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Translating and Rewriting: the  
Reception of the Old French  
*Floire et Blancheflor* in Medieval  
England

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## Preface

Few medieval literary works have enjoyed as much popularity as that gained by *Floire et Blancheflor*<sup>1</sup>, an intriguing romantic story of Oriental origin which spread throughout all Europe during the Middle Ages.

Medieval writers from Spain, France, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia revised the romance from the twelfth century to the sixteenth, the story constantly undergoing recontextualization.

The one in Middle English survives in four manuscripts, and goes back to an Old French original composed roughly between 1160 and 1170, the period in which the trouvère Chrétien de Troyes started to compose the first medieval romances.

When exactly the Middle English adaptation was made is difficult to say, as none of the manuscripts seems to be direct copy of the original, but critics agree that it must have been around 1250<sup>2</sup>. This early date makes *Floris and Blancheflour* the second oldest romance in English after *King Horn* (c. 1225-50), but whereas the latter is a typical example of the “matter of England” set in the Germanic world in Western Europe, the first one is an Oriental tale with all the distinctive wonders of the East: a Saracen setting permeates the tales together with harems, eunuchs and an emir who marries a different wife every year.

In the introduction of her edition of *Floire et Blancheflor*, Margaret Pelan points out:

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<sup>1</sup> Among the various spellings of the title of the romance, I chose that one used by DU MERIL (1856) and PELAN (1956) in their editions, as they are known to be the earliest and the most “authoritative” Old French editions of the legend.

<sup>2</sup> This opinion is shared by KOOPER (2006) and DE VRIES (1966); this last one hazards to fix the date of composition more precisely (at the beginning of the last quarter of the century, about 1275). For a more detailed discussion of the evidence helping to fix the date of composition of the original, see DE VRIES (1966:50).

“Le goût de l’exotisme éveillé par les Croisades, renforcé per la lecture des romans antiques, expliqueraient en grande partie le success de Floire. Les détails festueux de la vie orientale qu’on y trouve étaient de nature à plaire aux Français (et aux Françaises) qui se rendaient compte pour la première fois des splendeurs de l’ Orient”.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the story remain nevertheless uncertain: analogies and resemblances have been discerned in numerous romances of Greek, Byzantine and Arabic origin, although their relationship to the Occidental versions is still unclear. As Kelly points out,

“scholars disagree as to whether *Floire et Blancheflor* is an oriental tale adapted for Western audiences, or a tale whose European author simply supplied it with an oriental setting”<sup>4</sup>.

The poem tells of the troubles of two lovers. The king of Spain captures a Christian noblewoman, who gives birth to a daughter, Blancheflour, on the same day as his queen bears a son, Floris. The children are raised together at court and grow close. Fearing that they will marry, the king sells the girl to some merchants travelling on the way to Cairo (actually Babylon), where she is then sold to the emir of the city. Floris vows to seek Blancheflour and leaves. After have travelled far and wide, he arrives in Babylon, where he learns that each year the emir selects a new bride from his tower and kills his old wife. Thanks to the bridge warden’s advice, Floris gains access to the tower and saves his beloved, but the two are discovered by the emir: he demands they be killed, until a king persuades him to spare their lives, so impressed at the willingness of the young lovers to die for one another. Floris is then knighted, he and Blancheflour are married. Soon after, news of the Spanish

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<sup>3</sup> PELAN (1956:XXI).

<sup>4</sup>As Kelly summarizes in the introduction of KOOPER’s (2006) on-line edition of *Floris and Blancheflour* <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/ekfbintro.htm>.

king's death reaches Cairo and the two lovers depart for home where they inherit the kingdom, embrace Christianity, and convert their subjects as well.

*Floire et Blancheflor* well embodies the characteristics and the qualities of the romance-genre. It is a poem full of luxury and artifice, where the only factual element is perhaps the heavily elaborated account of the city of Babylon. Sumptuousness and deception are the key- words even in the "popular" English adaptation, which had to sacrifice much of the detailed elaboration of its refined French "original", and the action is almost completely detached from realistic considerations. *Floris and Blancheflour* would seem, in atmosphere and tone, the closest English poem to the sophisticated courtly tradition of love-romances<sup>5</sup>.

Yet it is necessary to bear in mind that the poem is not essentially a *medieval* romance, as GIBBS points out:

"[...] It has nothing to say about feudal chivalry, nor is it an account of the hero's spiritual education. The love described is not *fine amour*, even though it is handled in a rather similar fashion. The love of the two "children" is not simply allowed to override all other considerations in the action: it is the only consideration, in rather the same way that *fine amour* is the moral imperative of Chrétien's *Lancelot*. However, the two lovers are not in the relationship of mistress and servant. They are two children together against an adult world, and their love is completely mutual. It can hardly be adulterous, for they are not adults. The poem thus belongs to romance in the same way as the Greek prose romances which may have given rise to it".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> FELLOWS (1993:43).

<sup>6</sup> GIBBS (1966:33).

Unlike the usually bloody and military milieu where romances of the same century of *Floris and Blancheflour* developed, our poem has none of the chivalric circumstances which are so easy to be found in other texts, such as the Middle English Poems *Havelock the Dane* or *King Horn*; the only sword that occurs in *Floris and Blancheflour* is indeed that of the Emir, who, in his anger at discovering the two lovers in bed together, is tempted to kill them and draws his sword, only to drop it when pity moves him to embrace the young couple. The hero himself, Floris, performs no act of martial skill at all, and is in fact not even a knight; it is only at the very end of the story that the Emir, impressed by Floris's account of his adventures, names him knight and invites him to join his retinue.

Another significant aspect is, during his quest for Blancheflour, which makes up a large part of the story, Floris's disguise of a merchant, a member of a class that in other romances is hardly visible at all, in the Middle English literary tradition, as well as in the Old French one.

Additionally, *Floris and Blancheflour* distinguishes itself from other romances by the fact that each section of the poem is strictly dependent upon the previous one, so the story has a linear and coherent development; such feature enables the audience to recognize the successive turn of events as part of an ongoing pelting within a consistent plot.<sup>7</sup>

*Floire et Blancheflor* generated immediate enthusiasm among his first readers. We recognize its success through the influence it exerted on other romances (like *Florimont*, *Floris et Litiopé*, *Eracle*, *l'Escoufle*<sup>8</sup>), for the allusions in contemporary literary works<sup>9</sup>, but above all for the

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<sup>7</sup> These observations are pointed out by KOOPER (2006:3-4).

<sup>8</sup> In his study *Mélanges Roques* (1952), DELBOUILLE would add to this list many other works, such as *Lanval et Guigemar*, *Tristan*, *Philomena*, *Erec* and, perhaps, *le roman de Troie*. PELAN (1956: XXIII) does not completely agree with him, arguing that: “*tout en reconnaissant les ressemblances generals, où on peut voir aussi parfois l'effet du*

impressive number of translations and adaptations in various foreign languages which clearly attest how the roman “travelled” throughout Europe and kept alive interest and curiosity even long after its composition.

The popularity of the legend of *Floire et Blancheflor* has achieved so much success with the reading public to survive until nowadays: one may still find modernizations and retellings of the story in all Europe literary background, especially in France and Spain.<sup>10</sup>

Today the romance of *Floire et Blancheflor* is quite diversely appreciated: in the introduction of her edition, Pelan sums up some of the most significant<sup>11</sup>; Du Ménil, for example does not provide a completely positive comment:

“Il faut à un sujet étranger aux souvenirs historiques, aux croyances religieuses et aux traditions domestiques, un intérêt dramatique bien puissant pour devenir universellement populaire et, malgré nos sympathies d’éditeur, nous doutons que les aventures de Floire et de Blancheflor eussent été suffisantes, si quelque grande influence n’avait pris en main leur fortune”.

However most opinions on the romance show high degree of approval and admiration.

According to Reinhold, *Floire et Blancheflor* is “une des plus touchantes legends que la littérature du moyen Âge nous ait conservés”<sup>12</sup>.

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*hazard, il faut avouer que les ressemblances de textes nous frappent beaucoup moins qu’elles ne frappent M. Delbouille”.*

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Amadas et Idoine*, as well as other texts of Occitan origin signaled by REINHOLD (1906:9).

<sup>10</sup> Marchand (1930, *La Légende de Flore et Blanchefleur*) and Hannedouche (1971, *Floire et Blancheflor*) have produced modern French editions of the legend; as well as in Spain numerous copies of cheap printed versions of *Flores y Blancaflor* were issued throughout the nineteenth century, aimed at the widest Spanish public.

<sup>11</sup> PELAN (1956:XXII-XXIV).

<sup>12</sup> PELAN (1906:XXIII-XXIV).

Faral observes that *Floire et Blancheflor* is “un des plus exquis parmi les romans d’aventure, l’œuvre d’un artiste délicat”<sup>13</sup>. Långfors defines it “un charmant conte”<sup>14</sup>.

The present dissertation focuses on the reception of the romance *Floire and Blancheflor*, examining the twelfth-century French source text and its fourteenth English adaptation through a comparative approach.

Special attention is devoted to identifying and reconstructing the translation strategy emerging from the comparison between the Middle English translation and its assumed French original.

The final purpose is to identify the lines or passages where the Middle English adaptation diverges from the French text and to analyze the most significant instances of omissions, substitutions, additions and reductions occurring in the target text.

I thus investigate the different mechanisms of reception and reworking of *Floire et Blancheflor* according to the socio-cultural and linguistic milieu distinguishing the twelfth century source text from the later Middle English adaptation.

For this end, the target-oriented approach theorized by the *Translations Studies* is employed. It helps us to better evaluate the cultural and ideological implications of the deviations appearing in the Middle English text, as compared to the French original, and thus to better understand the interrelations and relationships between the two.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted to the just mentioned method of *Translation Studies*, which made its contribution to the introduction of a new descriptive approach to translation in the 1990s. It aims at exploring the process and modalities whereby texts

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<sup>13</sup> PELAN (1956:XXII-XXIV).

<sup>14</sup> PELAN (1956:XXII-XXIV).

are transferred from one culture to another, trying to identify the mechanisms that govern the adaptation from the source context to the target context. Such method finds its actualization in the final translation analysis between the French “original” and its later English adaptation. For this reason, it is necessary to first identify the peculiarities of translation in the Middle Ages, and to highlight the major cultural and literary features characterizing this historical period.

Chapter 2 is a brief introductory section, which illustrates the legend of *Floire et Blancheflor* discussing the origins of the story and its European manuscript and textual tradition.

Particular attention is devoted to the French textual history (chapter 3), as the poem of *Floire and Blancheflor* seems to affirm first in France, the birthplace of the medieval chivalric romance.

As far as the English manuscript tradition is concerned, an overview of the codicological context in which redactions A, C and E are placed is given in chapter 4. This inquiry does not only provide us with clues and hints to better understand how the texts are likely to have been used, but enables us to adequately evaluate the characteristics of the target texts as compared to the source text.

An entire chapter (Appendix I) is dedicated to the textual tradition of the English romance. I thus proceed with a preliminary investigation on the relationships between the four English adaptations, focusing on some significant instances of textual criticism. This introductory study allows me to select the most suitable English witnesses – as far as length and reliability in readings are concerned - to be used in the following and final comparative analysis with the Old French “original”.

The widest section (chapter 5) is devoted to the comparative analysis between the Middle English translation of *Floris and Blancheflor* and its presumed Old French source text.

A final chapter (6) is dedicated to some remarks on the role of the texts preserving *Floris and Blancheflor* within the wider structure of the polysystem. A closer view at the net of inter-relations

of the vernacular redactions within the literary polysystem of Middle Ages England contributes to revealing the potential influences exerted by our texts on later translations or, eventually, original works.

## Chapter 1 *Translation Studies* and Medieval Literature

### 1.1. *Translation Studies: a new approach to translation*

Since the end of the twentieth century the increasingly lively debate about translation has involved a series of theoretical practises and methodologies aiming at highlighting the key aspects in the act of translation and of its final product.

Numerous debates and discussions about translation arose among scholars and come into succession in the previous decades, the aim being that of providing prescriptive norms and how-to manuals to be used in the solution of practical problems.

During the 1950s and 1960s, systematic innovative studies on translation began to develop: a considerable number of books have appeared, numerous long renowned journals have devoted entire issues to translation studies and new journals have been founded, as well as further investigation in the field was flourishing all over the world.<sup>15</sup>

As a matter of fact, *Translation Studies*<sup>16</sup> became firmly established as a notable discipline, mainly in the linguistic field.<sup>17</sup> Its most innovative contribution is the introduction of a descriptive approach to translation, i.e. its inclination to reject any prescriptive position, according to which a translation

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<sup>15</sup> In 1958, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet carried a contrastive comparison of French and English in Quebec. In 1964, Eugene Nida published *Toward a Science of Translating*, a manual for Bible translation influenced to some extent by Chomsky's generative grammar. In 1965, John C. Catford theorized translation from a linguistic perspective. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Czech scholar Jiří Levý and the Slovak scholars Anton Popovič and František Miko worked on the stylistics of literary translation from a literary translation. These initial steps in the research were collected in James S. Holmes' paper at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics held in Copenhagen in 1972. See respectively NILDA (1964), CATFORD (1965), LEVÝ (1967).

<sup>16</sup> The term *Translation Studies* was used for the first time by HOLMES (1975).

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction into the field of *Translation Studies* see BASSNET (1991).

should be judged by balancing its degree of adherence and uniformity to the source text but rather to explore the features which make the target text “the result of a complex semiotic process of reformulation, affecting not only the linguistic level, but also the socio-cultural and ideological dimension”.<sup>18</sup>

The interdisciplinary method of *Translation Studies* aims to explore the process and modalities whereby texts are transferred from one culture to another, trying to identify the mechanisms that govern the adaptation from the source context to the target context.

As BASSNETT (1991:37-38) points out,

“The purpose of translation theory, then, is to reach an understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation and, not, as is so commonly misunderstood, to provide a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation”.

In other words, it aims to examine what took place during the process of reading and rewriting a text in another language and its subsequent reception setting, focusing attention on the target text and on its linguistic and socio-cultural background.

*Translation Studies* explores the process whereby texts are transferred from one culture to another using an interdisciplinary method:

“A distinguishing feature of work in Translation Studies has been the combining of work in linguistics, literary studies, cultural history, philosophy and anthropology. There have been a number of endeavours to open up the huge field of the genealogy of systematic thinking about translation in

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<sup>18</sup> BAMPPI (2007:41).

different cultures and to investigate the way in which translation has played a shaping role in the formation of literary system and the history of ideas”.<sup>19</sup>

### **1.1.1. The Polysystem Theory and the Target-Oriented Approach**

One of the most influential theories on translation of the twentieth century was Itamar Even-Zohar’s Polysystem theory. It intends translations from a more comprehensive perspective by locating them within the concept of the literature of the target language.

The notion of Literary Polysystem was introduced in the 1970s by the Israeli Itamar Evan-Zohar and later developed by the so-called Tel-Aviv group, whose leading member was Gideon Toury, an Israeli translation scholar and professor of Poetics, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at Tel Aviv University.

The concept of Polysystem has been then reformulated and enlarged in a series of later studies and experimented with by a number of scholars in various countries. Its foundations had actually been already outlined in the 1920s by the late Russian formalists, especially Tynjanov, Jakobson and Ejkhenbaum.

Tynjanov's question was how one could figure out innovation in a work if one did not know its tradition. In order to explain this relationship, he brought in the concept of *system* “used to denote a multi-layered structure of elements which relate and interact with each other”<sup>20</sup>

According to the *system*, literary traditions, genres, or a literary work itself formed different systems working in dialectical relation to each other<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> BASSNET (1991:XI-XII).

<sup>20</sup> SHUTTLEWORTH (1998:176).

EVEN-ZOHAR (1990: 9-26) went further with this theory of systems. He called the entire network of interrelated systems as a *polysystem*:

“a multiple system , a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent”.

This included literary as well as non-literary systems and involved both “high” and “low” genres and canonised (secondary or conservative) and non-canonised (primary or innovative) genres:

“The Polysystem Theory, unlike the Formalist approach, views Literature as part of a large interconnected network of systems that have a dialectical relationship with each other. Translation also forms a part of this polysystem”.<sup>22</sup>

It was actually a theory originated from the literary field and then extended to the sphere of translation studies. This theory could analyse the position of translated literature in a given literary system.<sup>23</sup>

As we know, the literature of every country consists of 'original' writings and 'translated' ones, each of which can occupy the central or peripheral position in the literary polysystem.

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<sup>21</sup> See GENTZLER (2001:112).

<sup>22</sup> GENTZLER (2001:111).

<sup>23</sup> Even-Zohar's theory had direct relation to his work in Hebrew literature. Hebrew lacked original texts and its literature owed much to works translated from Russian and Yiddish literature. As a result, translations had a central position in Hebrew literature. This is what prompted Even-Zohar to think further about the position that translations can occupy in the literature of a particular language.

As MUNDAY (2001) and SHUTTLEWORTH (1998:177) remark, the polysystem is hierarchically organized, i.e. the elements which make it up -amongst other things, different literatures and genres, including translated and non-translated works- compete for dominance.

EVEN-ZOHAR (1978) considers translated literature not only as any integral system within any literary system, but also one of the most active and dynamic system within it.

The position of translations varies upon the nature of the literary system they belong to.

EVEN-ZOHAR (1978:193) believes they could occupy a primary (central) or secondary (peripheral) position, depending on the larger system it was part of. The periphery being although more likely.

EVEN-ZOHAR (1978) marks this distinction, specifying that when translated literature maintains a central position in the literary polysystem- and it therefore actively participates in shaping the centre of the polysystem- it would represent an integral part of innovatory forces; as a result, it would play a prominent role in literary history of a country (primary activity). When, on the contrary, translations maintain “the established code”<sup>24</sup>, i.e. do not provide any kind of innovation, they exert a secondary activity.

According to EVEN-ZOHAR (1990b:46), the position of translated literature within the polysystem cannot be deduced *a priori*:

“Whether translated literature becomes central or peripheral, and whether this position is connected with innovatory (“primary”) or conservatory (“secondary”) repertoires, depends on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study”.

Even-Zohar describes three conditions in which translated literature commonly maintains a primary position:

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<sup>24</sup> As EVEN-ZOHAR defines it (1978:22).

- (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is 'young' in the process of being established;
- (b) when a literature is either 'peripheral' (within a large group of correlated literature) or 'weak, ' or both;
- (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuum in a literature.<sup>25</sup>

According to Even-Zohar, in the first two cases translations play an important role, as the language/literature is inadequate to express a wide range of experiences in the contemporary world. Translations can also bring in a whole new set of literary genres that do not exist in the literature of that language. It often occurs that translations give examples of works deviating from the norm, thus motivating the target language to experiment with genres.

The third case exemplifies the situation when there are literary vacuums in the literature of a country. These vacuums take place when the current original literary works are no longer considered satisfactory and the native literature is not able to fulfil the public expectations. It is thus easier for foreign literature to assume central position.

There are instances where translated literature occupies the secondary position and represents a peripheral system within the polysystem. In this case it has no major influence over the central system governed by the original native literature, which determines the form of translated texts in the target culture. Translated texts just serve to maintain the above-mentioned “established code” exemplifying, with EVEN ZOHAR’s words, “a major fact of conservatism” (EVEN ZOHAR 1990b:48).

A very significant aspect must be taken into consideration speaking of the position of translated literature, i.e. the influence of a translated text on the target culture.

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<sup>25</sup> EVEN-ZOHAR (1990b:47).

EVEN-ZOHAR (1990b:45-51) argues that this factor depends on whether the position of translations is central or peripheral in the target culture. When it occupies a central position, then the translation introduces into the polysystem some types of texts, forms and genres which the target culture is not able to produce independently; these works will provide new stimulus for further creative activity, thus enriching the literary heritage of the target culture.

If the translation occupies, on the other hand, a secondary position, the attempt of the translation itself will be to fit into an already existing framework, rather than set a trend. This is because the target culture is strong enough to have well-developed traditions of literature and would not welcome radical departures from the norm. This will not encourage experimentation in form or thought, but will expect adherence to its rules of practice.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of translation shifts according to the position of translated literature. When translations occupy a central position, the definition of 'translation' itself expands to accommodate what are strictly not translation, including imitations and adaptations:

“and even the question of what is a translated work cannot be answered *a priori* in terms of an a-historical out-of-context idealized state: it must be determined on the grounds of the operations governing the polysystem. Seen from this point of view, translation is no longer a phenomenon whose nature and borders are given one and for all, but an activity dependent on the relations within a certain cultural system”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> These concepts are expressed in detail in EVEN-ZOHAR (1990b:45-51).

<sup>27</sup> EVEN-ZOHAR (1990b:49).

Even-Zohar's theoretical approach has been further developed by Gideon Toury who, in his work *In Search of a Theory of Translation*<sup>28</sup>, tried to understand the actual reasons behind choice of works to be translated and to discover if there was a set of rules that governed translations within a particular polysystem.

Toury believes that the reasons for selecting a particular work to translate were more often non-literary or ideological rather than literary. In his view, translated texts should be analysed from within the context into which they are received, as they are exposed to several kinds of influence, among all the socio-cultural impact. He sustains that translated texts are also strictly guided by the subjectivity of the translator and the purpose of the translation. There is no doubt that Toury's translation theories are thought to be target-oriented.

As he points out:

"In its socio-cultural dimension, translation can be described as subject to constraints of several types and varying degree. These extend far beyond the source text, the systemic differences between the language and textual traditions involved in the act, or even the possibilities and limitations of the cognitive apparatus of the translator as a necessary mediator".<sup>29</sup>

Rejecting all theories which gave primacy to the source language work, Toury focuses on the actual relationships between the source text and the translation (or, as he defines it, "factual replacement"). He does not discredit the linguistic and literary elements that go into the making of a translation, but he introduces a set of new features.

As GENTZLER (2001:127) puts it,

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<sup>28</sup> Published in 1980, it is a collection of papers based on his field study in translation.

<sup>29</sup> TOURY (1995:54).

“The eventual goal of Toury's theory was to establish a hierarchy of interrelated factors (constraints) that determine (govern) the translation product. In short, Toury demanded that translation theory includes cultural-historical ‘facts’, a set of laws that he calls ‘translation norms’”.

In his essay *The Nature and Role of Norms in Literary Translation* (2000), Toury clarifies that there will be a set of multiple norms in any society at a particular period in time. These norms might be in fight with each other, but a systematic study over a period of time can disclose a specific pattern underneath the seemingly disjointed set of norms. This means that different translations of the same text in different time periods in the same culture would indicate the prevalent.

The three types of translation norms outlined by Toury are preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms.<sup>30</sup> As he puts it,

“Norms consist of the personal preferences of the translator as well as external factors like the socio-cultural conditions that influence her/him”.<sup>31</sup>

The first group involves those factors that influence the translation strategy (which Toury defines as *directness of translation*) and determine the so called *translation policy*<sup>32</sup>. This last one considers the dynamics one should take into account before translating a text from a culture to another one: the literary preferences of a given language or culture influence the nature and the kind of text.

As far as the *directness of translation* is concerned, it implicates enquiries of what kind of translations the receptor culture will tolerate and accept the best.

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<sup>30</sup> TOURY (2000:202).

<sup>31</sup> TOURY (2000:202).

<sup>32</sup> With this term, TOURY (2000:202) denotes “those factors that govern the choice of text types; or even of individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/ language at a particular point in time”.

Initial norms, on the other hand, lie inside the subjective sphere of the translator. They deal with all personal decisions the translator has to make with respect to translation strategy, i.e. his tendency to remain close to the source text in his translation method or to be more loyal to the target language.

The last ones, the operational norms, are those which govern the concrete process of translation or, as TOURY (2000:202-3) defines them, those “directing the decisions made during the act of translation itself”. These norms are influenced by the position the translated text occupies within the polysystem of the target culture.

The concept of *equivalence*, rejected by many of his contemporaries, has been retained in Toury’s theoretical approach and converted into a “functional-relational postulate of equivalence”<sup>33</sup>, which has been realized in a given historical period or in any other reasonable sector.

As TOURY (1995: 61) puts it,

“what this approach entails is a clear wish to retain the notion of equivalence, which various contemporary approaches have tried to do without, while introducing one essential change into it: from an ahistorical, largely prescriptive concept to a historical one. Rather than being a single relationship, denoting a recurring type of invariant, it comes to refer to any relation which is found to have characterized translation under a specified set of circumstances”.

The dynamic character of the target-oriented approach is highlighted also by BAMPI (2007:47):

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<sup>33</sup> TOURY (1995:61).

“The most important and innovative aspect of the target-oriented approach is that the translation is analysed according to its dynamic nature, not only inter-culturally from one context to another, but also intraculturally, as part of the development of a literary polysystem across time”.

The Belgian scholar Lefevere went further and in his essays collected in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*<sup>34</sup>, he explores how the process of rewriting works of literature manipulates them to ideological and artistic ends, so that the translated text can be given a new, sometimes subversive, historical or literary status.

He introduced the concept of *refracted text*, with which he refers to those “texts that have been processed for a certain audience (children, for example), or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology”.<sup>35</sup>

In other words, the term “refraction” is used by Lefevere to mean “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work”.<sup>36</sup>

In 1985 the concept of *refraction* gave way to *rewriting*. With this last one, Lefevere refers to “any text produced on the basis of another with the intention of adapting that other text to a certain ideology or to a certain poetics and, usually, to both”.<sup>37</sup>

In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, LEFEVERE (2004: vii) formally presents his theory, according to which “translation is a rewriting of an original text”. According to him,

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<sup>34</sup> BASSNETT & LEFEVERE (2001).

<sup>35</sup> GENTZLER (2001:137).

<sup>36</sup> HERMANS (2004:127).

<sup>37</sup> HERMANS (2004:127).

“All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live”.

He emphasizes that the practice of translation is not an easy and transparent linguistic process but involves a series of decisive factors influencing the final text. These factors include power, ideology, poetics and patronage/authority. These last two play a very significant role in the rewriting process,

“as not only the authority of the patron, the person or institution commissioning or publishing the translation, but also the authority of a culture viewed as the central culture in a given time or geographical area, and the authority of the text”.<sup>38</sup>

And translation is regarded by Lefevere

“as the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work (s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> LEFEVERE (1992:115).

<sup>39</sup> LEFEVERE (2004: 9).

Therefore, translation needs to be studied in connection with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, with emphasis on the various attempts to shore up or undermine an existing ideology or poetics.

One should thus estimate translation as an intercultural communicative practice which has to be contextualized according to specific circumstances (language, history, ideology etc.) in the culture from which it derives, as well as within the culture into which it is introduced.

After a brief but careful overview on the most influential translation theories and approaches from the last two centuries, I am able to assume that the polysystem theory and the target-oriented approach can be usefully employed in the study of translation in the Middle Ages and, in particular, in the analysis of the translation strategy employed in the reworking of the Old French *Floire et Blancheflor* into its Middle English adaptation.

In order to better evaluate the features of the translated text and its deviations from the source text, one should adequately consider the target language context together with all those extra literary factors contributing to giving birth to the *refracted text*, to use Lefevere's expression.

This is particularly significant if we are dealing with medieval texts, where modifications and changes from the original to the translation are quite common, the main reason being the high number of stages of presumed written/oral tradition lying behind the transmission.

In order to apply the major theoretical theories developed by the target-oriented approach to the study of translation in the Middle Ages, one should consider the historical context and the diachronic dimension: as seen above, every descriptive and theoretical effort in analysing translations needs to be linked to a specific culture in a specific moment of its development.

## 1.2. The practice of translation in The Middle Ages and the concept of textual “instability”

As was seen above, the extremely normative approach characterizing the *Translation Studies* till the second half of the twentieth century pushed the emerging discipline in the direction of prescriptiveness, recognisable not only in the excess of normative manuals but also in some of the most insightful theoretical writings on the subject.<sup>40</sup>

The inflexible nature of translation theory was revealed in its inclination to consider translation a practice based on general binary oppositions in which one of the term more or less openly prevails on the other. As a result, problems and difficulties arising during the translation activity were relegated to these polar opposites, which are identified in *form vs substance* and *source vs target*.

As Djordjević puts it:

“The form vs substance dichotomy dates back to the earliest theoretical pronouncements on translation and is often expressed in terms of an opposition between ‘word-for-word’ and ‘sense-for-sense’ translation”.<sup>41</sup>

The contrast between deference to the ‘source’ (language/text/culture) and privileging of the ‘target’ (language/text/culture) was introduced for the first time in Schleiermacher’s 1813 essay *Über die verschiedene Methoden des Übersetzens*, where he distinguishes two kinds of translations:

“Entweder der Übersetzer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:7-8).

<sup>41</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:8). A more detailed presentation of this dichotomy is displayed in BASSNET (1991).

<sup>42</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:8) op. cit. note 1, Schleiermacher (1813).

It is indeed unquestionable that both form/substance and source/target choices have to be made in any translation process, where they combine in intricate ways.

As DJORDJEVIC (2000) observes, the source/target opposition is of a much later date than the form/substance one:

“In the Middle Ages, for example, [...] the theorizing of translation was chiefly concerned with the transmission of meaning, so that focus was on the relation between form and substance. By the early nineteenth century, literature had come to be strongly associated with nationality, and discussion had shifted to the question of how best to serve the cultural interests of one’s nation, which led to the privileging of the source/target relational axis”.<sup>43</sup>

As a matter of fact, the influence that the opposition source/target exerted on translation theory has been weaker in the Middle Ages more than nowadays, with the result that for many years translational equivalence was constructed as *formal* (*word-for-word* translation) rather than *dynamic* (*sense-for-sense* translation); *formal equivalence* tends to emphasise fidelity to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the original language. *Dynamic equivalence*, by contrast, tends to favour a more natural rendering, for instance when the readability of the translation is more important than the preservation of the original grammatical structure, with NILDA’s words (1964):

“Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content, while dynamic equivalence characterizes translations based not so much on matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message as on the concern that the relationship between receptor and

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<sup>43</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:8, note 2).

message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message’’.<sup>44</sup>

This represents indeed one of the reasons why translators and theorists of translation have long felt discomforted handling with Medieval literatures.

