Translation Trouble in *Le Roman de Silence*: Using Shiny and bookdown for Digital Editing of Medieval Texts

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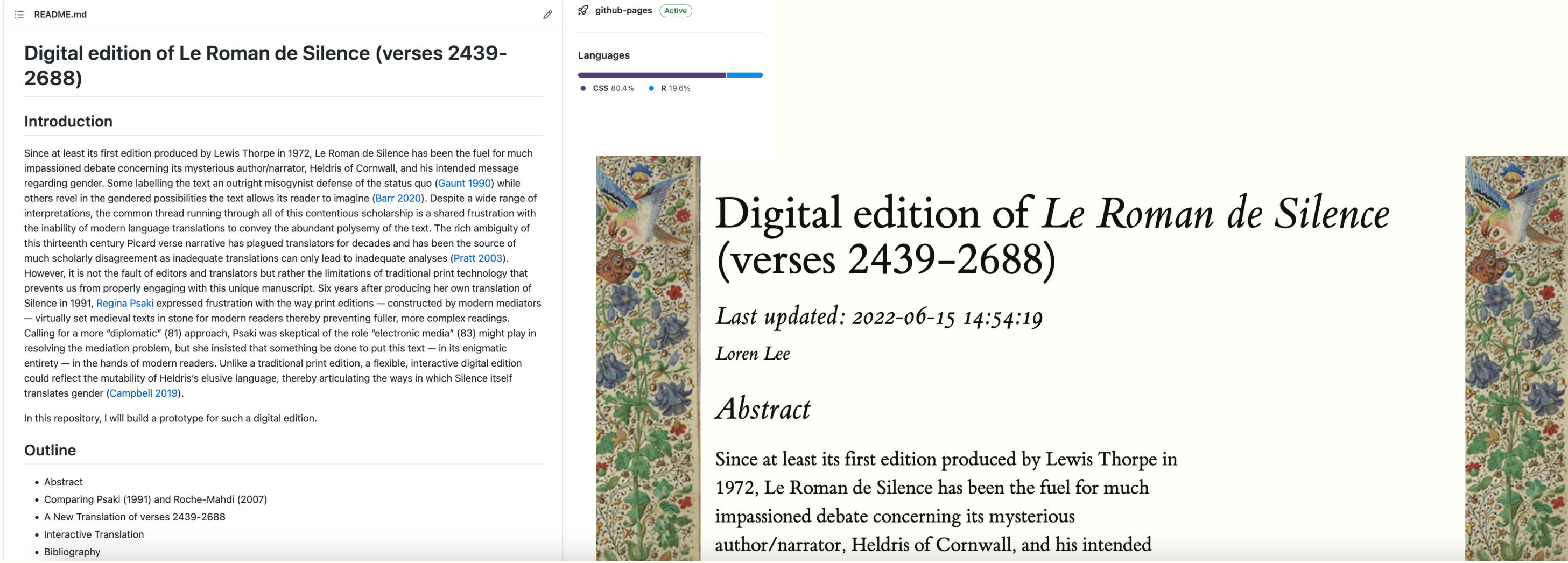
Introduction

Fig. 1 Author/Narrator of *Le Roman de Silence* (13th cent.) Heldris of Cornwall seated before lectern with open book. Image from WLC.LM.6, f.188r A. Accessed via https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscripts/2018/08/15/silence/

Why digital over print?

