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THE CLERKLY NARRATOR FIGURE IN OLD FRENCH HAGIOGRAPHY AND ROMANCE

The opening line of the *Song of Roland* (MS Digby 23) establishes the authority of the clerkly narrator:

Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes.

Who but a learned clerk would make use of the Latinism *magnes*, and in the rhyme position at that! Through the clerkly application of poetry a community is established, a community in which Charles the king is *our* emperor. Various learned topoi — e.g., the authority topos of « si la geste ne ment » — are woven into the text subsequently as typical epic formulae. Finally, the clerkly name Turoldus is inserted at the end of this manuscript. Meanwhile, a narrator figure is manifestly singing the story, commenting explicitly and implicitly on the events, usually, however, by capitalizing on his public's previous knowledge of the Roland legend, as when, a few *laisses* before the battle at Roncevaux, he exclaims: « Deus! quel dulur que li Franceis nel sevent! » (ed. Bédier, 716). Thanks to poetry, the latent truth of the legend is articulated and thereby transposed into history; the authoritative clerkly narrator device is indispensable to this transposition.

Other devices dependent on such a narrator are also pressed into service: « Charles the king, our great emperor » suggests that somehow Charles is still with us, that he is *our* king (i.e., presumably, the king of France) and emperor; all this occurs, of course, at a time when in real geopolitical terms France and Empire had drifted apart. The poetic « confusion » and « anachronism » are further reinforced by the use of verb tenses: « Charles... for a full seven years *has been* in Spain: / he *conquered* the high ground down to the sea. / No castle *remains* standing before him, / Except Zaragoza, which *is* on a mountain », etc. Past and present coexist in such a way as to situate the narrative in the

past while stressing its present import and meaning. This contrived and *written* poem thus makes use of the devices we employ in colloquial diction when we tell stories: « I went to Paris and after a few hours' rest I get up and meet this guy — he turns out to be my sister's old boyfriend! » The clerkly narrator of the *Roland* is very much *there*, physically, as it were, in this diction; however, he plays down his learnedness; he is made to take on folksy, colloquial ways.

Early vernacular hagiography duplicates or, it may even be said, prepares the way for the utilization of the procedures I have just alluded to. Tense sequence in the strictly narrative passages of a text like the *Life of Saint Alexis* (MSS *LAPV*) are colloquially jumbled in order to achieve an immediacy and a relevance analogous to those brought off in the first *laisse* of the Oxford *Roland*. Thus, when Alexis goes to visit his bride right after their marriage feast, present and past are mixed indiscriminately (and differently) in the various surviving manuscripts. However, in *oratio recta*, i.e., in the bride's touching *planctus* over her husband's mortal remains, the extraordinarily complex tense sequence is maintained verbatim in *all* the manuscript (stanzas 95-99). Presence of the narrator in the first instance, absence in the second. Indeed, the 9th-c. *Cantilène de sainte Eulalie*, our first surviving OF saint's life, fully exploits this device: « Voldrent la veintre li deo inimi, / voldrent la faire dïaule servir. / Elle non eskoltet les mals conselliers, / qu'elle deo raneiet... » (3 ff.); and: « La domnizelle celle kose non contredist, / volt lo seule lazsier, si ruovet Krist » (23 f.). Poetry here too is placed, as in the *chanson de geste*, at the service of an historical truth: the saint as imitator of Christ's incarnation.

The epic narrator, though as clerkly as any other, tends to refract his clerkliness within the poem by means of emphasis upon such procedures as may be described as *implicit*, e.g., the judicious use of certain clerkly words, the colloquial tense play, reliance on his audience's knowledge of the legend. It is this emphasis that differentiates the epic narrator figure from his hagiographic counterpart who, we observed, also uses these same procedures; in vernacular hagiography the presence of the clerkly narrator is far more *explicit*: the clerk figure is built into the saintly paradigm

itself. He stands for the tradition — that is, the authority — at the same time he officiates in the ritual performance. Let me explain.