In medieval practice authors and writers did make no visible effort to achieve formal equivalence to the source text; they were rather driven to privilege *acceptability* rather than *adequacy* (to the original).<sup>45</sup> Obviously, even the most *adequacy*-oriented translation involves shifts from the source text.

The source/target dichotomy has also been reshaped in terms of a discrepancy between translations aiming to reproduce their original and those aiming to replace them.<sup>46</sup>

A first relevant aspect to deal with in this respect is the distinction between vertical and horizontal translation. As FOLENA suggests (1973: 57-120), medieval translation might be described either as *vertical* or as *horizontal*; in the first case, he refers to translations into the vernacular from a source language that has a special prestige or value (i.e. Latin). In the second one, he intends any translations where both the source and the target language have a similar status (e.g. Norman French into English).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> NILDA (1964:159).

<sup>45</sup> The opposition between *adequacy* and *acceptability* is TOURY’s adaptation and elaboration of the above mentioned standard dichotomy between *formal* and *dynamic*. TOURY (1980:54, 116).

<sup>46</sup> COPELAND (1989:15-35).

<sup>47</sup> It is of crucial importance to take into account the authority of a culture and of every single text when a medieval translated text is analysed because this helps us to properly evaluate all the characteristics of the target text.

While the vertical approach splits into two different kinds, the above mentioned word-for-word technique as opposed to the sense-for-sense method, the horizontal approach involves complex questions of *imitatio* and borrowing.

BASSNET (1991: 53) tries very hard to define the usual medieval attitude of imitation and borrowing, retaining the notion of *plagiarism* with its emphatically negative connotations of intellectual dishonesty. She points out:

“The high status of imitation in the medieval canon meant that originality of material was not greatly prized and an author’s skill consisted in the reworking of established themes and ideas.

The point at which a writer considered himself to be a translator of another text, as opposed to the use he might make of translated material plagiarized from other texts, is rarely clear”.<sup>48</sup>

During the past decade, more and more scholars have focused their attention on such hitherto ignored aspects of medieval translation as for example translations between vernaculars, translation of popular literature and anonymous works and other correlated problems.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most significant aspects arisen from scholars’ studies on the medieval practice of translation is no doubt the attitude of legitimate freedom of reworking.

Throughout the medieval period, an age to which our modern notions of originality, authority and literary ownership would have been quite unknown, we can experience extensive overlap between translation and rewriting. The weakness of the author’s role and his function led the medieval writer to feel himself legitimized to rephrase the text. This concept is well clarified by FOUCAULT (1969):

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<sup>48</sup> BASSNET (1991:53).

<sup>49</sup> Insistence on the descriptive, as opposed to the prescriptive, norms of translations and more sustained research in the theoretical and practical activity of medieval translation goes back no earlier than the seventies and the eighties of the twentieth century. DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:11).

“The weakness of the role bestowed on the author – or rather on the author-function – is crucial if one want to analyse the attitude of the copyist towards his model, and of the translator towards the source text. For some types of text the absence of ‘authorial labels’ represented a justification, or even an instigation, to rewrite the text”.<sup>50</sup>

The attitude of legitimate free reworking, as BAMPI (2007:49) points out, often gave rise to a series of variants and reductions, which usually match with the intention, or with the need, to revise the source text in order to adapt it to the new historical, social, ideological and cultural contexts.

Understanding translations as rewriting can be seen in a positive and constructive way because while maintaining the skeleton of the narration and emulating the original framework, medieval writers and copyists could even introduce new concepts and innovative expedients or schemes.

This aspect is particularly emphasized by LEFEVERE (1992). He does not only affirm that every translation can be understood as a rewriting but he also recognises a certain ideology and poetics within each ‘textual manipulation’:

“All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertake in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society”.<sup>51</sup>

This conception is shared also by DJORDJEVIĆ (2000):

“Romance was always, in effect, reinvigorated by ‘translation’, in the wide medieval sense of rewriting and reinventing stories for different tastes, audiences and periods”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> BAMPI (2007: 49) op. cit. note 13, Ferrari (2001:61).

<sup>51</sup> LEFEVERE (1992:XI).

<sup>52</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:3).

Some of the most common questions scholars attempted to answer studying in particular Middle English translation of Anglo-Norman and Old-French romances dealt with the contextualization of the translation process together with the identification of its main parameters: Who translates, who is the text addressed to, why and how?

As HERMANS (1985:11-12) argues, it is necessary to identify the “crucial instances of what happens at the interference between different linguistic, literary and cultural codes” as precisely as possible. This can be done through the definition of the audience to which texts were meant to, not only in linguistic terms but also in cultural ones:

“The paradigmatic case of translation is that in which a text written for an audience is transposed into another linguistic medium, one that properly belongs to another audience, presumably with a different cultural background and therefore with a different set of cultural expectations too”.<sup>53</sup>

Scholars and linguists found this task a very complex venture, especially if we consider the intricate socio-linguistic and socio-cultural situation in post-Conquest England, a period from which derives the old stereotype that the English language suffered greatly from oppression and even tries at suppression by French<sup>54</sup>: as BOITANI and TORTI (1993:91-106) point out, “the whole point was to drive the French out of the country. French literature being one of the strongholds of the invaders’ power, it had to be outside”.

We should thus be careful to judge the cultural and linguistic mix of features we are dealing with for each manuscript and to analyse the specific translation process generating our text.

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<sup>53</sup> DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:14).

<sup>54</sup> This aspect is put on evidence by DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:14-15).

For this reason, we must be able to distinguish between textual manipulation which is translation-specific and that which is not.

This aspect is particularly significant when a considerable lapse of time exists between the original and the translations. In our case the “original” Old French *Floire et Blancheflor* precedes the presumed Middle English archetype of at least a century and a half and an even wider lapse of time exists between the Old French and the attested Middle English translations.<sup>55</sup>

Another black mark is no doubt the fact that the text I have taken into account is among those that effectively established the genre in Middle English, so we have no earlier referents for comparison. In the absence of romance as a specific category, a possible answer might be to look more closely at existing narrative texts (included religious texts portraying saints’ lives, historical writings, as well as folk-tales and fabliaux). A closer view at the net of inter-relations of the vernacular redactions of *Floris and Blancheflour* within the polysystem of the Middle English (translated) literature contributes to revealing the potential influences exerted by our text on later translations or, eventually, original works.

This enables us to have a clearer insight into the kinds of literary constraints and conventions prevailing at the time and could maybe serve as a basis for suppositions and conjectures as to how English translations of French romances modify this system of rules and restrictions. With DJORDJEVIĆ’s words (2000:16):

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<sup>55</sup> The original French had been presumably written between the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and its end; the assumed archetype of the Middle English tradition probably goes back to around 1250, while the other English translations are dated until the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

“Since translation does not take place in a vacuum, any analysis of translated texts must also take into account the broader circumstances of their production and transmission: that is, not only the literary system but the social context too, and their often elusive relationship”.

Another aspect one should consider is the role minstrels could have had in the transmission of the text, altering and, in most cases, obscuring the already complicated question of textual affiliation.

In the case of *Floris and Blancheflour*, the influence of minstrels’ transmission can be claimed for at least one of the surviving manuscripts.<sup>56</sup>

It is not easy to draw a clear-cut line in-between passages which can be ascribed to the original and those which have been probably extended or inserted during the transmission of the text; as well as it is anything but simple to distinguish between what is translation and what is manipulation or reworking.

DJORDJEVIĆ (2000:20) properly asserts that the early Middle English Romance,

“as opposed to Chaucer’s writings, are very much in the public domain; they straddle the often extremely blurred borderline between what we would now call popular and highbrow, and even, at times, between oral and written. They exhibit to a much greater degree what Paul Zumthor has described as one of the main features of the mode of existence of a medieval text- *mouvance*”.

The concept of *mouvance* was formulated by Paul Zumthor in the second chapter of his study of medieval French poetry *Essai de poétique médiévale*<sup>57</sup>. Zumthor remarked the contrast between the relatively fixed texts found in manuscripts of the works of some named late-medieval French poets

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<sup>56</sup> According to DE VRIES (1966:7), the fact that some episodes in A have undergone more substantial variations than others could be accounted for the likelihood that more or less self-contained episodes might have been performed independently.

<sup>57</sup> ZUMTHOR (1972).

(Charles d'Orléans, Guillaume de Machaut) and the much more common medieval combination of authorial anonymity (or near-anonymity) and a high level of textual variation, which might involve not only modifications of dialect and wording but more substantial rewriting and the loss, replacement, or rearrangement of whole sections of a work. He used the term *mouvance* to describe this textual mobility.

ZUMTHOR (1972:72) argued that anonymity and textual variation were connected: medieval vernacular works were not normally regarded as the intellectual property of a single, named author, and might be indefinitely reworked by others, passing through a series of different 'états du texte' ('textual states').

In other words, the concept of *mouvance* includes the notion of an idealized work whose single texts are merely imperfect and abstract representations:

“Le caractère de l’oeuvre qui, comme telle, avant l’âge du livre, ressort d’une quasi-abstraction, les textes concrets qui la réalisent présentant, par le jeu des variantes et remaniements, comme une incessante vibration et une instabilité fondamentale”.<sup>58</sup>

This concept of textual “instability” emphasizes how texts are structured systems capable of assuming different communicative values, each of them aims to express and convey specific contents.

Segre (1976) underlines the importance of studying this alteration as a historical phenomenon, as direct consequence of the copyist’s active well-aware attitude:

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<sup>58</sup> ZUMTHOR (1972:507).

“Quando si trovano due varianti in due o più manoscritti, esse sono spia di un mutato sistema e vanno perciò studiate come fenomeno storico, perché l’atteggiamento del copista non è mai passivo.

Accogliendo questa prospettiva di analisi, i manoscritti possono essere interpretati come una serie di ‘diasistemi’ nell’ambito del sistema sovraordinato del testo”.<sup>59</sup>

Speaking of textual instability and variation, I would like to mention Cerquiglini’s post-structuralist sequel to Zumthor's work.<sup>60</sup>

He avoids Zumthor's term of ‘mouvance’ because of its indivisible association with oral culture, using rather the term ‘variance’.<sup>61</sup>

He concentrates on the relationship between the different written realizations of medieval vernacular works, and the implication of their variance for the medieval concept of textual authority. Like Zumthor, he sees this purposeful variation (what he defines the scribe's *'intervention consciente'*) as intrinsic to the transmission of medieval Romances.

CERQUIGLINI (1989:58) claims that it is anachronistic to consider works of this type as the intellectual property of a single author, textually fixed at the “moment unique où la voix de l'auteur, que l'on suppose, se noua à la main du premier scribe, dictant la version authentique, première et originelle”.

In considering all manuscript variants as mistakes, the editors of medieval vernacular works have misunderstood their essential nature “dans l'authenticité généralisée de l'oeuvre médiévale, la philologie n'a vu qu'une authenticité perdue”.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> BUZZONI (2005:51), op cit. Segre (1976).

<sup>60</sup> CERQUIGLINI (1989).

<sup>61</sup> CERQUIGLINI (1989:120).

<sup>62</sup> CERQUIGLINI (1989:58).

Cerquiglino believes that the electronic edition, since interactive and multidimensional, can offer both more textual information than the printed edition and easier comparison of different versions of a work. It mirrors, according to Cerquiglino, medieval conditions of production more accurately than print technology:

“l'écrit électronique, par sa mobilité, reproduit l'oeuvre médiévale dans sa variance même”.<sup>63</sup>

In the following section we will apply the major theoretical concepts developed by the target-oriented approach. The study of the inter-relations between the translated texts that place themselves in different position along the diachronic axis may enable us to better analyse the main characteristics of at least two (A and C) of the four witnesses of *Floris and Blancheflour* by viewing them both as part of the system of translated literature and, from a wider perspective, as part of the literary polysystem of medieval England.

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<sup>63</sup> CERQUIGLINI (1989:116).

## Chapter 2    The Romance of *Floire et Blancheflor*

### 2.1. History: Origin of the Romance

The romance of *Floire et Blancheflor* is often referred to as belonging to the “Matter of the East”: most of the scene of the action is laid in “Babylon”, i.e. Cairo, in Egypt, and the story owes at least some of its charm to its somewhat unreal Oriental setting.

Since the Middle English romance is known to be an adaptation of some Old French version, and thus the question of the origin of the story is only of peripheral interest in a discussion of the Middle English poem, I will not deal with the subject in detail but I will confine myself to discussing some of its main aspects.

The earliest theory that deserves special attention is that put forward by du Méril, who argued that the story of *Floire et Blancheflor* is based on a lost romance of Byzantine origin, or rather that some Byzantine romance inspired the author of the French poem.<sup>64</sup> This theory, which is largely based on rather general similarities between several themes in *Floire et Blancheflor* and in extant Greek-Byzantine romances, found wide acceptance, until in the last decade of the nineteenth century claims were made for Persian and Arabic origins of the story.<sup>65</sup>

The theory of Arabic origin became very popular, but in more recent times there has been the tendency of dismissing all theories of foreign origin and to regard the Old French romance as being primarily an original French creation containing some elements that ultimately go back to the

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<sup>64</sup> DU MÉRIL (1856) did not take a completely clear stance as other scholars did, who claimed that the French poem was almost certainly a translation of some Byzantine romance. Among them, see HERZOG (1884:2).

<sup>65</sup> See DE VRIES (1966:63). These remarks are based on some articles mentioned by the author himself (see notes 100,101).

East.<sup>66</sup> Some critics went even further, suggesting that *Floire et Blancheflor* is the product of the imagination of some French poet, who merely added some traits of primitive “turquerie”<sup>67</sup>. According to LOZINSKI (1942:39),

“[...] on est même tenté de se demander si elle n’est pas née tout simplement dans le cerveau d’un Français qui l’aurait agrémentée de quelques traits de “turquerie” élémentaire”.<sup>68</sup>

Yet the theory of Arabic origin remains the most reliable: many striking parallels between *Floire et Blancheflor* and Arabic tales contribute to put the theory of Oriental origin on a solid foundation.<sup>69</sup>

Among the elements in the story that are distinctly Arabic, DE VRIES (1966:64) identifies some of the most relevant, first of all the Tower of Maidens where Blancheflor is kept prisoner by the emir and where Floris finally finds his beloved; the detailed description of the tower, intended as *tor as puceles*<sup>70</sup> where more than a hundred maidens lodge and work at the emir’s service, reveals the same role and function of the Eastern harem, from which it must have been derived.

Other elements and details of the story are easily comparable to those found in tales collected in *One Thousand and One Night* -the well-known gathering of West and South Asian stories and folk tales- among them the Emir’s practice of choosing a new wife once a year, at the end of which he

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<sup>66</sup> DE VRIES (1966:63, note 102), op.cit. Lot-Borodine (1913: 62, note 98).

<sup>67</sup> The term *Turquerie* defines the Orientalist fashion in Western Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries imitating aspects of Turkish art and culture. Many different Western European countries were fascinated by the exotic and relatively unknown culture of Turkey, which was the center of the Ottoman Empire, and at that period of time, the only power to pose a serious military threat to Europe. The West had a growing interest in Turkish-made products and art, including music, visual arts, architecture and sculptures.

<sup>68</sup> LOZINSKI (1942:39).

<sup>69</sup> This belief is shared by HUET (1906:95-100) and DE VRIES (1966:63-66).

<sup>70</sup> “En la tor a set vins puceles de grant parage et forment beles; por çou qu’i sont les damoiseles a non la *Tors as Puceles*”, D’ORBIGNY (2003:96, ll. 1899-1992).

makes her kill<sup>71</sup>, as well as the King and Queen's plan to create a fake burial chamber to make Floris believe that Blancheflour is dead.<sup>72</sup>

Another recurring motif characterizing several stories in the *Thousand and One Night* is the expedient by which a lover is reunited with his beloved by hiding in a chest or a basket and being carried to her room. It has also been pointed out by DE VRIES (1966:65) that Floire disguising himself as a merchant is a common subterfuge found in many tales of Arabic origin<sup>73</sup>.

According to GRIEVE (1997:1-6), many similarities between motifs and topics in the Old French poem and in Oriental tales can therefore be held to prove a possible indebtedness of the poet to certain stories that may have circulated orally, probably in Arabic Spain, which would have produced a direct contact between Eastern and Western culture.

She assumes that *Floire et Blancheflor*'s route from East to West has taken place through the Crusades, which could represent the means of its importation: the Provençals, whose active part in the Crusade is well-known, may have been the agents, or, as is so often the case with the Oriental tales, they "embraced" the poem, as already imported in a Latin dress via Constantinople.

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<sup>71</sup> This habit is reminiscent of the behavior of King Shahriyar in the framing story of the *Nights*; for a more detailed discussion on the differences between the two tales, see DE VRIES (1996:64).

<sup>72</sup> As DE VRIES (1966:64) points out, this motif appears in the *story of Ghanim*, where a sham mausoleum is built to make the caliph Harun-al-Raschid believe that his favorite slave-girl is dead. As well as Basset identifies a parallelism of the episode of the fake-funeral in the Persian tale of *Urwā and Afrā*. The story tells of an orphan, Urwā, and his cousin, Afrā, who are brought up together but separated when they reach a mature age. A detailed presentation and discussion of other issues related to the relationships between Arabian Tales and *Floire et Blancheflor* is provided in BASSET (1907).

<sup>73</sup> There are actually numerous tales in the *One Thousand and one night*, where the caliph Harun-al-Rashid dresses up as a merchant. He represents an important character in many of the stories set in Baghdad; with his *vizier*, Ja'far, he roams in disguise through the streets of the city to observe the lives of the ordinary people; some titles include: *Isaac of Mosul and the Merchant*, vol.5 (408–409) *Harun al-Rashid and the Damsel and Abu Nowas*, vol.4 (339-40), *Harun al-Rashid and three poets*.

Grieve tries to demonstrate that the origin of the narrative lies in Spain and goes back to the wars between the Moors and the Christian kings ruling there. This hypothesis would not only explain the strong emphasis placed on the conversion of Floris and all his subjects in many of the continental adaptations, but also the confusing, even "perplexing" geography of these versions.

Those who support the Byzantine theory often use as a basis of comparison *Floire et Blancheflor*'s similarities to *Aucassin et Nicolette*, another French "roman idyllique" probably of Byzantine origin.

It has long been recognized that there are many resemblances between *Aucassin* and *Floire et Blancheflor*<sup>74</sup>. The problem is whether one romance was the source of the other, or whether the two poems go back to a common original. As De Vries points out,

"recent opinions agree with the idea that despite the many similarities between the two stories, there are too many substantial differences to assume that the two works are neither one the source of the other, nor they based on a common original".<sup>75</sup>

The poem also alludes to classical motifs, the most noteworthy of which is the passage describing the inscription on the cup that Floire's father receives from the merchants who have sold Blancheflor, for which the poet probably drew from the *Roman d'Enneas*. Other allusions show that the author was familiar with romances such as the *Roman d'Alexandre* and the *Roman de Thèbes* and with poems derived from *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Pyramus and Narcisse*.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> A more detailed and exhaustive study on their similarities, even if rather dated, is that contained in Brunner (1880). He believed that the author of *Aucassin* was inspired by *Floire*, not the version we know, but a previous drafting which had been lost.

<sup>75</sup> DE VRIES (1966:66).

<sup>76</sup> For more details about assumed literary sources of *Floire et Blancheflor*, see PELAN (1956:XVI-XX).

## 2.2. Literary relationships and sources: the European reception of *Floire et Blancheflor*

This paragraph deals with the complex history and diffusion of the legend of *Floire et Blancheflor* across Europe. The interrelation between the different versions and adaptations of the story has been the subject of several studies, most notably those of Herzog, Reinhold, Du Méril and Grieve<sup>77</sup>.

What follows should therefore be regarded as an attempt to briefly review the literature on the subject and to single out those aspects that are of some importance for the study of the Middle English *Floris and Blanche flour*.

The account of the story in the West is complicated, mainly because of the puzzling multiplicity of versions among which it is sometimes extremely difficult to determine the interrelations: Medieval writers from Germany, Spain, France, Italy, England and Scandinavia reworked the story from the twelfth to the sixteen century, developing and emphasizing social, political, artistic and religious goals, while maintaining its entertaining qualities.

Herzog points out that two distinct general versions of the story can be distinguished. In the first one, A, the so-called “aristocratic version” seems to be preserved the story in its original and genuine form; the second, B or the “popular version” seems instead to be a reshaping of the original poem in the attempt to adapt to common folk a story in its existing outline, which was primary addressed to higher classes of society<sup>78</sup>.

For this purpose slight allusions in A are expanded into striking incidents in B: supernatural elements and horrible details are introduced to intensify and make some passages more stunning and enchanting. Since these new components are of a kind common to other Byzantine tales, we

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<sup>77</sup> HERZOG (1884); REINHOLD (1906); DU MÉRIL (1856); GRIEVE (1997).

<sup>78</sup> HERZOG (1884). Herzog’s classification of the aristocratic (A) and popular version (B) is not to be confused with later critics’ classification of the French manuscripts as A and B (aristocratic) and D (popular).

can easily deduce that the reshaping of the story had already taken place before the importation from the East.

Version A seems first to have been imported into France<sup>79</sup>, the cradle of the Medieval chivalric romance. From France it was early retailed to Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, England and possibly Italy.

In Germany are to be encountered several editions of the popular story. The earliest one seems to have been the Low Rhenish poem, *Floyris and Blauncheflur*, of about 3700 lines, translated by an unknown poet around 1170.

Composed by Konrad Fleck, the Middle High German poem *Floire und Blantscheflur* belongs to the middle of the thirteenth century; made up of 8006 lines, it seems to have been arranged after an Old French original.

A version in Ripuarian<sup>80</sup>, extant in fragments, dating from the end of the thirteenth century is also known.

Somewhat younger is the Middle Low German poem of 1488 lines, *Flos vnde Blankeflos*, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century; this version would go back to a French original too.

In the Netherlands, the story appears in a Middle Dutch poem of 3973 lines by Diederic van Assenede and probably dating from the third quarter of the thirteenth century.

The legend of *Floire et Blancheflor* had a wide circulation also in the North, as one must infer from the number of Scandinavian versions preserved. The first adaptation to appear is an Old Norwegian

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<sup>79</sup> Of the French textual tradition, we will deal with exhaustively in the following chapter.

<sup>80</sup> Of the 184 lines of this fragment, about 150 are completely legible. Ripuarian is a German dialect variety, part of the West Central German language group.

fragment of a saga, followed by the complete Icelandic narrative of *Flóres ok Blankiflúr*, both very probably dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century.

A Swedish poem of 2192 lines, translated from a second lost Icelandic original<sup>81</sup>, appears at the beginning of the fourteenth century and gave the basis for a Danish translation of the same version in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

The distinguishing feature of the Scandinavian versions lies in the conclusion: Floris refuses to enter the tower where Blancheflour is kept by the use of magic tricks but proposes instead to fight in single combat with the most valiant knight of the Emiral's army. The protagonist overcomes the Emiral's knight and receives Blancheflur as reward<sup>82</sup>.

According to Herzog<sup>83</sup>, we must presume an earliest Scandinavian version coming from a French original with the distinctive ending of the Northern version of the tale.

As far as England is concerned, the legend survives in the Middle English poem *Floris and Blancheflour*, a thirteenth century original version, transmitted through four manuscript texts: A, C, E, V.<sup>84</sup>

The second of these renovated versions, i.e. B, first circulated in Italy, Greece and Spain.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See DE VRIES (1966:55, note 72) op. cit. Olson (1921). For a presentation of the major adaptations of the legend which survive nowadays and their bibliographical references, see DE VRIES (1996:55) and GRIEVE (1997:15-22).

<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed description of the distinguishing features of the Northern versions and their literary implications see FRENCH AND HALE (1964: XXXV) and GRIEVE (1997:36-9).

<sup>83</sup> HERZOG (1884: 15, 35, 45-6, 66).

<sup>84</sup> The English manuscript tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour* will be taken into account in detail in chapter four.

<sup>85</sup> According to GRIEVE (1997:15-17), all versions of B represent Blancheflur's parents as Italian, and in part have the same names for the characters. This aspect, together with other corroborating facts, seems to indicate that version B first took root in Italy, and from there spread into Spain and Greece.

In Italy the tale of *Floire et Blancheflor* gained great popularity and it spread into two main different versions: the *Cantare*, written by a popular poet in *ottave rime* and Boccaccio's first prose romance, *Filoloco*. Both versions show peculiar features of version B with some special traits of version A.

To exactly determine the interrelations between these two translations is very complex. From allusions in the *Filoloco*, GRIEVE (1997:16) and BARRON (1987: XXXVI) are led to suppose that the *Cantare* was the older. Internal evidence, however, seem to deny the hypothesis that the *Filoloco* derived from the *Cantare*. The two versions rather go back to the same common source<sup>86</sup>. It seems furthermore that the Italian adaptation *Filoloco* is, in many passages, more complete and detailed and in single line instances closer to the French tradition than the *Cantare*.

In relation with the Italian group one should also mention the Greek *Florios and Platziaflore*, composed in the fourteenth century and founded upon the *Cantare*.

The Spanish romance *Flores y Blancaflor* appears definitely later, in the year 1512. However, we can already find allusions to the story in the thirteenth century, when the *Gran conquista de Ultramar* refers to Floris and Blanche flour as "the most devoted pairs of lovers that one have ever heard".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> PARIS (1899:440-7) believed that the two texts shared similarities that differed to such a degree from the French versions that they must have derived from a totally different strain of the legend. He supposed besides that many of these unusual features show their reliance on even more primitive versions of the story than is found in the French manuscripts. He hypothesized a lost "third strain" of *Floire et Blancheflor*, that probably was an Italo-Spanish version.

<sup>87</sup> FRENCH AND HALE (1964:XXXVI). The great prose epic *La Gran Conquista de Ultramar* is considered to be one of the greatest Spanish works of the thirteenth century, the century, which saw the beginning of Spanish as a literary language. It includes an enormous compilation relating to the Crusades (as the story of *Bertha* mother of Charlemagne and the *Cavallero del Cisne*). *La Gran Conquista de Ultramar* embodies the earliest sample of Chivalry romance in the Spanish language.

The close connection of *Flores y Blancaflor* with the Italian version is perceptible, although its source seems hardly to be directly the *Cantare*. The beginning of the Spanish romance points rather to a version in the North of Italy, which the Spanish translator would have probably adapted into its language without significant modifications.

Version B seems also to have served as a basis for the French second version (Fr B) and for some later German *Volksbücher*: one Bohemian adaptation from Boccaccio's *Filoloco* and a Hebrew adapted version from Fleck's German poem<sup>88</sup>.

Scholars agree on the belief that version A was the first to become known, since we find it not only in Old French, but in the Germanic versions originating from a French source, in an almost uncorrupted and unaltered state: a French version of A must in effect have existed about 1170 to serve as a basis for the low Rhenish *Floyris und Blanscheflur*.

All the different versions of B have instead been noticeably influenced by A, sign that the advent of B after A had become established and renowned.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> FRENCH AND HALE (1964:XXXV).

<sup>89</sup> A more exhaustive discussion on the textual interrelations among the European versions of *Floire et Blancheflor* would fall outside the remit of this work. For more detailed presentation see DE VRIES (1966: 55-60) and GRIEVE (2006).

## Chapter 3 *Floire et Blancheflor*

### 3.1. The French textual tradition: preliminary remarks

We earliest encounter the legend of *Floire et Blancheflor* in France. It is here that the tale of the two lovers becomes for the first time matter for poetic treatment.

As it often occurs in the case of Medieval romances, jongleurs and chamberlains tried to introduce foreign imported narratives into the cycle of their own country story by using bonds of kingship, characters and proper names common to the national epic<sup>90</sup>.

The influence of the French scribes' intervention on a pre-existing story-matter is discernible not only in favoring names and characters belonging to the French historical and cultural tradition but also in the implication of learned sources, descriptive scenes on setting, properties and portraits of the characters, quite out of proportion to the narrative context.<sup>91</sup>

The story appears in Old French in two distinct versions: the earliest, which is commonly designated as I., had its origin about 1160<sup>92</sup> and seems to represent fairly well the A general form of the story.

In discussing the interrelations between the two French versions, Du Ménil defines version I. an adaptation for a select public, designating it "version aristocratique", against version II. or "version populaire".

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<sup>90</sup> Thus, for example, Blancheflor is represented as being the mother of "Bertha of the big foot", the wife of Pepin, father of Charlemagne.

<sup>91</sup> This observation has been made by FRENCH AND HALE (1964:XXXII-III).

<sup>92</sup> The evidence mentioned by PARIS (1899) consists of allusions to some literary works such as *History of Troy*, *Siege of Troy* and *Aeneid*. The place of origin, according to him, was probably in Western France, in the region around Beauvais, lying between Normandy, Picardy and Île de France.