Fig. 2 Image of manuscript WLC.LM.6, f. 209r. The Picard verse is written in rhyming couplets formatted in two columns. Illumination to the left shows the Queen Eupheme (right) seducing Silence (left). The scribe has carefully copied the text around the hole in the parchment on the right. Accessed via https://www.queerarthistory.com/love-between-women/le-roman-de-silence/
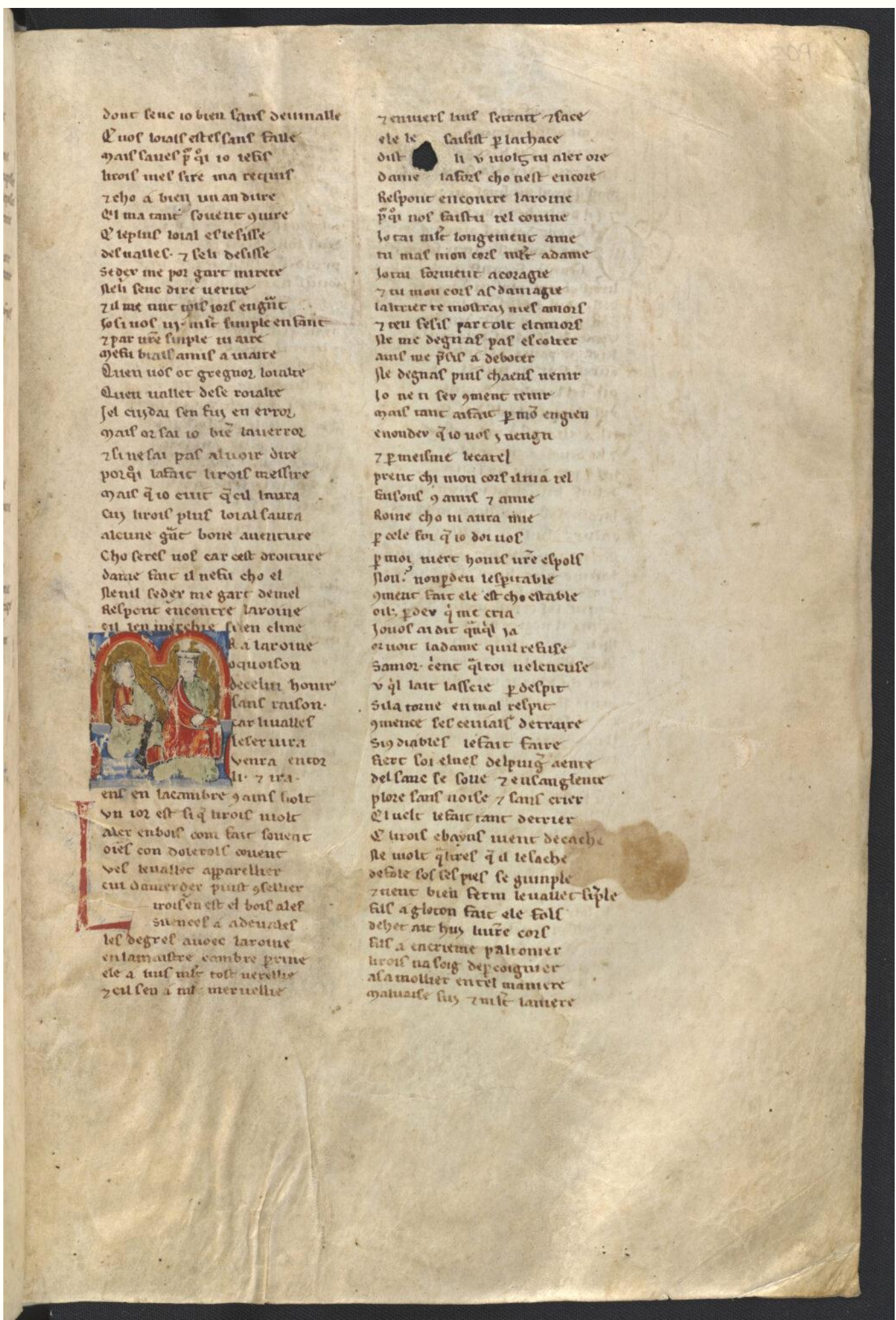
