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Author(s): Loren Ringer

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Exchange, Identity and Transvestism in *Le roman de Silence*

Loren Ringer

The *Roman de Silence*, a thirteenth-century romance written by Heldris de Cornuälle, was first edited by Lewis Thorpe in 1972. The rather lengthy prologue does not introduce the story as one might expect but stands instead as a social commentary on the avarice and moral decay of the time. In referring back to a healthier era, Heldris applies this motif to a more specific theme: that of patronage. From this economical viewpoint on writing, the idea of exchange emerges on three different levels which I shall treat separately: material exchange which, is of course, the most obvious, given the author's quasi-digressive prologue on wealth; verbal exchange in both writing and speaking; and sexual exchange or more specifically, exchange in sex. An examination will follow of the question of sexual/textual identity as it concerns the heroine, Silence; this will focus primarily on problems in gender and gender-identification, including a consideration of the name, a medieval leitmotiv par excellence, and on problems related to the interpretation of language on both a written and oral level. The theme of transvestism which originates from folkloric tradition receives unique treatment in the text and thus merits discussion as well.

First I would like to give a short synopsis of the text: Ebains, the king of England, is at war with the king of Norway. To end the war, the latter offers his beautiful daughter to the former; they marry and peace is restored. Shortly thereafter, two counts, who married twin sisters in Chester, kill each other in a dispute over inheritance from their father-in-law. Ebains, who was visiting Chester, immediately decrees that no one shall inherit land through the female line.

On his return to Winchester, the king and his entourage are attacked by a terrible dragon. Cador, Ebains's nephew, is rewarded land and the free choice of a wife for killing the beast. He takes Eufemie, the only daughter of the count Renalt de Cornuälle, as his wife and Ebains grants them a dispensation so that Cador can inherit his father-in-law's domaine.

Eufemie is soon pregnant and the young couple is worried that they will have no more children. She gives birth to a girl and they raise the child as a boy, giving her the name of Silentius; she is called Silence, a name which preserves the secrecy surrounding her sex. Silence is brought up in seclusion by a loyal seneschal and his wife and, along with their son, she is taught to hunt, joust and fence. Although she has all the appearances of a sturdy young boy as she approches adolescence, her father deems it necessary to explain why she is being raised as a male child.

Silence senses a great deal of emotional turmoil and decides to run away with two minstrels in order to learn something that might serve her if ever the secret were divulged. Upon learning of her disappearance, Cador decrees that all jongleurs who pass by his territory will be killed.

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Meanwhile, Silence tours France and learns very quickly the art of *jonglerie*, so well that she soon outdoes her mentors. They decide to kill her, but she is forewarned in a dream and escapes danger.

Missing her parents, she returns home, but since she is still in disguise, she is duly sentenced to death. Her father finally recognizes her, but only after she shows him a birthmark on her right shoulder.

Ebains summons Silence to his court and the Queen Eufeme (not to be confused with Silence's mother Eufemie) falls madly in love with the pseudo-young man. After offering herself to Silence twice to no avail, the queen denounces her, pretending that Silence tried to rape her. Ebains, perplexed and not wanting to kill Silence, sends the latter to France with a letter asking the king of France to welcome her. Eufeme exchanges the letter for one which demands the execution of Silence. After confirming that the letter was indeed false, the French king welcomes Silence to his court and before her eighteenth birthday, she is dubbed a knight.

When several of king Ebains's vassals revolt against him, Silence, who by now has become one of the most acclaimed knights in the world, returns to England accompanied by thirty French knights and puts down the uprising. Back at the British court, she is again propositioned by Eufeme and once again she is expulsed from the royal presence. This time, she is to look for Merlin. Since it is said that only a woman can find him, Eufeme hopes to keep Silence away from the court forever. Silence does find Merlin and leads him back to the court. Silence's real identity is then revealed, the Queen is quartered, and Ebains marries Silence, now known as Silentia.

The story's dramatic ending stands in sharp contrast to the prologue. Challenging the reader to a critical reading of the text, the author announces his *pre*text of remuneration for poets. In a very pointed attack on stingy princes, Heldris develops a scatological motif that criticizes the accumulation of wealth. He returns to this theme later (vv. 255-76) where he depicts the image of a spider spinning a web from its own waste in order to obtain sustenance. Yet another intervention on money appears when the author uses a typical rhetorical device of homonymy to assimilate the words "honte" and "avoir":

> Et Honte voelent tolt avoir:
> Honte ont et Honte les maintient.
> (v. 1571)

The context of this passage is a discussion on inheritance and king Ebains's decree; in it, shame is opposed to honor. The question of inheritance and therefore the material exchange of land from one person to another is fundamental to the text since it is for this reason that the heroine will be raised as a male in order to inherit her father's land.