In both the Saint Mary the Egyptian and the Alexis traditions the clerkly narrator assumes in each redaction the rôle ostensibly created by the original clerk. Zosimas is not only an important figure in the story he is also the clerkly witness to Mary's sanctity whereas, in the case of Alexis, this witness derives directly from Alexis' writing down his own story, a text subsequently read out by a clerk, at the Pope's command, to the assembled populace. Clerkly witness and authority, purposefully accounted for in the text, are almost as fundamental to hagiographic composition as is the tale of the saint's miracles. Thus, Rutebeuf's version of the life of Mary links the narrator to Zosimas from whom poetically he who « rudement œuvre » derives. They are related *in the literary process of the hagiographic tradition.* (In the late 10th-c. Latin *Vita Sancti Alexii*, in fact, the learned clerk, or archivist [*cartularius*], is specifically named as Æthius; he too is a character in the story). The tradition is renewed endlessly and, we might add, timelessly in each redaction, especially in the vernacular.

The clerkly narrator's explicit rôle as officiant is equally important. Through his presence and thanks to his use of a first-person narrative frame, the community so necessary to the functioning of the poem is created: joined to the narrator's « I », the community becomes the « we » to whom the narrator addresses himself in the prayer with which most saints' lives close. « Tuit oram », says the *Eulalie* narrator, « que por nos degnet preier, / Que auuisset de nos Christus mercit » (26 f.). The *Alexis* is no exception: « Aiuns, seignors, cel saint home en memorie, / si li preiuns que de toz mals nos tolget » (stanza 125). Frequently, the first-person plural (or community) is, as in the *Roland*, a given of the story. Thus, whereas the Latin *Vita Sancti Alexii* starts *in medias res* (« Fuit Romæ vir magnus et nobilis Euphemianus nomine... »), the vernacular narrator of MSS *LAP* carefully provides a little preface designed to establish the connection between *his* community and the Roman community of yore: « Bons fu li secles al tens ancienur / quer feit i ert e justise et amur »; nowadays « tut est muez » and « ja mais n'iert tel cum fut *as anceisurs* » (MS *L*,

stanza 1). The Romans are *our* ancestors, a point driven home in stanza 3: « nostra anceisur ourent cristientet ».

A fact often unnoticed by critics but which is important to our purposes here is that the clerkly presence is also manifest in what might be called the literary self-consciousness of many hagiographic structures: the very organization of the OF *Alexis* exudes a kind of learnedness. Easily identifiable figures and devices (e.g., the bride's *oratio recta*, to which I referred earlier), as well as certain compositional techniques characterize that text and, I believe, the genre. With respect to the *Alexis* itself Curtius (1936), Spitzer (1932), and Miss Hatcher (1952) have pointed out some of these procedures; indeed, Curtius declared flatly that any interpretation of the poem that does not take into full account the poetics of the time is doomed to failure. Contrivance is thus far closer to the surface here than in contemporary *chansons de geste*; it is a structural component. This fact does much to explain the direction taken by many subsequent versions of the Alexis tradition in the OF vernacular. Thus, we recall, the wedding-night scene in MSS *LAP* starts off with one line: « Com veit le lit, esguardat la pulcele ». The 13th-c. *rédaction rimée*, relying on the same kind of clerkly narrative authority, interpolates an explicit amplification designed to make sure we all get the point of Alexis' motivation; the narrator enters his protagonist's mind in a very novelistic way: « Kant Alexis ot se femme veue, / Ki tant par est cortoise et bien creue / Et covoitose et blance en se car nue, / Et voit le cambre ki si est portendue, / Dont li ramembre de se cheleste drue » (G. Paris and L. Pannier, *La Vie de saint Alexis* [Paris, 1872], 282). The scene is obviously sensual. Alexis was tempted by the pretty girl and *locus amœnus*. Or, at the very least, we the audience can and should understand him as having been tempted. We are not unmoved ourselves, and in our temptation we come to understand the purport of Alexis' renunciation: it is made *real*. In this way also, then, the clerkly redactor places his *clergie* — here his mastery of *descriptio* — at the service of the saintly paradigm.

For brevity's sake let me now generalize a bit.

The clerkly romancers of the second half of the 12th c. shared with their hagiographer counterparts a belief in *clergie*; the narrators of Wace, Marie de France, and Chrétien de Troyes are

