# Learning about Women: Proverb Usage in the *Roman de Silence*

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Medieval writers of romance, as well as writers of didactic treatises and religious sermons, relied on various compositional manuals and earlier works of literature for guidance concerning their own compositional and rhetorical style. As Edgar de Bruyne suggests in his *L'ésthetique du Moyen Âge,* they had the formal education provided by rhetoricians and grammarians as exemplified in the works of classical literature, yet also learned from earlier religious scholars such as Philo, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine concerning Biblical exegesis (4.3: 302). Rather than innovate compositional strategy, poets created new works by bringing together traditional principles of writing and interpretation as outlined or exemplified by others with matière or content chosen by themselves or their patrons. In addition, as more authors chose to write in vernacular languages, oral sources also influenced their compositional strategies; these sources included localized proverbial materials and therefore should be examined for their role in the creation of what Douglas Kelly calls the "art of romance" (8).

Heldris of Cornwall, writing the *Roman de Silence* in the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century, exemplifies how medieval poets combined a variety of compositional styles while draw-

ing on genres such as historiography, hagiography, and romance to create their works. In this paper, I explore how Heldris of Cornwall incorporates both learned and common proverbs, as well as references to proverbial content, into his narrative and how they reflect a clearly identifiable compositional method utilized to establish the *auctoritas* or literary authority of the narrator and various speakers within the text while also serving to direct interpretation of the narrative, in particular, the role and meaning of the three primary female characters: Eufeme, Eufemie, and Silence. While complete examination of his proverb use is beyond the scope of this article, my goals are to argue for the importance of proverbs to Heldris' compositional strategy, to place the poet's usage of proverbs within a context of romance writers of the thirteenth century, and to suggest how this usage contributes to helping define a central area of debate surrounding the text, namely, whether the author presents a proto-feminist, ambiguous, or negative view of women (See, for example, the range of interpretations given by Brahney 54, Krueger 112, Gaunt 203).

## Proverbs and Compositional Strategy

The use of proverbs by an author was governed by established practice and recommended by medieval educators such as Alain de Lille, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, and Matthew de Vendôme. A proverb is usually identified as such by a demonstrable recognition of its extensive use within a community of speakers or writers and can often be linked to either established written traditions or oral sources. Learned proverbs are transmitted through literary traditions, specifically classical and biblical traditions, while common proverbs typically reflect experiences any member of a community may have had. While the former were often used by writers to provide a moral lesson, the latter were cited to explain events or human behavior as described in the narrative. A poet's use of proverbs can therefore indicate a familiarity with a certain body of written or oral content and can provide clues concerning the type of audience he or she may have expected to receive a work. The use of literary proverbs, for example, may imply that the author expects the audience to be familiar with

a specific body of literature, while a reliance on examples that reflect daily activities, such as hunting or fishing, may suggest that the audience could relate to the use of these images.

Mathew de Vendôme writes his *Ars versificatoria* around 1175 and here advocates the use of proverbs at the beginning of a work in verse, making reference to Horace's *Epistles* 1.14.36, suggesting:

> Ut aliquis utatur zeumatico principio [vel] secundum ipozeusim, prae(ter)mittendum est generale proverbium, id est communis sententia, cui consuetudo fidem attribuit, opinio communis assensum accomodat, incorruptae veritatis integritas adquiescit. (1.16)
>
> [Just as one may use zeugma or hypozeuxis for a beginning, so may he also begin with a general proverb, that is, universal sentiments in which custom reinforces belief, in which common opinion agrees, and in which the purity of unalloyed truth inheres.] (Parr 29)

For Mathew de Vendôme, a proverb provides a way in which the poet could establish a common base of experience or knowledge that unites him with his audience. As examples, he cites classical authors including Ovid, Lucan, Horace, Cato, and Statius (1.17-29).