On one level, material exchange functions outside the text and points to the act of writing as it was conceived of in Heldris' times. The poet adhered to the idea that only God could create, and the art of poetry consisted of simply arranging the "material." The end product was then compensated by another "material," namely the patron's money. Thus material exchange can be

understood as a tool to bring the author into his text, and the word itself functions on three different levels: Heldris arranges a given "material" in which "material" constitutes a major theme (i.e., inheritance), and he is recompensed materially for his efforts.

Material exchange is paralleled by verbal and sexual exchange, so much so that it is difficult to tell if the latter two are merely submotifs in support of the former or whether they constitute central themes in the poem. By verbal exchange, I am referring to what the author does with words, the core material of language which is at the poet's disposal. In fact, this is what links the two types of exchange. The word or *verbum* is the basic substance of the God-given material with which man communicates and with which poets write. In this romance, the author's use of words mimics the precarious quality found in material exchange (both in and out of the text) and points to the malleability of language.

To illustrate this idea, it is appropriate to consider first the title. No title is provided in the manuscript, and *Le roman de Silence* is an invention of modern editors. Since Silence is the main character and silence constitutes a central theme, the given title seems an appropriate designation.[1] At the same time it announces the notion of verbal exchange or rather the lack or difficulty of exchange. I will address the question of interpretation later. First, I would like to examine the linguistic word play.

The use of homonyms is very common throughout the text, as in the example noted above. In another example, "(n)en a mie" (homonymically related to "ennemi") is rhymed with "ami" so that the rapport between rhymes is one of opposites (vv. 1151-52). This kind of play alerts the reader to an interesting relationship between words that are rhymed. A rhymed couple, "silence" and "science," is in fact the focal point of an article by Kate Mason Cooper. Though Cooper does not mention that the words are rhymed, as they are in vv. 3589-90, she proposes that when one removes the letter "l" (and hence "elle") from the word "scilentiă," the word "scientia" remains which refers to wisdom and knowledge as well as to the ancient texts which medieval authors sought to articulate (359). Another rhymed pair is "desire" and "dire." When the "es" is removed from "desire," "dire" is left. One can only speculate on what the extracted "es" (Freudian overtones aside) might signify: given the difficulty with which the characters express desire in the text, is not the *es*-sence of desire the ability to communicate or exchange it? Yet another sort of linguistic game is found in the assimilated spellings "count" and "story" in the word "conte." The counts (spelled "conte" or "cuens") are often giving accounts ("conter") of action

1. Taken as a proper name, the title compares with Christian name titles such as *Lancelot* or *Erec et Enide* where the person figures as a main character. Viewed as a motif, *Le roman de Silence* conjures up the type of personification found in *Le roman de la rose* but at the same time, it constitutes an oxymoron if one understands: a romance *of* (constructed out of) silence. Yet another meaning is derived by comprehending silence as a theme and therefore taking the title to mean: a romance *about* silence. For the present study, all of these interpretations find a legitimate role.

that takes place in the story ("conte"), all of which can lead to ambiguity (v. 4495 for one example). Still another linguistic exercise consists of inventing words by the use of a prefix. Cador's use of the word "desvaleter" to refer the eventual unveiling of Silence as a woman, undoubtedly reflects a play on the word "despuceler." Lastly, Heldris employs chiasms several times. Here is but one example:

> L'enfes, qui mal n'ot, est guaris.
> Il n'est garis qu'il n'ot nul mal.
> (v. 2141)

This kind of reversal echoes the thematic structure of Silence's story. Born a girl, she is raised as a boy and at the story's close the cavalier is "desvaleté" and becomes a beautiful women. All of these linguistic elements bring language into question, pointing to its disfiguring and mutable qualities.[2]

Like verbal, the third type of exchange, sexual, backs up and is related to the functions of material exchange. First, it plays a key role in inheritance and the way money is transmitted. Secondly, sex is also a creative force much like the God-created material and the poetic word; they all hold production to be an essential goal.