Pelan rather uses two different terms, “roman idyllique” for the first and “roman d’aventure” for the second one; she claims that these labels are much to be preferred to those used by older editors as they designate two different specific genres, rather than two distinct kind of audiences and since scholars and academics did not know very much about medieval audience at that time, such terms would better be avoided. She points out:

“On se demande aussi, en étudiant la deuxième version, c’est qu’est devenu le roman idyllique. Il subsiste encore sans doute, mais sous une forme dénaturée. En multipliant les récits de combats et les incidents de toute sorte, l’auteur a transformé ce roman en un roman d’aventures. On voit qu’un roman idyllique peut ainsi, par l’addition de hors-d’œuvre, devenir un roman d’aventures, mais il est assez difficile d’imaginer la transformation inverse”.<sup>93</sup>

The II. French version is, according to Herzog, the result of a sort of mixing of the A and B versions of the tale. It interlaces passages common to both adaptations, adding at the same time a series of new episodes, which cannot be found in any forms of the story, neither in A nor in B. In the introduction of his edition, Herzog observes:

“Ich halte dafür dass dieselbe [i.e. the Old French. II. version] ebenfalls aus Italien nach Frankreich hinübergewandert ist, wo ihr Bearbeiter den Inhalt des zweiten Kreises mit dem ihm geläufigen ersten Kreise so verschmolzen hat, dass dieser einige nur dem zweiten Sagenkreise angehörige Züge ganz verdrängte”.<sup>94</sup>

The style and manner of handling the story is quite different in the two French versions; the “aristocratic version” -the one I will take into account- preserves the traits of an Oriental romance

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<sup>93</sup> PELAN (1956:XIII).

<sup>94</sup> HERZOG (1884:11).

and represents Floris as a love-sick youth. The writer emphasizes the sentiment of love and the romantic and passionate feelings between the two protagonists. He carefully describes the elaborately constructed tomb<sup>95</sup> (1) and the finely hand-decorated cup<sup>96</sup> (2):

1) “Li coupiers ert ciers et vaillans,  
d’une escarboucle reluisans;  
N’est soussiel si orbes celiers,  
s’il estoit, li boutilliers  
ne peüst sans autre claret  
cler vin connoistre d’ysopé.  
D’or avoit deseure un oisel  
Trifoire, qui molt par ert bel,  
Plus bel ne vit ne hom ne fem:  
c’est vis celui qui l’esgardoit  
que vis estoit, si voletoit”.<sup>97</sup>

2) “De rices listes ert listee,  
de ciers esmaus avironee.  
Pieres i a qui vertus ont  
Et molt grans miracles i font,  
Jagonses, saffirs, calcedoines,

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<sup>95</sup> The false tomb that the king erected in order to make Floris believe that Blancheflour is dead.

<sup>96</sup> The ornate cup that the King gives in exchange to the merchants for Blancheflour.

<sup>97</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003:28, ll. 483-494).

Et esmeraudes et sardoines,  
Pelles, coraus et cristolites  
Et diamans et ametites,  
Et ciers bericles et filates,  
Jaspes, topaces et acates”<sup>98</sup>.

Another evocative scene which shows how the “aristocratic” version is overflowing with soulful details is that portraying the suggestive atmosphere in the emir’s garden with its perfumed flowers, solid trees and bright birds singing sweetly (3):

3) “Li vergiers est tostans floris  
Et des oisiaus I a grans cris.  
Il n’a soussiel arbre tant cier,  
benus, plantoine n’alier,  
ente nule ne boins figiers,  
peskiers ne periers ne noiers,  
n’autre cier arbre qui fruit port,  
dont il n’ait assés en cel ort.  
Poivre, canele et garingal,  
encens, girofle et citoual  
et autres espisses assés  
i a, qui flairent molt souse.

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<sup>98</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003:38, ll. 645-654).

Il n'en a tant, mon essient,  
Entre Orient et Occident.  
Qui ens est et sent les odors  
et des espisses et des flors  
et des oisiaus oïst les sons  
et haus et bas les gresillons,  
por la douçor li est avis  
des sons qu'il est en Paradis.<sup>99</sup>

He dwells in sensuous fondness in his enumeration equally of the fine stuffs and precious stones in the Emir's garden: *saffirs, calcidoines, jagonses et sardoines, rubis, jaspes et cristaus, topasses et esmaus*<sup>100</sup>.

The "popular version", on the other hand, seems to be adapted to the ideal of the native French epic; Floris embodies a model of courage and knightly virtue, reminding the heroes of the Charlemagne cycle of stories. The writer interpolates scenes in which Floris displays his fighting qualities in exciting combats in the manner of the *Chansons de Geste*.

The author of II. emphasizes the battle scenes at the expense of descriptive and evocative passages. He definitely seems to be a practical turn of mind, and instead of fondly enumerating the gems received in return for Blancheflour, he rather describes the conditions and circumstances of the sale. From the instances above, it is easily perceivable how the II. adaptation had been modified in style and tone: the sweet and sentimental tale of the "aristocratic" version changed into an unfeeling,

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<sup>99</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:102, ll. 2001-2020).

<sup>100</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:100, l. 1994 et segg).

more knightly and heroic in content poem, greatly influenced by the ideals of contemporary French poetry, i.e. by the manners and conventions of the epic literary genre of the *Chansons de Geste*.

### **3.2. Floire et Blancheflor: the French manuscript tradition**

The Old French romance *Floire et Blancheflor* is extant in four complete manuscripts, known as A,B,C,D and one fragmentary, V:

**A.** Paris, BNF, fr. 375, fol. 247 v<sup>o</sup>b - 254 v<sup>o</sup>a, second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century;

**B.** Paris, BNF, fr. 1447, fol. 1 r<sup>o</sup> - 20 v<sup>o</sup>, first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century;

**C.** Paris, BNF Supplément fr. 12562, fol. 69 r<sup>o</sup> - 89 r<sup>o</sup>, second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> - first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century;

**D.** Paris, BNF, fr. 19152, fol. 193 r<sup>o</sup> - 205 v<sup>o</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> century;

**V.** Vatican, Palat. Lat. 1971, fol. 85 r<sup>o</sup> - 90 v<sup>o</sup> (fragmentary), first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>101</sup>

These manuscripts represent two different versions of the Old French story: the first (version I.), the “roman idillique”, is exemplified by A,B,C and V; the second (version II.), the “roman d’aventure”, by D.

Since the Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* is definitely based on I., the second French version needs no further treatment here.

The comparison between the three manuscript copies ABV allows concluding that B is the most subject to modifications and alterations as far as style, syntax and lexicon are concerned if

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<sup>101</sup> In this study only A, and to a lesser extent B, will be taken into account. C, D and V will be not dealt with because of single different reasons: C seems to be a bad copy of A, V is fragmentary, D hands down another version of the story, the “popular” one.

compared to their source text. A and B belong to the same family, which have had the largest diffusion on the European continent and which D'Orbigny himself baptized *vulgate continentale*.<sup>102</sup>

As to the relative value of the manuscripts containing Fr I, there is general agreement that C is valueless from the point of view of textual history, and it is probably a bad copy of A.<sup>103</sup>

Manuscript A, “cette luxueuse collection d'œuvres narratives profanes”<sup>104</sup>, includes a wide range of celebrated romances in verses:

1. Résumé de Perot de Nesle
2. *Roman de Thèbes*
3. *Roman de Troie*
4. *Li sieges d'Ataines*
5. *Dis de Jehan Bodel*
6. *Alixandre*
7. *Des dus de Normandie* (a work of prose)
8. *Roman de Rou*
9. *Del roi Guillaume d'Engleterre*
10. *Flore et Blanceflor*
11. *Blancandin*
12. *Cligès*
13. *Erec et Enide*

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<sup>102</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:VII).

<sup>103</sup> This belief is shared by D'ORBIGNY (2003:VII) and GRIEVE (2006:17).

<sup>104</sup> Thus defined by D'ORBIGNY (2003:VIII).

14. *La veillllete* (fable)
15. *Isle et Galeron*
16. *De Theophilus*
17. *Amadas et Ydoine*
18. *La Chastelaine de Vergi*

The manuscript is a large format folio volume of vellum leaves, printed in four columns. Written in a fine book hand, the first letter of each paragraph is written apart from the rest of the text and rubricated.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to the group of romances (II)<sup>106</sup>, the manuscript contains two other kinds of texts: a group of pedagogical works in prose (I)<sup>107</sup> and some religious texts (III)<sup>108</sup>. The first group includes:

19. *Apocalypse*
20. *Explication de l'Apocalypse*
21. *C'est de Sénèque.*

The second one consists of:

22. *De St. Estevene*
23. *Vers de la mort*
24. *Li loenge de Nostre Dame*

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<sup>105</sup> PELAN (1956:III).

<sup>106</sup> (from f. 34a to 333b).

<sup>107</sup> (from f. 1a to 27a).

<sup>108</sup> (from f. 333b to 346b).

25. *De la vielette* (cf. II, 14)

26. *9 Miracles de Nostre Dame*.<sup>109</sup>

As to the date of the manuscript, both paleographical evidence and internal hints point to the second half of the thirteenth century. The manuscript actually contains the indication of a year (1288), in the final part of the *Roman de Troie* (fol. 119 v<sup>o</sup>).<sup>110</sup>

The group of pedagogical texts had been written with a different hand from that of the other two.<sup>111</sup> Most of the romances seem to have been copied by a scribe named Jehan Madot, nephew of Adam de la Halle<sup>112</sup>, as we learn it in the explicit of the *Roman de Troie* (fol. 119 a<sup>o</sup>):

“Cis livres fu fais et fines  
En l’an de l’incarnation,  
Que Jhesus soufri passion  
Quatre vins et mile et dues cens  
Et wit. Biax fu li tans et gens,  
Fors tant ke ciex avoit trop froit  
Qui surcot ne cote n’avoit.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> For a more detailed presentation of the content of the manuscript, see the introduction to REINHARDT (1926).

<sup>110</sup> A terminus ante quem for the composition of A would thus be the last ten years of the thirteenth century.

<sup>111</sup> REINHARDT (1926:IV) firmly asserts “Le premier groupe est d’une autre main que les deux suivants”.

<sup>112</sup> REINHARDT (1926:IV). Adam de la Halle, also known as Adam le Bossu was a French-born trouvère, poet and musician, whose literary and musical works include chansons and jeux-partis (poetic debates) in the style of the trouveres, liturgical polyphonic motets and a musical play, *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, which is considered the earliest surviving secular French play with music. He was a member of the *Confrérie des jongleurs et bourgeois d’Arras*.

<sup>113</sup> REINHARDT (1926:IV).

Jehan seems to have copied the romances up to folio 182<sup>a</sup>, i.e. up to the *Roman d’Alexandre*; *Floris et Blanchefleur* would be thus excluded.

The remaining part of the manuscript had been presumably written by another hand, the same which provides an opening summary of the manuscript content (cf. II, 1) and which has been identified with Perot de Neele.<sup>114</sup>

As far as the language of A is concerned, it seems to have been entirely written in the dialect of Picardy, as D’Orbigny points out:

“La plupart des traits dialectaux et des pratiques graphiques en usage dans les ateliers picards du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle sont présent dans le ms. A”.<sup>115</sup>

According to LACY AND GRIMBERT (2008: 67), the most reliable hypothesis is that the manuscript had been copied in Arras, the capital 'chef-lieu' of the Pas-de-Calais department. Here in 667 Saint Vaast established an episcopacy and a monastic community, which developed during the Carolingian period into the immensely wealthy Benedictine Abbey of St. Vaast.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> This detail has been provided both by REINHARD (1926:IV) and D’ORBIGNY (2003:VIII).

<sup>115</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003: IX). For an accurate presentation of the language of the scribe of A see the introduction to D’ORBIGNY (2003). The Picard dialect of Medieval French was spoken in the far North of France, in the former provinces of Picardy and Artois, as well as in Belgian Hainault/Hennegau.

<sup>116</sup> The Abbey of St. Vaast was a Benedictine monastery situated in Arras, département of Pas-de-Calais. The Abbey was of great importance amongst the monasteries of the Low Countries. It was exempt from episcopal jurisdiction and maintained its independence until 1778, when it was aggregated to the Congregation of Cluny.

Judging from d’Orbigny findings on the language of A –“A c’est une copie picarde (velin, 4 col.) effectuée à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans un atelier D’ORBIGNY” (2003:VIII) - I am led not to exclude the likelihood that A might had been copied in the scriptorium annexed to the monastery of Corbie’s Abbey (about 15 kilometres from Amiens, the country town of the Region of Picardy, in northern France).

The Abbey of Corbie was located at the confluence of the rivers Somme and Ancre and it was supposed to be founded between 658 and 661 on a territory owned by the Crown of Queen Batilde, widow of Clovis II.

The analysis of the manuscript content does not allow to definitely identify the social milieu where the manuscript was used and to determine with certainty the kind of audience it could be intended for. Judging from the religious content of some texts, we are maybe led to assume that at least part of the texts preserved in A would have been used inside the walls of the monastery. (cf. III, 1-5).

This codex actually encompasses a considerable number of texts belonging to extremely different genres, both secular and religious.

The first kind is exemplified by Group II, the most extended one; it mainly consists of classic Medieval chivalric and courtly romances. The first subgroup includes *Erec et Enide* (II, 13), one of the earliest known Arthurian romances composed by Chrétien de Troyes around 1170; the second one contains chiefly courtly love romances; one of the most representative is *Cligès* (II, 12), a 1176 poem, telling the story of the knight Cligès and his love for his uncle's wife, Fenice.

An interesting element emerging from considering some of these texts is that the person who originally commissioned them and presumably the public they were meant to belong to the noble class. This is true for the *Roman de Troie*, the forty thousand line poem by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, written between 1155 and 1160 as a medieval retelling of the epic theme of the Trojan War. As pointed out by NOLAN (1992), the audience of Benoît's famous poem was an aristocratic one, for whom this retelling and the *romans antiques* in general, served as a moral purpose, a "mirror for princes" within the larger didactic genre of mirror literature.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> NOLAN (1992). The so-called *mirror literature*, known also as *speculum principis* and *Fürstenspiegel* from Latin and German respectively, refers to a genre of political writing during the Early Middle Ages, Middle Ages and the

Similar cases are that of the *Roman de Rou*, which, according to his author Wace<sup>118</sup>, was originally commissioned by King Henry II of England.<sup>119</sup> A large part of the romance is devoted to William the Conqueror and the Norman Conquest in England; and that of *Isle et Galeron*, written by the French *trouvère* Gautier d'Arras, whose major patrons belong to the aristocracy, among all: Theobald V, Count of Blois, Baldwin IV, Count of Hainaut, Beatrix, the second wife of Frederick Barbarossa.<sup>120</sup>

All these texts thus seem to have been commissioned by members of the French aristocracy, and most likely circulated in an aristocratic milieu. The legitimacy of this interpretation would be confirmed by the fact that most of these texts openly address to the representatives of the aristocracy. They were intended to convey a picture of the courtly society and of the ideals that nourished it. This is the case of both chivalric and courtly love romances (the above-mentioned group II), texts which provided entertainment as well as means for moral instruction<sup>121</sup>.

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Renaissance. They are best known in the form of textbooks, whose aim was to instruct kings and rulers on certain aspects of rule and behavior; in a broader sense, the term is also used to indicate stories or literary works aimed at creating images of kings for imitation or avoidance. They were often composed at the accession of a new king, when a young and inexperienced sovereign was about to come to power.

<sup>118</sup> (c. 1110 – after 1174), sometimes referred to as Robert Wace, was a Norman poet, who was born in Jersey and brought up in mainland Normandy.

<sup>119</sup> WACE (2002).

<sup>120</sup> See COWPER (1949).

<sup>121</sup> It is indeed well-known that the first French chivalric romances had the task to display the customs and behaviour of the courtly society: they usually portrayed fantastic stories about a brilliant male character, a knight having heroic qualities or a loyal and fair King with noble deeds; they laid the foundations for the reception of both the ideological and aesthetic set of values characterizing the courtly Literature in France, its original stage of development. BUMKE (1991).

It is yet safe to assert that another significant number of texts could have been used as tales intended to entertain and amuse. This might be the case of *La vieillette*, which, belonging to the genre of the fabliau, aims to be humorous and comic.

In the light of what has been observed so far, we can assert that the most plausible audience of the manuscript should be sought within a lay milieu rather than within a monastic community.

This hypothesis finds its foundation in some tangible considerations. One of the most evident is that the collection of religious texts is confined to the final part of the volume; the author may have intentionally chosen this arrangement of texts, devoting the bulk of the volume to the most significant group of romances and adding at the end some texts of religious content and nature circulating in the library of the monastic community of Corbie's Abbey<sup>122</sup> or, according to LACY AND GRIMBERT's more reliable hypothesis (2008: 67) of the Abbey of St. Vaast.

As BURGIO (2003: 62-63,78) points out, it was not so uncommon that in Medieval Northern France representatives of the aristocracy commissioned to clerics and monks manuscripts containing texts of religious nature:

“Nella storia di molti testi religiosi è possibile riconoscere un medesimo dinamismo: la loro stesura nasce dalla commissione a un chierico da parte di un patrono aristocratico, la cui corte risulta essere il luogo primo della ricezione. [...] Tra XIII e XIV secolo Mahaut d'Artois, figlia di Robert II e di sangue reale, a cui si attribuisce la committenza della *Bible historique* di Guyart des Moulins, possedeva una ricca biblioteca 'moderna', in cui i libri di devozioni, i volgarizzamenti agiografici e

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<sup>122</sup> The library contained some important manuscripts of Tertullian's works; an *Apologeticum*, now in St. Petersburg, (although another copy written at Corbie does exist, Paris, B.N.Lat.1623); a copy of the so-called Corbie collection of Tertullian's Montanist works, together with some of Novatian; a copy of Novatian's *De cibis Judaicis* under Tertullian's name. The manuscripts of the Corbie collection seem to have drifted out of the abbey at some period. For more detailed information on Corbie's Abbey and its library, see GANZ (1990) and MÉRINDOL (1976).

biblici si allineavano accanto alla più recente produzione laica, romanzi arturiani, storiografia francese, libri di viaggi”.

Another reason supporting the hypothesis of the lay milieu could be the fact that the transmission of knowledge within male monastic communities in the Middle Ages occurred almost completely through writings, which were strictly religious and theological in nature and almost exclusively written in Latin.

The presence of such texts as *De St. Estevene* or *9 Miracles de Nostre Dame* within a manuscript like Fr A- which preserves mainly secular courtly-chivalric romances- could rather be ascribed to the increasing demand of French laymen for religious and spiritual texts in vernacular. As BURGIO (2003:66-67, 70) detects, this request originated from the interaction between different socio-cultural phenomena that took place in France from the eleventh century onwards:

“I testi che godettero di fortuna continuata permettono talvolta di registrare, nella disposizione geostorica dei loro codici, il loro spostamento da *audiences* religiose ad ambienti laici.[...]

Tra la fine del XII e i primi decenni del XIII secolo si definisce nella *Christianitas* una serie articolata di possibilità ricezionali della scrittura religiosa: da una parte i *clerici* colti, capaci di attingere alle fonti latine scritte e dotati del monopolio della loro volgarizzazione, dall'altra gli *illiterati* analfabeti, ristretti nel recinto dell'oralità; in mezzo, assieme ai religiosi poco acculturati, quei laici che possono avvicinarsi alla scrittura volgare o addirittura a quella in latino. [...] Questo fu l'esito di situazioni e fattori socio-culturali diversi; la crescente domanda di testualità religiosa da parte dei laici fu alimentata dalle istanze spirituali che agitavano la chiesa d'Occidente dopo il Mille, dalla reazione pastorale delle istituzioni ecclesiastiche. Un passaggio decisivo si fissò nei primi decenni del Duecento: gli ordini mendicanti e la definizione di una politica di controllo sulla vita dei *laici* furono i primi strumenti con i quali i chierici affrontarono il compito di dirigere i bisogni religiosi di una

società che si faceva sempre più complessa e articolata, con lo spostamento del suo centro propulsivo dalla compagna feudale alle nuove strutture urbane e il progressivo svilupparsi dell'apparato politico-amministrativo regio”.

As we have seen, manuscript A is actually a miscellaneous manuscript, containing texts of both religious and lay content and it is entirely written in Old French.

The language of the manuscript could furthermore confine the audience to a restricted local area, the province of Picardy. We are thus led to assume that the manuscript could have been commissioned by a member of the high aristocracy living in that district.

Manuscript B is a smaller format folio volume than A, written on vellum leaves, in two main columns. It goes back to the beginning of the fourteenth century and consists of three romances, which occupy the whole volume:

1. *Le conte de Floire et Blancheflor*
2. La chanson de *Berte aus granz piez*
3. Le Roman de *Claris et Laris*.<sup>123</sup>

Differently from A, “le ms. B présente una graphie ‘francienne’; nous l’avons conservée dans le récit de la partie d’échecs”<sup>124</sup>. According to one theory of the development of French, *Francien* was chosen out of all the competing Oïl languages as an official language (Norman and Picard being the

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<sup>123</sup> An addition inserted at the beginning of the text of the *Conte* refers to Berthe as the daughter of the heroine. *Claris*, instead, is the name of Blanchefleur’s friend in manuscript B (which corresponds to *Gloris* in manuscript A).

<sup>124</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003:IX, note 2). Although the author decides to edit version A of *Floire et Blancheflor*, he preserves lines of B in the passage describing the chess game between Floris and the guardian of the tower (pp. 112-14, ll. 2193-2234, printed in italics).

main competitors in the Medieval period).<sup>125</sup> B thus preserves a text which, linguistically speaking, hands down a supra-regional and unmarked language variety than A as far as lexicon, morphology and syntax are concerned. This does not represent however a sufficient reason to consider B the more reliable manuscript. As D'Orbigny actually points out:

“La comparaison des trois copies A,B,V permet de constater que B modifie plus constamment que les autres témoins le style, la syntaxe, le lexique du texte de leur ancêtre commun”.<sup>126</sup>

As far as the kind of texts contained in B is concerned, we can just notice the presence of a *chanson* belonging to the well-known medieval narrative genre, the *Chanson de Geste*, which opens up the French literary tradition. La *chanson de Berte aus granz piez* belongs to the subgenre *Geste du roi* (the chief character is usually Charlemagne or one of his immediate successors) and as all the *chansons*, it was very likely performed orally by jongleurs and minstrels to a wider, sometimes illiterate public; sometimes- although more rarely- to members of the great courts or smaller noble families.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The existence and definition of *Francien* was put forward in the nineteenth century by Gaston Paris.

The theory currently prevailing, however, is that *Francien* was one of the dialects in the dialect continuum on top of which an administrative language, untrammled by perceived regionalisms, was imposed as a compromise means of communication and record to replace Latin. CERQUIGLINI (1998).

<sup>126</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:VII).

<sup>127</sup> Opinions vary greatly on whether the early chansons were first written down and then read from manuscripts (although parchment was quite expensive) or memorized for performance, or whether portions were extemporized, or whether they were entirely the product of spontaneous oral composition and later written down. Similarly, scholars differ greatly on the social condition and literacy of the poets themselves; were they cultured clerics or illiterate jongleurs working within an oral tradition? As an indication of the role played by orality in the tradition of the *Chanson de Geste*, lines and sometimes whole stanzas, especially in the earlier examples, are noticeably formulaic in nature, making it possible both for the poet to adapt a poem in performance and for the audience to grasp a new theme with ease. BUMKE (1991:521-22).

The point is that B seems to address to a more extensive audience than A not only as far as the language of the two manuscripts is concerned (A is written in the dialect of Picardy, which was thus comprehensible by a restricted number of people living in a restricted geographical area in the North) but also with respect to the kind of public, being the *Chansons de Geste*, as we just said, performed by jongleurs in public squares, thus representing an oral medium most likely received by a broader public.

Which of the two complete manuscripts, A or B, is to be preferred is still a matter of dispute. Many editors have selected A because the manuscript itself is slightly older (1288) than B (1300-50). A (/C) and B seem actually to represent the same version- the so-called “aristocratic” one- but with some very different readings.<sup>128</sup>

The only modern editor to base her edition on B is Pelan<sup>129</sup>; she justifies her choice, explaining that, when lines appear in A that are lacking in B, they just refer to some ornamental details, probably added by scribes or copyists on purpose. On the other hand, when B contains a line that is missing in A, it contributes to the thematic coherence of a passage and is thus crucial for the story. She openly confers to B the role of the most authentic and genuine text preserving the story of the two lovers:

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<sup>128</sup> GRIEVE (1997:17).

<sup>129</sup> Among the other editors BEKKER (1844) and WIRTZ (1937) have preferred A; DU MÉRIL (1856) and KRÜGER (1938) published both versions.

“B nous a semblé, tout compte fait, offrir de meilleures leçons que A. [...] Cette édition fera connaître le poème sous une forme évoluée. Quand un nouveau Bédier<sup>130</sup> surviendra pour peser, évaluer, mettre à leur place les nombreuses traductions et adaptations étrangères, on verra se dresser un beau bâtiment restauré avec autant d’art que d’ingéniosité. En attendant cet heureux moment, nous croyons que la copie aussi fidèle que possible d’un bon manuscrit écrit en francien pourra rendre service, en mettant sur les yeux du lecteur un texte authentique et homogène”.<sup>131</sup>

B is actually not free from errors and omissions; it teems with blunders and individual lines and a few passages have been lost. Even the rhyme shows -at some points- great carelessness on the part of the scribe or, sometimes, an occasional rhyme seems to be due to an unsuccessful attempt to recast a couplet in which one of the rhyme-words was unfamiliar to the scribe. Sometimes B makes utter non-sense of a passage by omitting one or more lines, which should obviously be preceded by a line similar to those found in A.<sup>132</sup>

Then again, while reading Pelan’s comments, we easily perceive her inclination in overlooking the failing of A, favouring version B and its “qualities”:

“À comparer les deux versions on constate tout de suite que l’auteur de la seconde<sup>133</sup> est bien moins doué que celui qui a écrit le première. Il répète sans cesse les mêmes situations et les mêmes détails; il reprend assez souvent ses propres vers; il introduit et prolonge des scènes fastidieuses. Les

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<sup>130</sup> Pelan cites Bédier, writer, scholar and historian of Medieval France. Bédier revived interest in several important old French texts, including *Le roman de Tristan et Iseut* (1900), *La chanson de Roland* (1921), and *Les fabliaux* (1893). He was a member of the Académie française from 1920 until his death.

<sup>131</sup> PELAN (1956:VI).

<sup>132</sup> GRIEVE (2006:17 et segg.). Pelan herself mentions “lacks” and variations of B, which visibly move away from the other versions in PELAN (1956:VII *Modifications apportées au manuscrit B*).

<sup>133</sup> Version A according to Pelan; B is instead for her “la plus ancienne et au point de vue littéraire la plus intéressante” PELAN (1956: V).

inconséquences et les invraisemblances abondent. Les raisons qu'il donne pour les actions de ses personnages sont parfois maladroitement et les situations amenées naturellement dans la première version sont introduites de incohérente dans la seconde".<sup>134</sup>

Pelan's reflections are worthy of note not only because she was, from an historical point of view, the first editor to publish version B of the French tradition<sup>135</sup> but also because of her firm belief in the inferiority of A merely because of the scribe's intervention-consisting in alterations, remodelings and reshapings, use of repetitions- in making the text his own revised version of the story.

According to Grieve and D'Orbigny<sup>136</sup>, B had been composed in a more recent past than A (Pelan herself, in dating the two manuscripts, identifies A with the oldest<sup>137</sup>).

As mentioned above, both seem to descend from a common antecedent and we cannot exclude that A is the source of B. As things stand, I am naturally led to think that, being A older than B of at least fifteenth years, it was the scribe of B who reduced the number of repetitions and recurrences, decreasing at the same time the quantity of details (which could appear –according to Pelan-redundant and useless), probably in order to render the narrative more readable and comprehensible to the public.

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<sup>134</sup> PELAN (1956: XII-XIII).

<sup>135</sup> Together with Du Ménil, she opens the "season" to the so-called "critical editions" of the *Conte*, editions containing a composite text based on a number of manuscripts, in which readings rejected from the text are relegated to foot-notes or to an appendix of variants. They thus initiate the first investigations and discussions on the interrelations between the different versions and adaptations of the French tradition of *Floire et Blancheflor*.

<sup>136</sup> GRIEVE (1997:17); D'ORBIGNY (2003:VII-VIII).

<sup>137</sup> PELAN (1956:III-IV).

Pelan also argues that A “suffered” the attempt of an imaginative and creative scribal mind, who reports the same passages after lines, enriches of details some scenes, gives birth to suggestive and evocative descriptions of episodes and events.

The choice of the manuscript-guide is always a very subtle and complex task, where subjectivity often plays an important role influencing the editor’s choice in selecting one instead of another.

As Pelan sums up:

“M. Gillscheg relève des faiblesses de A; Wilmotte croit à la supériorité de B; Krüger, s’est obstinée, malgré toute évidence, à préférer le manuscrit A. M. H. Stone, de même, trouve A *frequently defective*. M. Lozinski, par contre, croit pouvoir en démontrer la supériorité. Un des arguments de celui-ci, et certains de ses exemples, prouvent en tout cas la force de l’élément subjectif dans le choix d’un manuscrit. [...] Et pour citer qu’un exemple de l’opposition entre nos goûts, “la franche gaieté” de l’épisode du magicien, qui provoque son admiration, est pour moi du pur remplissage”.<sup>138</sup>

Manuscript A seems, on the whole, the most appreciated; the most influential editors who published the *Conte* believe that A definitely preserves a more reliable text than B.

This is clearly pointed out by D’Orbigny:

“[...] Les éditeurs du *Conte*, à l’exception de Margaret Pelan, ont retenu le ms. A qui, malgré ses ajouts (jeu de Barbarin et tentative de suicide dans la fosse aux lions, second *planctus* de Floire, sur la mort de ses parents) et malgré de fâcheuses coupures opérées dans le récit de la partie d’échecs, présente un texte sensiblement supérieur à celui de B”.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> PELAN (1956: V-VI). She refers to the episode in which the King makes a magician call at palace in order to alleviate Floris’s pain. This passage is preserved only in A.