Likewise, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, writing his *Poetria nova* and *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* in the beginning of the thirteenth century, recommends using several types of proverbial materials as valuable compositional tools for the writer of poetry or prose including exempla and sententiae (I.48). Of the eight ways he recommends a writer begin a work, three involve the use of a proverb, three others the use of *exempla*. Each of these writers provides implicit and explicit definitions of how to recognize or define proverbs. Geoffrey de Vinsauf, for example, provides the following definition: "Proverbium enim est generalis sententia, et illud quod datur per generalem sententiam 'docetur,' 'probatur,' 'perhibetur' per aliud speciale, quod subjungiter" (Documentum II.5) [A proverb is a

universal statement, and what is proposed through a universal statement 'teaches,' 'proves,' 'cites' through something particular which is connected with it (de Vinsauf 1968, 43).] Thus defined, proverbs take on a variety of formal attributes, but should consistently remain associated with an author's intent or *sens*.

Proverbs became an accepted part of the poetic arts used by the medieval poet, and were included as aspects of *inventio*, *elocutio*, and *dispositio*. They were used by authors for various reasons including the medieval need to appeal to authority as a resource for invention, and as established rhetorical practice. In addition, the use of vernacular proverbs that reflected common experience allowed poets to communicate with both literate and illiterate audiences. This became particularly salient in relation to the art of preaching, as preachers were increasingly given the task of communicating religious beliefs and exhorting moral behavior among their congregations. Alain de Lille, for example, urges the use of proverbs in sermons and draws attention to the Book of Solomon as a source of inspiration for preachers (20). His own *sermonettes* are full of proverbs from both patristic and classical sources, including works by Ovid, Virgil, and Seneca.

In Old French narratives, the use of proverbs increased throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, yet seemed to have had various periods of literary vogue, culminating in the second half of the thirteenth century. The use of both learned and common proverbs varied in frequency, contextual situation, and thematic use. Many phrases that acquired a fixed and rhymed form in the vernacular were adaptations of ideas evident in Latin sources. Through linguistic and statistical analysis of 112 Old French narratives, Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker has found that proverb usage in narrative literature rose in the period between 1150-1170, saw a period of intense and varied usage between 1170 and 1230, and then saw a reprise between 1270-1285 (151). Among twelfth-century works, the *romans d'antiquité* stand out for their usage of proverbial materials, as do the historiographical works of Wace. During the period of Chrétien de Troyes, Gautier d'Arras, and Hue de Rotelande at the end of the twelfth century, Schulze-Busacker has identified the development of three specific uses of proverbial materials: for purposes

of ornament, didacticism, and humor (152). The frequency of use of proverbial materials and the contexts in which they appear, however, varies widely among authors.

### Proverb Usage in the *Roman de Silence*

Heldris' use of proverbs is traditional, in that his usage can easily be reconciled with the standards outlined above. Yet, when compared to most vernacular romances, it is exceptional in terms of the sheer number of proverbs and clear references to proverbial materials he includes. He is also unique in that he often combines the use of proverbs with other compositional strategies. Like many romance poets, he integrates proverbs within the discourse of the narrator or characters for didactic purposes as well as to provide humor. The phrases often run across lines, and are sometimes clear references to proverbs rather than complete citations.

For identification of proverbs, I have used Joseph Morawski's 1925 collection, *Proverbes français antérieurs au XVe siècle,* as suitable attestation of contemporary existence in the vernacular. In addition, I have consulted several of the original manuscripts originally edited by Morawski and have found additional proverbs he did not include in his edition.[1] I have also incorporated the citations identified by both Schulze-Busacker and Sarah Roche-Mahdi in my discussion here. All translations of the proverbs are my own, though some have been left in the original as they are not of direct interest to my reading of *Silence*.