Sexual exchange can be considered from several different perspectives. First, in a political context, the two most important married couples in the text are the result of exchange. Eufeme becomes the wife of Ebains in exchange for peace between England and Norway. Likewise, Ebains grants Eufemie her choice of husband for healing Cador (he was injured by the dragon's breath and Eufemie is skilled in medecine); coincidentally, they fall in love with each other so that in this case, the desire is one of mutual attraction. Later, Silence becomes the wife of Ebains but the only exchange in this relationship involves the changing of suffixes on Silence's name, the -us transformed to -a.

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2. It is interesting to note here the question of oral versus written tradition. Heldris uses words such as "matyre," "viers," "rime" and "conte" to refer to his story. His proposed source which, according to Thorpe, has thus far proven itself ficticious, is mentioned in the text:

> Si com l'estorie le nos livre,
> Qu'en latin escrite lizons,
> En romans si le vos disons.
> (v. 1662)

The source is referred to as "escriture" (v. 2690) and so it seems that the source as well as Heldris' own poem derive from a written tradition. There are however instances in the text where orality seems to be suggested. For example, when the author intervenes: "Que valt, segnor, d'aslongier conte?" (v. 224), he could be addressing his readers or an audience. An implicit intervention occurs with the use of the third person plural possessive adjective "lor" (v. 254) which could imply either an oral or written tradition, but which in either case aligns the author with his French reader/listener in talking about English laws. The author also frequently employs the interjection "oïl" and the verb "oïr," which would also indicate orality (vv. 716, 1261, 2223).

The fact that the main character's birth is related relatively late in the text (v. 1800 out of 6706 verses) leads to the second instance of sexual exchange. The text contains a fairly typical definition of courtly love and *gradus amorus*, the steps of falling in love. This seems to conform to medieval tradition with the exception of the author's emphasis on the kiss. Approximately one hundred lines are devoted to Cador and Eufemie's first kiss and its importance in the establishment of their relationship. Using the metaphor of food, the poet suggests the idea of consummation to which the kiss will eventually lead. The parallel is made between kissing and the establishment of contact between the two lovers' hearts (v. 1118) which, as Nicolas J. Perella indicates in his book, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane*, is a traditional pre-coital phase. However, it is later pointed out that while kissing, one cannot speak: "Longement baisent et acolent; Quant pueënt parler, si parrolent" (v. 1144). When one reconsiders the discussion on verbal exchange, is the kiss a replacement for verbal communication, an alternative form since it also involves the buccal cavity, or is it a precursor to coition which also constitutes an exchange? The use of the word "delite" in the line "Por lor baisier ki lor delite" (v. 1134) would seem to indicate that the latter is true since this word can also refer to sexual pleasure.

The third type of sexual exchange originates in the conception of Silence. The author mentions the "semance" of the father and the "fruit" that results from it: "Que de cel fruit haitié le face, / Si com par lui vint a semence" (v. 1675). The idea of exchange is relatively clear and seems to indicate several things. First, this passage underlines the role that nature will have in forming the fetus into a "figure." The author aligns himself several times in the text with nature in that they both have a given "matyre" with which to create. Since it is a question of procreation that takes place in the uterine space, both author and nature take control of the feminine body. Consequently, a parallel is formed between the creation of Silence, the product of nature, and Silence, the romance heroine. Another reason for focusing on semen is that procreation was considered (and for some continues to be) the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse. Thus, the child and the text are simultaneously legitimized.

During the rest of the romance, problems of gender and gender identification abound. Silence's sexual identity and its textual manifestations are clearly a central issue in the story, as we have seen in this discussion of exchange. Cador explains the choice of the name:

> Il iert només Scilenscius;
> Et s'il avient par aventure
> Al descovrir de sa nature
> Nos muerons cest -us en -a,
> S'avra a non Scilencia.
> Se nos li tolons dont cest -us
> Nos li donrons natural us,
> Car cis -us est contre nature,
> Mais l'altres seroit par nature.
> (v. 2082).

He will be named Silencius

> And if it happens by chance
> That his nature is discovered
> We will change this -us into -a,
> And she will be named Scilentia.
> If we withdraw then this -us,
> We will restore natural law ("us"),
> Because this -us is against nature
> And the other is according to nature.

Onomastics holds an important status in medieval romances; consequently, a name like Silence strikes the reader as unusual despite the common use of suffixes in this particular romance. The child is simply called Silence, which makes her name an ambiguous signifier of gender. As seen elsewhere in medieval texts, the signifier often has an explicit rapport with the signified, and such is the case with Silence. Skipping to the end of the story, Silence is indeed de-named when her true sex is revealed and the -us becomes -a.