<sup>139</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003: VIII).

After Du Ménil, who arranged for the first edition of the two different witnesses preserving the text of *Floire et Blancheflor*<sup>140</sup>, i.e both A and B, all editors chose A as manuscript-guide in their edition, as well as I did for my study.

The French edition that I have taken into account for my analysis is D'Orbigny's *Le conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*, a revised critical edition of the text contained in manuscript A.<sup>141</sup>

I took A as prototypical version, not only for a matter of convenience (as mentioned above it is available in many different editions and thus easier accessible and comparable) but also for the fact that some significant additions and supplements in A (which are lacking in B) could reveal the scribe's intent in gaining the attention of the French medieval public and in satisfying its demands and expectations.

In other words, manuscript A may offer a few instances that help us to delineate its audience and comprehend its involvement in the poet's act of linguistic and literary creation of his own text. This aspect will be of great importance in the comparative study between the French source text and the Middle English adaptation, where modifications, cancellations or adjunctions are presumably attributed to the translator's strategy of reworking the French narrative according to the Middle English new public's reception.

The present study takes into account two different editions mainly: the already mentioned D'Orbigny's 2003 critical edition of *Floris et Blancheflor* and De Vries' 1966 edition of *Floris and Blancheflor*<sup>142</sup>, a readable text of all four English witnesses of the poem.

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<sup>140</sup> DU MÉNIL (1856).

<sup>141</sup>D'ORBIGNY (2003).

The French version of manuscript B, handed down in Pelan's edition *Floire et Blancheflor*<sup>143</sup> will be taken into consideration when its readings appear to be more reliable than those in A or simply worthy of note.

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<sup>142</sup> DE VRIES (1966).

<sup>143</sup> PELAN (1956).

## Chapter 4 *Floris and Blancheflour*: The Middle English manuscript tradition<sup>144</sup>

The Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* is extant in four manuscripts:

- A. Ms. Advocates' 19.2.1, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, fols. 100r-104v. (the Auchinleck MS.);
- C. Cambridge University Library MS. Gg. iv.27.2, fols. 1r-5v.
- E. British Museum MS. Egerton 2862, fols. 98r-111r.
- V. British Museum MS. Cotton Vitellius Diii, fols. 6r-8v.

Two of the manuscripts are clearly older than the others: C and V belong to the end of the thirteenth century, A probably dates from 1330-1340, while E is variously dated as belonging to the end of the fourteenth and the first part of the fifteenth century<sup>145</sup>.

The beginning of the poem is missing in all English manuscripts, but details can be supplied by the original French or other versions.

E preserves at least 195 lines of the beginning of the text which the other witnesses lack.

V, on the other hand, suffered badly from a fire that damaged Sir Robert Bruce Cotton's library in 1731. As a result, the leaves are all imperfect and in many parts extremely difficult to read.

A and C lack an almost equal number of lines. The first one suffered considerable mutilation (probably due to the beautiful miniatures it contained) but some of the missing leaves have been later recovered<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> The English textual tradition is widely discussed in Appendix I.

<sup>145</sup> DE VRIES (1966:1-6).

However it is not only the different number of lines missing at the beginning that causes the four witnesses to vary considerably in length; this is also due to the fact that the texts underwent in many parts modifications, such as abbreviations or additions, revisions or adjustments.

Especially in the case of a popular romance like *Floris and Blancheflour*, it is likely enough that scribes and copyists knew the story and had read it or heard it recited on several occasions before they wrote down some manuscript version. Thus they might be easily led to add details in order to embellish parts of the story, to omit things or entire passages that, in their opinion, were not essential.

As a result, A has 861 lines, C 824, E 1083 and V 445. After a careful analysis of what we have and of what has been lost, it can be deduced that the original must have numbered some 1200 lines (about a third of the length of the original Old French text).<sup>147</sup>

#### **4.1. The Auchinleck Manuscript**

Some particular aspects concerning the physical make up (format, arrangement and handwriting) of the book and its history could provide some additional information about the kind of audience to which the manuscript was addressed.

The Auchinleck manuscript -whose name derives from its first known owner, Lord Auchinleck- is a folio volume of 332 vellum leaves, written in double columns, except the first six folios. The manuscript suffered considerable mutilation, probably for the sake of the miniatures with which, in

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<sup>146</sup> A detailed presentation of each manuscript is given in DE VRIES (1966:1-6).

<sup>147</sup> Cfr. KOOPER (2006:6).

its original state, it must have been copiously illuminated. Most of these have been extracted and a significant number of leaves cut away.

Like all the English witnesses preserving the poem, it is defective at the beginning, the first line corresponding to l. 1000 of the French original version.<sup>148</sup>

As it stands, the manuscript contains forty-four texts of a wide range of genres, like hagiographies, moral and political poems, humorous tales, religious verse texts and poems of satire and complaint.

Of Auchinleck's forty-five surviving texts, eighteen are romances, including stories of English heroes, heroes of France, Arthurian romances, some showing an interest in the supernatural and the fairy world as well as other ones written in a more epic, heroic style.

Auchinleck distinguishes itself from other literary manuscripts of its time<sup>149</sup>, as it does not include texts written in French or Latin, preserving merely Middle English poems.

This manuscript is of great interest as it is depository of the poetry popular in fourteenth-century England. According to WIGGINS (2003), it embodies the first real collection of English romances, offering a rare snapshot of the kind of literary texts circulating in England in the period before Chaucer; as she asserts,

“The contents of the manuscript are representative of the kind of literary environment and linguistic milieu with which writers of the later fourteenth century were familiar. That is, Auchinleck is especially valuable for understanding the development of English Literature because it offers an insight into an English vernacular literary culture which preceded and was influential upon Chaucer and his generation”.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> DE VRIES (1966:1-3).

<sup>149</sup> Such as the contemporary West manuscripts BL Harley MS 2253 and BL Royal MS 12.c.xii.

<sup>150</sup> WIGGINS, the Auchinleck Manuscript: Importance (2003:3).

Here the texts of the Auchinleck in the manuscript order:

1. *The Legend of Pope Gregory* (ff.1r-6v)  
f.6Ar / f.6Av (thin stub)
2. *The King of Tars* (ff.7ra-13vb)
3. *The Life of Adam and Eve* (E ff.1ra-2vb; ff.14ra-16rb)
4. *Seynt Mergrete* (ff.16rb-21ra)
5. *Seynt Katerine* (ff.21ra-24vb)
6. *St Patrick's Purgatory* (ff.25ra-31vb)
7. *þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi and þe Soule* (ff.31vb-35ra stub)
8. *The Harrowing of Hell* (ff.?35rb-?37rb or 37va stub)
9. *The Clerk who would see the Virgin* (ff.?37rb or 37va stub-38vb)
10. *Speculum Gy de Warewyke* (ff.39ra-?48rb stub)
11. *Amis and Amiloun* (ff.?48rb stub-?61va stub)
12. *The Life of St Mary Magdalene* (ff.?61Ava stub-65vb)
13. *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary* (ff.65vb-69va)
14. *On the Seven Deadly Sins* (ff.70ra-72ra)
15. *The Paternoster* (ff.72ra-?72rb or ?72va stub)
16. *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* (?72rb or ?72va stub-78ra)

17. *Sir Degare* (ff.78rb-?84rb stub)
18. *The Seven Sages of Rome* (ff.?84rb stub-99vb)
19. *Gathering missing* (c1400 lines of text)
20. *Floris and Blancheflour* (ff.100ra-104vb)
21. *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* (ff.105ra-105rb)
22. *The Battle Abbey Roll* (ff.105v-107r)
- f.107Ar / f.107Av (thin stub)
23. *Guy of Warwick* (couplets) (ff.108ra-146vb)
24. *Guy of Warwick* (stanzas) (ff.145vb-167rb)
25. *Reinbroun* (ff.167rb-175vb)
- leaf missing.
26. *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (ff.176ra-201ra)
27. *Of Arthour & of Merlin* (ff.201rb-256vb)
28. *þe Wenche þat Loved þe King* (ff.256vb-256A thin stub)
29. *A Peniworþ of Witt* (ff.256A stub-259rb)
30. *How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found* (ff.259rb-260vb)
31. *Lay le Freine* (ff.261ra-262A thin stub)
32. *Roland and Vernagu* (ff.?262va stub-267vb)

33. *Otuel a Knight* (ff.268ra-277vb)

Many leaves lost, but some recovered as fragments.

34. *Kyng Alisaunder* (L f.1ra-vb; S A.15 f.1ra-2vb; L f.2ra-vb; ff.278-9)

35. *The Thrush and the Nightingale* (ff.279va-vb)

36. *The Sayings of St Bernard* (f.280ra)

37. *Dauid þe King* (ff.280rb-280vb)

38. *Sir Tristrem* (ff.281ra-299A thin stub)

39. *Sir Orfeo* (ff.299A stub-303ra)

40. *The Four Foes of Mankind* (f.303rb-303vb)

41. *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* (ff.304ra-317rb)

42. *Horn Childe & Maiden Rinnild* (ff.317va-323vb)

leaf missing.

43. *Alphabetical Praise of Women* (ff.324ra-325vb)

44. *King Richard* (f.326; E f.3ra-vb; S R.4 f.1ra-2vb; E f.4ra-vb; f.327)

Many leaves lost.

45. *þe Simonie* (ff.328r-334v)

As to the date of the manuscript, both paleographical evidence and internal references point to the second quarter of the fourteenth century<sup>151</sup>. One of the texts in the manuscript, the anonymous *Short English metrical Chronicle*, contains an allusion to the death of Edward II and preserves a prayer for his son, Edward III (“our ȝong king”), who came to the throne in 1327. This date represents the *terminus a quo* for the Auchinleck manuscript, which is supposed to have been produced between 1330 and 1340.<sup>152</sup>

Very little information is accessible about the early history of the manuscript. From the fragments of evidence that survive, it is possible to make a few, tentative suppositions.

What we came to know is that the manuscript was presented to the Advocates’ Library, Edinburgh, in 1744 by Alexander Boswell. As member of the faculty of Advocates, judge and father of James Boswell<sup>153</sup>, he must have preserved some kind of contacts and relationships with bookmen and bibliophiles that probably gave him access to such a rare literary volume.

The manuscript was already in Boswell’s custody by 1740, as his signature appears on a paper flyleaf with this date<sup>154</sup>.

It seems furthermore that it came to Scotland before this date and that it was acquired by Boswell here rather than brought to Scotland by him. This is suggested by the location of a number of

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<sup>151</sup> DE VRIES (1966:2).

<sup>152</sup> DE VRIES (1966:2). There is actually another later reference in the *Chronicle*, pointed out by COOPER (2006). This slightly later date is implied in the account of how Lancelot held Guenevere in Nottingham Castle. Since the events at Nottingham took place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1330, it is very unlikely that the manuscript could have been produced before 1331.

<sup>153</sup> James Boswell (29 October 1740 – 19 May 1795) was a lawyer, diarist, and author born in Edinburgh, Scotland. He is best known for the biography he wrote of one of his contemporaries, the English literary figure Samuel Johnson, which the modern Johnsonian critic Harold Bloom has claimed is the greatest biography written in the English language.

<sup>154</sup> DE VRIES (1966:2) detects that on f.1r is an inscription that records Boswell’s donation in 1744.

fragments from Auchinleck that were used as notebook covers by an unidentified St. Andrews professor. The connection with the University of St. Andrews might suggest that Auchinleck was owned by some scholar there in the early eighteenth century.<sup>155</sup>

The manuscript was given the name and number it has today<sup>156</sup> when it was re-catalogued in 1840. In the last century it reached its current location, the National Library of Scotland.

Of the previous history of the manuscript nothing is known with certainty. There are a number of marginal jottings and internal references containing names, but among these there is nothing that helps us to accurately fix the ownership or history of the volume.<sup>157</sup>

In a series of articles<sup>158</sup>, Hibbard Loomis has put forward the hypothesis that the manuscript would have been produced in a London Bookshop as a commercial venture. She argued that Geoffrey Chaucer read it when he was young and he took it as inspiration for his famous satire on verse romance, *The Tale of Sir Thopas* (from *The Canterbury Tales*)<sup>159</sup>. Whether Chaucer handled the manuscript must actually remain an open question, in spite of Hibbard's attractive and on the whole persuasive arguments, but at least the case for a London origin of the manuscript is very strong.

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<sup>155</sup> This hypothesis has been put forward by WIGGINS, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and Owners (2003:1).

<sup>156</sup> Advocates' MS 19.2.1.

<sup>157</sup> For an exhaustive list of the names appearing in the manuscript, see WIGGINS, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and Owners (2003:2).

<sup>158</sup> HIBBARD LOOMIS (1940: 111-128); HIBBARD LOOMIS (1942: 595-627); HIBBARD LOOMIS (1962: 150-187).

<sup>159</sup> DE VRIES (1966:3); WIGGINS, the Auchinleck manuscript: Importance (2003:3).

There are indeed many signals for close collaboration between the scribes of the manuscript, which can be derived from the study of the catchwords, the ruling of the pages and the paragraph signs.<sup>160</sup>

As this is a wide (and as a result costly) manuscript, professionally produced and with a carefully executed design scheme, it is very likely that it was produced on commission for a specific purchaser. Who this person might have been, is still unknown and a topic of discussion between scholars. Different hypotheses have been proposed: PEARSALL and CUNNINGHAM (1977) suggest that the most likely owner was a London merchant, “someone who aspired to aristocratic status and expressed this aspiration by reading texts concerned with chivalric themes”;

RIDDY (1994) claims that the owner could be a lady, such as *Katerine de la Poole*, a self-made woman, whose name appears among the list of Norman names in the *Battle Abbey Roll* in the manuscript. Looking to the list of Norman names too, TURVILLE-PETRE (1996) proposes “a very rich family [...] that had a long tradition of crusading, such as the Beachamps and the Percies [...]”, as he notices a particular persistence on the matter of crusading among the texts in the Auchinleck.

The Auchinleck was written by six different scribes. The scribe who copied the text of *Floris and Blancheflour* (known as scribe 3) had a cursive bookhand described as an early idiosyncratic form of *Anglicana Formata* showing some evidence of Chancery training. BLISS comments that “the length of *f*, *r* and long *s* (all of which run well below the line), shows the influence of Chancery hand”<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> Cfr. BLISS (1951:652-8).

<sup>161</sup> BLISS (1951:653).

This is highly significant with regard to manuscript production: it may imply that the scribe worked within Chancery and would have supplemented his regular work with freelance copying. The appearance of this hand also argues strongly against the belief that Auchinleck was a monastic production, endorsing, instead, the likelihood that it represents an enterprise that was lay and commercial<sup>162</sup>.

Early examples have come down to us of books composed in monastic scriptoria or book collection produced by individuals for their own use or for their families, local communities. Auchinleck, on the contrary, provides evidence of expert and qualified copyists collaborating on a real commercial project. It embodies one of the earliest examples of book production in England which was business-related.

In the light of these considerations, we are able to assume, though not definitely, that the audience of the manuscript should be sought within a lay milieu, rather than be identified with religious or monastic communities.

Not only its layout and make up but also its accurate and consistent transcription editorial policy reveal the professional nature of scribes' collaboration on the Auchinleck, thus providing further useful material about production methods and techniques, which- as we saw above- were undoubtedly intended to give birth to a commercial creation<sup>163</sup>.

Though this is agreed, the specific details about how and where production took place remain nevertheless uncertain and they have been subject of debate among scholars and academics.

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<sup>162</sup> This hypothesis is shared by DE VRIES (1966: 3) and WIGGINS, *the Auchinleck Manuscript: Importance* (2003:3).

<sup>163</sup> WIGGINS (2003) provides a very accurate description of how script, layout and punctuation in the Auchinleck have been represented and lists cases of editorial regularization.

Many different suppositions came into succession through years, one after the other: from Hibbard Loomis' secular version of the monastic scriptorium, where a compact team of scribes would have undertaken translation, composition as well as copying in a workshop to Robinson's suggestion that the Auchinleck was composed in booklets. According to him, booklets were seen to represent an abstract stage of production and the purchaser would have selected a series of the ready-made booklets to his/her taste to be merged together to draw the final volume<sup>164</sup>.

In the 1980s, Shonk makes use of the evidence of catchwords and structural features of the manuscript to claim that scribe 1 played the role of "editor", i.e., in addition to copying a considerable section of the volume, he was responsible for coordinating production at all levels, being the intermediary between the other scribes and the purchaser,

"Thirty-seven catchwords survive in the manuscript, appearing in the lower right-hand corner of the verso side of the last folio of a quire. Thirty-six of these were written by Scribe 1. These include catchwords linking his own quires to those of Scribe 2, Scribe 3, Scribe 4, and Scribe 6 and linking quires successively written by Scribe 5. Scribe 1's catchwords, then, provide links of some sort for the work of every scribe. [...] Shonk proposes that each section of the manuscript returned to Scribe 1 for organization and compilation after it had been copied".<sup>165</sup>

The most recent studies of the Auchinleck offer new inputs and approaches to the manuscript: TURVILLE-PETRE (1996) argued that it has to be considered a "highly themed manuscript", a sort of "handbook of the nation" aiming to express patriotic feelings; HANNA (2000) takes into account Auchinleck metropolitan context defining the manuscript as the product of a distinctive London

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<sup>164</sup> ROBINSON (1972).

<sup>165</sup> WIGGINS (2003), the Auchinleck manuscript: editorial and transcription policy (2003:5-6).

literary culture. Wiggins finally reconsiders the editorial role of Scribe 1 and “emphasizes the evidence Auchinleck provides for the existence of efficient networks of textual exchange at this date”.<sup>166</sup>

#### **4.2. Cambridge University Library MS. Gg. IV.27.2**

Manuscript Cambridge University Library MS. Gg. iv.27.2 (C) deserves special consideration too, as it will be taken into account in the final comparative analysis where A lacks some lines or passages or where its readings are visibly more reliable and consistent than those in A.

Not much is known about Gg. IV.27.2, the piece of manuscript (C) containing the fragment of *Floris and Blancheflour*. We just know from DE VRIES (1966: 3) that it is a single quire of fourteen vellum leaves, written in double columns throughout. DE VRIES (1966:3-4) provides some selected details about the layout and the script of the manuscript: the scribe of C has a clear and sharp handwriting. Two lines are sometimes written as one, especially at the bottom of a folio, in an effort to save space; as a result additions above the line are fairly common.

There are large red and blue capitals and paragraph signs. The initials, sometimes hardly distinguishable from capitals, are written apart from the rest and rubricated. There are few corrections, apparently in a contemporary hand.

The manuscript very likely dates from the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> WIGGINS, the Auchinleck manuscript: importance (2003:4).

<sup>167</sup> Although in *The Catalogue of manuscripts preserved in the University Library of Cambridge* the hand of the scribe is attributed to the fourteenth century (1858:72), the first hypothesis is very probably the most reliable, as it has been put forward in more recent times, see KOOPER (2006: introduction).

The beginning of the *Floris and Blancheflour* is lost, the first line corresponding to l. 1010 of the French text<sup>168</sup>.

As it stands, it is a fragment containing, besides *Floris and Blancheflour*, the well-known Middle English chivalric romance *King Horn* and an incomplete version of *The Assumption of our Lady*.

It has been suggested that it was previously bound up with ms. Gg.IV.27.1, the well-known Chaucerian manuscript.<sup>169</sup> The *Catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in the University Library of Cambridge* (1858:172-4) contains some useful information about Gg.IV.27.1. We know that it is a folio volume of 488 leaves on parchment (about 38 lines in a page) and that the handwriting very probably goes back to the first half of the fifteenth century.

The original illuminations have been extracted, but the deficiencies are supplied in a good modern hand. The volume contains various works ascribed to Geoffrey Chaucer, whether in verse or in prose.

The manuscript consists of the following texts:

1. *His A, B, C or la Priere de nostre Dame* (fol.5a)
2. *Litera directa de Icogon, per G. C* (fol.7b)<sup>170</sup>
3. No title (fol.8b)
4. *De amico ad amicam* (fol.10b)
5. *Responcio* (fol.11a)
6. *The fiue Bookes of Troilus and Cresseide* (fol.14a)
7. *The Canterbury Tales* (fol.123a)<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> DE VRIES (1966:4).

<sup>169</sup> DE VRIES (1966:3).

<sup>170</sup> A short *Balade de bone conseyl* is added (fol.8b).

8. After a gap, the remainder of the *Parson's Tale* (fol.376a to fol.412b)
9. *The Prologue of the Legend of good Women* (fol.413a)
10. *The Legend of Cleopatra* (fol.420a)
11. *The Legend of Tisbe of Babylon* (fol.422a)
12. *The Legend of Dido, queen of Cartage* (fol.424a)
13. *The Legend of Hipsiphile and Medea* (fol.430b)
14. *The Legend of Lucrece of Rome* (fol.434b)
15. *The Legend of Philomene* (fol.441a)
16. *The Legend of Phillis* (fol.443b)
17. *The Legend of Hypermestre* (fol.445b)
18. *The Parliament, or Assembly, of Fowls* (fol.448 a)
19. *The Temple of Glass* (fol.458a)
20. *Supplicatio Amantis* (fol.467)<sup>172</sup>

After listing the contents of Gg.IV.27.1, the catalogue refers to the section of manuscript containing *Floris and Blancheflour*:

“In addition to the above, are inserted fourteen smaller leaves, also on parchment, in a hand of the fourteenth century. [...] The following are the pieces inserted in a different hand”:

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<sup>171</sup> Breaks off at fol.375b in the “Parson’s Prologue”.

<sup>172</sup> From the *Catalogue of manuscripts preserved in the University Library of Cambridge* (1858:172-4). At the end of the volume (fol.483 and segg.) are inserted Chaucer’s Retraction, a glossary of his obscure words, a table of contents and three small pieces entitled *Bon Counsail* (or a *Saiyng of dan John*), *Chaucer to his emptie Purse* and *Chaucer’s words to his scrivener*. Almost all texts preserved in the manuscript had been printed among Chaucer’s *Works* (London, 1687).

21. A portion of the *Romance of Florice and Blaunche flour* (p.1)
22. *Horn*: an early English romance in verse (p.11)
23. *Assumption de nostre Dame* (imperfect at the end, p.26)<sup>173</sup>

The evidence that our piece of manuscript (Gg.IV.27.2) was added to Gg.IV.27.1 and that the two originated independently is confirmed by CALDWELL (1943:299):

“[...] This is clearly shown by the old foliation of the manuscript [Gg.IV.27.2]. When the manuscript was rebound, presumably under the direction of Henry Bradshaw, the leaves of Gga [Gg.IV.27.2] were placed at the end, where they are now foliated separately, 1-35, and the manuscript was refoliated to take account of the lost leaves”.

As we mentioned above, Gg.IV.27.2 (1250-1300) is older than the Chaucerian manuscript (1400-50) of at least a century and the interpolation would thus have taken place at least after 1450. Dr. Suzanne Paul informs me that the leaves of Gg.IV.27.2 were added to Gg.IV.27.1 probably by Joseph Holland<sup>174</sup> who owned the manuscript in the late sixteenth century. He was a collector and antiquary born at Weare in Devonshire about 1552 or 1553. The evidence of his intellectual interests and activities is clear. He was a member of the Inner Temple and knew the heralds in the College of Arms,” and he must, of course, have known personally his fellow-members in the society of Antiquaries. Francis Thynne, the animadverter on Speight’s 1598 edition of Chaucer, knew Holand well enough to borrow a manuscript from him in 1604 or 1605”.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The *Catalogue of manuscripts preserved in the University Library of Cambridge* (1858:172-4).

<sup>174</sup> A quite detailed biography of Joseph Holland can be found in CALDWELL (1943).

<sup>175</sup> CALDWELL (1943:296).

CALDWELL (1943:299) strengthens the hypothesis of Holand's ownership in his article, where he explained that he had the chance to examine Gg.4.27.1:

[...] I suggested on the basis of circumstantial evidence that the manuscript had once been in Holands' possession. [...] When I first had the opportunity of examining the manuscript itself – in the summer of 1939 [...] – I was lucky enough to confirm the suggestion. In the lower left corner of the first extant folio of Gg [Gg.IV.27.1.] is the erasure of the name JOSEPH HOLAND and the date 1600.

No more than an almost imperceptible greenish tinge remains of the ink. The "A" and "N" appear under a strong red light, as does enough of the "L" (an "L" fits the space perfectly) to make the reading certain. The other letters of the name and the numerals of the date are easily made out once they have been noticed at all".<sup>176</sup>

As CALDWELL (1943:299) observes, that Holand was responsible of Gg.IV.27.2 too cannot be completely proved, for neither his signature nor his hand with certainty appears in it.

Caldwell supposes however that Holand added the leaves of Gg.IV.27.2 to the Chaucerian manuscript with the aim to supply the lost passages, whose Gg.IV.27.1 had been sadly mutilated.

He notices that the ink in which his name was written on folio 5 of Gg.IV.27.1 seems to have been used also in Gg.IV.27.2:

"It is perhaps the green but more probably, I think, the blue that appears here and there in Gga [Gg.IV.27.2] and in heading in Gg [Gg.IV.27.1] . This blue leaves the same greenish tinge when it is erased as that which appears about the erasure of the name – as does also the blue used by Holand or his amanuensis in MS Harley 7026".<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> CALDWELL (1943: 299, note 28).

<sup>177</sup> CALDWELL (1943: 299, note 41).

A very interesting aspect to highlight is no doubt the co-existence of two different languages within Gg.IV.27.2, English and Italian.<sup>178</sup> This feature is extremely relevant if one aims at reconstructing the context in which the text was probably used. We may indeed assume that it was not used in religious context or within male monastic foundations, where manuscripts were written almost exclusively in Latin. This hypothesis gains further support if one looks at the genre of the texts making up the manuscript. Judging from the fictional and legendary subject of the majority of texts, we are maybe led to believe that the most plausible audience of the manuscript should be sought within a lay milieu.

It is yet true that both Gg.IV.27.1 and Gg.IV.27.2 contain some texts of religious content. Gg.IV.27.2 preserves at the end the *Assumption de nostre Dame*. If the manuscript was originally intended to be used within the walls of the monastery as private reading for monks, or it was rather a lyrico-romantic production displaying, at some points, a sacred theme is not easy to determine. In actual use, however, it seems to have played a double role. In two of the six manuscripts in which the present version of the story is preserved (the Chetham Manuscript and the Cambridge University Gg.IV.27.2.), the legend is associated with romances, and we are led to infer that it is the romantic quality of the legend that has appealed to the collectors, maybe to Joseph Holand himself. He might have assembled Gg.IV.27.1 and Gg.IV.27.2, as he noticed a resemblance among the kind of texts preserved in the two manuscripts, i.e. entertaining romances for the most part with a constrained amount of religious material.

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<sup>178</sup> In Gg.IV.27.1, in the poems *De amico ad amicam* and *Responcio*, English, Latin and French lines alternate.

It could not be a coincidence, however, that the first text of Gg.IV.27.1, *His A, B, C or la Priere de nostre Dame*, and the last of Gg.IV.27.2, *Assumption de nostre Dame* are both religious texts, a prayer and a legend respectively, devoted to *nostre Dame*.

Dr. Suzanne Paul, Medieval Manuscripts Specialist of the Cambridge University Library, informs me that the language of Gg.IV.27.2 has been localized in the county of Berkshire<sup>179</sup>, where Henry I founded the Abbey of Reading<sup>180</sup> in 1121. As TOMPKINS (1805) points out, the Abbey was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist.

We are led to assume that the two texts, the prayer opening Gg.IV.27.1 and the legend ending Gg.IV.27.2 were thus copied in the scriptorium of the Abbey of Reading in honor of the Virgin Mary, to which the Abbey was devoted.

Despite the plausibility of this thesis, no evidence exists that the Abbey of Reading included a scriptorium as center of production of manuscripts. A more reliable hypothesis is that the manuscript had been copied in the nearby of Reading, commissioned by a group of monks of the Reading Abbey for their private use. After its royal foundation, the Abbey was indeed established partly by monks from the Cluny Abbey in Burgundy, together with a group of monks from the Cluniac priory of St. Pancras at Lewes in Sussex.

In order to make more reliable hypotheses on the receptional context of C, we could rely upon other manuscripts which are supposed to come from the same place of production. In fact it would not be the first time that a monk from the Reading Abbey commissioned a manuscript for his

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<sup>179</sup> With regard to the provenance of the manuscript, there is an entry for it in Lalme (<http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html>).

<sup>180</sup> Reading is a large town and unitary authority area in the ceremonial county of Berkshire, England. It is located in the Thames Valley at the confluence of the River Thames and River Kennet.

pastoral activity and/or amusement; London British Library MS Harley 978 is a manuscript from the Reading Abbey dating from the mid-thirteenth century containing a collection of musical and literary texts, among all the well-known Middle English lyric *Sumer is icumen in*.

As TAYLOR (2002: 76-136) points out, it was very probably commissioned and owned by one of the Reading monks it mentions<sup>181</sup>, William of Winchester, Benedictine monk and lover of polyphonic music.

The manuscript is a miscellaneous compilation, mainly of Latin and French texts, useful or entertaining rather than devotional; it includes other musical pieces (all religious), medical material, Goliardic satires. *Sumer is icumen in* is the only Middle English text in the manuscript, and it is possible that it was included primarily for its musical interest.

To conclude, there is yet not enough clear evidence to safely determine the socio-cultural identity of the owner of the manuscript before Holand, and in particular between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. I just limit myself to thinking that the multi-lingual nature of the manuscript points to a learned owner, probably a layman. Yet, on the basis of the comparison with London British Library MS Harley 978, I cannot exclude the possibility that the owner of the codex was a priest or a monk, or a group of them belonging to the Abbey of Reading, who used it partly for his/their prayer activity and partly to deepen his/their knowledge and/or for his/their personal interest.