Heldris rarely uses complete proverbs that can be attested to be "actual proverbs" by their inclusion in contemporary or later proverb collections. In fact, only five proverbs appear in an almost identical form in the romance as they appear in proverb collections, most of which date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Morawski #170, 440, 463, 637, and 1434). More often, he either adopts forms different from those found in collections extant today, or uses only fragments of a larger citation, which I classify as "integrated proverbs;" I have identified thirteen such references in the romance (Morawski #194, 509, 663, 850, 1098, 1154, 1295, 1757, 2080, 2158, 2338, 2365, 2481). Heldris also makes close

references to ideas expressed in extant proverbs, often expanding on the theme of a proverb in a sequence of three, which can be referred to as *proverbes en série.* [2]

### Proverbs and Concerns about Women

Though Heldris uses proverbs for a variety of didactic purposes, such as exploring concepts of loyalty and service as well as honor and shame, of particular interest are those that comment on the "nature" of women and their expected behavior. Heldris dedicates several short digressions to the exploration of how these themes and characters use proverbs to strengthen their arguments or positions about women. I will begin by outlining these particular sections of the text, relating them to the over-all usage of proverbs in the text. I then suggest that the vitriolic nature of Heldris' discourse may reflect the poet's adaptation of one version of the *Seven Sages* tradition, Johannes de Alta Silva's *Dolopathos*. With this analysis, I hope to demonstrate that Heldris' comments fit into a larger tradition of writers who are concerned with the "nature" of women.

Within the romance, characters consider the impact of their actions and often attempt to predict the reactions of others. They also seek support for their decisions from others or from the implied audience. At other moments, it is the narrator who steps in to endorse the position of one or another character. In all of these scenarios, proverbs are used to clarify a position; of interest to us here is how and when Heldris chooses to use proverbs about women and their nature.

One section of the text in which the poet uses proverbs extensively occurs near the beginning of the work when the narrator recounts the meeting of Cador and Eufemie, the parents of Silence. Both Cador and Eufemie illustrate a tendency towards introspective forethought. Before the two marry, Eufemie is concerned that Cador, though wise and courteous, may change his good behavior after he receives wealth and favor from the king. Likewise, Cador is worried about the changeability of Eufemie's feelings and the way in which she, as a woman, makes important decisions. Cador dwells on the idea that gender determines behavior and expresses sentiments

similar to those enunciated directly by the narrator elsewhere concerning the volatility of women's nature:

> Et feme rest de tel afaire,
> Ne fait pas al miols que puet faire.
> Sa volenté tient por raison,
> De soi honir quiert oquoison.
> Son voloir trait contre nature,
> Contre raison, contre droiture:
> Ne prent garde u s'amor desploie
> Et puet sel estre se desroie
> Que marier puet a plaisir
> Mais mioldres pooirs est taisir. (667-77)
>
> [Yes, that's the way a woman is: she doesn't *do better than* she can, she holds her will to be reason, she seeks occasion to dishonor herself. Her will works contrary to nature, contrary to reason and to convention: She doesn't care where she deploys her love, and can easily stray out of bounds if allowed to marry where she pleases. But it's better to be silent.][3]

The first line, "Ne fait pas al miols que puet faire," suggests that women have limited abilities to behave well, an idea reintroduced at the end of the narrative when the narrator comments on the low expectations one should hold for women's behavior. It may also play on the negation of the proverb, "Qui mielz puet mieuls face" [One should do the best that one can] (Morawski # 1996). The next line, "Sa volenté tient por raison," draws on the sentiments expressed in the proverb "On puet selonc raison ce c'on veut" [One takes for reason what one wants to] (Morawski, # 1538). The next line, "De soi honir quiert oquoison," is a clear adaptation of one of the most popular proverbs about women as documented in romance by Schulze-Busacker, "Fame veult touz jours faire ce que l'en vee" [A woman always wants to do that which is forbidden] (Morawski # 742). In fact, Schulze-Busacker cites the quote as the second most popular proverb used by romance writers (33). Seen together, this section

also provides a good example of *proverbs en serie,* which is typical for Heldris' compositional style. By using this proverb, the narrator suggests it would be dangerous to actually allow Eufemie, as a woman, to choose her own mate. Cador is thus afraid that if Eufemie is left to choose her own spouse, it would not be himself. Though Cador may enunciate a generality in which he believes, Eufemie proves herself to be "more wise" than the typical woman since she does indeed select Cador as a spouse.