Fig. 3 Image of a page from the most recent print edition of *Le Roman de Silence* (Roche-Mahdi 2007). The illumination of the manuscript is missing, the verses have been numbered, scribal errors and abbreviations have been resolved, and the English translation to the right does not reflect the rhyme of the original. (My own image)
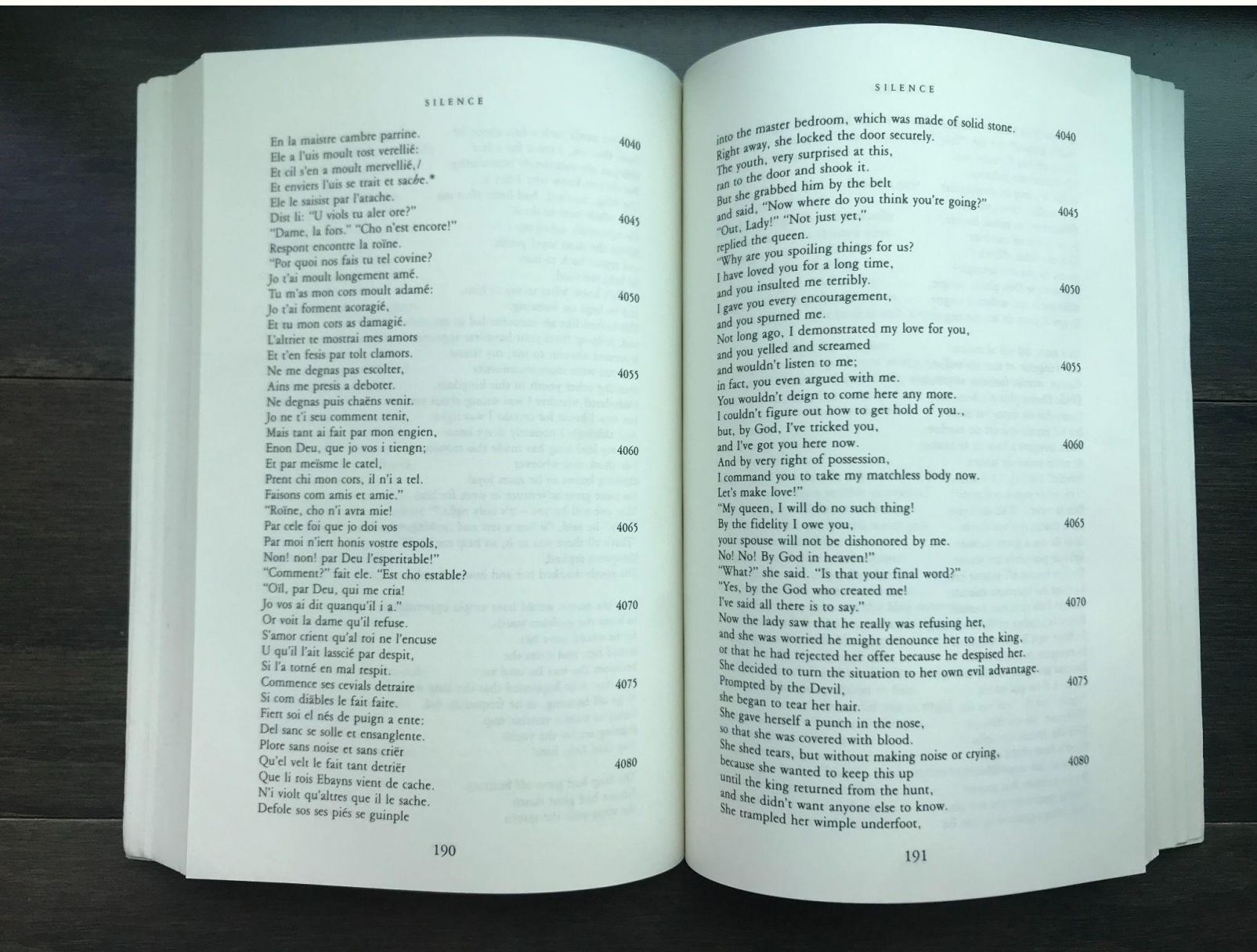
There are three key limitations of print that digital editions can resolve:

☞ They are difficult to update regularly.
☞ They are static.
☞ They lack the aesthetic of the manuscript.

How does digital editing address the limitations of print?

☞ Flexibility ☞

Because the digital edition is built using bookdown and is hosted on GitHub, I can routinely push out updates and new features any time and make these updates immediately available to my readers.

Fig. 4 Screenshot from the homepage of my GitHub page (left) and of the homepage of the bookdown document (right)

☞ Interactivity ☞

With this digital edition, readers are presented with the opportunity to make decisions and interact with the text. Readers need many translations to approach this narrative, which I propose providing using interactive data tools like Shiny. By incorporating these methods, readers can interact with a dynamic translation that more completely translates the polysemy of the original text.
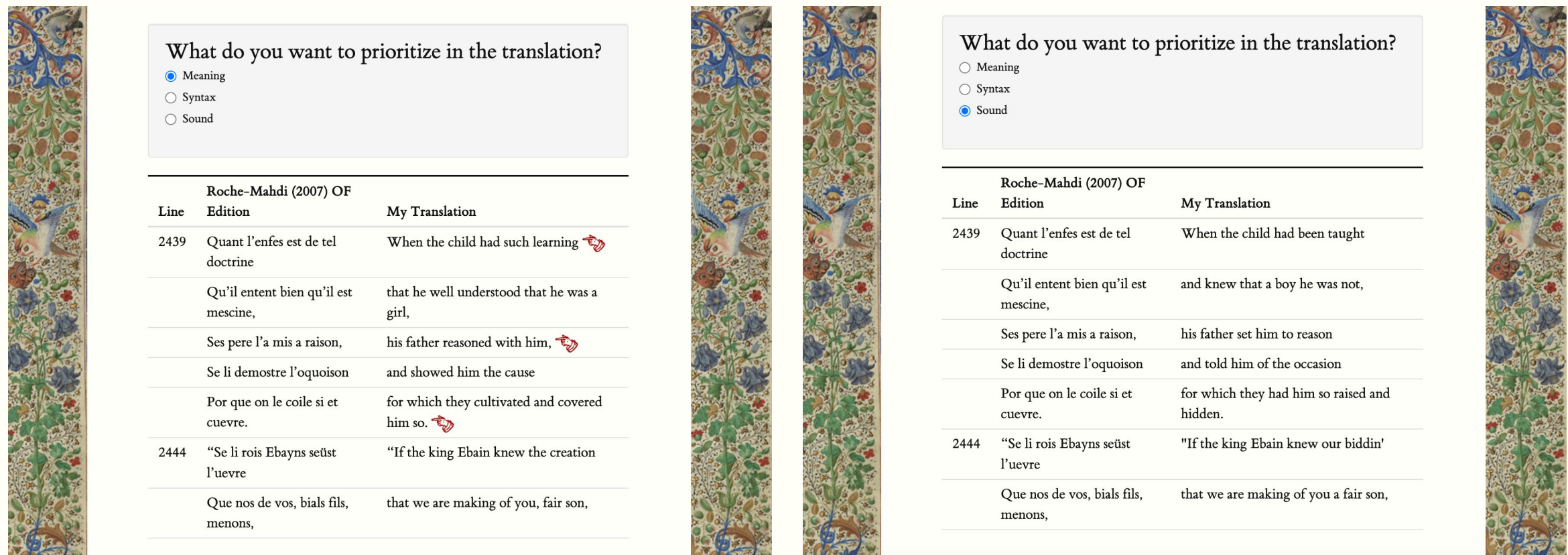
Fig. 5 Screenshots from the interactive translation. On this page, readers can choose what they want to prioritize in their translation: meaning (left), syntax (not pictured), or sound (right).

☞ Aesthetic Playfulness ☞

Fig. 6 *The Author Hearing the Story of Gillion de Trazegnies* in *Romance of Gillion de Trezegnies*, 1464, Lieven van Lathem, illuminator, and David Aubert, scribe. Tempera colors, gold, and ink on parchment, 15 5/16 x 11 in. The J. Paul Getty Museum, MS 111, folio 9. Accessed via https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/medieval-manuscripts-alive-middle-french/.This folio is the source image for my digital edition's borders. Later medieval manuscripts often included elaborate decorative marginalia.

A digital edition also gives me, the developer, full reign to incorporate the artistic vibe of the original. I'm not just the translator; I get to play *bookmaker*, *scribe*, and *illuminator*! For example, in my prototype edition my textual notes are all flagged with these little manicules, which are inspired by the marginalia that actual scribes would have used to emphasize and comment on their work.

Access this prototype digital edition: https://leeloren.github.io/silence/

Conclusion

Fig. 7 Silence stands between the seneschal (left) and nurse (right) who raise him/her. Image from WLC.LM.6, f.203r A. Accessed via http://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/tag/roman-de-silence/

Future Expansions:

☞ Translation

Readers could be enabled to adjust more settings of the translation they are reading to highlight different aspects of the text. For instance, how much should a translation of *Le Roman de Silence* emphasize the character Silence's masculinity? Silence's class? What modern pronouns would Silence use? when? and why?

☞ Participation

Digital readers could even submit their own translations to the GitHub repository that houses this interactive edition, thereby creating a web of translations that more closely resembles the medieval scribal practices of copying and rewriting circulating texts.

☞ Editing

This prototype digital edition demonstrates how we can offer readers of medieval literature more in the way of translation through interactivity. One significant expansion to this sort of digital edition would be to include similar levels of interactivity and flexibility on the editing side. *Le Roman de Silence* survives in only one manuscript, but other medieval texts survive in tens or even hundreds of manuscript copies. Each of these copies should be considered unique iterations of the texts they contain, and a digital edition would enable readers to appreciate that variance.