learned manipulators of the art of poetry. However, to the extent that these narrator figures in romance are to be identified with the poet-romancer they do not so much believe in the material they are telling as they believe in how they are participating in the telling itself. The poetic act comprises more, then, than mere service to an external myth. Or rather, given the fabulous character of the romance context, it cannot be limited to a naïve — even though learned — service of this kind. Also, and this too is important, the narrator figure is not the hagiographer-officiant; that is, what he says may be, and often is, contradicted by other sources of information in the romance (e.g., situations, characters, tone, etc.). Irony frequently prevails here as it cannot, structurally speaking, in hagiography. Thus, the narrator's opening lines in Chrétien's *Yvain* speak of the prowess and courtesy characteristic of the Arthurian world. Yet these statements are totally undercut by what actually happens: Arthur's leaving the table and his guests in order to go to bed with Guenevere; the nasty quarrel between Ké and Calogrenant — a quarrel relished by the queen herself, etc. Manwhile, in the *Roman de Brut* Wace's narrator describes the « great peace » of the Arthurian golden age which tellers-of-tales have turned into fables: « Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir, / Tut folie ne tut saveir » (ed. Arnold, 9793 f.). The truth of these tales is hard to penetrate, even though Wace's avowed purpose is to tell the « verité » of those « ki Engleterre primes tindrent » (4). Doubt, therefore, is built into what his narrator says; thus Arthur's mortal wound, removal to Avalon, and possible return — the legend — elicit this commentary: « Tut tens en ad l'um puis duté, / E dutera, ço crei, tut dis, / Se il est morz u il est vis » (13, 238 ff.). (Nothing of this sort takes place in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace's source [XI, 2]).

When we compare and contrast a text like the *Alexis* with an Arthurian romance, we observe — and I repeat — an extraordinarily similar devotion to *clergie*, to poetic learning. However, we also note an equally extraordinary shift in emphasis. Faith in what is being served by poetry is replaced by poetic service itself. Each of Chrétien's four prologues unequivocally makes this point: the *bele conjointure* of *Erec et Enide*; the listing of the poet's *œuvre* and the narrator's stress of *clergie* in *Cligés* (what takes

place in France is the *composition*, not the chivalric action, of that romance); in the *Charrette* the clerkly service furnished Marie de Champagne by Chrétien parallels the chivalric service offered Guenevere by her doting Lancelot; and let us recall a few lines from the *Graal*:

> Dont avra bien salve sa paine
> CHRESTÏENS, qui entent et paine
> Par le comandement le conte
> A rimoier le meillor conte
> Qui soit contez a cort roial:
> Ce est li CONTES DEL GRAAL,
> Dont li quens li bailla le livre.
> Oez coment il s'en delivre (ed. Roach, 61 ff.).

The precedence of poetry in romance narrative is a fact. In significant ways the style of poetry constitutes a *matière*, something global. Much is gained, but something is lost too. Efforts will be made to make up the loss, efforts analogous to those attempted, with respect to epic, by Jehan Bodel in his *Chanson des Saisnes*. A few questions come to mind: How did the clerk poet, steeped in the romance tradition, go about utilizing his new poetic instrument in the reconstruction of hagiographic narrative? Or, to put it another way, how did the romance-type clerk poet — the new officiant of poetry itself — acquit himself of the saintly office? To what degree was he successful? And what is the lesson he provides us as literary historians and as students of poetry?

Wace offers a fine starting point. His *Vie de saint Nicolas* begins with a prologue that closely resembles — though with important differences — the prologues to the *Roman de Brut* and to the *Roman de Rou* (i.e., prologues of early *translatio studii* romances). The clerk-narrator figure is characterized as such far more concretely than, say, in the *Alexis*; he is defined in terms of his clerkly task: « A ces qui n'unt lectres aprises / Ne lur ententes n'i ont mises, / Deivent li clerc mustrer la lei, / Parler des seinz... » (ed. Ronsjö, 1 ff.). The prologue to *Rou* expresses the same idea: « Si escripture ne fust feite / E puis par clers litte e retreite, / Mult fussent choses ubliees » (ed Andresen, 7 ff.). The clerk proclaims the importance of his rôle in the transmission of knowledge. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, we recall, behaves analogously in the prologue to his *Roman de Troie*: « if clerks had kept silent, the

world would have lived in folly and our lives would be as the lives of beasts ». Poetry, then, *is* clerkliness; the clerk's fidelity to his duty preserves civilization and truth — to a considerable extent his action *is* truth.