The question of women's nature appears again in the scene in which the king must decide how to react to the news, the lie, told to him by the queen, Eufeme, that Silence has tried to rape her. Elsewhere in the text, the king is concerned about "doing the right thing" so that he may satisfy his wife's rancor while maintaining his own honor (a point at which he also uses proverbs). As the audience knows the queen has made false charges, it is not surprising that we find some commentary regarding the queen's character as being typical for a woman:

> Mais ne volt son dit blastengier
> Car feme quant se violt vengier
> En tel maniere est moult trençans,
> Cho set li rois, et trop tençans
> Est el. Quant on le roeve taire
> Dont s'esforce de noise faire.
> Sil violt li rois miols aquoisier
> Ensi qu'il le fesist noisier.
> Mais ne li valt pas une tille,
> Car la roïne est bien gopille
> En son corage et moult destroite. (4265-4275)
>
> [But he also didn't want to contradict her words, because a woman, when she wants to avenge herself in such a situation, is very stubborn and she is too defensive; this the king knows. When one asks her to keep quiet, she tries all the harder to make noise. So the king tries his best to quiet her, but it's just as if he were making her louder. But it didn't do a bit of good, for the queen is a real

vixen in her heart and very difficult.]

The references here cannot be clearly linked to specific proverbs but draw on common stereotypes associated with women, such as their shrewdness, their desire for revenge, as well as their talkativeness, as in the proverb "Ne dire a ta femme ce que tu celer weus" [Do not tell your wife anything that you want kept secret] (Morawski #1333 ). Here as elsewhere, the wisdom and temperance of a man are pitted against the plans and/or emotions of a woman. As Cador fears a woman's tendency to besmirch her reputation and be guided overmuch by her desires as opposed to reason, the king fears her power and vengefulness.

It is the king's scribe, thrown into prison for the queen's crimes, who next turns to proverbs to express his disgust with women. This time, her faults are not those of poor judgment or talkativeness, but her more active attempts to deceive, conceal, and to harm men:

> Mais nus hom ne puet feme ataindre
> Quant el se violt covrir et faindre.
> Feme vait par son bel samblant
> Le sens del siecle tolt enblant.
> Sens d'ome sage poi ataint
> Por feme ataindre qui se faint…
> Car feme nen est pas laniere
> D'engiens trover en tel maniere.
> Engignose est por home nuire
> Plus que por un grant bien estruire.
>
> (5001-5006; 5013-5016)

[But no man is a match for a woman when she is bent on concealment and deception. A woman goes about putting up such a *fine front* that she fools everyone. A wise man's reason can achieve little against a woman who wants to deceive . . . A woman is always quick to think of something clever in such circumstances. She is much quicker at finding ways to harm a man than at thinking up something beneficial.]

Again, a *home sage* is no match for her deceitfulness—woman is powerful and evil. Any man will lose against a woman bent on deception. A wise man loses against a deceitful woman, and a man seeks to help others while a woman seeks to harm them. The sentiments echo that of the most popular proverb identified by Schulze-Busacker, "Qui croit et aimme fole fame, il geste avoir, cors et ame" [A man who trusts and loves a crazed woman will lose his future, his body and soul] (Morawski #1877) as well as another, "Femme scet ung art avant le deable" [Women are more crafty than the devil] (Morawski #740). This tirade against women gives way to the scribe's meditation about his own options. He concludes that this situation must be a punishment for past sins. As the proverb goes, "Li viés pechié, on le tiesmoigne / Renovielent sovent vergoigne" (5037-5038) [Old sins, as we all know, are a constantly renewed source of shame] (Morawski #2481), which is similar to the proverb "Vieulz pechiez fet novele honte" [Old sins continue to cause new shame] (Morawski #2481).