It is noteworthy that Silence chooses her own name when she runs away with the jongleurs. Renaming herself Malduit, she explains that it means "mal apris" (v. 3579). However, when the name is closely scrutinized one realizes that it has multiple meanings. The word contains "mal," a homonym of "mâle," and the past participle of "duire" which means "to lead, to direct and to instruct." Left as one word, "malduit" signifies "mal mené" or "mal conduit" in modern French.[3]

The second problem involving sexual/textual identity concerns the conflict in gender and more specifically gender identification. Perhaps the central issue in this conflict is the debate between Nature and Nurture. This duo appears in the romance as individual characters and they function as metatextual commentators on Silence's upbringing. In the first discussion that takes place, Nature is upset with Nurture for having "desnaturé" (v. 2272) the product that she has created (or even "escrit," as we see elsewhere [v. 1918]). Nurture ("Noreture" in Old French) can be defined as environment but is more specifically "upbringing" or "custom" and is synonymous with "us" which is appropriately the same spelling as the suffix that her father has attached to her name. Consequently, Nature can be seen as the producer or creator of life, whereas Nurture represents the more masculine, patriarchal society. Nature accuses Nurture of disguising the beautiful product of her creation.[4]

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3. Although the verb "conduire" did exist in Old French and could refer to behavior in a figurative sense, I could not find "malconduit" as one word. One cannot help but notice that the difference between "malduit" and "mal*con*duit" (i.e. "con" or the female sex) is exactly what Silence is being forced to hide.
4. The discussion between Nature and Nurture could indicate a seemingly feminist perspective. However, several interventions both explicit and implicit show a certain misogyny on the part of the author; twice he depicts the woman as a manipulator who will invade a man's life when in love but whose love will not remain firm (vv. 3900, 4266). In the end, the poet contends that it is better to impose silence upon them, and in the final verses of the romance, he uses Eufeme as a prime example. Could this have anything to do with her name which, like

Silence herself accepts the paternal dictum of silence concerning her gender when it is explained to her at age twelve. Nature and Noreture return to discuss her dilemma and she experiences much internal conflict. The distressed child asks herself:

> Silencius! qui suis jo donques?
> Silencius ai non, jo cui,
> U jo sui altres que ne fui.
> Mais cho sai jo bien, par ma destre,
> Que jo ne puis pas altres estre!
> Donques sui jo Scilentius,
> Cho m'est avis, u jo sui nus.
> (v. 2538).

> Silencius! Who am I then?
> I have the name Silencius I believe
> Or I am other than I was.
> But this I know well, by my right hand,
> That I cannot be other!
> Therefore I am Silencius,
> It seems to me, or I am nothing (or nude).

Such an acute identity crisis comes from her confusion in gender identification. The question is complicated by the fact that "nus" can refer to either "nothing" or "nude," so that she either considers herself to be a non-being or is aware that her nude body does not correspond with her nomenclature. She temporarily accepts the situation but, as mentioned in the synopsis, she is later worried that she will not possess any feminine skills; in the event that she was permitted to display her true gender she would find herself in another quandary. Poetry will eventually provide her with the feminine qualities that she so desires; she learns well and is attracted at a young age to writing.

The last problem concerning gender is raised by pronominal use in the text. Silence is most often referred to as "il," but Nature and Nurture who know her true identity use "elle." Quite often, the author juxtaposes a masculine and feminine signifier in the same line. For example, he calls Silence the "valet ki est mescine" (vv. 3954, 3871). In this way, the reader continually encounters what Michèle Perret calls the "caractère hybride" (335) of the heroine and is consequently reminded of the discrepancy between her inner and outer identities.

This kind of confusion in the text leads us to a topic intertwined with the problem of sexual/textual identity: the difficulty encountered in interpreting the spoken and written word. The first example comes when the love-sick Eufemie enters Cador's room with the intention of confessing her love:

> Li jors apert et Eufemie

Silence's mother's, Eufemie, can be assimilated to the word "euphemism"? For a further development of this idea, see Anita Benaim Lasry's article, "The Ideal Heroine in Medieval Romances: Quest for a Paradigm," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 32 (1985):227-43.