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<sup>181</sup> The online *Catalogue of illuminated manuscripts of the British Library* (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8682>) reports: “Possibly commissioned from Oxford booksellers by the author of the note on f. 160v, 'Ord.li. W. de. Wint', variously identified as W[illiam?] of Wycombe (fl. c.1275), music copyist and Benedictine monk, or William of Winchester, monk of Reading”.

Of the later history of the manuscript very little is known. From Holand, it passed directly or indirectly into the collection of Richard Holdsworth, an English academic theologian born in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1590 (died in 1649). He was the Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, from 1637 to 1643. The manuscript finally entered the University Library of Cambridge in 1664.

A look at the other manuscripts of the English tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour* would not be very helpful here: V is too mutilated to be of any usefulness, while E turned out to be corrupt in many points, thus not reliable at all.<sup>182</sup>

Yet it preserves the first 195 lines of the romance lacking in the other manuscripts. For this reason, I will briefly examine its content and attempt to make some conjectures on the basis of its codicological context.

### 4.3. Manuscript Egerton 2862

MS. Egerton 2862 is a folio volume of 148 vellum leaves containing a number of metrical romances.

It was earlier known as the ‘Trentham Manuscript’ because it was once preserved in the Library of the Duke of Southerland at Trentham hall in Staffordshire.<sup>183</sup>

Some of the margins contain scribbles, the most interesting of which is one found in two different folios (ff.73<sup>v</sup> and 127) in a hand which, according to DE VRIES (1966:4), goes back to the sixteenth century. The scribble says “Thomas Waker of lyttell belinges”, i.e. Little Bealingsm Suffolk, perhaps the name of the former owner.

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<sup>182</sup> For a detailed description of the linguistic traits of each manuscript, see Appendix I.

<sup>183</sup> DE VRIES (1966:4).

There is further evidence from a letter inserted at the beginning (*Letter to Gen. J. Leveson-Gower*) that about 1800 the manuscript was in the possession of John Leveson Gower. And at the end of the manuscript a note by George Granville Leveson Gower, second Duke of Sutherland, says:” This book was given by General L. Gower to the Marquis of Stafford [George Granville Leveson Gower, Duke of Sutherland, 1833] my father”.

Besides *Florence and Blanchefloure*, the manuscript preserves the following texts:

1. *Letter to Gen. J. Leveson-Gower*, Lord Mark Robert Kerr, f. ii [1805-16]
2. Notes by George Granville Leveson-Gower, 2nd Duke of Sutherland, ff. i., iii b [1833-1861]
3. *Romance of Richard Coeur-de-Lion*, Richard I of England (romance), f. 1, 1400 ca.
4. *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, ff. 45-94 b, 96, 1400 ca.
5. *Poetry: Moral distich*, f. 50, 16<sup>th</sup> century
6. *Sir Degarre* (romance) Imperf, ff. 95, 97, 1400 ca.
7. *Florence and Blanchefloure* (romance), f. 98, 1400 ca.
8. *The Batell of Troy*, f. 111 b, 1400 ca.
9. *Amys and Amylion* (romance), f. 135, 1400 ca.
10. *Sir Eglamour* (romance), fragmentary, f. 148, 1400 ca.

Manuscript Egerton 2862 lacks several leaves from the beginning<sup>184</sup> and the first few leaves are partly illegible through damp. Yet it preserves, as we already mentioned, at least 195 lines of the beginning of the text which the other witnesses lack.

In view of the general considerable reduction of the French “original” by E, it is likely that only one folio has been lost in this manuscript.<sup>185</sup>

The manuscript has been variously dated to the end of the fourteenth century or the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>186</sup>

The crucial issue that needs to be dealt with is whether the manuscript was used within a monastic context or within a lay milieu, as one would be inclined to deduce from the evidence we possess. The uniformity of texts contained in the codex (romance material) and the absence of explicit clues as to religious or sacred references within the text, set aside the possibility that the manuscript was used within a monastery or a religious context.

Not only the kind of texts preserved in the manuscripts and its language –all metrical romances written in Middle English- but also the socio-cultural identity of the owners<sup>187</sup> point to a lay milieu.

A brief look to the handwriting of the manuscript could be useful in order to better evaluate the socio-cultural background in which the text had been composed.

According to DE VRIES (1966:5), E “is written in a very legible plain, informal running hand”.

SCHELLEKENS (1989: 21-22) observes as well that

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<sup>184</sup> The first line of E corresponds to l. 193 of the French text.

<sup>185</sup> DE VRIES (1966:5).

<sup>186</sup> MCKNIGHT (1901) dates MS. Egerton 2862 to 1440; TAYLOR (1927) in the first half of the fifteenth century; KOOPER (2006) in the fourteenth century ca.

<sup>187</sup> Although they hold the codex in a definitely later period than that in which it had been copied.

“the text was written in an Anglicana hand with some Secretary features. The script is well spaced and easy to read, and the angle is almost upright. The letters are separated and rounded”.

The scribe who copied the manuscript was thus very likely a skilled and practiced one but, as SCHELLEKENS (1989:22) remarks, he did not pay too much attention on the formal make-up and the aesthetic layout of the codex:

“From the execution of the text and the quality and size of the parchment, it would appear that the manuscript was produced by a professional scribe for a wealthy patron. Yet it is plain in appearance, there are no illuminations or paragraph marks and capitals were never executed. The first letter in the top line is often elaborated with cadel ornament, more frequently near the beginning of the manuscript than later. Much of this decoration was subsequently cropped”.<sup>188</sup>

DE VRIES (1966:4), on his part, observes the scribe’s ambiguity in reproducing the end flourishes, tags or hooks:

“The only difficulty in transcribing the manuscript is the interpretation of the end flourishes, tags or hooks added to many letters, in particular –n, -m, -d, -g, -f, especially as the scribe was by no means consistent in the use of them”.

As SCHELLEKENS (1989:22) puts forward, the most reliable hypothesis is that the codex was commissioned by a “wealthy patron”, a member of the high society for his private use. The scribe’s intent was probably that to provide a readable and accurate version of the text while neglecting the usually formal editorial and transcription policy used for works intended as commercial products.

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<sup>188</sup> For a more detailed list of inconsistencies in E see SCHELLEKENS (1989: 21-24).

## **Chapter 5 Translation analysis: the Relationship between Fr A (Paris, BNF, fr. 375) and the Middle English witnesses.**

One of the first aspects emerging from the comparative analysis between the source text and the English translation is no doubt the degree of condensation in the Middle English romance: the English translator concentrated on the narrative subject proper and left out all the long descriptive passages and detailed sections which feature so largely in the Old French version.

Despite its considerable abbreviation, the Middle English adaptation reveals such modifications and changes, suggesting how the version was adapted and reshaped in order to be received and appreciated by its public.

The textual framework of the Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* involves a group of four manuscripts among which there are considerable differences in the treatment of individual episodes. Manuscripts A and C are regarded as the most reliable.<sup>189</sup> Although manuscript A contains occasional deviations from its ultimate source -probably due to oral transmission- it still remains the longest and in many ways the most complete text.<sup>190</sup>

C seems to approach the original the nearest; it does not contain serious blunders and omissions and it preserves a considerable number of archaic features which might very probably go back to the original.<sup>191</sup> This is why I selected A and C for my analysis.

For the beginning of the romance, I will rely upon Manuscript Egerton 2862 (E), as it preserves 195 lines which do not appear in the other versions. In the following section I will thus explore the textual relationships between Fr A and E.

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<sup>189</sup> This assumption is based on the results emerging from the analysis of the English textual tradition (Appendix I).

<sup>190</sup> This was not only detected by KOOPER (2006:7) but it is also observed in Appendix I.

<sup>191</sup> The above-mentioned features are exhaustively displayed in Appendix I.

The reshaping of the translated text may occur through a series of textual modifications, from omissions to expansions and explicatory interventions.

For the sake of clarity I decided to divide the differences between the two texts into four categories:

- 1) omissions;
- 2) amplifications;
- 3) substitutions;
- 4) reformulations.

The analysis will embrace examples of different types of discrepancies between the two redactions. Special attention will be devoted to those cases that are more likely to represent true innovation of the English translator.

## **5.1. Fr A (Paris, BNF, fr. 375) – E (Ms. Egerton 2862)**

### **5.1.1. Omissions**

This is no doubt the group containing the most numerous examples if compared to the other categories.

- 1) The most remarkable aspect emerging from the comparison between the original French, Paris BNF fr. 375, and the Middle English Manuscript Egerton 2862 is the omission in E of the first 193 lines of Fr and, in particular, of the two prologues opening the French text.

The first, the so-called “Carolingian prologue” (ll. 1-30), and the second one (ll. 33-56), preceded by a linking couplet (*or sivrâi mon proposement,/parlerai avenanment*), introduces the circumstances in which the romance had been told, i.e. the love discourses between two sisters.

The former contains an invitation to the lovers (to *cil qui d'amors se vont penant*) to hear the story of *Floire et Blancheflor* and goes on referring to the ancestry of the two main characters, indicating the inheritance that Floire received from his maternal uncle, King of Hungary:

**Fr. 375 (Paris, BNF, fr. 375):**

Signor, oiiés, tot li amant,

Cil qui d'amors se vont penant,

Li chevalier et les puceles,

Li damoiseil, les damoiseles!

Se mon conte voles entendre,

Molt i porrés d'amors aprendre. (ll. 1-6)

[...] Berte as grans pies fu nee;

Puis fu en France mariee.

Berte fu mere Charlemaine,

Qui puis tint France et tot le Maine. (ll. 9-12)

[...] Bautisier se fist en sa vie

Flores por Blanceflor s'amie (ll. 19-20)

[...] Uns siens oncles fu mors sans oirs,

qui de Hongerie estoit rois;

Flores fu fix de sa serour,

Por çou fu sires de l'onour. (ll. 27-30)

The narrator, probably a *jongleur* or a chamberlain<sup>192</sup> starts the romance addressing to the hearing audience and creating a direct communication with his public.

The French text embodies from the beginning the typical features of the chivalric and romantic story written for the sophisticated audience of the court, a small and select audience consisting largely of ladies (*les puceles* and *les damoiseles*) but also of men (*li chevalier* and *li damoiseil*).

The narrator's attempt to establish a straight contact with his public, diminishing the distance between himself and his addressees reminds the *trouvères*'s poetry. As MÉLIGA (2003:98-99) points out,

“Dalla poesia lirica-in particolare dei trovatori, fra i quali si contano autori con un notevole grado di autocoscienza artistica-si ricava il senso di una ‘comunità’ letteraria dove la distanza fra produttori e destinatari è particolarmente ridotta. [...] Vediamo qui all’opera una caratteristica della poesia medievale, non solo cortese: il rivolgersi a un pubblico individuato, culturalmente e spesso anche storicamente vicino all’autore, che stabilisce con esso una comunicazione diretta. Questo fa sì che in certi casi la cerchia degli spettatori potesse essere molto ristretta, limitata ai *familiars* e agli ospiti più assidui o noti della corte, gli unici in grado di decifrare le allusioni a persone, luoghi o avvenimenti che troviamo all’interno di certi componimenti. [...] D’altro canto, i rapporti intertestuali e la componente ‘dialogica’ presenti in larga parte della produzione dei trovatori e dei trovieri presuppongono la partecipazione di un pubblico con un’ adeguata educazione alla poesia, almeno per quel che riguarda le regole dei generi e l’uso di determinate situazioni liriche”.

The mention of the Carolingian Lineage in the first lines suggests the explicit will of celebrating the Carolingian tradition: the opposition between the Christian and non-Christian world (the baptism of

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<sup>192</sup> This hypothesis has been already put forward in chapter 3, after having supposed a number of stages of oral transmission behind the French manuscript.

Floris for Blancheflour's love), as well as the references to Berte and Charlemagne and to Floris as *sires de l'onour* highlights the splendour of the Carolingian dynasty and the chivalric venture undertaken by its representatives for the conquest of *onour*.<sup>193</sup>

The second prologue reveals how, within the space of the Court, women represent the most privileged literary addressees. As MÉLIGA (2003:100-101) points out speaking of the audience of courtly and chivalric texts,

“[...] A cavalieri e chierici andrà però ancora aggiunto l'importante complemento, per quanto riguarda le attività di promozione (e talora di produzione) letteraria ma soprattutto la costituzione del pubblico, della componente femminile della corte. Nelle 'camere' a loro destinate all'interno del castello le donne, aristocratiche della famiglia del signore o dame della loro cerchia, fanno della letteratura<sup>194</sup>, da sole o con la compagnia dei chierici e forse di qualche cavaliere più educato: in una *cambra*, dove era entrato per passare piacevolmente il tempo in compagnia delle *damoiseles*”.

This is the case of *Floris and Blancheflour*, in which the narrator experiences the story of the two lovers hearing a lady telling it to her younger sister, a story that was previously recited from a book by a cleric to the same lady:

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<sup>193</sup> Leclanche (in PIOLETTI 1992:49, cit. note 1) argues that this prologue would not belong to the original version of the story, as the Icelandic Saga (*Flores saga ok Blankiflúr*) and the French fragment in V (Vatican, Palat. Lat. 1971), lacking the first 92 lines, do not mention any references to Bertha or Charles the Great, nor those concerning the Inheritance gained by Floris from his maternal uncle. The presence of the Carolingian prologue in both BN fr. 375 (A) and BN. fr. 1447 (B) raises questions relating to the transmission of the text and the definition of its statute. If it is a later addition, what is the reason for which it has been added and which are the clues it can provide for the reconstruction of the reception of the text are still matters of dispute.

<sup>194</sup> The expression 'fanno della letteratura' could appear ambiguous here. In this context and considering his forward, I think that the author wants to refer to the women's (loudly) reading activities, thus identifying them with the audience of the literature, rather with its producers.

**Fr. 375 (Paris, BNF, fr. 375):**

En une chambre entrai l'autier,  
Un vendredi après mangier,  
Por deporter as damoiseles  
Dont en la chambre avoit de beles. (ll.33-36)

[...] Illoec m'assis por escouter  
Deus dames que j'oï parler.  
Eles estoient deus serours;  
Ensamble parloient d'amors.  
Les dames erent de parage,  
Cascune estoit et bele et sage.  
L'aisnee d'une amor parloit  
A sa seror, que molt amoit,  
Qui fu ja entre deus enfans,  
Bien avoit passé deus cens ans,  
Mais uns boins clers li avoit dit,  
Qui l'avoit leü en escrit.  
Elle commence avenanment.  
Or oiiés son commencement. (ll. 43-56)

The French romance goes on (ll. 57-188) telling the ventures of the King of Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) into Galicia, in north-western Spain. He attacks a band of Christian pilgrims on the way of St. James to the famous medieval pilgrimage shrine of Santiago de Compostela. Among the pilgrims are a French knight and his recently-widowed daughter, who has decided to dedicate the

rest of her life to the sanctuary of the apostle. The knight is killed and the girl is taken prisoner to Naples, where she is made lady-in-waiting to Felix's wife. Both women are pregnant and their children are born on the same day, Palm Sunday: Floris to the Muslim Queen and Blanche flour to her lady-in-waiting.

The English translation does preserve neither the two prologues nor the lines narrating Felix' attack to the Christian pilgrims in Galicia or the capture of the woman who becomes Blanche flour's mother.

It begins in *medias res*, describing how Floris and Blanche flour children were both fed by the Christian lady and grew up together:

**Egerton 2862 (E):**

Ne thurst men neuer in londe

After feirer children fonde.

Þe Cristen woman fedde hem þoo;

Ful wel she louyd hem boþ twoo.

So longe she fedde hem in feere

Þat þey were of elde of seuen zere. (ll. 1-6)

The omission of the two prologues might be read as a relevant clue to the translator's intention to reshape the text for a different audience. The deletion of all references to a courtly oral tradition leads us to assume that they were not necessary to the aim for which the text was intended.

The Middle English translation evidently addressed to a different audience from the one of the source text in social and cultural terms.

As was seen above<sup>195</sup>, the analysis of the Middle English manuscript tradition points more likely to a lay milieu and to a definitely written product intended to be read by representatives of the aristocracy for their own use and mostly enjoyed silently.

It is yet very probable that at least a number of lines lacking at the beginning has been lost in the transmission of the romance. It could not be a coincidence, indeed, that all four manuscripts are deficient in the first lines of the poem. There is furthermore no convincing reason supporting the hypothesis that the English translator decided on purpose to start in *medias res*, with a couplet (*Ne thurst men neuer in londe After feirer children fonde*) that evidently should be preceded by some introductory lines.

The first remarks regard some macroscopic aspects of the translation. Here follow some of the other most significant examples of omission in the English translation.

- 2) The source text mentions *maître Gaidon*, the person who teaches Floris and Blancheflour at court.

In the English translation this piece of information is missing:

**Fr:**

Quant li rois vit son fil si bel

de son eage damoiseil

et aperçut que sot entendre,

a letres le vaut faire aprendre.

Gaidon l'a comandé, un mestre;

miudres de lui ne pooit ester.

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<sup>195</sup> See chapter 4. The following statement is inferred on the basis of the results emerging from the analysis on the assumed audience and receptional context of ms E and found more reliability in SCHELLEKENS (1989:22).

Ses parens ert, de sa maison;  
Fondés des ars Gaides ot non.  
Li rois commande son enfant  
qu' il apreng, et cil en plourant  
li respond: "Sire, que fera  
Blanceflore? Et don't n'aprendra? (ll. 199-210)

**E:**

þe King behelde his sone dere,  
And seyde to him on þis manere:  
þat harme it were sette to lore  
On þe book letters to know,  
As man don both hye and lowe  
"Feire sone", he seide, "þow shalt lerne;  
Lo, þat þow do ful 3erne".  
Florys answered with wepyng,  
As he stood byfore þe Kyng;  
Al wepyng seide he:  
"Ne shal not Blanche flour lerne with me? [...] ( ll.7-18)

- 3) The French "original" also preserves a very detailed passage describing the everyday activities of the two children. The romantic and full of sense atmosphere of this episode is absent in the Middle English translation, where it is reduced to a condensed and plainer account:

**Fr:**

Ensamle lisent et aprentent,

a la joie d'amor entendent.  
Quant il repairent de l'escole,  
Li uns baise l'autre et acole.  
Ensamble vont , ensamble vienent,  
Et lor joie d'amor maintiennent.  
Un vergier a li peres Floire  
U plantee est li mandegloire,  
toutes les herbes et les flours  
qui sont de diverses coulours.  
Flouri i sont li arbrissel,  
d'amors i cantent li oisel.  
La vont li enfant deporter  
cascun matin et por disner.  
Quand il mangeoient et bevoient,  
Li oisel deseure aus cantoient.  
Des oiselés oënt les cans,  
Çou est la vie as deus enfans.(ll. 235-252)  
[...] Et quant a l'escole venoient,  
Lor tables d'yvoire prenoient.  
Adons lor veïssiés escrire  
letres et vers d'amours en cire! (ll. 255-258)  
[...] En seul cinc ans et quinze dis  
Furent andoi si bien apris  
que bien sorent parler latin

et bien escrire en parkemin (ll. 265-268)

**E:**

To scole þey were þut.

Boþ þey were good of wytte;

Wonder it was of hur lore,

And of her loue wel þe more.

Þe children louyd togeder soo,

Þey myzt neuer parte atwoo.

When þey had v zere to scoole goon,

So wel þey had lerned þoo,

Inowz þey couþ of Latyne,

And wel wryte on parchemyne. (ll. 25-34)

- 4) In order to divide the two children, the Queen suggests the King to send Floris away to a distant land, Montargis, where her sister *Sebile* lives. In the translated text the woman's name is missing:

**Fr:**

«Dame, dist il, et jou l'otroi.

Consilliés m'ent vos et moi».

«Sire, fait ele, envoions Floire

ostre fil, aprendre a Montoire.

Lie en ert mlt dame Sebile,

ma suer, quist dame de la vile». (ll. 321-326)

**E:**

«Dame, rede vs what is to doo»

«Sir , we shul oure soon Florys

«Sende into þe londe of Mountargis.

Blythe wyl my suster be,

Þat is lady of þat contree»; (ll. 64-68)

- 5) The source text preserves a few lines (ll. 373-386) containing a passage courtly and sentimental in tone displaying Floris's emotional state in living without Blancheflour and loving her from a distance. It contains a lyric sequence (*Amours li a livré entente* [...]) which distinguishes itself from the rest of the text, as it is delimited by two white spaces up and down. This passage is summed up in the English translation in a few less expressive lines:

**Fr:**

Mais nul oïr ne nul veoir

ne li puet faire joie avoir;

il ot assés, mais poi aprent,

car gran doel a u il s'entent.

Amours li a livré entente,

el cuer li a planté une ente

qui en tous tans flourie estoit

et tant doucement li flairoit

que encens ne boins citouaus

ne giroffles ne garingaus

Et cele dour rien ne prisoit;

Toute autre joie en oubloït:

Le fruit de cele ente astendoit,  
Mais li termes molt lons estoit,  
çou li ert vis, du fruit cuellir,  
quant Blanceflor verra gesir  
jouste soi et le baisera,  
le fruit de l'ente cuellera.

Flores atent a quelque paine  
tot le terme de le quinzaine.  
Quant il vit qu'ele ne venoit,  
dont sot bien que gabés estoit  
et si doute forment et crient  
que morte soi quant el ne vient.  
A tant laist le mangier ester  
Et tot le rire et le jüer,  
Le boire laist et le dormir  
Cil se criement de son morir. (ll. 369-396)

**E:**

Yf eny man to him speke  
Loue is on his hert steke.  
Loue is at his hert roote  
Dat noþing is so soote:  
Galyngale ne lycorys  
Is not so soote as hur loue is,

Ne nothing ne non other [flour].  
So much he þenkeþ on Blancheflour,  
Of oo day him þynkeþ þre,  
For he ne may his loue see.  
Þus he abydeth with muche woo  
Tyl þe fourtenyzt were goo.  
When he saw she was nouzt ycoome,  
So muche sorrow he haþ noome,  
Þat he loueth mete ne drynke,  
Ne may noon in his body synke.

- 6) When the Queen persuades Felix not to kill Blancheflour, he proposes instead to sell her to some merchants travelling on the way to Babylon and comments that he took his decision because he is afraid of the sin of killing her, i.e. he is afraid of God's punishment. This aspect does not shine through in the English translation.

The King's fear of godly punishment seems the main reason pushing Felix to retreat. In the French text he explicitly says that he would have preferred killing Blancheflour in exchange of a scanty reward rather than selling her and receiving an abundant compensation. The King's cruelty is emphasised in the French text, while in the English translation it is not highlighted at all:

**Fr:**

Le roi accepte a grant paine l'otroie.  
Par un borgois illoec l'envoie  
qui de marcié estoit molt sages  
et sot parler de mains langages.

Ne le fist pas par convoitise  
vendre li rois en nule guise;  
muis amast il sa mort avoir  
que ne fesist cent mars d'avoir  
le pecié crient, por çou le lait.  
Li marceans au port s'en vait  
Et a teus offer la pucele  
Qui l'acatent, car molt ert bele [...] (ll. 419-430)

**E:**

Vnneþes þe King graunted þis;  
But forsoth so it is.  
þe King let sende after þe burgeise,  
þat was hende and curtayse,  
And welle selle and bygge couth,  
And moony langages had in his mouth.  
Wel sone þat mayde was him betauzt,  
An to þe hauen was she brouzt. (ll. 153-160)

- 7) In the story, Blancheflour is sold to some merchants by the King, who receives in exchange twenty marks of red gold and a precious cup once owned by Aeneas and decorated with scenes of Paris and

Helen of Troy.<sup>196</sup> The French original provides a very accurate and detailed description of the cup and gives important details about its history and owners (from 1.442 to 1.504, i.e. sixty-two lines).

The description is much reduced in the English adaptation:

**Fr:**

[...] trente mars d'or et vint d'argent,

et vint ailes de Bonivent,

et vint mantiaus vairs osterins,

et vint bliaus indes porprins,

et une ciere coupe d'or

qui fu emblee du tresor

au rice emperreour de Rome

ainc a plus ciere ne but home.

A grant merveille fu bien faite

et molt fu soutiument portrait

par menue neeleüre;

Vulcans le fist, s'i mist sa cure.

El hanap ot paint environ

Troies et le rice doignon,

et com li Griu sehors l'assailent,

com au mur par grant air maillent,

et com cil dedens se deffendent,

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<sup>196</sup> In the French "original" also twenty pieces of Benevento's silk, twenty coats of squirrel and twenty bliauds (women's and also men's overgarments worn from the eleventh to the thirteenth century in Western Europe, featuring voluminous skirts and horizontal puckering or pleating across a snugly fitted under bust abdomen).

quariaus et peus agus lor rendent.

En l'eur après fu painte Helaine,  
comment Paris ses drus l'en maine.

D'un blanc esmail ot fait l'image,  
Assise en l'or par artimage.

[...] Ens el covercle de desus,

Illoec ert paint comme Venus,

Pallas et Juno ensement

vinrent oïr le jugement

de Paris, car eles trouverent

une pume, dont estriverent,

de fin or, u escrit estoit

la plus bele d'eles l'aroit

Cele pume a Paris liverent

et en après li conjurerent.

[...] Li coupiers ers ciers et vaillans,

d'une escarboucle reluisans;

n'est soussiel si orbes celiens,

s'il i estoit, li boutilliers

ne peüst sans autre claret

cler vin connoistre d'ysopé.

[...] Li rois Eneas l'em porta

de Troies quant il s'en ala,

si le dona en Lombardie

a Lavine, qui fu s'amie.  
Puis l'orent tot li ancissour  
qui de Rome furent signor  
dusqu'a Cesar, a cui l'embla  
uns leres, qui la l'aporta  
u li marceant l'acaterent  
et por Blanceflor le donerent. (ll. 442-504)<sup>197</sup>

**E:**

[...] Ther haue þey for þat maide zolde  
Xx. mark of reed golde,  
And a coupe good and ryche;  
In al þe world was non it lychee.  
þer was neuer noon so wel graue;  
He þat it made was no knave.  
þer was purtrayd on, y weene,  
How Paryse ledde away þe Queene;  
And on þe couercle aboute  
Purtrayde was þer both her loue;  
And in þe pomel þeron  
Stood a charbuncle stoon.  
In þe world was not so depe soler  
þat it nold lyzt þe boteler,

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<sup>197</sup> I selected the most significant lines, those that better highlight the attention to detail of the French text if compared to the English translation.

To fylle boþale and wyne,  
 Of syluer and gold boþ goodand fine.  
 Enneas þe King, þat nobel man,  
 At Troye in batayle he it wan,  
 And brougt it into Lumbardy,  
 And gaf it his lemman, his amy.  
 Þe coupe was stoole fro King Cesar;  
 A þeef out of his tresour-hous it bar.  
 And sethe þat ilke same þeef  
 For Blaunchefloure he it zeef. (ll. 161-184)

8) At a certain point in the story, the King and the Queen make Floris believe that Blancheflour is dead. In order to do so, they erect a false tomb in a church and place on top of it a new and prettily painted stone with letters written all around with great solemnity.

The French text specifies that the idea of the tomb is the Queen's. In the English translation, instead, this piece of information is missing.

The elaborated tomb, to the description of which one hundred- thirteen lines are devoted in the French romance (ll.547-660), in the English poem is dismissed with just nine lines (ll. 209-218):

**Fr:**

Sire, fait ele, a moi entent:

car faisons faire un tomblel gent,

fais soit de marbre et de cristal,

et d'or et d'argent li esmal.

«Morte est Blanceflor», ce dirons,

et nostre fil conforterons. (ll.535-540)

[...]

La tombe fu molt bien ovree,

d'or et d'argent iert neelee.

N'a soussiel beste ne oisel

ne soit escrit en cel tomblel,

ne serpent c'on sace nomer,

poisson de douce aige et de mer.

Devant un mostier, sos un arbre,

sist la tombe, qui fu de marbre.

Une pierre ont dessus assise

que orfevre fisent de Frise.

Cele pierre qui sus gisoit

De tres fin marbre faite estoit,

Inde, cert et gausne, vermel;

[...] Desor la tombe ot tresjetés

deus biaux enfans tres bien mollés.

Onques nun hom si bien sanlans

d'or ne vit faire deus enfans.

Li uns des deus Flore sanloit

Plus que riens nule qui ja soit.

L'autre ymage ert ensi mollee

comme Blanceflor ert formee.

Et li ymage Blanceflor

devant Flore tint une flor;  
[...] Au chief desus de cel tomblel  
avoit planté un arbrisel;  
molt estoit biaux et bien foillis  
et de flors ert adés garnis;  
totes sont cargies les brances  
et les flors noveles et blances.  
Cius arbres a a non benus;  
ja un seul point n'en ardra fus.  
As pies par devers le solel  
avoit un turabim vermel;  
soussiel nen a plus bele cose,  
plus ert bele que flors de rose.  
[...] De rices listes ert listee,  
de ciers esmaus avironee.  
Pieres I a qui vertus ont  
et molt grans miracles i font,  
Jagonses, saffirs, calcedoines,  
et esmeraudes et sardoines,  
pelles, coraus et crisolites  
et diamans et ametites,  
et ciers bericles et fiates,  
jaspes, topaces et acates.  
Toute ert la tombe neelee,

de l'or d'Arrabe bien letree.

Les letres de fin or estoient,

Et en lisant çou racontoient:

«Ci gist la bele Blanceflor,

A cui Flores ot grant amor» (ll.5 547-660)

**E:**

They lete make in a chirche

A swithe feire graue wyrche,

And lete ley þer vppon

A new feire peynted ston,

With letters al aboute wryte

With ful mucche worshippe.