However, the tirade, which also piles the comments one on top of another using *proverbes en série*, is not necessarily original. In fact, it mimics a passage from Johannes de Alta Silva's *Dolopathos,* the early thirteenth-century Latin rendition of the *matière* of the *Seven Sages*. After Lucinius, a silent character who parallels the role of Silence, is freed from his imposed silence, the nature of the queen's deceit, who had falsely accused him of sexual assault, is revealed. The revelation scene, similar to that at the end of *Silence,* then turns to the ranting of Virgil, who serves a role similar to that of Merlin. Virgil, one of the emperor's principal advisors who is overcome with disgust at the queen's behavior, begins a tirade against all women and exclaims to the entire court:

> O ait furor, o scelus, o nequicia, o malicia mulieris, o uere monstrum, mulier, monstruosius cunctis monstris, quis tantum scelus uidit, quis audiuit, quis huic simile cognouit nec cogitauit! . . . Ecce uix tandem credidi quod audieram mulieram scilicet una arte uicesse diabolum nec esse maliciam que sue ualeat preualere. Quis enim etiam sapientium eius animum circumscribat, quis cordis eius

> abissum scrutari sufficiat, quis invitam ualeat custodire? Non hanc turris enea seruare poterit, non cathene ferree eius frangunt conatus, non sere, non porte eius euincunt consilia. Per hanc commouentur reges, oriuntur bella, euertuntur urbes, uastantur regiones multorumque nobilim sanguis effunditur, per mulierem suscitantur ire, rixe, inuidie, detractiones, emultiones, dissensiones ac simultates. Quid plura? Per mulierem denique totus perditus est mundus. Grade malum mulier. (de Alta Silva 1913, 87.31- 88.15)

> [O madness, O wickedness, O baseness, O evil woman, O woman truly a monster more monstrous than all monsters! Who has ever seen or heard such wickedness! . . . I could scarcely believe what I heard: that a woman had beaten the devil at his own game; that no evil was worse than hers! What wise man could outwit her? Who could guard her, unless she wished it? A bronze tower could not hold her, iron chains could not restrain her; bars and gates could not prevail over her plans. Through her kings totter, wars arise, cities fall, lands are devastated, and much noble blood is shed. Anger, quarrels, hatred, slander, jealousy, conflicts, and rivalry come from woman! But why go on? The whole world was lost through a woman. A woman is a great evil.] (de Alta Silva 1981, 77)

Here, Virgil summarizes earlier lessons told about women throughout the text's inserted tales while holding up the queen for special consideration, much in the way the narrator of the *Silence* does to Eufeme. Though Virgil seeks to condemn women, his accusations also reveal the inherent fears he has of women's powers. Far from being impotent, the women presented in the various tales, including the queen herself, are vocal, sexual, and clever. They have qualities which, though potentially neutral, are presented as negative

and evil in these situations, as the women involved are involved in disreputable acts such as adultery and regicide. One can see links between the negative portrayals of women illustrated in the various tales and of the frame tale of the *Seven Sage's* tradition and that of Eufeme. However, in *Silence,* a type of distillation takes place in which the most virulent critiques of women focus on only one woman—Eufeme.

The narrator takes over the role of commentator on the nature of women in two other narrative digressions. The first occurs at Ebain's court following the successful triumph of Silence and her fellow knights over the rebelling English barons. This time, unlike earlier conflicts, the tension is not between a man and a woman, but between a woman (the queen Eufeme) and another woman (Silence, who the queen thinks is a man and thus treats like a man). The narrator uses the opportunity to add another dimension to his previous comments. So far we have seen discussion of woman's relationship to reason, her ability to deceive, and her desire to harm others. Here, the narrator turns to the popular subject of woman's incapacity to love honorably and faithfully.

> Faintice feme paltoniere,
> Quant violt d'ome estre parçoniere,
> Pasmer et plorer est sa guise.
> Mais ja n'iert d'ome si soprise,
> Por cho qu'il n'ait de s'amor cure,
> Ne voelle sa male aventure.
> Feme faintice n'ainme mie,
> Ains faint pur furnir sa folie.
> Moult a a dire en fainte feme. (5232-5242)

> [When a treacherous *devious* woman wants to get her claws into a man, she gets her way by weeping and swooning. Yet she's never so taken with a man that she doesn't want to destroy him if he rejects her advances. A deceitful woman never loves, she only deceives to feed her lust. There is much that could be said on the subject of woman's deceitfulness.]