Nevertheless, the hagiographic framework of the *Vie de saint Nicolas* obliges Wace to define his audience more broadly than, say, in *Rou*; in this latter text the narrator declares: « Jeo parouc a la riche gent, / Ki unt les rentes e le argent, / Kar pur eus sunt li liure fait / E bon dit fait e bien retrait » (163 ff.). A kind of hedging occurs in *Nicolas*. As he and other romancers often do, Wace identifies himself by name (« Jo sui Normanz s'ai non Guace ») and proceeds to say that he was asked, presumably by a noble patron, « que jo face / De seint Nicholas en romanz, / Qui fist miracles bels et granz. / En romanz dirrai de sa vie... » (36 ff.). However, vv. 7-22 describe a complete human society composed of laymen and clerks, fools and wise men, small and great, poor and rich, to each of whom God has given « divers dons a diverse gent »; it incumbs on all of us — knights and bourgeois, peasants and aristocrats — to display our goodness and to have faith in God. All men « bonement deivent esculter / Quant il oient de Deu parler » (21 f.). The clerk must not hide his light under a bushel — this is Wace's typically clerkly point (« Qui mels set mels deit enseigner », 23) — but those of us who are not clerks should, for our part, make every effort to understand; as, so to speak, readers, we have lights that should not be hidden either. Most interestingly, then, Wace proposes to his audience that its duty is to heed his saintly poetry: « Petit prendra qui sert petit, / Si cum l'escriture le dit » (33 f.). The audience is made up of people who serve God according to their station in varying ways; however, the community also must listen to the clerk by *reading* carefully the romance poetry he places at their disposal for their enlightenment. « I write », says Wace, in order that « li lai le puissent aprendre, / Qui ne poënt latin entendre » (43 f.). Understanding is thus — and I repeat — a form of reading: the counterpart to the clerkly job of poetic composition. We are all different, then, as individuals and as members of social classes; we are all one in the saintly community of this kind of poetry, a community in which the clerk's function is special.

Wace's prologue, as is the case with most *translatio studii* prologues, is fully integrated into the narrative that follows. Nicholas, an only son, is born to rich and powerful parents. He is educated as a clerk might be: « Petitet fut a lettres mis, / Par grant entente fut apris. / Quant plus crut et plus amenda, / Plus servi Deu et plus l'ama » (68 ff.). He gives away in charity all his earthly belongings. He is consecrated bishop of Myra. The rest of the poem is made up of a series of anecdotes recounting Nicholas' good deeds. The beneficiaries of his charitable interventions, like Wace's audience (as described in the prologue), include an amazing cross-section of the entire society of his time: a poor man with three daughters to marry off; a mother who inadvertently left her baby in boiling bath water; a child possessed by the devil; three murdered clerks who, thanks to Nicholas' prayers, were restored to life; sailors on a stormy sea; a town afflicted with famine; three counts unjustly accused of treason; a dying woman whom, while on his own death bed, Nicholas cures, etc. His saintly efficacy continues even after his demise: over half the poem is given over to these posthumous miracles. The range of his activity, as told in the poem, extends to, and comprises, the range of Wace's own public, both present and, one assumes, future: the range of his — i.e., Wace's — poetic activity. In this fashion the history of the ancient community of Myra is rendered relevant to Wace's contemporary Anglo-Norman community: a genuine *translatio* takes place. Wace's *poetic* activity — his intercession — is thus largely equivalent to the *matière* of Nicholas' life: both are *works*. Hagiography and romance structure blend here — to my mind interestingly and successfully.

Subsequent developments also merit our attention. If Wace's *Vie de saint Nicolas* represents a kind of hagiographic transposition through romance, Jehan Bodel's *Jeu de saint Nicolas*, composed in 1200 (about a half-century after Wace's poem), illustrates another, more thorough transposition: hagiographic narrative becomes hagiographic theater. Nevertheless, romance-type clerkliness, as I have described it, remains an essential feature. It reverts, however, to « implicitness », being contained in the generic transformation itself.

Whether the prologue was actually written by Bodel or whe-

ther, more probably, it was added by a later hand (this is Albert Henry's thesis), its presence tends to underscore the feature of clerkliness. For who is the *preecieres* but a clerkly preacher, a character whose unique rôle is to introduce and summarize the action of the play, the authority of whom acts as guarantor of the truth of it all? What will be played out on stage is accurate, derived from the authentic life of the saint. If, as I believe, Bodel did not himself write the prologue, the *remanieur* who did write it felt fully authorized to do so. Here, then, the play is the thing; its organization as drama is what counts. This organization is Bodel's doing — his presence — and, we all know, Bodel was a consummately conscious literary artist, given especially to the reworking of older forms in terms of new poetic techniques. Thus, we remember, his *Song of the Saxons* renews the *chanson de geste* by incorporating and subjecting to epic purposes the discoveries of romance construction.