Who-so couth þe letters rede,

Pus þey spoken and þus þei seide:

“Here lyth swete Blaunchefloure

þat Florys louyd par amour”. (ll. 209-218)

- 9) In order to come back from Montargis, Floris must ask the permission of his father, the King. The subordinate relationship between father and son, i.e. King and subject, is clearly detectable throughout the French romance, not much in the English adaptation:

**Fr:**

[...] A tant es Floire repairié,

quant de son pere ot le congié.(ll. 661-662)

**E:**

[...] Now Florys hap vndernome,  
And to his fader he is coome. (ll. 219-220)

**10)** When Floris finds out, erroneously, that Blancheflour is dead, he goes insane and he decides to kill himself. He starts a monologue in which he addresses first to his beloved, then to the Death (or its allegorical representation) in Christian terms (ll. 713-784). This passages is reduced by the English translator to a few lines:

**Fr:**

Oï! Blanceflor! Blanceflor!  
Ja fumes nos né en un jor  
Et en une nuit engené,  
Si com nos meres ont conté  
[...] Ahi! Blanceflor, cler visage!  
Onques feme de vostre eage  
Ne vi plus bele ne plus sage,  
De coi que fuissies de parage.  
[...] Bele, forment nos entramiens  
et en escivant consilliens;  
l'uns a l'autre son bon disoit  
en latin, nus ne l'entendoit.  
Ha! Mors, tant par es enuieuse,  
de pute part, contralieuse,  
ja apelee ne venras,  
ne ciaux qui t'aimment n'amerassent.

[...]

Quant hom mus vaut et il doit vivre,  
dout t'entremés de lui ocirre;  
quant doit avoir en son jovent  
joie, tu li taus soudement.

[...] Par fois, mais ne te proierai,  
Ains qu'il soit vespres m'ocirrai.

Des or mais haiç jou ceste vie  
Quant j'ai perdu ma douce amie.  
Molt hastivement le sivrai  
et au plus tost com ains porrai.

Ele m'ara proçainement  
en Camp Flori u el m'atent. (ll. 713-784)

**E:**

“Blancheflour!”, he seide, “Blancheflour!”

So swete a þing was neuer in boure.

Of Blancheflour is þat y meene,

For she was come of good kyn.

Lytel and mucche loueden þe

For þy goodnesse and þy beaute.

zif deþ were dalt aryzt,

We shuld be ded boþ in feere.

“Deþ”, he saide, “ful of enuye,

And of alle trechorye,

Refte þow hast me my lemman.

“Forsoth”, he saide, “þow art to blame”;

She wolde haue leuyd, and þow noldest

And fayn wolde y dye, and þow woldest. (ll.271-286)

Some lines after, the French text preserves a quite extensive passage describing The King’s unsuccessful attempt to alleviate Floris’s pain. He makes a magician call at palace, Barbarin, who can entertain and amuse his son. But Floris still laments Blancheflour’s absence, says a prayer to God and tries to suicide throwing himself into the lions’ den. He goes out miraculously safe from the den and he tries again to kill himself with a stilet. His mother, the Queen, stops him.

In the translated text just one Floris’s attempt to suicide with a knife is preserved<sup>198</sup>:

**Fr:**

Porpensa soi qu’il s’ocirroit,

car talent de vivre n’avoit.

A çou qu’il ert ensi pensans,

esgarde et vit les fosses grans

u li rois ot mis ses lions;

deus en I ot fiers et felons.

Porpensa soi que la iroit

Et dedens la fosse sauroit,

as lions se feroit manger.

La vint, ne vaut plus atargier.

Ançois que li entrast dedens,

---

<sup>198</sup> This episode is preserved only in version A of the French tradition.

Une orison fist molt dolens:

«Damedieus, peres souverains

[...] Moi et m'amie Blanceflor

Metés ensanle en Camp Flori,

Biaus sire Dieus, je vous en pri» (ll.899-924)

Un grafe trait de son grafier,

D'argent estoit, molt l'avoit cier

Por Blanceflor qui li dona

Le darrain jor k'a lui parla,

quant il en ala a Montoire.

[...] En son cuer bouter le voloit;

quant sa mere çou aperçoit,

seure li court, le grafe prent,

si le castie doucement.

Mere que mere, por morir

ne pora mais ce doel soffrir. (ll. 993-1012)

**E:**

After deeþ clepe no more y nylle,

But slee myself now y wille.

His knyf he braide out of his sheth;

Himself he wolde hauc doo to deth.

And to hert he had it smeten,

Ne had his moder it vnderzeten.

Den þe queene fel him vppon,

And þe knyf fro him noom.  
She reft him of his lytel knyf,  
And sauyd þere þe childes lyf. (ll. 287-296)

After Floris's mother saves his life, imploring his son not to commit suicide, she takes a discourse on life after death. In the English translation, instead, she limits herself to running in tears to her husband, the King, and persuading him to tell Floris the truth about Blanche flour:

**Fr:**

«Fius, fait ele, molt es enfans  
quant de ta mort es porquerans.  
[...] Se vos ensi vous ociés,  
En Camp Flori ja n'enterrés  
Ne vos ne verrés Blanceflor:  
cil cans ne reçoit pecheor.  
Infer son calenge i metroit:  
La irés, biaux fius, orendroit  
Minor, Thoas, Rodomadus,  
cil sont jugeor de la jus,  
en infer font lor jugement,  
cil vos metroient el torment,  
la u est Dido et Biblis,  
qui por amor furent ocis,  
qui par infer lor drus querant.  
[...]» (ll. 1013-1038)

**E:**

Forþ the Queene ranne, al wepying,

Tyl she com to the Kyng.

þan seide þe good lady:

“For Goddes loue, sir, mercy!

Of xxi children haue we noon

On lyue now but this oon.

And better it were she were his make,

þan he were deed for hur sake”. (ll. 297-304)

**11)** As soon as Floris learns from the Queen that Blancheflour is still alive, he thanks the Christian God with a quite extensive invocation and then he decides to leave in search of his beloved. In the English poem, this invocation to God does not appear and when Floris discovers that Blancheflour is not dead, he immediately expresses his desire to depart:

**Fr:**

«Biaus fius, fait ele, par engien,

Par le ton pere e par le mien,

Fesins cest tomblel faire ci.

[...] Nos voliemes que Blancheflor

N'eüst a toi plus nule amor,

por çou que crestiïene estoit.

[...] Fius, fait ele, por Dieu, merci!

car tot est voirs çou que je di,

cest grant doel, fius, ne maine mais,

en cest país remain en país [...]  
--Dame, fait il, dites vos voir?  
--Fius, fait ele, tel pués veoir»  
A tant la pierre ont sosleevee.  
Quant li desous ne l'a trovee,  
Diu en rent grasses et mercie  
quant sot que vive estoit s'amie.  
Quant il le sot, errant jura  
que il querre partout lira.(ll. 1063-1088)

**E:**

“Floryes, soon, glad make the,  
By þe þow shalt on lyue see.  
Florys, sone, prouȝ engynne  
Of þy faders reed and myne,  
Þis graue let we make,  
Leue sone, for thy sake,  
ȝif þow þat maide forget woldest,  
After oure reed wyf þow sholdest.”  
Now euery word she haþ him tolde,  
How þat þey þat mayden solde.  
“Is þis soth, my moder dere?”  
“Forsoth”, she seide, she is not here”  
Þe rowȝ þat [þere] was not þe mayde.  
“Now moder, y þink þat y leue may.

Ne shal y rest nyzt ne day,  
Nyzt ne day ne no stounde,  
Tyl y haue my lemmon founde.  
Hur to seken y woll wende,  
þauz it were to þe worldes ende.” (ll. 311-330)

12) The French “original” often reveals the intervention of the narrator throughout the text. He invites the readers not to be astonished in front of the power of love and to consider how love pushes men to act in a prodigious way. No intervention from the narrator is detectable in the English adaptation<sup>199</sup>:

**Fr:**

Signor, ne vos esmervilliés,  
Çou cuide faire certement  
dont s’esmercellent molt de gent. (ll.1095-1098)

The narrator goes on mentioning two philosophers, Chalcidius and Platon, who share this vision about love in their works. In the translated text there is no allusion to them:

**Fr:**

[...] C’est en Calcide et en Platon  
Que pas ne cuidera nus hom  
qu’estre puis fait çou que fera

---

<sup>199</sup> The intervention of the narrator addressing to the public can be easily found throughout the French text. Another significant example is detectable at l. 931 (*Signor, çou trouvons en l’estoire [...]*).

cil qui d'amors espris sera.<sup>200</sup> (ll. 1099-1102)

**13)** The description of the equipment that the King provides to Floris for his journey occupies in the French text seventy-seven lines (ll. 1127-1204) and is dismissed by the English translator with thirty-two (ll. 339-371): the description of the harness (saddle, reins, etc.), for example, occupies from l. 1169 to l. 1204, while in the English translation it is reduced to just some lines:

**Fr:**

Li rois li done un palefroi  
qui siens estoit, o le conroi,  
qui d'une part estoit tos blans  
de l'autre rouges comme sans.  
La soussele ert d'un paile cier  
tres bien ovree a eskekier;  
toute le sele et li arçon  
fu de la coste d'un pisson.  
[...]La couverture de la sele  
ert d'un brun paile de Castele,  
tote floree a flors d'orfrois;  
tel le voloit avoir li rois.  
[...] Li estrier valent un castel,  
d'or fin sont over a noiel.

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<sup>200</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:53, note 1) relates: "Ni dans le *Timée* (la seule œuvre de Platon connue à l'époque), ni dans le *Commentaire* qu'en a fait Chalcidius, on ne trouve rien de tel. Il y a cependant dans le *Commentaire* une citation de la *République* de Platon où il est dit qu'en songe «la part bestiale de l'homme ose n'importe quoi»."

Li lorains est molt biaux et ciers,  
Onques n'ot millor chevaliers.  
[...] Les resnes de fin or estoient  
de la u du frain departoient.  
Trestout ensi aparillié  
l'a li rois a Flore baillié. (ll.1169-1204)

**E:**

De King let sadel a palfray,  
De oon half white so mylke,  
And þat other reed so sylke.  
I ne can telle nougt  
How rychely þat sadel was wrougt  
De arson was of golde fyn,  
Stones of vertu stode peryn (ll. 364-37)

This comparative analysis enables us to gain an initial overall view of the recodification process that characterises the text in the target language.

We can firstly observe that the English poem is a radical abridged and condensed adaptation of the source text.

The marks of “popularization”, intended as the revision of the romance for a wider and more heterogeneous public, are widespread and undeniable. They involve, in particular, the reduction of descriptive passages and evocative lines from rhetorical ornament to practical function. This is clear for example in the passages describing the wonderful cup, to the description of which sixty-two lines are devoted in the French romance against the twenty-three lines in the English translation; or

in the lines describing Blancheffleur's elaborated tomb and its precious stones (*Jagonses, saffirs, calcedoines, et esmeraudes et sardoines, pelles, coraus et crisolites et diamans et ametites, et ciers bericles et fiates, jaspes, topaces et acates*) against the more elementary and essential description provided by the English translator.

Some particulars, as the reference to *maître Gaidon*, educator of the two children at court or to the Queen's sister's name, *Sebile*, and other very specific details, such as the indication of the precise age when Floris and Blancheffleur go to school (*En seul cinc ans et quinze dis*) are not mentioned in the Middle English adaptation. The English translator does not probably find them crucial or decisive elements contributing to the narrative development of the plot.

Not only the richness of details sequences but also the tender and sentimental elements are much condensed. This is for example the case of the emotional passage containing Floris's state of mind thinking of Blancheffleur, who is far away from him. While in the French original the episode is treated in a typical courtly style, in its English translation it is more closely engaged with reality and Floris's attitude to love is not conceived in abstract terms.

The motives of love and honour make the essential point but lose the sophisticated elaboration of it, particularly at the expense of the kind of psychological analysis of characters.

As GIBBS (1966:20) puts it, speaking about Middle English romances as "popular"<sup>201</sup> adaptation/translation from French or Anglo-Norman poems,

“[...] The poems come closer to our modern conception of romance as an attractive but not relay relevant fiction, which may be enjoyed on a unphilosophic level, simply as entertaining narrative.

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<sup>201</sup> With this term, Gibbs very probably refers to the tendency of Middle English romances translated from Old French poems to be adapted to suit the needs and understanding of a wider and more heterogeneous audience whose ideology revolved any more around the values nourished within the courtly society and depicted in chivalric literature.

[...] Being the romance the subtle and aristocratic form that it is, popularization will impoverish the philosophical ethos of the poem, fails to preserve the theme of spiritual education in the hero, and will leave us, at best, with a lavishly described account of picturesque adventures”.

It is yet necessary to point out that this “impoverishment” and “popularization” attributed to the English adaptation if compared with its source text could instead represent important clues which enable us to better evaluate the mechanisms of recodification and reception of the target text.

The insistence on the Christian element in the English translation is not perceptible as well as throughout the French poem: the King’s fear of the sin of killing Blancheflour because he is afraid of a God’s punishment, the extensive monologue Floris makes addressing to the Death after having learned of Blancheflour’s death, the prayers and invocations to God and the recurring motif of the *Champ Fleuri*, which implies the likelihood of a blissful life after death for all believers in Christian religion, permeate the tale preserved in the French original. In the English translation, on the other hand, the religious sequences are reduced to a few scanty lines or even removed.

This choice could be attributed to the conscious will of the translator, who condenses and, in some cases, removes all the passages religious in tone which might indeed be not appreciated or perceived as inconvenient by the kind of audience to which the new text was addressed.

The radical decrease or almost absence of the narrator’s intervention throughout the English text is another mark which contributes to characterizing the rearrangement of the translation from the source text. This aspect could reveal indeed the practise of transmission of the text itself, which in

the case of the Old French romance can be presumably identified with a minstrel's copy or we should suggest that it was taken down from recitation.<sup>202</sup>

The English text, on the contrary, seems to have been reshaped in order to be read, rather than to be listened to and this hypothesis would be strengthened by considering the study of the English textual tradition (see chapter 4) where it was seen that the romance survives in quite elaborate "library copies" or, at least, they were not primarily conceived as minstrels' rehearsals to be recited orally.

The Old French scribe's choice of alluding to some learned references, as for example that of the two philosophers Chalcidius and Platon (ll. 1099-1100), indicates that the cultural level of the addressees was rather high.

On the contrary, the analysis of the Middle English text proposed above leads us to think it probable that the translator did not mention the philosophical references, maybe because his addressees were not sufficiently educated to understand and thus appreciate such references.

### **5.1.2. Amplifications**

The cases in which an amplification of the English text is evident are less numerous compared to the previous category.

- 1) At a certain point in the narration, the English text contains an additional couplet probably inserted by the translator:

**Fr:**

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<sup>202</sup> This hypothesis has already been conjectured in chapter 3 on the basis of the results emerging from the analysis on the manuscript, textual and contextual tradition of the French manuscript.

Li marceant en sont tout lié,

Car assés i ont gaaigné.

Et li borgois est revenus,

au roi fu tos l'avoirs rendus.

La roïne s'est porpensee

Et si parla comme senee:

«Sire, fait ele, que diron

quant vostre fil Flore verrons

et quant il repairiés sera,

s'amie nos demandera?

[...]

Sire, fait ele, a moi entent:

Car faisons faire un tomblel gent,

Fais soit de marbre et de cristal,.

Et d'or et d'argent li esmal.

«Morte es Blanceflor», ce dirons,

Et nostre fil conforterons. (ll. 419-540)

**E:**

Now þese merchaundes þat may belete,

And ben glad of hur byzete,

**How let we Blanche flour be,**

**And speke of Florys in his contree.**

How is þe bu[r] gays to þe King come

With þe golde and his garysone

And haþ take þe King to wolde  
þe seluer and þe coupe of golde.  
They let make in a chirche  
A swithe feire graue wyrche [...] (ll. 201-210)

It is very likely that the English adaptor inserted these two lines in order to justify the variation of scene from that describing the selling of Blancheflour to the merchants and the following one portraying the erection of the false tomb ordered by the King. It seems that this couplet represents an expedient used by the translator to give continuity to the story and enhance the cohesion of the text from a narrative point of view.

- 2) In the frame story, Floris asks his father to make Blancheflour leave with him to Montargis. In the source text the hero addresses the King with anger; in the English poem, besides conveying irritation and impatience, Floris weeps in front of him:

**Fr:**

Floires iriés li respondi:  
«Sire, fait il, que puet çou ester  
Que Blanceflor lais et mon mestre?  
Blanceflor pri que viegne o moi» (ll. 346-249)

**E:**

Florys wept before þe Kyng,  
And seide: “Sir, without lesyng,  
For my harme out ze me sende.  
Now she ne myzt with me wende,  
Now we ne mot togeder goo,

Al my wele is turned to woo". (ll. 83-88)

Adding the verb *wept*, the English translator reduces Floris's explosion of anger, highlighting rather his pain and frustration. The French copyst would probably have considered unsuitable for a prince, i.e. a person belonging to the high aristocracy, to be depicted crying and weeping in front of the King. The English adapter, on the other hand, does not judge inappropriate to represent Floris's crying to his audience, probably because he thought that this detail would not have been considered scandalous or shameful by the public he addressed to (as, on the contrary, it possibly occurred with the audience of the French poem).

- 3) While Floris's stay in Montargis, the King is informed of his son's mood and intentions by the chamberlain. In the English poem the translator amplifies the sequence and specifies how the chamberlain gets in contact with the King, i.e. through a letter:

**Fr:**

Li cambrelens au roi le mande.

Il en ot doel et ire grande.

Del venir li done congiés.

La roïne apela iriés [...] (ll. 397-400)

**E:**

Þe chamberleyn sent þe King to wete

His sones state al ywrete.

Þe King ful sone þe waxe to-brake

For to wete what it spake.

He begynneth to change his moode,  
And wel sone he vnderstode.  
And with wreth he cleped þe Queene [...] (ll. 131-137)

In this case the English translator adds the detail of the letter just to make clear how the King was informed by his chamberlain of his son's condition. The amplification does not contribute to the development of the plot but it specifies the King's reaction after having found out his son's deterioration. The English writer explicated this detail, as he probably wanted to clarify and enrich the interconnection between the King's actions.

As was seen above, the amplifications of the English redaction (E) constitute a very small group of examples. They do significantly affect neither the narrative sequence nor the meaning of the story or do not even play a crucial role in the development of the plot. They can be rather traced back to the intention of the translator to enhance the cohesion of the text from a narrative point of view, including some details which are useful but not essential for the interpretation of the story.

### 5.1.3. Substitutions

- 1) The Middle English version preserved in E opens telling the childhood of the two protagonists. It narrates that the Christian lady, Blanche flour's mother, fed and raised them both until the age of seven years. In the French original the age until which she would have nourished the two children is two years:

**Fr:**

Ensemble nori les enfans

Tant que cascuns ot bien deus ans; (ll. 189-190)

**E:**

So longe she fedde hem in feere

Pat þey were of elde of seuen zere. (ll. 5-6)

The different indication of the year could be explained with more than one guess. The writer could have found the number *seven* in the version from which he copied his text and he just limited himself to reproducing it; if the story had been handed down through different stages of (oral) transmission (as was supposed in chapter 4), it would be probable that it underwent significant changes and transformations, such as the variation of this detail; or it can be simply explained as a mistake due to the copyist's distraction or misunderstanding: the French *deus* contains the two central vowels *eu*, the same ones in the English *seuen*.<sup>203</sup> Another plausible hypothesis is worth mentioning. The translator could have decided to correct this element intentionally on the basis of the symbolic value of the number *seven* in the Medieval culture (seven are the wonders of the Middle Ages, seven are the liberal arts or *artes liberales*, seven the days that God needs to complete his work of Creation).

The choice of substituting the number *two* with *seven* could thus be ascribed to the translator's superstition, as the number *seven* was considered at that time as symbol of fortune, prosperity and good chance.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> It is well known that the scribes' practice of copying consisted in a very standard procedure: they first read one or more lines together, memorized them and finally reproduced them in writing. It was thus common that in the act of copying, scribal errors easily escaped, mainly due to distraction or misreading. For a more complete depiction of the practice of copying in Middle Ages, see LUISELLI FADDA (2000:149-162).

<sup>204</sup> For a more accurate presentation of the Medieval Number Symbolism, see HOPPER (1938).

2) In comparison with the French original, one should notice that the noun *mescine*, referred to Blanche flour, is substituted in the English translation by the term *mayde*. The French name implies a precise connotative meaning, referring to a woman of low class origin<sup>205</sup>; *mayde*, on the other hand, simply defines the heroine with the neutral and impartial term *girl*<sup>206</sup>. This practice is detectable throughout the whole text:

**Fr:**

A la mescine veut aidier  
et si son signor consillier  
c'a son signor puisse plaisir  
et Blanceflor de mort garir. (ll. 309-312)

**E:**

þe Queene answered þan and seid,  
And þougt with hur reed  
Saue þe mayde fro þe deed. (ll. 52-54)

The French copyist probably wanted to highlight the inferior social rank of Blanche flour compared to the royal lineage of Floris and his family.

Using the term *mayden*, the English translator rather chooses to reduce the social gap between the two protagonists. He does not feel the need to foreground Floris's lineage and to use a term which

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<sup>205</sup> The glossary provided by D'ORBIGNY (2003:218) at the end of his edition proposes the following definition for *mescine*: "désigne un enfant ou un adolescent de sexe feminine par opposition au *mescin* (comme *vaslet* par opposition à *pucele*, mais ces deux derniers termes peuvent être connotés 'de naissance noble', alors que *mescine* s'applique plutôt à des êtres de statut social inférieur)".

<sup>206</sup> At the entry *mayden*, the glossary at the end of DE VRIES's edition suggests: *maiden, girl*.

denigrates Blancheflour's social condition, thus exalting more or less implicitly Floris's and his family's.

#### 5.1.4. Reformulations

- 1) In the source text the King often makes use of harsh and brutal images. When he suggests the Queen to kill Blancheflour, he expressly asserts that he wants to slit Blancheflour's throat. The English translator, instead, limits himself to state that he wants the young girl dead; he thus lightens the bloody representation portrayed in the source text:

**Fr:**

«Certes, fait il, la damoisele  
Mar acointa ceste novele!  
Puet ester que par sorcerie  
A de mon fil la drüerie.  
Faites le moi tost demander,  
Ja li ferai le cief cauper [...]. (ll. 401-406)

**E:**

He begynneth to change his moode,  
And wel sone he vnderstode,  
And with wreth he cleped þe Queene,  
And tolde hur alle his teene,  
And with wrap spake und sayde:  
“Let do bring forþ þat mayde!  
Fro þe body þe heued shal goo”.

Þenne was þe Quene ful woo. (ll. 135-142)

The translator's choice to diminish the cruelty of some images described in the French text is detectable throughout the English adaptation. He could maybe have thought that such brutality and violence would not have been particularly appreciated by his public.

The French writer, on the contrary, tends to emphasise the cruel and violent side of the poem, probably whether because cruelty and violence match up in the collective imagination to power and control, thus exalting the King's authority, or because the Medieval audience of the Court (to which the poem was probably addressed) was used to such strong and sharp images to be represented in oral and theatrical performances played at Court.

- 2) When the King and the Queen tell Floris that Blancheflour is dead, he immediately asks where she is buried and begs them to bring him to her. In the French romance it is just the King who accompanies Floris to the girl's tomb, while in the translated text both sovereigns take him to her:

**Fr:**

Li rois a la tombe l'en maine. (l. 703)

**E:**

Þeder þey him brougt on hyze. (l. 259)

The English translator extends the task of bringing Floris to Blancheflour's tomb also to the Queen. The role played by the Queen in the narrative action is reduced to a few interventions in the French poem, where mainly the King's military enterprises and authoritative decisions are put in the foreground. The English translator tends instead not to emphasize this aspect as much as it is in the

source text: The King's harsh pronouncements and undisputed resolutions of the French poem become more reasonable and moderate in the English romance, where the emperor takes his decisions with firmness but mostly after had consulted his wife, the Queen.

The English translator seems to devote to her -and more or less implicitly to the female role in general- a wider narrative space to move in and a more effective decisional-power.

This choice could be maybe related to the receptional context of the text and be ascribed to the fact that a wide group within the audience of the English romance was made up by women.

Some lines earlier, the same passage describes Floris's breakdown to the revelation that his beloved Blancheflour has died. The French original repeats the same indication within a short distance. The English text does not only provide a structural reworking of the sequence, but he also deletes the repetition, as he probably judged it superfluous for the development of the plot:

**Fr:**

**Il s'est pasmés en molt poi d'eure**

**trois fois**; quant revint, forment pleure:

«La mors, fait il, por coi m'oublie,

quant perdu ai ensi m'amie?

Dame, fait il, car me menés

a se tombe, se le savés»

Li rois a la tombe l'en maine.

Flores i va a molt grant paine

et vit l'escrit de Blanceflor

a cui Flores ot grant amor.

**trois fois le list, lors s'a pasmé**

**ains c'un seul mot eüst parlé.** (ll. 695-708)

**A:**

Flores, þat was so feire and gent,

Sownyd þere verament.

[...] When he awoke and speke myzt,

Sore he wept and sore he syzt,

And seide to his moder ywys:

“Lede me þere þat mayde is.”

Þeder þey him brouzt on hyze;

For care and sorow he wold dyze.

As sone as he to þe graue com,

Sone þere beheld he þen

And þe letters bagen to rede,

Þat þus spake and þus seide:

“Here lyth swete Blanche flour,

Þat Florys louyd par amour”.

**Pre sithes Florys sownydde nouth;**

Ne speke he myzt not with mouth. (ll. 245-268)

- 3) In the English translation, the passage in which Floris comes back from Montargis and asks Blanche flour's mother where his beloved is, is a bit amplified and reworked. The English translator specifies some lines earlier that the Christian lady gained knowledge of the King and Queen's machination and that the King himself ordered her to make Floris believe that her daughter is dead:

**Fr:**

La mere a la mescine treuve  
a cui son corage descuevre:  
«Dame, fait il, u est m' amie?»  
Cele respont: «El n' i est mie.  
--U est? --Ne sai.—Vos l' apelés!  
--Ne sai quell part. --Vos me gabés.  
Celés la vos? --Sire, nonal.  
--Par Dieu, fait il. Çou est gran mal!»  
Quant cele mais celer nel puet,  
pitié ot grant, plorer l' estuet.  
En plourant il a dit: «Morte est.  
--Puet ester voirs?—Oil, voirs est.  
--U est li cors, u? – El mostier.  
--Et quant fu morte? – Uit jors et ier  
Que si est morte Blanceflour,  
Voire, sire, por vostre amor.»

**Elle mentoit a essient,**

**C'au roi en ot fait sairement.** (ll. 669- 686)

**E:**

Þe maydenys moder he asked ryzt :

“Where is Blauncheflour, my swete wyzt?”

“Sir”, she seide, “forsothe, ywys,

I ne woot where she is.”

**She bepouzt hur on þat lesyng**

**Þat was ordeyned byfoore þe King.**

“þow gabbest me”, he seyde þoo,

“þy gabbing doþ me mucche woo.

Tel me where my leman be.”

Al wepyng seide þenne shee:

“Sir”, shee seide, “deed”. “Deed!”, seide he.

“Sir”, she seide, “forsothe, gee!”

“Allas, when died þat swete wyzt?”

“Sir,withynne þis fourteenyzt

þe erth was leide hur aboue,

And deed she was for thy loue”. (ll. 229-244)

The translator maybe decided to specify this detail earlier (the fact that Blanche flour’s mother actually knows that her daughter is not dead but she was ordered to make Floris believe that she is) for reasons of clarity of the plot. The passage describing the King and Queen’s conspiracy against Floris is indeed a bit intricate and to anticipate this piece of information could actually be helpful for the reader to better comprehend and thus appreciate the storyline.

- 4) In the passage describing the equipment that the king provides Floris for his journey, the red and white colors apply to the saddle of l. 364. In the source text, they apply to the horse itself:

**Fr:**

Li rois li done un palefroi

qui siens estoit, o le conroi,

qui d’une part estoit tos blans

de l'autre rouges comme sans. (ll. 1169-1172)

**E:**

[...] Þe King let sadel a palfray,

Þe oon half whiteso mylke,

And þat other reed so sylke. (ll. 364-366)

A plausible hypothesis is that the reformulation could have been brought about by a mistake made by the translator while reading the manuscript he used as model. He probably misread the passage and ascribed the qualities of the horse to the saddle.

As was seen above, the most expansive category is that containing the omissions. The English translator shortened long descriptive passages and reduced most of the courtly and chivalrous elements characterizing the source text. Despite the considerable degree of condensation, it is important to note that in the essential features of the narrative, the translator follows his original closely, so that the main outline of the story is preserved as accurately in English as in French. The English poet has not expanded or amplified the text by adding further details or by introducing personal reflections. He rather displayed the crucial storyline in a shortened form.

As far as the cases of substitution and reformulations are concerned, most of them seem to derive from the need of the translator to adapt elements and aspects of the source language and culture to the English tradition. Structural reworking could be considered reformulations introduced in order to make a passage clearer or to explain the chain of actions in those lines of the French "original" which were probably judged to be a little ambiguous or confusing.

Some of them might represent, besides, important clues which enable us to better evaluate the context of reception of the English translation and to make reliable conjectures on the kind of audience to which the text could be addressed.

## 5.2. Fr A<sup>207</sup> – A<sup>208</sup> /C<sup>209</sup>

The rest of the analysis will take into consideration the Auchinleck manuscript as Middle English version to be compared to the French original. When it lacks some lines or it is visibly corrupt, we will rely upon C.

