bandell argues that the role of women in England shrank after the Norman Conquest under the impact of social change brought from the Continent. 'The English Chroniclers' Attitude Towards Women', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16 (1955), p.113-118.

[8] George Kane, *Middle English Literature* (London 1951), p.38, n. 1.

[9] Nanette Roberts, 'Making the Mold: The Roles of Women in the Middle English Metrical Romances, 1225-1500'. (Dissertation, New York University 1976), p.1.

[10] Caroline Eckhardt, 'Woman as Mediator in the Middle English Romances', *Journal of Popular Culture* XIV (1980), p.94-107.

[11] The *Partonope* translator has rather bewilderingly been praised both for his extreme fidelity and his 'odd mingling of respect and freedom'. For a discussion of his abilities as a translator, see my forthcoming '*Partonopeu de Blois* and its Fifteenth-Century English Translation: A Medieval Translator at Work', in *The Medieval Translator*, vol. 2, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies, 1991.

[12] Ronald M. Spensley, 'The Courtly Lady in *Partonope of Blois*, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973), p.288-91.

[13] Harris, *op. cit.*, p.41.

[14] Sarah Barrow, *The Medieval Society Romances* (New York 1924), p.92.

[15] See particularly Andrée Kahn Blumsteain's *Misogyny and Idealization in the Courtly Romance* (Bonn 1977) with reference to French and German romance. The list of writings on courtly love is too long to give here, but for a seminal article on the relationship of literary and supposed historical manifestations of courtly love and its effect on the portrayal of women, see John F. Benton, 'Clio and Venus. An Historical View of Medieval Love' in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, edited by F.X. Newman (Albany, New York 1986), pp.19-42. In 'Roman breton et mythes courtois: L'évolution du personnage féminin dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* XV (1972), 193-204 and 283-93, Marie-Noëlle Lefay-Toury traces what she perceives as a 'dégradation' of the female characters in Chrétien's five romances. For a view that the ideal heroine in French and Spanish romance is independent, well educated and embodies a 'masculine spirit and behaviour but does so in a manner distinctly feminine', see Anita Benai'm Lasry, 'The Ideal Heroine in Medieval Romances: A Quest for a Paradigm', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 32 (1985), 227-44.

[16] Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York 1975), p.2.

[17] Joan Ferrante, 'Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature', *Women's Studies* II (1984), 67-98.

[18] Joan Ferrante, 'Public Postures and Private Maneuvres: Roles Medieval Women Play', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, edited by Mary Erler and Maryane Kowaleski (Athens, Georgia and London 1988), pp.213-29.

[19] Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin* (Chicago 1985), pp.29 and 37. The whole of chapter 1 is devoted to a comparison of the roles of women in *chanson de geste* and romance.

[20] Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp.52-3.

[21] Harf-Lancner (*op. cit.*, p.36, n. 19) suggests that 'fée' at line 1125 is a misreading because Melior is called this only by her enemies. Variants provide better readings: 'arme', 'fez' or 'feu'. In support of Harf-Lancner, I would add two other reasons for rejecting 'fée'. The *Partonope* poet is too accomplished to have built up suspense throughout the scene only to throw it away carelessly by mentioning a 'fée'; rather, he waits another seven lines and mentions Partonopeu's fear of the 'maufés' yet again before dramatically announcing : Mais ço est une damoisele; (1134). Secondly, the English text has 'þynge' (1190), which is used as elsewhere to translate, not 'fée' but 'maufés'.

[22] He purports to make two other references to his source in the lines immediately following. The first, with which he ends this long and completely original interpolation, falsely claims that the 'ffrensche boke' tells it 'shortely, and nozte in prose'. He adds: Ther-fore fully I me purpose/After myn auctor to make an ende' (1292-96). The second renders 'la damoisele atent s'estent/Et a son pié le tousel sent' (1143-44) by '[she] streyghte forthe herre legge and happed to ffele/Trewly þe ffrenshe boke seyeth þe hele' (1298-99). The tone of this whole passage is extremely humorous and its purpose in referring to the French source is obviously to tease the reader.

[23] Spensley, *op. cit.*, pp.290-91.

[24] One difference between the presentations of the heroine is that the English Narrator adds several reminders to his audience concerning her high rank and its significance. She is of 'grette degre' (1195); Partonope's fears are allayed when he learns she is 'of so hye kyndrede borne' despite her cruel words (1355-56). Such remarks are made throughout the poem and are indicative of the time span and social differences separating the French and English audiences.