The officiant-text-community relationship essential to hagiographic composition is worked out by Bodel in his *S^t Nicolas* within the dramatic structure which, by definition, characterizes its audience as a collective and participating community. The Artesian tavern scene so typical of much 13th-c. theater — e.g., the *Courtois d'Arras*, the *Jeu de la feuillée* — with its slangy, racy Picard language, the comic depiction of low-life, and its stock situations, provides a precious and efficiently ironic link between the saintly story and those who presumably watched the play. Meanwhile, the *prud' homme*, a kind of cross between a knight, a sober bourgeois, and a clerk, who is imprisoned by the Saracen king, bears decorous witness in courtly language to the saint in a manner that fully duplicates, in theatrical terms, the clerkly authority figure of much hagiographic narrative. It is he, moreover, who assumes this rôle *explicitly* at the very close of the play when he is called upon — pulled by hagiographic patterns — to declare: « A Dieu dont devons nous canter / Hui mais: *Te Deum laudamus* ». His mature age, his dignity, and above all his faith — these are idealized clerkly traits — combine with his dramatically central function in the play. After all, it is his life and freedom that are at stake. He is made to be an effective « serious » officiant, a structural counterpart to the comic but equally human thieves.

Thus, the total dramatic experience — Bodel's generic reworking of hagiography — justifies the later, and very « conservative », addition of the « self-conscious » romance-type proloque I mentioned earlier. The *preeciere's* intervention is perhaps poetically unnecessary, but one understands why it was tacked on to Bodel's text. For us it constitutes a valuable piece of medieval literary criticism. In the final analysis whether Bodel himself wrote it or whether it was composed by a later copyist is quite irrelevant.

Generic transposition of hagiographic modes typifies also Rutebeuf's efforts in this type of composition. With Rutebeuf, in my opinion, we reach a new peak of creativity — probably the last such peak — in OF hagiography. His *Vie de sainte Marie l'Égyptienne* and *Sainte Elysabel* are narratives that resemble in some ways Wace's *Saint Nicolas*; his *Miracle de Théophile* proves that he was also a master playwright in a style close to that of Jehan Bodel. However, Rutebeuf's clerk figure differs from that of Wace and Bodel. Whereas, we saw, the romance form imparts authority to Wace's narrator and, in Bodel's play, theatricality contains, as it were, the saintly lesson, in Rutebeuf's narratives new structures prevail. Poet-clerk and narrator-persona share an identity as close as that we find in the *Alexis*, however. But their joint authority in Rutebeuf derives from his reassessment of the clerkly function within the community; it is as special as was that of Wace and Bodel, yet it is based elsewhere. Rutebeuf's clerkly narrator is credible in that he is to be understood as a *person* — a witness not only to the clerkly tradition (a translator-adaptor) but also to experience, a man, then, whose life and works are both poetically and existentially identical. In his hagiographic narratives Rutebeuf makes use of an essentially *lyric* poet-protagonist figure, a lyric ego who is experientially as well as literarily — i.e., conventionally, on both counts — linked to the story recounted in the poem at the same time he is contained entirely in his own manner of exercising his poetic craft. Hagiographic biography and lyric autobiography are conjoined. Rutebeuf's saints' lives are thus highly contrived works — *œuvres* — thanks to which he who « rudement œuvre » (like the ox with which so frequently he etymologically identifies himself) may help his own salvation along as well as that of others by telling of divine grace. (In this,

quite curiously, Rutebeuf resembles his younger contemporary, Jehan de Meun, another romance transposer of lyric modes!, whose « mirror of lovers », we recall, was written in order to spare future lovers death from the sweet pangs of love).

Rutebeuf uses many clerkly romance contrivances, often reversing them to ironic effect. This procedure is typical of his style. Is not the « Mariage Rutebeuf » a kind of turn about of courtly lyric (with its wintry season, its mad punning, its hyperbolic chanting of misery all along the length of its rattling *tercets coués*)? We remember, for example, that, following in Wace's footsteps, Chrétien de Troyes proudly informed us in *Erec et Enide* that he was about to compose the story that would live as long as « crestïantez; / de ce s'est Crestïens vantez » (ed. Roques, 23 ff.), and that his *Conte du graal* would be « le meillor conte / Qui soit contez a cort roial » (ed. Roach, 65 f.). Not so Rutebeuf, at least not *apparently* — but more on that anon; listen now to a few lines from *Du Sacristain et de la femme au chevalier*:

> Et Rustebué en un conte a
> Mise la chose et la rima.
> Or dist il que, s'en la rime a
> Chosë ou il ait se bien non.
> Rudes est et rudement oevre:
> Se rudes est, rudes est bués:
> Rudes est, s'a non Rudebués.
> Rustebués oevre rudement,
> Sovent en sa rudece ment
>
> (ed. Faral-Bastin, 750 ff.).