Saut sus que ne s'atarja mie.
Vient en la cambre a son ami.
Dist li: "Amis, parlés, haymmi!"
Dire li dut: "Parlés a mi,"
Se li dit: "Parlés haymmi!"
"Parlés a mi" dire li dut,
Mais, "haymmi!" sor le cuer li jut.
Si tost com ele ot dit "amis,"
En la clauze "haymmi!" a mis.
"Ami" dut dire, et "haymmi!" dist,
Por la dolor qui en li gist .
(v. 892)

The day broke and Eufemie
Who did not delay jumped up.
She come's into her friend's room.
She says to him: "Friend, speak, hate me!"
She meant to say "Speak to me,"
But said to him: "Speak, hate me!"
"Speak to me" she meant to say,
But "Hate me" remained on her heart.
As soon as she said "Friend"
She put "Hate me!" in her sentence.
She should have said "Friend"
[and she said "Hate me!"
Because of the pain that is in her.

The effects of love being what they were in medieval times (fever, shaking and swooning are just a few of the symptoms), it is not surprising that one would err in speech while in the throes of love. Telling your loved one to hate you when you mean to tell him/her to speak to you *does* however constitute a serious gaffe in amourous discourse. In Eufemie's case, the mistake occurs unintentionally, but what is interesting is that even though Cador cannot be certain of her intentions (they have just met), he is able to interpret correctly the scrambled message. It is a question of seeing through the faulty choice of words in order to understand what is really meant. According to R. Howard Bloch, Cador qualifies as a trouvère:

> The troubadour or Trouvère is one who attempts to fill the silences or "trous" in speech (which he also makes by speaking). Similarly, the lover is one who desires the other, but only in so far as he or she desires speech. Sexual desire is ultimately a desire for language[...]. (90)

To interpret the message correctly, Cador must rely on instinct rather than language.

Trusting instincts becomes a life and death matter later in the text when Silence arrives in France with the switched letter which says that she should be beheaded. The King, taken by the pseudo-young man's beauty, does not wish to kill her and so he consults several counts. These counts are described as "senés,"

meaning wise, and thus they represent, as Cooper indicates, the consummate reader (352). Following their advice, the king sends the letters back and the counterfeit is discovered.

The labile quality of language indeed permeates the text. While Bloch defines the role of the trouvère, Cooper gives an insightful analysis of the jongleur:

> The term *joglerie*, derived from the Latin *ioculari*, is alternately defined in the vernacular as "playing tricks," "joking" or "singing songs"; it is often assimilated in this and other writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the term *jenglois*, from the Latin *iactare*, designating in medieval French "idle or empty speech." In either case, playing tricks, joking and empty speech all have one thing in common—the use of signs or symbols to point to that which is not there, to indicate absence. (349)

Since Heldris seems to consider the jongleurs as fellow craftsmen for whom the plea of liberal patronage also applies, and because one of the major themes of the poem involves silence, suddenly form and content start to merge. What better way to maintain Silence's silence than to use a scrambled, almost coded language which characters *in* the text and readers *of* the text are challenged to interpret?

The author shows an additional concern for language in the leitmotiv of writing in wax. Its first mention comes in the intervention where the author compares the durability of love to that of writing in wax (v. 1169); the heat will exterminate both, since the love will not be kept in memory and the wax will not successfully "retenir la lettre escrit" (v. 1177). Writing in wax is referred to in verses 1524, 4277, 4363, 4374, 4856, 5252. It is interesting to note that wax was also used to mold medieval coins. In both cases, wax constitutes the means to an end, a sort of rough draft that is by its very nature subject to change.

The last part of this study dealing with transvestism serves to reinforce and in some ways combines the multi-faceted system of exchange and ambiguities raised in the discussion on sexual/textual identity. Perret distinguishes between the interior or "sexe réel" and the exterior or "sexe apparent." According to Perret, most men use transvestitism to obtain the desired woman whereas for women, cross-dressing usually coincides with an asexual phase (329). Both cases are illustrated in *Le roman de Silence*; Merlin has the uncanny ability to see through false appearances; when the heroine leads him back to the court, he exposes not only Silence's true sex but also that of a man dressed as a nun who is really one of the queen's lovers. For the reasons indicated above, Silence's female body which according to the text is quite beautiful, remains hidden beneath men's clothing. Even at birth she is said to be in ill health (this is so the priest won't unwrap her for the baptism) and is immediately bundled in "dras," which here refers to a blanket and will later take the form of clothing. Silence realizes the discrepancy between inner and outer and plays on the words "desos" (under) and "deseure" (over, on top of). The author often makes reference to Silence's plight as "il est desos les dras mescine" (v. 2480). After considering Silence's aforementioned confusion about her identity and the confusion in the

text surrounding the word "nus," one senses that she is imprisoned in men's clothing.