[25] F1524 and E1877; F1568 and E1917; F4684 and E5998; F4856 and E6135; F4860 and E6142; F4985 and E6260; F5032 and E6301; F9094 and E10733; F9655 and E11162; F10325 and E11950.

[26] Spensley, *op. cit.*, p.289, n. 1. Of interest in this context is Uraque's later comment that Melior was upset more by being discovered and losing her reputation than by losing her love (4999-5000), a line that is omitted in the English and ignored by Spensley.

[27] Ferrante, 'Public Postures', p.220. The critic insists elsewhere on the groundless nature of Melior's secrecy when she argues that Urake

recognizes in Partonopeu a fine knight, 'the most suitable husband', and one that would be accepted by Melior's people ('Male Fantasy', p.89). However, Uraque's speech occurs much later in the poem.

[28] In the English poem Partonope is eighteen, which makes Melior's excuse less plausible (521) because he would have been old enough to be a knight. All the French manuscripts have thirteen except L, which has fifteen.

[29] Uraque also points out to Melior her ultimate power in choosing a husband. This occurs once in the French (5028-29) and in milder terms than the English translator's 'For to your luste they moste a-gre' (6297). The English has a second reminder that is extremely explicit: 'No man may be any bonde/Yowe restrayne for yowre desyre' (6245-46).

[30] Ferrante, *Woman as Image*, p.86, and 'The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact and Fantasy', in *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, edited by Patricia H. Labalme (New York 1980), pp.9-42. Ferrante also comments on the fact that Melior's father educated her because he thought she would be an only child, a motif also found in *Le bel inconnu*, *Tristan* and *Yvain*. Such only daughters were perhaps educated in order to fill a fillial gap.

[31] After the initial love-making, described in detail in both poems, Melior would like to wake Partonopeu 'por avoir de lui son deduit' (1578), for as the English translator explains: 'wyth hym to play was all her moste delyte' (1925). When the lovers are reunited, they 'font tot quanque bon lor sanble' (4202), they 'falle fro þys Dalyaunce' (5493). Melior informs Partonopeu several times of her desire to marry him and protests that otherwise she would be thought 'legiere' (F1396f. and E1670f.).

[32] In the Arsenal MS, the poem ends with a triple marriage: Partonopeu and Melior, the King of France and Uraque, and Gaudin and Persowis. This ending was not however part of the original poem.

[33] Spensley, *op. cit.*, p.291.

[34] Robert Hanning, in *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven and London 1977) analyses in detail Uraque's meeting with Partonopeu in the Ardennes. He defines *engin* as 'the ingenious manipulation of facts and lives to order and control reality', and calls it a 'thoroughly pragmatic virtue', p.93. Thus Uraque's forged letters, devised solely for Partonopeu's good, are 'benign' in nature. *Engin* can sometimes appear more questionable, as I suggest.

[35] The three French MS variants do not support the English translation, although the manuscript used by the translator may have.

[36] Newstead, *op. cit.*, p.918.

[37] Ferrante, 'Male Fantasy', p.90.

[38] Harf-Lancner, *op. cit.*, p.322.

[39] Here too the English Narrator plays a trick on his audience in his catalogue of the girl's charms. He protests he is not going to tell them all

in detail, then proceeds to do so in a passage twice the length of the original and conforming exactly to the rhetorical conventions of female description.

40 Spensley, *op. cit.*, p.291.

41 A full account of the translation techniques used in rendering these passages can be found in my previously mentioned article. There I also discuss in detail the nature of the Narrator's personal interventions and the changes made by the translator. For a study of the French Narrator, see in particular John Grigsby, 'The Narrator in *Partonopeu de Blois*, *Le bel inconnu*, and *Joufroi de Poitiers*', (*Romance Philology* XXI (1968), 536-43, and Roberta L. Krueger's perceptive and more recent 'The Author's Voice: Narrators, Audiences, and the Problem of Interpretation', in *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, edited by Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly and Keith Busby, vol. I (Amsterdam 1987), pp.115-40.

42 I argue for a strong Chaucerian, but also Lydgatian, influence in my article on the translation techniques used.

43 Roberts, *op. cit.*, p.120.