### 5.2.1. Omissions

The English translation preserves a great number of omissions: long descriptive sequences preserved in the source text have been extensively reduced or completely cut out in the target text. As the cases of omissions are too many to be mentioned here (the English romance preserves more or less one third of the French text), I will limit myself to indicating some of the most striking and significant examples.

- 1) As soon as Floris enters the city of Babylon, he feels lost and confused. At this point the French “original” contains a long passage (ll. 1611- 1650) describing a painful struggle in Floris’s heart through an imaginary debate between *Savoir* and *Amours*: he is deliberating with himself whether

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<sup>207</sup> Paris, BNF, fr. 375.

<sup>208</sup> Ms. Advocates’ 19.2.1, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (the Auchinleck manuscript).

<sup>209</sup> Cambridge University Library Gg.iv.27.2.

he should reveal his identity or not. Characteristically, the English adapter left out the whole passage, his only interest being the incidents of the story:

**Fr:**

Savoir se met en son corage,

qui li ramembre son parage

et com li oirre folement.

Fait il: «Tu ne connois la gent,

Flores, ton conseil u diras,

comment oirres et que quis as?

Se t'en descuevres, fol seras,

U soit a certes u a gas! [...]» (ll. 1611-1618)

- 2) When Floris arrives at the bridge porter's (Daris's) house, he is welcomed with copious food and delicious wine. The French passage devoted to the description of the dinner is very detailed. The English translator summarizes the whole passage in a couplet:

**Fr:**

De boin mangier ont a fusion

et vollilles et venison.

Lardés de cerf et de sengler

ont a mangier sans refuser,

grues et gantes et hairons,

pertris, bistardes et plongons;

tout en orent a remanant.

Quant del mangier sont soffissant,

adont fait aporter le fruit  
li ostes Daires par deduit,  
puns d egrenat, figes et poires  
--et avoec fu molt boins li boires!--,  
Peskes, castaignes a plenté,  
car molt en ont en cel regné. (ll. 1685-1698)

**A:**

Of fischss, of flessch, of tender bred,  
Bope of whit win and of red. (ll. 183-184)

The same couplet appears also a few lines earlier in the English translation (ll. 103-104) when the text describes the dinner that the host makes prepared for Floris. The English adaptor retained the same couplet and use it again eighty lines after, maybe for the sake of convenience .

- 3) The source text provides a very detailed account of Babylon. Daris, the tollkeeper, describes every part of the city, included the tower where Blancheflour is kept, and gives Floris advise as to how to reach her. The whole passage is one hundred-fifty lines long (ll. 1795-1944). The English translator reduces it to fifty lines (ll. 221-272):

**Fr:**

Babiloine, si com jou pens,  
dure vint liues de tos sens.  
Li mur qui le clot n'est pas bas;  
tot entor est fais a compass

et est fais trestous d'un mortier  
qui ne doute pikois d'acier,  
si a quinze toises de haut;  
de nule part be crient assaut.

En tot entor a set vins portes:

Tors a desus larges et fortes.

[...] En Babiloine ça dedens

A tors faites plus se set cens  
u mainent li baron case.

[...] En miliu de ceste cité

A une tor d'antiquité,

cent toises haute et cent lee,

roonde comme keminee;

tote est de vert quarrel de marbre

covert a vause tot sans arbre,

hourdee amont comme clokier

li topins est desus d'or mier.

[...] li pilier sont trestout de marbre

Et de plaitoine est la closure,

d'un arbre cier qui tostans dure;

de myrre et aussi de benus

sont les fenestres tot li plus.[...] (ll. 1795-1874)

**A:**

Abouten Babiloine, wigouten wene,

Sexti longemilen and tene,  
 And ate walle þar beþ ate  
 Seuen siþe twenty gate.  
 Twenti toures þer bezinne,  
 Pat euerich dai cheeping is inne;  
 [...] An hundred toures also þerto  
 Bez in þe borewe, and somdel mo  
 [...]And in þe bourh, amide þe rizt,  
 Per stant a riche tour, [I] þe aplizt  
 A þousand taisen he his heize,  
 Wo-so it bi-alt, fer J negze,  
 And an hundred taises he is wid,  
 And imaked wiz mochel prid  
 Of lim and of marbelston; [...] (ll. 221-245)<sup>210</sup>

- 4) The description of the Emir's garden is the great set-piece of the courtly French version. It can be still found in the English poem, though the passage is less than half the length:

**Fr:**

Li vergiers est et biaux et grans,  
 nus n'est si biaux ne si vaillans.  
 De l'une part est clos de mur

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<sup>210</sup> As the number of lines in question would occupy too much space here, I just limited myself to citing the most significant ones, i.e. those which better show the peculiarity in the kind of details of the source text if compared with the target text.

Tot paint a or et a asur,  
Et desus, sor cascun cretel,  
Divers de l'autre a un oise;  
[...] Quant li oisel ont grignor vent,  
sdont cantent plus doucement,  
et el vergier, au tans seri,  
des oisiaus I a si douc cri,  
et tant de faus et tant de vrais,  
merles et calendres et gais  
et estorniaus et rosignos,  
et pinçonés et espringos  
et autres oisiaus qui i sont  
qui par le vergier joie font,  
[...] De l'autre part, ce m'est avis,  
Court uns flueves de Paradis  
[...] En icele eve de manieres  
Truevë on precieuses pieres;  
Saffirs I a et calcidoines,  
Boines jagonses et sardoines,  
Rubis et jaspes et cristaus  
Et topasses et boins esmaus  
[...] Li vergiers est tostans floris  
Et des oisiaus I a grans cris.  
Il n'a soussiell arbre tant cier,

[...] Poivre, canele et garingal,  
encens, girofle et citoual  
et autre espisses assés  
i a, qui flairent molt soués. (ll. 1961-2012)

**A:**

[...] An brenge hem into on orchard,  
Ʒe fairest of al middelhard.  
Ʒer is foulen song;  
Men miȝte libben Ʒer among.  
About Ʒe orchard goƷa wal;  
Ʒe werste ston is cristal.  
Ʒer man mai sen on Ʒe ston  
Mochel of Ʒis werldes wisdom.  
J a welle Ʒer springez inne  
Ʒat is wrowt wiȝ mochel ginne.  
Ʒe welle is of mochel pris;  
Ʒe strem com fram Paradis.  
Ʒe grauel in Ʒe grounde of precieuse stone,  
J of vertu iwis echone:  
Of saphires and of sardoines,  
Of oneches and of calsidoinis. (ll. 282- 297)

- 5) The lord of the house where Floris stops to gather news on Blancheflour reveals to the young hero that she has been brought to Babylon:

**Fr:**

Cil qui l'acaterent disoient  
k'en Babiloine l'en menroient,  
a l'amiral tant la vendroient  
qu'il au double i gaigneroient.» (ll. 1308-1310)

**A:**

To Babiloyne þai wille hire bring,  
J selle hire to Kaiser oþer to king. (ll. 51-52)

The English translator leaves out the information of the gain value, probably because he judges this indication to be redundant. This detail has been actually already explicated some lines earlier, in the passage describing the golden cup given in exchange of Blancheflour to the skilled merchant sent by the King.<sup>211</sup>

- 6) The quite extensive sequence in which Daris tells Floris about the city of Babylon, (accurately describing the Emir's palace and its orchard) and advises him how to enter the impenetrable Tower where Blancheflour is kept prisoner by the Emir, is characterized in the source text by the narrator's

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<sup>211</sup> Cfr. E 181-186. This passage is actually contained in the first part of the story preserved in E. My hypothesis would reveal to be true only if the copyist of A had access to the first section of the poem. According to my conjecture, A would have preserved the first lines of the poem (today contained only in E) and would have been later eradicated of them by reason of the supposed numerous stages of (oral) transmission of the text. This supposition would be strengthened if considering the stemmatic hypothesis of the English manuscript tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour* (ch. 7), where A and E could very probably belong to the same tradition, and descend from the same antecedent (*a*). Another plausible reason for this omission could be ascribed to the translator's intention to eliminate those elements which are simply not necessary for the development of the plot.

intervention; he introduces passages, steps in with personal comments, makes observations and remarks. His function is that of holding the listener's attention turning it to some particular episodes and to occasionally clarify some passages, not only for Floris's convenience-to whom the narrator is addressing directly within the narrative-but maybe also for the free-standing audience which is listening to/reading the text.

This is not detectable in the English adaptation, where Daris does not assume the role of storyteller as much clearly as in the source text and does not intervene here and there with personal reflections or comments.

He introduces the passage describing the Emir's garden and its enchanting atmosphere only in the French "original":

**Fr:**

**Or devés del vergier oïr,  
por coi les fait illuec venir.**

Li vergiers est et biaux et grans,  
Nun n'est si biaux ne si vaillans. [...] (ll. 1959-1962)

**A:**

Panne scholle men fechche doun of þe stage  
Alle þe maidens of parage,  
An brengre hem into on orchard,  
Þe fairest of al middelhard. [...] (ll. 280-283)

**C:**

And, Floriz, I mai þe telle fore,  
Hu scchal beon his Quene icore.

All þe maidens of parage,  
Me schal bringe adun of þe stage,  
And leden hem into on orchard,  
þe fairest of al þe middellard. [...] (ll. 267-272)

He intervenes with spontaneous comments and takes an active part in telling the story:

**Fr:**

[...] De l'autre part, **ce m'est avis**,  
Court uns fleuves de Paradis  
Qui Eufrates est apelés. [...] (ll. 1987-1989)

**Fr:**

[...] Un arbre I a desus planté,  
plus bel ne virent home né;  
[...] Par grant engien l'arbres i siet,  
Car li arvres est tos vermeus.  
De çou ot cil molt bons conseus  
Qui le planta k'a l'asseoir  
Fu fais l'engiens, **si com j'espoir**. (ll. 2025-2034)<sup>212</sup>

Every morning the Emir uses to summon two maidens from their rooms who fetch him water, basin and towels to serve him. That morning is Clarice and Blancheflour's turn. Blancheflour, lying in bed with Floris, has fallen asleep. Clarice has the task to protect them. In the dialogue between

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<sup>212</sup> Another very significative example of the narrator's intervention could be detected at Fr. ll. 2053-2054 (*Oïr pöés molt grant merveille/a cui nule ne s'apareille.*)

Clarice and the Emir, who is wondering why Blanche flour is still in her room, Clarice tries to justify her absence. The source text provides a couplet revealing his personal reflections:

**Fr:**

[...] Quand le vit: «U est Blanceflor? »

[...] En Gloris n'ot que porpenser:

«Par foi, ci le cuidai trover,

sire, car ains de moi leva.

Quant n'est venue, ja venra.»

**Venue fust s'ele peüst,**

**s'autre oquison trové n'eüst!** (ll. 2578-2586)

**A:**

Pe Ameral asked after Blaunche flour,

Whi and wharfore zhe ne come,

As hi was woned to done.

“zhe was arisen a rich were;

Ich wende her hauen ifonden here. [...] (ll. 601-605)

A similar case occurs when Floris and Blanche flour are standing in front of the Emir waiting to be judged. The French text provides a quite extensive passage describing the physical aspects of the two children, focusing on Floris's beauty. The narrator intervenes, tells the story in first person and makes the public know his point of view. The English text, on the other hand, condenses the passage in a few lines and does not reveal the narrator's thoughts.

**Fr:**

Ses eages fu de quinze ans

Et neporquant assés fu grans.

Cief ot bien fait et cringe bloie,

Desi au braiel si baloie,

front par mesure, molt ert blans,

plus biaux ne fu nus hom vivans.

Si surcil sont brun et petit,

Onques nus hom plus bel ne vit.

[...] Sa face resanle soleus

Quant au matin apert vermeus

[...] Grailles par flans et grans par pis,

la car blanche com flors de lis,

bras ot cras, mains blances com nois.

**Je ne cuit que** voiés des mois

Nisun plus bel de son eage,

Plus fort, plus vaillant ne plus sage.[...] (ll. 2859-2880)

**A:**

[...] þer nas non so sterne man

Þat þise children loked vpan,

Þat þai ne wolde alle ful fawe

Here iugement haue wizdrawe. (ll. 724-727)

As was seen above, in the French text the narrator inserted here and there his personal comments, as if he would have thought aloud and/or would have addressed straight to his public. His intervention throughout the text gives the narrative a more lively and dynamic outline, where the storyteller -at a

certain point identified with Daris- contributes to involve the listener/reader into the dynamics of the story.

The English adapter chooses instead to give continuity to the telling and conceives a more linear and uniform –sometimes flat- narrative structure, where the narrator’s intervention is radically reduced or even missing.

This element might well represent an important clue strengthening the hypothesis that while the French poem was probably destined to be performed orally at Court, its English version was maybe addressed to a single reader who enjoyed it silently or recited by a family’s member to a very restricted group of people within the domestic environment.<sup>213</sup>

7) In the following passage, the Emir has just find out that Floris entered the tower, came into Blancheflour’s bedroom and slept with her. He is furious with anger and menaces the young lovers to put them to death. In the French’’original’’ the Emir addresses to Blancheflour with a very rude language:

**Fr:**

Il en a Flore a raison mis:

«Qui estes qui tan testes bris

k’osastes entrer en ma tour

et coucier avoec Blanceflor?

Par tos les dieus a cui j’aour,

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<sup>213</sup> This supposition is inferred on the basis of the results emerging from the analysis on the assumed audience and receptional context of ms. A (paragraph 4.1) and will be strengthened by considering other deviations of the English romance from its source text, such as the rendering of direct passage into reported speech (see paragraph 5.2.4.)

ancui mores a deshonor!

**Ocirrai vos et la putain,**

ançois qu'escapés, de ma main» (ll. 2683-2689)

**A:**

Do bispak þe Ameral bold

Wordes þat scholde sone bi told:

“Sai me now, þou belami,

Who made þe so hardi

For to come into mi tour,

To ligge þer bi Blaauncheflour?

To wroþerhale ware ze bore;

ze schollen þolie dep þerfore.” (ll. 638- 645)

It is noticeable here that the translator judged the Emir's words as utterly inadequate. He omitted the accusatory words used by the King to refer to Blancheflour and limited himself to commenting on the unfortunate fate of the two children, who are going to be killed.

- 8) In the passage describing the ceremony through which the Emir chooses his new wife every year, the French writer uses a quite ambiguous expression, which could be implicitly related to the erotic sphere:

**Fr:**

Et se il a o soi pucele

que il mieus aime et soit plus bele,

sor li fait par encantement  
la flor caïr a son talent.  
D'ui en un mois li jours sera  
que ses barons assanlera,  
tot icil qui sont de sa geste,  
car a cel jor tenra sa feste.  
Banceflor dist k'adont prendra,  
ses totes autres ciere l'a;  
es set vins n'a si bele flor,  
por çou le veut prendre a oissor.

**Il desire molt son servise,**

tote s'entente a en li mise; (ll. 2069-2082)

**A:**

J gif þer ani maiden is  
Ðat þamerail halt of mest pris,  
Ðe flour schal on here be went  
Pourth art and þourgh enchantement.  
Þous he cheseþ þourz þe flour,  
J euere we herknez when hit be Blancheflour. (ll. 318-323)

The translator did not only reduce the passage but also omitted the equivocal expression used by the French writer. He could have probably recognized the ambiguous value of the words used in the source text and found them unsuitable or inappropriate to the context in which they are employed.

*Il desire molt son servise* could indeed refer to the every-day service that Blancheflour and Clarice accomplish for the Emir, i.e. fill his basin with water and provide him towels, but it could also allude to an erotic reading. The emir has physical relationships just with the “lawful” wife of the current year, which would explain his impatience when he is in love with another of his virgins.

- 9) A very extensive passage preserving Floris’s departure from Daris, his first contact with the tower porter and their lengthy play at chess is completely left out in the English translation. Whereas the source text carefully describes Floris winning the porter’s good will by losing to him at chess and bribing him with the precious cup, the middle English adaptation just relates that Floris managed to gain the porter’s confidence (“*pou art mi man*”, l. 398), as Daris previously suggested him to do:

**Fr:**

[...] Es vos l’uissier qui l’arasonne

Si roidement que tot l’estone:

«Estese spie u traïtour

qui si espîés nostre tour?

--Sire, dist il, naie, par foi,

mais por içou l’esgar et voi

[...] Cil sot parler tant ricement,

et cil le vit tant bel et gent,

por çou k’en lui vit tel biauté,

tote entrelaist sa cruauté

et dist:« Ne sanlés pas espie»

De jüer as eskés l’envie. (ll. 2179-2198)

[...] Quant Flores voit sa convoitise,  
es poins li a la coupe mise,  
et dist: «Pas ne la vos vendrai,  
mais par amor le vos donrai,  
par çou qu'il m'ert gerredonés  
se mon besoing ja mais veés. »  
Cil prent la coupe et puis li jure  
k'en lui server metra sa curee. (ll. 2243-2250)

**A:**

Nou also Florice haþiwrowt,  
Also Darie him haþ itawt,  
Pat þourgh his gold and his garsome  
De porter is his man bicome. (ll. 394-397)

10) The French writer often uses words or expressions alluding to the feudal tradition which the English adaptor does not repeat in his translation.

In the source text, when the Emir makes his barons call and tells them how he discovered Floris and Blancheflour in bed together, he says that he would have wanted to challenge in duel the young hero:

**Fr:**

Mes cambrelens por li ala.  
Un jovencel o li trova  
dormant, cuida que fust pucele.  
Eneslepas m'en dist novele.

Jou i alai com plus tost poi;  
quant le trovai, grant ire en oi,  
**d duel qu'en oi ne peuç mot dire.**

Eneslepas le vauç ocirre. (ll. 2745-2751)

**A:**

Bifore hire bed myself I com,  
J fond bi hire an naked grom.  
Po þai were me so loþe,  
I þouzte to han iqueld hem boþe;  
Ich was so wroç and so wod,  
J çit ich wizdrouç mi mod, (ll. 674-679)

After he informed his barons on the events succeeding the days before, the Emir asks them advices on how he can avenge himself for the offense he suffered:

**Fr:**

Signor, oï avés mon conte.  
Par jugement vengiés **ma honte**. (ll. 2759-2760)

**A:**

[...] Fort ich haue after çou isent  
To awreke me þourç iugement.  
Nou ze witen hou hit is agon,  
Awreke me swiþe of mi fon. (ll. 680-684)

The source text goes on describing the passage in which the king's barons and dukes pronounce their opinion on how the Emir should judge the two lovers and thus proceed with the final sentence. After one duke's proposal to hear what Floris and Blancheflour have to say before condemn them to death, another king, who visibly disagrees with the former, starts to speak with fury. His intervention is not mentioned in the target text:

**Fr:**

De l'autre part est dans Yiliers,

rois de Nubie fors et fiers:

«Dans rois, fait il, foi que vos doi,

Del tot en tot pas ne l'otroi. [...] (ll. 2771-2774)

As D'ORBIGNY points out (2003:59, note 2), *Dans* is an archaic title generally used to connote a sovereign in feudal sense:

“Le titre archaïque *dan, dam, dant* (domine) est en général ironique, méprisant ou brutal. Souvent employé dans les apostrophes épiques, il a des connotations féodales, qui s'opposent aux apostrophes courtoises (*biaus sire, frère, amis*)”.

11) The quite extensive passage in the French text describing Floris's ceremonial of baptism, which is then extended to his subjects, is completely left out in the English redaction. This last one just contains an allusion to Floris's conversion but does not mention the religious ritual.

**Fr:**

Flores se fait crestïener

et après a roi coroner.

Por Blanceflor, la soie amie,  
mena puis crestiienne vie.  
Trois archevesques ot o soi  
qui sont de crestieene loi.  
Sa corone li presignierent  
Et saintement le baptisierent.  
Quant il se fu crestiiené,  
tos ses barons a apelés,  
si lor prie par boine amor  
qu'il croient Diu nostre signor.  
[...] Trestot si baron li pluisor  
Se baptisierent a cel jor;  
[...] Qui le baptesme refusoit  
Ne en Diu croire ne voloit,  
Flores les faisoit escorcier,  
ardoir en fu u detrencier. (ll. 3307-332)

**A:**

J vnderfeng Cristendom of prestes honed,  
J þonkede God of alle his sonde. (ll. 852-853)

The English adaptor probably found it inappropriate to copy the passage as it stands in the source text. The Old French harsh lines seem indeed out of context if we consider the episode in which they are inserted. A confident atmosphere prevails in the scene, displaying all constructive feelings,

happiness, generosity and tolerance: Floris and Blanceflour have indeed just returned to their homeland and they are crowned King and Queen, acclaimed by their subjects.

The source text's insistence on the need to embrace the Christian religion and to extend the ritual of baptism to the entire kingdom could be a cunning way to release Floris's father from the massacre of Christian pilgrims that he committed in the prologue of the story, preserved only in the French "original".

The English adaptor would thus have had no reasonable motives to maintain this passage, as he probably judged it unnecessary or superfluous for the development of the plot.

### 5.2.2. Amplifications

- 1) A recurrent amplification one should note throughout the Middle English redaction is the allusion to the motif of *gyn/gin(nne)*.

As BARNES (1993:112-115) outlines, *gyn* plays an important role in the development of the romance of *Floris and Blanche flour*. Floris loses and is reunited with Blanche flour through *gyn* and strategy: from the King and Queen's plan to put an end to the *liason* between their son and Blanche flour giving birth to the elaborate engine of her faked death (the false tomb) to the strategy through which Floris is smuggled into the tower in a basket of flowers.

The action of the story takes place within a framework of trick and subterfuge, beginning with the machination of Floris's parents, continuing with a succession of helper-figures who provide the protagonist with advice (*red*) and *gyn*: the burgess with whom he lodges at his first port of call endorses the ability of his sworn brother, Daris, *to wissen 7 reden arisz* (A 1.164); Daris devises the plan whereby Floris intentionally loses at chess in order to win the cooperation of the tower porter,

suggesting him to pretend to be an engineer (*J sai þou art a ginour*, l. 346); and Clarice, Blancheflour's friend, temporarily manages to conceal Floris's presence in the tower. The English narrative celebrates the motif of gyn, making machination and plotting a focal point of the story.

The following passage preserves the lines in which the host suggests Floris to stop at his sworn brother's house, Daris, as he would have been able to advise and tell him all that he need to know once entered in Babylon.

The whole passage is preserved only in C, although all the other English witnesses share the couplet lacking in the source text and probably added by the author of the presumed English archetype:

**Fr:**

En Babiloine est rices hom,

Grant tour I a et fort maison.

De nos deus pors somes compaing,

par mi partomes le gaaing.

Icest anel li porterés

et de moie part li dirés

qu'il vos conseut mius qu'il porra. (ll. 1567-1573)

**C:**

In Babilloine oþer wher a beo,

þat he miȝte hire iseo

**Hu he miȝte mid sumne ginne,**

**His lemman Blauncheflur awinne.**

þanne sede þe burgeis,

þat was hende J curtais:

“At Babilloine ate frume

To one brigge þu schalt cume”. (ll. 129-136)

**A:**

[...] Hou e mizte wiz sum ginne,

De faire maiden to him awinne.<sup>214</sup>(ll. 157-158)

**E:**

[...] ʒif he myzt with any gynne

þat feire may to him wyne. (ll.497-498)

Another occasion in which the English adaptor highlights the important role played by *gyn* is when Floris is warned by Daris that the city of Babylon cannot be penetrated with any means or stratagems. This is rather a case of reformulation rather than adjunction, as the corresponding lines in the source text already preserve an allusion to *engien* yet, whereas the French writer lists a wider number of expediences (*force, por avoir, engien* and *encantement*), the English adaptor limits himself to mention just two of them, *strenge* and *ginne*:

**Fr:**

Il n’i a roi en cest païs,

se autretel plait avoit quis

qui par force ne por avoir

ja l’akievast, si com j’espoir,

ne engien ne encantement

a li ravoir ne vaut niënt. (ll. 1781-1786)

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<sup>214</sup> The same couplet with some formal variations occurs at A ll. 209-210, 406-407, 806-807.

**A:**

Ʒat alƷerrichchest kyng

Ne dorste beginner swich a Ʒing; (ll. 217-218)

[...] Ʒat alderest feeblest tour

Wolde kepe an emperor,

To comen al Ʒer wizinne,

NeiƷer wiȝ strengȝe ne wiȝ ginne. (ll. 231-234)

Applications of the term *gyn* extend to anatomy in the Middle English redaction: whereas the source text describes the eunuchs who guard the harem as those who ‘*Les genitaires pas nen ont*’ (l. 1910), the eligibility of guard duty in the tower is defined thus:

**A:**

Ne mai no seriaunt be Ʒerinne

Ʒat in his brech bereƷ Ʒe ginne,

NeiƷer bi dai ne bi niȝt,

But he be ase capoun diȝt. (ll. 263-266)

By way of direct comparison between the application of *gyn* in the French “original” and in the Middle English redaction, a higher proportion of references to *gyn* appears in *Floris and Blancheflour* than in its alleged source.

As BARNES (1993:94) points out,

“*Gyn* can have a certain moral ambivalence in its association with trickery and guile, but, occurring as it does most often in the service of the hero, its connotations are predominantly positive”.

Trickery and artifice, strategy and deception seem to represent, for the English translator, essential components to defend Floris and his safety. They also embody strategic expedients for the hero to win against his rivals, make them allies and join forces to reach the final goal, i.e. enter the impenetrable tower of Babylon and carry Blancheflour home.

HANNING's statement (1977:111) reinforces the belief that factors like trickery and artifice within the narrative plot of a thirteenth-century romance exerted a high level of fascination among its readers and were particularly appreciated by Middle English courtly audience:

“The ability to create an advantage by calculation, manipulation, and the use of illusion is particularly admired and cultivated in a courtly society, where it is the only power available to most”.

2) In the passage in which Floris takes leave from the host and his wife, the English translation adds a detail which is absent in the source text:

**Fr:**

O lui l'a le nuit herbergié  
tant c'au matin a pric congié.  
A son oste cent sols dona  
et en après molt li pria,  
s'a Babiloine ami eüst  
qui de riens aidier li peüst. (ll. 1553-1558)

**A:**

And gaf his hoste an hundred schillinge,  
To his hoste abd to his hostesse,

J nam h[i]s leue and gan hem kisse.  
And zerne he hap his oste bisouzt,  
Dat he him helpe, zif he mouzt (ll. 152-156)

In the English redaction Floris does not only reward his host giving him money (*an hundred schillinge*) but he also kisses him and his wife as a sign of respect and gratitude.

As Legge puts it speaking of the first Middle English adaptations from Old French “originals”, “courtoise finds little place, and only lip-service is paid to it”.<sup>215</sup> It thus seems that Floris’s act of kissing is a way to express his appreciation for the host and his wife’s *courtoisie*, i.e. for their kindness and concern.

- 3) The passage preserving the Emir’s discourse to his barons shows a structural reworking and an additional couplet introducing a change of scene. It was probably inserted by the English translator in order to provide a link with the preceding lines and/or to enhance the cohesion of the text:

**Fr:**

[...] Après fait ses barons mander.  
Li baron furent assemble  
contre la feste en la cité,  
car li termes molt prés estoit  
que sa feme prendre devoit.  
Vient i roi et vavassor.  
Tous emplist li palais le roi

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<sup>215</sup> GIBBS (1966:19) op. cit. Legge (1963).

de sa gent qui sont de sa loi. (ll. 2704-2712)

**A:**

Til he had after his barenage sent

To wreken him þourgh iugement.

**What helpez hit longe tale to sschewe?**

**Ich wille zou telle at words fewe:**

Nou alhis baronage haþ vndernome,

And to þe Amerail zhe beþ icome.

His halle, þat was heize ibult,

Of kynges and dukes was ifult. (ll. 656-663)

- 4) One of the most striking examples of amplification is detectable at the very end of the poem, where the English translator adds some lines which are absent in the source text:

**Fr:**

Chi fenist li contes de Floire,

Dieus nos merce tos en sa gloire! (ll. 3347-3348)

**A:**

Nou ben þai boþe ded;

Crist of heuene heure soules led.

Nou is þis tale browt to þende

Of Florice and of his lemma[n] hende,

Hou after bale hem com bote;

So wil oure Louerd þat ous mote.

Amen siggez also,

And ich schal helpe zou þerto. (ll. 854-861)

The French writer concludes the poem with a couplet in which he announces that the story has finished and begs for receiving God's glory (*Dieus nos merce tos en sa gloire!*).

In the English adaptation are found, beyond the usual benediction of the hearers, the assurance that the couple lived happily: Floris and Blancheflour died but they enjoyed life in Heaven after pain.

The English text ends with a hopeful message for the audience: the writer addresses all people who will read his text (himself included) and assure them that if they loved God (as the two protagonists of the story did), they would live a blissful and peaceful life in Heaven.

He does not limit himself to concluding the story, he rather wants to give his readers hope, to infuse them trust in life after death, pushing them to identify themselves with the two characters.

The Middle English text thus expands the generic final invocation to God drawing a parallel between the salvation of the two characters and the salvation which God bestows on all those who live righteously. This example of amplification gives support to the hypothesis that the romance collection preserved in the Auchinleck manuscript was- besides its already revealed entertaining purpose<sup>216</sup>- probably intended to provide a means for moral edification.

- 5) The detail of Blancheflour reproaching Floris with being unfaithful to her while speaking to Clarice is not found in the French "original". The English translator enriches the description of the sorrow and fear of the innocent maiden by adding an emphasising element which has no counterpart in the source text:

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<sup>216</sup> For suppositions and conjectures on the receptional context of the Auchinleck manuscript and its main purpose see paragraph 4.1.