Clearly, the narrator adapts a familiar tone, yet one element is markedly different. Rather than talking about women in general, he specifies the type of woman to whom he refers—the *faintice* or deceitful woman. Perhaps Heldris feels this move is necessary for one of several reasons. First, he may not want to be accused of condemning all women, including by default those in his audience. Second, he may feel the need to further clarify the vast differences between the two characters in the scene, both of whom are actually women. Above all, the tirade reflects a common belief concerning a woman's use of crying as a stratagem: "Femme se plaint, femme se deult, femme est malade quant el[le] le veult" [Women complain, cry and act sick as it suits them] (Morawski # 739).

Though there is not room here for a detailed comparative analysis of the various proverbs about women Heldris uses to those which were circulating in proverb collections of the period, a brief examination of the statistical information provided by both Morawski and Schulze-Busacker does provide additional context. In his collection of 2,500 proverbs, Morawski provides more than fifty which explicitly discuss women. Many refer to women in general, with only a few specifically commenting about bad or good women. An overwhelming number of these, some of which were not even edited by Morawski, appear in the fifteenth-century MS. Q., *Bib. Nat. Latin 10360*. Of the fifty cited by Morawski, only sixteen have been attested in other romances by Schulze-Busacker. Five stand out as the most common:

| Proverb | Proverb # | Occurrences | Other MS[4] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cueur de femme est tost mué | 435 | 16 | 12 |
| Femme scet ung art avant le deable | 740 | 10 | 7 |
| Fame veult touz jours faire ce que l'un lui vee | 742 | 25 | 18 |
| Fous est cis qui feme weut gaitier | 769 | 7 | 7 |
| Qui croit et aimme fole fame<br>Il gaste avoir et cors et ame | 1877 | 22 | 17 |

A distinction between women in general, and bad or good women, appears in the following proverbs about specific types of women, all demonstrated in MS. Q:

> A femme torte ung patin. (Morawski # 31)
> Bonne femme honneure son seigneur. (Morawski #274)
> Femme deshontee met son pain au four.
> (Morawski #732)
> Femme mariee doit estre simple et porter la guimple.
> (Morawski #724)
> Femme seule est rien. (Morawski. #741)
> Qui a belle femme ja il n'en soit lié. (Morawski #1781)
> Qui a bonne femme si a bon chatel. (Morawski. #1783)
> S'il n'avoit une belle femme est une veille elle seroit
> trop chiere. (not edited in Morawski, fol. 578.)

By the end of the narrative, the *femme faintice* is dead and the good woman, Silence, has recovered her female appearance and taken on the position as queen. Ebain has acknowledged that "Il n'est se preciose gemme, / Ne tells tresors com bone feme" [There is no more precious gem, nor greater treasure, than a virtuous woman] (6633-6634). This line can be linked to both the above proverb, "Qui a bonne femme si a bon chattel," [He who has a good woman has a valuable asset] and the Biblical book of Proverbs, where a virtuous woman is seen as more valuable than rubies (Prov. 31:10-15).

At the end of the romance, a good woman is contrasted not with a bad or deceitful woman, but with a normal, everyday woman, who is, evidently, still less than honorable by her very nature:

> Maistre Heldris dist chi endroit
> C'on doit plus bone feme amer
> Que haïr malvaise u blasmer.
> Si mosterroie bien raison:
> Car feme a menor oquoison,
> Por que ele ait le liu ne l'aise,
> De l'estre bone que malvaise,
> S'ele ouevre bien contre nature. (6684-6691)

> [Master Heldris says here that one should love a good woman more than one should hate or blame a bad one. And I will provide a good reason why: a woman has less motivation, provided that she even has the means or the opportunity, to be good than to be bad, for her good work is against her nature.]

He goes on to add that, though he has blamed Eufeme of being treacherous, good women should not be affected, but rather, they should work harder at behaving well (6695-6701). And besides, the story was more about praising Silence than blaming Eufeme (6697-6698). One may say that Heldris is trying to save face by putting the blame on only bad women, but this is clearly undercut by his suggestion that women have less motivation to be good. While Silence does provide a model of an active and positive woman, Heldris resorts to traditional stereotypes about women and thus does not particularly, in my opinion, suggest any real movement towards advocating positive or active roles for women in society.