The stress is put on the *figura etymologica* analyzing Rutebeuf's name — a learned device with which readers of this poet are perforce familiar. Consequently, we must read Rutebeuf's text in terms of the clerkly, technically oriented, romance tradition while, at the same time, we seek also to understand his departures. Now then, we recall, both *Sainte Marie* and *Sainte Elysabel* begin with romance-type proverbs or *sententiæ*; the two narratives are replete with characteristically romance amplifications, descriptions, *oratio recta*, learned figures, reference to Latin authorities, etc. But, I repeat, the framework of reference has been entirely transformed. Chrétien's or Wace's celebration of their craft has been replaced

not by lesser craftsmaship or even by a lesser *sense* of craftsmanship but rather by a total subversion of craft to the expression of something else, of something which, for lack of more time and space, I shall call « poetic voice ». Rutebeuf's persona — the narrator of the political poems, the poems of misfortune, the saints' lives — is no more and no less than that voice, put to a multiplicity of uses, to be sure, but nonetheless a unity, a style, wherein, like that of the great troubadours and *trouvères*, lies its strength. Thus, the lyric narrator of the two « Griesches » is very much the counterpart of the sinner-clerk of *Théophile*, redeemed perhaps by his *œuvre* just as Théophile was redeemed by the Blessed Virgin thanks to his prayer and contrition. So, in « La Mort Rutebeuf », does the protagonist-narrator (who, incidentally, describes himself as a poet) claim in hauntingly beautiful feminine verses that the Virgin who « espurja de vie obscure / La beneoite Egypciene » might one day take « en cure / Ma lasse d'ame crestiene ». Here, then, poetic voice is itself a *matière*. Thanks to poetry the individual — Rutebeuf's lyric self — takes on substance; his voice resounds with a new kind of relevance. Note also that Rutebeuf's saints' lives both tell the story of women, an appropriate subject for a lyrically oriented poet.

The myth of poetry, of its efficacy as discourse, remained strong in 13th-c. France, despite attacks made upon it from many quarters. New ways had to be found to defend poetry; Bodel, Guillaume de Lorris, Jehan de Meun, Rutebeuf, and Adam de la Halle, to name only the most outstanding, each came up with these new ways, with transpositions and transformations that kept poetry alive *as language, as process*. Rutebeuf knew that the old forms as such were dead — « or remainent chançons de geste », he says poignantly in the « Griesche d'été » (88), much as Villon would later ask, « Où est le preux Charlemagne? » — but he had learned from the old romancers and hagiographers that poetic creativity is indispensable to civilization, perhaps even to salvation. Rutebeuf's poetic voice is essentially a clerkly one. What was for Wace technique becomes for Rutebeuf a matter of poetic identity; and technique, paradoxical though this may sound, is thereby poeticized and used economically. Space allows one brief example before we finish: a kind of illustrative wrapping up.

Rutebeuf's *Vie de sainte Elysabel*, we noted, opens with a most traditional, romance-type prologue; we start with a proverb. Here is the text:

Cil Sires dist, que l'en aeure:
« Ne doit mengier qui ne labeure »;
Més qui bien porroit laborer
Et en laborant aourer
Jhesu, le Pere esperitable,
A qui loenge est honorable,
Le preu feroit de cors et d'ame.
Or pri la glorieuse Dame,
La Virge pucele Marie,
Par qui toute fame est garie
Qui la veut proier et amer,
Que je puisse en tel lieu semer
Ma parole et mon dit retrere
(Quar autre labor ne sai fere)
Que en bon gré cele le praingne
Por qui j'empraing cest besoingne,
Ysabiaus, fame au roi Thibaut,
Que Diex face haitié et baut
En son regne avoec ses amis
La ou ses desciples a mis.
Por li me vueil je entremetre
De ceste estoire en rime metre
Qui est venue de Hongrie,
Si est le Procés et la Vie
D'une dame que Jhesucriz
Ama tant, ce dist li escriz,
Qu'il l'apela a son servise;
De li list on en sainte Yglise

(ed. Faral-Bastin, 1 ff.).