Using Perret's polarized system I have inserted nudity as the intermediary stage by which one can permeate travesty. As mentioned above, when Silence returns from France the first time, she must show her own father a birthmark so that he will recognize her. Thus through nudity, Silence's true identity is revealed, and since her father mistook her for a man her real sex is also exposed, even if it is only to him.

As another example, it is interesting to return to the manuscript. Fourteen miniatures accompany the folios containing *Le roman de Silence*, and the last one is of Silence standing naked in front of King Ebains. (The miniature stands instead of a capital O which could be a visual designation of absence.) The miniature in conjunction with the word "velee" (v. 6418), which is what the nun and Silence must both give up, complete the final "unveiling" of Silence. "Velee," while referring to the nun's veil, can also be assimilated to velum, a more general term that could designate Silence's clothes, or it could also refer to the hymen which Silence is soon to lose. At any rate, Silence does offer her true self to Ebains: "Ne jo n'ai soig mais de taisir./ Faites de moi vostre plaisir" (v. 6628). Thus, while Silence as a man possesses the skill of jonglerie, that is to say the art of using speech to indicate absence, Silence as a woman accepts true silence.

I will finish the discussion of transvestitism with an examination of two words, "parage" and "mirëor." Until now, we have discussed mostly written and spoken types of communication, but we must include the visual to render the discussion complete. "Parage" can refer both to family, relation or noble birth and to ornament or "parure." The reader is again faced with a word that can either refer to the true, inner self or to exterior appearance. In the debate between Nature and Nurture, Silence herself refers to her "parage" (v. 2555) as a woman that environment ("us") will eventually distort. In this instance, the word "parage" seems to designate her birth, not necessarily as a noble, but as a woman. Thus it can also refer to a "parage" that is skin-deep or, in other terms, her biological female body before clothes are applied. This passage includes an expression that is used so many times in the text and adequately relates the disguise that Silence assumes. The expression is "a fuer de," which means "in the manner of."

In another debate, this time between the wise counts who are counseling the King of France, the count of Nevers speaks of the "halt parage" (v. 4647) of Ebains. Here, the word refers to his noble status as King but when referring to the "halt parage" of Silence (v. 4450) one can also think of her exterior appearance by which the King is so taken: "Sa grans bialtés m'a afolé / Que baizé l'ai et acolé" (v. 4470). Although he is perhaps taken by Silence's masculine beauty, I would suggest that the King senses, just as he did with the counterfeit letter, that something is amiss (pun intended). Could it be that he sees through her exterior appearance of noble birth to her natural "parage" mentioned above? This would be consistent with the theme proposed earlier of having to interpret messages based on false, exterior signs. If this is accepted, then clothes are put on the same level as language, both sharing a labile nature.

As for "mirëor," the problematic again involves the double meaning of a word; "mirëor" had the sense of "mirror" but also of "model." Thus, when the text says that the jongleurs "ont pris del mont le mirëor" (v. 3116), the reader is exposed to yet another double entendre. Is Silence a mirror in which others can see their own artifice, or is Silence the model of false exterior signs for the world to follow? If one takes into account the role of the mirror in medieval love poetry, the "dame" was metaphorically assimilated to the mirror for she reflected the man's love. Perhaps Heldris pushes this theme to its logical, albeit absurd conclusion: the "dame." Silence, gives a literal reflection of the male figure. Could this explain the French King's attraction to the young transvestite? As a model, she becomes the archetypal jongleur since she embodies the empty speech that we saw in Cooper's etymological study of the word.

To conclude, the textual consideration I have given this work stems largely from the concern for language and writing already inherent in *Le roman de Silence*. The rhetorical devices, the treatment of gender and identity and even the atypical development of medieval leitmotifs give *Le roman de Silence* a certain polyvalence in how it can be read and interpreted. Although the present study did not treat the subject of silence thematically, this word usually indicates the lack or absence of communication; in the text, it is exemplified by miscommunication, switched letters (in both senses of the word "letter"), ambiguous signifiers, just to name a few. However, in the case of this romance, silence is not barren; indeed, it engenders a rich textual product. For the reader, one could argue that silence truly is golden.

University of Wisconsin—Madison

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