We have seen that Heldris uses or adapts proverbs concerning women, and guides the reader to agree with his positions through their use. But does this make him particularly unique or misogynistic when seen in light of other French or Anglo-Norman romance writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? Clearly, Heldris is concerned about women, and their nature, but more specifically, does his proverb use reinforce his didactic message in an unusual or significant way? When seen in light of the large number of proverbs concerning women that have been attested to, and in comparison to how often proverbs about women were used by other romancers, Heldris' frequency of use seems to be relatively high, but not strikingly unusual.

When proverbs about women are analyzed within the corpus of twelfth and thirteenth-century romances, and in relation to specific writers, nine romances stand out for their inclusion of numerous citations of, or references to, proverbs about women. These include two from the *Seven Sage's* tradition (Herbert's *Dolopathos, Roman des Sept Sages de Rome* in verse), two from insular *romans*

*d'antiquité* (*Roman d'Eneas, Roman de Troie*), two by the same author (Gautier d'Arras' hagiographical narrative, *Roman d'Eracle* and *Ille et* Galeron), and two others (Hue de Rotelande's Ipomedon and Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose). In comparison to the rates of usage found in these works, Heldris' use of identifiable proverbs about women is not exceptional, though he does make additional comments about women that are not clearly related to specific proverbs. In terms of time of composition, these romances have a spread of roughly one hundred years, the romans d'antiquité being early in the third quarter of the twelfth century and Jean de Meun's work being the latest, in the third quarter of the thirteenth. We also see a high level of didactic romances in the group, including those of Gautier d'Arras and the two versions of the Seven Sages.

I believe that Heldris' work does have important affinities with this group of texts. Two of the works in question, the Roman de Troie and Ille et Galeron, in fact, are included in the same manuscript, Nottingham (Mi.LM.6). The use of allegory and personification, as well as discussion of the nature of women, link Heldris with Jean de Meun. And perhaps most significantly, Heldris adapts materials from the tradition of the Seven Sages in his own work, which I believe is an important intertext for reading the narrative construction of Silence.

**Conclusion**

Heldris' compositional style reflects an interest in following the use of proverbs as laid out by medieval rhetoricians, and he is particularly adept at utilizing proverbes en série at moments of narrative importance. Though many phrases do not exactly match attested proverbs, it is clear that Heldris understands both the forms and functions of proverbs. The paremiological tradition, as it existed in both Latin and Old French, clearly influenced the discourse within which Heldris chose to compose his narrative, and provided another didactic narrative tool with which he could construct his apparently unique work. Heldris uses proverbs as a central element of his program for teaching throughout the romance. Most important to him are the issues of honor and loyalty between lords and subjects, as well as the natures of both good and bad women, as

discussed here. The sentiments expressed in many of the proverbs are reinforced in narrative events. Seen as a whole, the use of proverbs is central to the establishment of both authority for the narrator and various characters, as well as essential to an understanding of the work. Through the author's repeated concerns about concluding his moralizing digressions to return to his story, we see a clear recognition of these two distinct but complementary aspects of the work as defined by the author.

Notes

[1] More specifically, by reexamining and reediting the proverbs in his Ms. Q, Bib. Nat. Latin 10360, I found several hundred additional proverbs that he did not edit, one of which referred to women.

[2] See Schulze-Busacker 32-34; this format is not identified by her as being used in Silence, though she does identify such usage in several authors associated with the insular literary tradition, including Wace, Hue de Rotelande, and Gautier d'Arras. Of particular importance is Gautier's Roman d'Eracle, in which the poet also uses this form to comment on the nature of women. See the discussion that follows.

[3] All translations are by Sarah Roche-Mehdi unless indicated by italics, in which case I have amended or redone the translation.

[4] Indicates the number of other manuscripts in which this proverb occurs as identified by Schulze-Busacker.

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