We recognize the proverb as typical of Rutebeuf's manner — his obsession with « work » — and we associate the subsequent development of the idea of *labeur* ' fieldwork ' with the metaphor of sowing and reaping exploited by Chrétien in the prologue to the *Conte du graal*. We also recall the importance, in that romance, of eating. Everything here is as technical as in other Rutebeuf texts, but the tone is made to befit a sober saint's life (unlike, say, the *fabliau*-style of his *Du Sacristain et de la femme au chevalier*). There is no fully contrived *annominatio* game here — at least not yet — though the double-edged humility topos is present: « Quar autre labor ne sai fere ». The diction, in fact, is rather

courtly, in keeping with Rutebeuf's dedication to Ysabiaus. Now then, what happens in the closure? We have to look at the final three sections. The story proper ends on v. 2130; the lesson is drawn in a conventionally hagiographic manner in vv. 2131-2152, ending on a note of praise for St. Elisabeth's generosity and tying into a mention of Rutebeuf himself: « Ainsinc fist la beneüree / (Bien dut s'ame estre asseüree / Dont Rustebués a fet la rime ». Thirteen lines follow that repeat, almost word for word, the same *figura etymologica* on Rutebeuf's name we quoted from *Du Sacristain*; they start: « Se Rustebués rudement rime... », and end: « ... més Rustebués / Est ausi rudes comme uns bués ». A connection between the two poems — two poems of differing manner — is established by this device which they both share; the same development also occurs often elsewhere in Rutebeuf's work, including *Sainte Marie l'Égyptienne*. The poet's voice brings together all the poems into a single *œuvre*.

The overwhelmingly *annominatio*-filled diction with which *Sainte Elysabel* eventually closes contrasts sharply with what surrounds it; Rutebeuf's *presence* is felt. Then: « Més une riens me reconforte: / Que cil por qui la fis [i.e., the poem] la porte / A la roïne Ysabel / De Navarre, cui molt ert bel / Que l'en li lise et qu'ele l'oie, / Et moult en avra el grant joie ». This is a typical lyric construct (and note the lady's name!) — but it is couched in romance-type dedicatory lines. One would expect this to be the end, however Rutebeuf cannot let go quite yet; twenty-one more lines follow. An explanation of the courtly diction ensues, I think, in this *translatio* image: « Mesire Erars la me fist fere, / De Lezignes, et de toute trere / Du latin en rime françoise, / Quar l'estoire est bele et cortoise » (2175 ff.). The *story* is beautiful and courtly. The poet is a kind of agent, though his *existence as Rutebeuf* is fundamental to his work; this is new. But then look what happens in vv. 2179 ff.; the closure is wrapped up in such a fashion that the poet-agent, his truthful and beautiful *matière*, and the lady-patroness (*not* the lyric beloved but nonetheless figurally related to her) fuse quite interestingly — lyrically, of course, though the context is ostensibly narrative: « L'estoire de la dame a fin, / Qu'a Deu ot cuer feable et fin. / De fin cuer, loial finement: / Se l'estoire en la fin ne ment, / Bien dut finement definer, / Quar

bien volt son tens afine / En servir de pensser fine / Celui seignor qui sanz fin fine ». The learned *annominatio*, based on *fin'amors* and linked to the earlier but equally learned *figura etymologica* on Rutebeuf's name, brings it all together. Hagiographic form is renewed, given a new *existence*. At this point the poet shifts into the traditional hagiographic key; he has *become*, thanks to his poem, a real narrator of the *vita sancta*, just like the *Alexis* officiant: « Or prions *donques* [emphasis mine] a celi / A cui tant bien fere embeli », etc. Rutebeuf's explicitly particular identity — his poetic voice — is thus efficiently joined to this generalized hagiographie instrument; a kind of personal *translatio* governs his relationship to the romance and lyric traditions. Through this assimilation-creativity Rutebeuf governs his language and, by thus participating fully in the poetic process, he expresses his, and his age's, faith. Rutebeuf serves poetry because he knew how to reverse traditional procedures without denying them. As I have tried to show, however, this reversal demonstrates not only Rutebeuf's respect for the tradition but also the extraordinary — the vibratingly vital — creativity built into OF hagiography.

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