**Fr:**

--Avoit! fait Blanceflor, Gloris,  
por coi si griement m'escarnis?  
Pecié faites, en moi foi,  
quant vos ensi gabés de moi.  
Damoisele qui a amor  
et joie en soi doit avoir flor.  
Bele suer Gloris, douce amie,  
Prés est li termes de ma vie.  
Li amirals dist qu'il m'ara,  
mais, se Diu plaist, il i faura. (ll. 2395-2404)

**A:**

“Auoy, dameisele!” quap Blaunchefflor;  
“To scorne me is litel honour.  
[...] Ich ihere, Clarice, wizoute gabbe,  
De Ameral wil me to wiue habbe;  
Ac þilke dai schal neuer be,  
þat I schal atwite me,  
þat I schal ben of loue vntrewe,  
Ne chaungi loue for non newe;  
For no loue, ne for non eie,  
So dop Floris in his contreie. (ll. 480-489)

This addition is even more evident in the couplet preserved in E:

**E:**

For no loue, ne for noon aye,

Forsake Floris in his contraye. (ll. 791-792)

### 5.2.3. Substitutions

Besides omissions, reductions and amplifications of some textual portions, the English adaptor introduces a few changes and modifications that aim at revising a number of elements which he probably judged as erroneous or unsuitable to the socio-cultural context of the addresses.

The English translator, for example, cuts out all the references alluding to the French history and culture: most of the names, whether of characters or places have been adapted to the English language and tradition, as well as many Old French lexical items/references are converted into their equivalent Middle English terms:

- 1) The name of characters modify according to the phonetics of the English language. The French *Gloris*, for example, changes into *Clarice*, *Daires* is replaced by *Daris* (*Darys*):

**Fr:**

**Gloris** ot non la damoisele.

Blanceflor doucement apele. (ll. 2385-2386)

[...] –Avoi! Fait Blanceflor, **Gloris**,

Por oi si griement m’escarnis? (ll. 2395-2396)

**A:**

To **Clarice** bour þe coupe þai bere.

Wig þe floures þat þerinne ere.

[...] **Clarice** to þe coppe com and wolde

þe floures handlen J biholde. (ll. 438-445)

**Fr:**

L'ostes Daires et Licoris

ent'aus deus ont lués Flore assis. (ll. 1679-1680)

–Amis, dist **Daires**, ne crèmes,

par mi le voir vos en ales. (ll. 1755-1756)

**A:**

Ac euere Florice sigte ful cold,

And **Darys** gan him biho[l]d. (ll. 185-186)

**C:**

“**Daris**”, he sede, “ihc wurthe ded,

Bute if þu do me sumne red”.

Þanne se[de] **Daris**, þe freo burgeis,

þat was wel hende J curteis [...] (ll. 317-320)

- 2) The measurement unites adopted by the French writer are converted into those ones commonly used in Medieval England:

**Fr:**

Babiloine, si com jou pens,

dure vint **liues** de tos sens. (ll. 1795-1796)

**A:**

Abouten Babiloine, wizouten wene,

Sexti longe **milen** and tene, (ll.221-222)

The *lieu* was one of the French Medieval royal units of length in use before the Revolution. The translator is naturally led to replace it with the English standard unit of length, the mile.

As one lieue would have corresponded to more or less two miles and a half<sup>217</sup>, the equivalent value of *vint lieues* would have been around fifty miles.

The English adapter, instead, replaced it with the number seventy (*Sexti and tene*). As we saw above<sup>218</sup>, the number *seven* is frequently used throughout the English poem to supplant other numeral values. This recurrence could thus be attributed to the translator's conscious will to modify the numeral elements found in the source text, maybe for the already mentioned symbolic value ascribed to that number in the Middle Ages (see paragraph 5.1.3).

- 3) The term referring to the splendid tower standing in the middle of the city of Babylon defined *Tor(s) as Puceles* in the French "original", assumes the name of *barbican (barbican)* in the Middle English translation, i.e. a "fortified watch-tower"<sup>219</sup>:

**Fr:**

[...] por çou qu'i sont les damoiseles

Aa non la **Tors as Puceles**.

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<sup>217</sup> For a more accurate conversion from ancient lieue to mile see <http://www.conversioncenter.net/length-conversion>.

<sup>218</sup> See paragraph 5.1.3.

<sup>219</sup> According to the definition one can find in the glossary of DE VRIES (1966:144).

[...] Les gardes qui en la **tor** sont  
Les genitaires pas nen ont.  
[...] Li maistre est fel et deputaire  
Et si garde l'uis de la **tour**  
Set bien quant il est nuis u jour. (ll. 1901-1918)

**A:**

And at þe gate is a gateward-  
He nis no fol ne no coward-  
zif þe[r] comez ani man  
Wiginne þat ilche **barbican**. (ll. 267-270)

Apart from these quite evident cases, one can also detect other sigificative examples of substitution. It is however more risky to establish with certainty which is the origin of these changes, as we cannot say whether they should be seen as part of the translator's strategy of reworking or they point to the use of other sources (written and/or oral); or finally whether they are to be interpreted as errors, due to mistaken reading or wrong interpretation. Most of the cases of substitutions are represented by the correction concerning specific details, as numbers and measurements.

- 4) In the source passage describing the structural characteristics of the *Tor as puceles*, the tower is one-hundred *toises* high and one-hundred width:

**Fr:**

En miliu de ceste cite

A une tor d'antiquité,

**cent toises haute et cent lee,**

roonde comme keminee; (ll. 1819-1822)

**A:**

And in þe bourh, amide þe rízt,

Ðer stant a riche tour, [I] þe aplízt

**A þousand taisen he his heize,**

wo-so it bi-alt, fer J negze,

**And an hundred taises he is wid,**

And imakede wíð mochel prid. (l.239-244)

The English text preserves here a quite contradictory passage. It relates that the tower is as high as it is wide but while the width is *an hundred taises* (as in the Old French text), the height measures *a þousand taisen*. In this case the substitution was probably brought about by a mistake made by the translator whilst reading the manuscript he used as model. In the transcription of the number, he could indeed have erroneously substituted *hundred* with *þousand*.

- 5) The two slaves who were ordered to lead Floris and Blancheflour towards the fire are substituted in the Middle English translation by *twaie sarazins*:

**Fr:**

Doi serf les amaintent avant.

Il I vinrent forment plorant,

si s'entresgardent doucemant. (ll.2788-2790)

**A:**

Twaie sarazins forþhem bringe

Toward here deþ, sore wepinge. (ll. 694-695)

The tendency of representing the Saracens as treacherous enemies is actually common within medieval Literature, and especially in Middle English romances: from *King Horn* to *Guy of Warwick*, from *Havelok* to *Beues of Hamtoun*.

AS ROUSE (2000:127-129) points out,

“As the antithesis of the Christian West, the image of the Saracen provides a powerful racial, cultural and religious Other during the later Middle Ages [...] Through the medium of the romance, the cultural process of otherness is given shape in the form of the Saracen world, enabling both the literary hero and the literate audience to ‘encounter’ the Other.

[...] Making use of traditional romance generic conventions such as heathen Sultans, treacherous stewards, wrongly imprisoned knights and devilish giants, the Saracen Other is constructed through contrasting archetypes of religion, honour and physical appearance”.<sup>220</sup>

The representations of the Saracen thus tend to follow a quite standard paradigm. According to METLITZKI (1977:160-197), the Saracen can be seen to have been most often represented in one of four ways: the enamored Muslim princess; the converted Saracen; the defeated emir or sultan; and the archetypal Saracenic giant.

In *Floris and Blancheflour* one of these categories is clearly displayed: the emir’s defeat by Floris (intended as Floris’s successful infiltration in the Saracenic tower through cunning and trickery).

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<sup>220</sup> For a detailed discussion of the representation of Saracens in medieval literature see ROUSE (2000: 127-141).

Each of the above-mentioned romances differently constructs the contrast between East and West, between Islamic culture and Christian world, thus displaying its own peculiar representation of the Saracen. In *King Horn*, for example, the Saracen plays the role of infidel invader usually thought of as Muslim, yet also clearly representative of the Vikings.<sup>221</sup>

- 6) Describing Babylon and its atmosphere, Daris tells Floris that every day the city houses markets with people milling about and goods to be traded, stored and secured. The term for *market* (Old French *foire*) is substituted by the translator of A with the corresponding noun of English origin. C, on the other hand, retains the item deriving from the “original” French text:

**Fr:**

A totes est la **foire** plaine  
en tous les jors de la semaine. (ll. 1805-1806)

**A:**

Nis no dai þourg þe ʒer  
Þat **scheping** nis þe[r] inne plener. (ll. 227-228)

**C:**

Eche day in al þe ʒere  
Þe **feire** is þer iliche plenere. (ll 215-216)

It is very interesting that the two English texts display different translation choices, particularly if we compare this case with other examples.

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<sup>221</sup> HERZMAN, DRAKE, SALISBURY (1999).

Similarly, the term *spusen* in C 788 recall the French *espouser* against the originally English term *wedded* used in A:

**Fr:**

s'amie li fait **espouser**.

Aprés fait Gloris demander. (3139-3140)

**A:**

J þe Amerale here **wedded** to Quene.

Þere was feste swiþe breme. (ll.828-829)

**C:**

He let hemto one chirche bringe,

And **spusen** hem wiþ one gold ringe. (ll 787-788)

In C one notices the tendency to retain the linguistic form of those elements that make explicit a direct derivation from the Old French language and tradition. On the contrary, in the Middle English text preserved in A the translator aims at leaving out or at substituting the same kind of textual element with a term of English origin.

It is thus likely that this type of intervention in A should be interpreted as resulting from the necessity of making the text more understandable, especially those elements that otherwise would have appeared more obscure in the target language.

Although the terms of French origin were very probably attested in the lexical repertoire of the Middle English language, they were maybe judged to be vague or ambiguous from a semantic point of view.

#### 5.2.4. Reformulations

Sometimes the translator reshapes the source text on a syntactic and stylistic level by reorganising the sentence structure or by transforming into reported speech some of the dialogue passages in the story. This last modification does not occur systematically but can be detected in a few cases.

- 1) The sequence in which the Emir asks Clarice where Blancheflour is and why she is not with her to serve him is an example of how the English adaptor used to convert a dialogue passage into a reported speech:

**Fr:**

[...] Quand le vit: «U est Blanceflor?  
Par foi, fait il, poi me crient,  
que tant demeure et que ne vient.» (ll. 2578-2580)

**A:**

Pe Ameral asked after Blauncheflour,  
Whi and wharfore zhe ne come,  
As hi was woned to done. (ll. 601-603)

- 2) The passage in which Clarice is introduced to the audience in the French romance is revised in the sequence of actions in the Middle English poem. Although he does not introduce substantial modifications, the translator anticipates or delays some of the elements making up the source text:

**Fr:**

[...] Cil prenent les flors, ses emportent;  
Si sont cargié que tot detordent.  
[...] Par les degrés montent amont,

Mais a la camber fali ont;  
[...] Quant cil sont ens, los flors descargent,  
a celi qu'il treuvent les baillent  
et lor message en haste font,  
lor flors laissent, si s'en revont.  
Cele les prent, si les mercie.  
A la corbeille est tost salie,  
des flors se jueet esbanie.  
Flores cuide çou soit s'amie,  
De la grant joie sus sailli,  
et la pucele s'esfreï,  
de la poor c'ot si s'escrie:  
«Merveille voi! Aïe! Aïe!» (ll. 2327- 2346)

**A:**

[...] To Clarice bour þe coupe þai bere,  
Wiz þe floures þat þerinne were.  
Þere þe coupe þai sette adoun,  
J zaf hem here malisoun,  
Pat so fele floures embrouzte on honed.  
Þai wenten forth J leten þe coppe stoned,  
Clarice to þe coppe com and wolde  
Þe floures handlen J biholde.  
Florisse wende hit hadde ben his swet wigt.

In þe coupe he stod vprigt,

J þe maide, al for drede.

Bigan to schrichen an to grede. (ll. 438- 449)

In the Old French passage the name of *Gloris* is revealed only after a few lines (l. 2385). Her character is firstly referred to with different appellations: *la damoisele*, *la compaigne de Blanceflor*, *la jeune fille*, *la pucele*. The English adaptor, on the other hand, makes clear from the beginning of the passage that the young girl, Blanche flour's companion is Clarice and that the room in which the basket has been wrongly carried is Clarice's and not Blanche flour's. This detail is revealed only a few lines after and conveyed impliedly through Floris's supposition in the French text. The translator might thus have anticipated and expressly specified this particular in order to make the storyline clearer to the reader.

Furthermore, the line describing Clarice's surprise in seeing Floris springing out from the basket is pronounced in the source text by Clarice's exclamation and rendered in the English adaptation in reported speech.

Another brief instance of reformulation from a direct speech into a reported speech construction is detectable in the passage in which Floris is asking the host where Blanche flour has been brought:

**Fr:**

[...] Quand il l'oï, son chief dreça:

«Sir, fait il, et u ala?» (ll. 1543-1544)

**A:**

[...] He miȝte make min herte glad,

Pat coupe me telle whidr ȝhe was lad". (ll.137-138)

Even though it is Floris who addresses directly to the host, the English translator uses an indirect speech construction (...*whidr zhe was lad*).

- 3) The English translator often reworks some lines of the source text, introducing and insisting, at some points, on the theme of *honour*:

Before leaving his host, Floris wants to thank him for giving news of Blancheflour and orders that a silver cup and some scarlet clothing could be brought to him immediately.

**Fr:**

Flores li done un boin mantel

Et un hanap d'argent molt bel:

«Sire, fait il, çou voel k'aiés

et Blanceflor gré en saciés,

car çou saciés, li vois jo querre.

Emblee me fu en ma terre» (ll. 1481-1486)

**A:**

Florice het nime a coppe of siluer whigt,

And a mantel of scarlet

Ipaned al wig meniuer,

And gaf his hostesse þer.

“**Haue þis**”, he saide, “**to þine honour**,

And þou hit migte þonke Blauncheflour.

Stolen zhe was out mine countreie;

Here ich [h]ere seche bi þe waie. (ll. 129-136)

A similar case occurs some lines after, when the host reveals to Floris that Blancheflour has been brought to Babylon. The passage in the target text is a bit amplified and differently reworked:

**Fr:**

--En Babiloine fu mencee

Et l'amiraus l'a acatee.»

Trestot ensi li a conté,

tant que il furent arivé.

O lui l'a le nuit herbergié,

tant c'au matin a pris congié (ll.1545-1554)

**A:**

“Child, to Babiloyne zhe his ibrouzt,

And Ameral hire haþ ibouzt.

He zaf for hire, ase zhe stod vprigt,

Seuen sithes of gol[d] here wizt.

For hire faired and for hire schere

Þe Ameral hire bouzte so dere,

For he þenkez wizgouten wene

Þat faire mai to hauen to Quene.

Amang oþer maidens in his tour

**He haþ hire ido wiz mochel honour”.**

Nou Florice rest him þere al nigt.

On morewe, whan hit was dailigt (ll. 139-150)

In the Middle English romance, the concept of *honour* is not only emphasized in other circumstances if compared with the source text but it also detaches from the meaning it assumes in the Old French poem. Here the conception of *honour* is mostly conceived -according to the courtly most traditional definition<sup>222</sup>- as an attribute to be gained just by physical prowess and military skill: warfare and armed conflicts are, for King Felix and his knights, the testing ground to prove their skills in arms and horsemanship.

The English translator, on the other hand, conceives *honour* as a quality to be ascribed to people with moral integrity and ethical honesty. One can detect the adaptor's tendency of attributing the qualities of honour and nobility to characters who are considered respectable and admirable in a new conception.

These qualities are indeed ascribed by the English author to the host for his kindness and concern about Floris's health, for his hospitality and helpfulness in giving him advices and instructions; as well as he defines Blancheflour as the girl *wiz mochel honour* , i.e. the most respectable among the maidens living within the wall of the Emir's tower.

4) The sequence of events in the source text is sometimes overturned by the English translator.

One of the most remarkable example is detectable in the passage where Floris and Blancheflour kiss the emir's feet, action which takes place before the hero brings the heroine to the altar. The sequence of actions is inverted in the target text:

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<sup>222</sup> JAEGER (1985:939-1210).

**Fr:**

Andoi li sont keü as piés,  
a grant joie li ont baisiés.  
Li rois les a fait redrecier,  
Flore veut faire chevalier.  
Des millors armes que il ot  
Le cornea au mieus qu'il pot.  
Aprés, quant l'ot fait chevalier,  
mener les fait a un mostier  
s'amie li fait espouser. (ll. 3131-3139)

**A:**

To one chirche h[e] let hem bringge  
J wedde here wig here owene ringge.  
Nou boþe þis children alle for bliss  
Fil þe Amerales fet to kis; (ll. 822-825)

Here the English adaptor probably considered the sequence of actions to be inadequate: the two lovers' act of kissing the emir's feet could have been perceived by the translator as an act of thankfulness for having approved their liaison and officially sanctioned their relationship through the wedding.

In the Old French text the emphasis of the passage is placed on the emir's decision to make Floris knight; the Middle English text, on the other hand, seems to focus rather on the episode of the

wedding and on the detail of the magic ring, the same ring that the Queen gives to Floris before leaving and which would have protected him from all kind of threats and dangers.

A similar case occurs some lines earlier when, during Daris's depiction of the enchanting orchard, the English translator upturns the sequence in which the bridge keeper cites the so-called "tree of love" and the fountain of magic powers:

**Fr:**

En milieu sort une fontaine  
en un prael, et clere et saine;  
en quarrel est fais li canal  
de blanc argent et de cristal.

Un arbre i a desus planté,  
plus bel ne virent home né;  
por çou que tos jors i a flors  
l'apelë on l'arbre d'amors [...] (ll. 2021-2028)

Quant li amirals veut coisir,  
ses puceles i fait venir  
au ruissel de la fontanele  
dont de fin or est la gravele  
[...] car quant il passe pucele,  
lors est li eve clere et bele;  
au trespasser de feme eüe  
l'eve en est lués tote meüe.  
[...] Après les fait totes passer  
desous l'arbre por acerter

la quell d'eles cel an ara,  
cele sor cui la flors carra. (ll. 2039-2060)

**A:**

Nou is þe welle of so mochel eye,  
zif þe[r] comez ani maiden þat is forleie,  
J hi bowe to þe grounde  
For to waschen here honde,  
Þe water wille zelle als hit ware wod,  
And bicom on hire so red so blod.  
Wich maiden þe water farez on so,  
Hi schal sone be foro;  
And þilke þat beþ maiden clene,  
Þai mai hem wassche of þe rene;  
Þe water wille erne stille and cler;  
Nelle hit hem make no daunger.  
At þe welle heued þer stant a tre,  
Þe fairest þat mai in erthe be.  
Hit is icleped þe tre of loue,  
For Floures and blosmes beþ euer aboue. (ll. 298-313)

The source text provides a longer and more detailed passage: the French writer first mentions the tree and the fountain, and then he explains how they work and what their respective function is.

The English adaptor, on the other hand, did not acquaint the reader with the two elements he is going to describe but rather introduces them in an abbreviated and apparently plainer form.

From the analysis above, one should remark that reformulations mainly contribute to the reshaping of the text from a syntactic and formal point of view but do not modify the narrative scheme in a significant way.

The change often represents examples of reformulation aiming at making the description of the story clearer and at bringing to the fore some relevant nuances on the narrative level.

The analysis of the major types of variation carried out so far has enabled us to single out some of the most significant features of the translation strategy embraced by the Middle English adaptor.

As was seen above, the rewriting process related to the translation of the source text aims at both making the narration clearer and, at some points, more consistent, as well as at reshaping the text to adapt it to a new kind of audience, probably of aristocratic extraction. This can be detectable from the translator's recurrent amendments or rewriting of those passages that he possibly judged to be unsuitable for an audience made up of people belonging to the aristocracy: he diminished the brutality of some scenes and toned down the accusatory and harsh words used by the Emir towards the female characters performing in the story, especially Blanche flour.

Furthermore, the omission of the numerous learned references one can detect throughout the source text, philosophical quotations and allusions to the epic poetry and literature included, can be probably traced back to the intention to adapt the text to the cultural level of the addressees.

The omission of the "Carolingian prologue" as well as of some lexical items and expressions alluding to the courtly-chivalric and feudal traditions give us important indications about the socio-cultural milieu of the public to which the romance was probably addressed.

The radical decrease or almost absence of the narrator's intervention throughout the English text is another mark contributing to characterizing the rearrangement of the translation from the source text and to revealing the practise of transmission of the text itself.

The on the contrary recurrent narrator's intervention through the French romance enables us to suppose that the source text could be identified as a minstrel's copy and could have probably undergone different stages of oral transmission<sup>223</sup>; the English romance, on the other hand, preserves some significant deviations- one of the most noteworthy the rendering of direct passage into reported speech- which lead us to assume that our translation had been produced in order to be read rather than to be listened to. This hypothesis would be strengthened by considering the results emerging from the analysis of the codicological context of the A-text.<sup>224</sup>

An already mentioned (and very probably the most visible) aspect emerging from the comparison between the two text is no doubt the degree of condensation of the Middle English romance, especially in the descriptive passages. The translator tended to emphasize the narrative line and to improve the cohesion between the sequences of events, leaving out the elaborated descriptions and the lengthy enumerations characterizing the Old French poem. This deviation leads us to assume that the final product he wanted to achieve was an evidently plainer and agiler version of the text, which aims to further transparency and clearness in the development of the plot and in the chain of actions.

A final aspect to reflect on is the insistence on the Christian element in the French "original" which is not accentuated as well as throughout the English translation: invocations, prayers and supplications for God's mercy, extensive monologues in which Floris begs for God's intervention

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<sup>223</sup> This hypothesis has been put forward at paragraph 3.2.

<sup>224</sup> See paragraph 4.1.

are frequent in the source text. In the English romance, on the other hand, sequences devoted to the religious matter or portraying episodes of religious nature<sup>225</sup> are reduced to a few scanty lines or even removed.<sup>226</sup> This observation could be helpful not only because it enables us to make more reliable conjectures on the receptional context of the two texts, but it also strengthens the hypothesis that the Old French romance could have been copied within the wall of a monastic scriptorium, while the Middle English manuscript had been produced in a lay milieu and was intended as a commercial project rather than a monastic production.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> See, for example, the episode portraying the ritual of baptism which in the French original is around thirty lines long, while in the English translation it is just mentioned, paragraph 5.2.1.

<sup>226</sup> The only case of amplification of this kind is detectable in the English text at the very end of the poem and it might be probably ascribed to the narrator's intention to provide a means for moral edification (see paragraph 5.2.2.).

<sup>227</sup> The hypothesis on the place of production and the receptional context of the Auchinleck manuscript are exhaustively displayed at paragraph 4.1.

## Chapter 6 Translating and Rewriting

### 6.1. The position of *Floris and Blancheflour* within the Polysystem of Middle English Literature

The comparative analysis of the French “original” and the Middle English redaction carried out in chapter 5 has brought to the fore some aspects that will now be evaluated on the basis of the major principles of the target-oriented approach to translation described previously (chapter 1).

Broadly speaking, we have detected a major inclination of A and E to deviating from the source text, which could reveal an intention to adapt the text to a different context of reception.

The presence of divergences in A and E from the French “original” is as revealing as the absence of remarkable differences between Fr A and C.<sup>228</sup>

The comparison between the French source text and A has enabled us to detect the major lines along which the translator has probably re-written his source text for a difference audience.

Some of the changes in A could be ascribed to the intent of enhancing the coherence of the narration and of clarifying, especially in some passage, the storyline in the chain of actions.

The most significant deviations are represented by omissions. Though it cannot be established with certainty whether such shifts should be ascribed to the translator’ act of reworking or to a copyist who had access to the text at a later stage, the nature of changes leads us to assume that the addressees of the text preserved in A were probably members of the aristocracy or emergent bourgeoisie and, as far as the place of production is concerned, to reject the hypothesis that the manuscript was copied within the wall of a monastic scriptorium.

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<sup>228</sup> This assumption is based not only on the study of the codicological context of C and the textual comparative analysis with the source text, but also on the linguistic resemblance between the two texts detected in Appendix I.

On the other hand, the results emerging from the analysis of the codicological context of C and from the comparative analysis with the source text, do not exclude the possibility, as has been supposed for the Old French romance<sup>229</sup>, that the manuscript has some religious implication, i.e. it had been originally copied in a monastic scriptorium, and thus it had been influenced by the socio-cultural settings of the religious environment.

The different attitude of the translators towards their source text can be considered in light of Toury's descriptive model of translation:

“[...] Thus, a translator may subject him-/herself either to the original text with the norms it has realized, or to the norms active in the target culture [...]. If the first stance is adopted, the translation will tend to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture. [...] If, on the other hand, the second is adopted, norms system of the target culture are triggered and set into motion. Shifts from the source text would be an almost inevitable price. Thus, whereas adherence to source norms determines a translation's adequacy as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its acceptability. Obviously, even the most adequacy-oriented translation involves shifts from the source text.<sup>230</sup>

One can detect that, while C is rather close to its source text, A (and, to some extent, E) shows a higher degree of rewriting and thus a stronger tendency towards the pole of acceptability”.

Such a reshaping has been maybe driven by the need to make the text suitable to an audience whose ideology did not revolve any more around the values fostered within courtly society and depicted in chivalric literature. A significant clue supporting this view derives first and foremost from a proper

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<sup>229</sup> See paragraph 3.2.

<sup>230</sup> TOURY (1995:56).

reflection on the assumed place and methods of production of the source text and of its Middle English adaptation, as well as the conditions of transmission of both.<sup>231</sup>

The fact that C is closer to the pole of adherence if compared to A can be accounted for by considering at least two major aspects. First of all, the authority of the culture from which the source text originated along with the manuscript dating: French was definitely the dominant literary language in England until at least the fourteenth century and its influence is easier detectable in C - the oldest manuscript preserving the text<sup>232</sup>- rather than in A.<sup>233</sup>

As a result, the translator of C tended more than in any other English witness to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and thus determined the translation's inclination towards adequacy rather than acceptability to the Old French "original".

Furthermore, as already mentioned above, the monastic production shared by Fr A and C, contributes to determining a certain degree of resemblance between the two manuscripts, not only as far as the textual level is concerned but also considering the editorial and transcription policy of the two texts.<sup>234</sup>

The analysis of the translation strategy also enables us to address the question of A and C in the system of the Middle English translated literature.

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<sup>231</sup> Supposed dating, place and methods of production, as well as the conditions of transmission of Fr A and A/C are dismissed respectively in paragraphs 3.2., 4.1 and 4.2.

<sup>232</sup> As it probably belong to the second half of the thirteen century (see paragraph 4.2).

<sup>233</sup> A is supposed to have been written around 1340, a period in which the French language did already lost the primacy on the literary production and English started to be employed as official language in all contexts of use.

<sup>234</sup> These formal details are dealt with in Appendix I.

A closer view at the net of inter-relations of the two vernacular texts within the polysystem contributes to revealing the potential influences exerted by both texts on later translations or, eventually, original works.

One of the first considerations pushing us to assert that our romance contributes to outlining the literary polysystem of Middle English literature derives from the comparison with some of the most influential (translated) medieval romances composed in the period between the end of the twelfth century and the fifteenth century in England.

Dealing with Middle English translations and/or adaptations<sup>235</sup>, especially from Old French and Anglo-Norman romances, one can detect that traits of simplification and “universalisation” (in terms of reduction of the courtly-chivalric element in favour of a more unmarked-in-genre version of the story) seems to be a well-established feature.

The results arisen from the comparative analysis between the source text and the English translation (ch.5) reveal a clear inclination of the English adaptor in diminishing the courtly material and in making essential the elaboration of details and the long descriptive passages characterizing the “original” romance.

This aspect has indeed been highlighted by numerous scholars handling the task to analyse the production of Middle English literature and, in particular, by Legge (1963), who describes the distinctive qualities shared by the first English adaptations from Old French and Anglo-Norman originals as follows:

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<sup>235</sup> As COOPER (2009:168) points out, “there is a point midway between such re-creations and literal translations where it becomes both impossible and pointless to try to distinguish translation from adaptation: the fourteenth-century English romance *Ywain and Gawain*, for instance, faithfully follows its source text, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain*, in terms of event and occasionally wording, but it also cuts back on some of the elaboration of the original in ways that emphasize what happens in the narrative rather than emotional analysis.”

“They were all apparently written to lend prestige to a family which, for one reason or another, could be regarded as parvenu. The hero is regarded as the founder of a family, and must preferably be a king, or become one at the end of the story. There must be a period of exile, if possible involving wandering over sea, with mention of exotic places, their fauna, and other details. [...] The author may take an existing story and adapt it to his needs. [...] Whether his fable is derived from truth or fiction, he will ornament it with signs and wonders. The burial of the hero in a monastery is almost universal. *Courtoise* finds little place, and only lip-service is paid to it. Since the object of writing at all seems to be to describe the founding of a family, marriage is bound to play an important part; love-affairs outside matrimony are out of place”.<sup>236</sup>

In this respect, *Floris and Blancheflour* shares most of the qualities listed by Legge. We are thus led to suppose that our romance can be considered part of this group of texts, not only on a narrative level -as it contains the narrative schemes and sequences mostly found in Middle English adaptations from Old French texts pointed out by Legge- but also on a textual and stylistic level, as it has been detected by GIBBS (1996:21) referring to the English translator’s act of reworking the text of *Floris and Blancheflour*:

“[...] the English poem is a condensed adaptation rather than a slavish translation. As in the French II. version, the tender and sentimental element is much condensed; but the English writer, unlike the writer of French II., does not introduce the hero and warlike in the form of duels and battles. He does not amplify by adding new details [...] He makes rather a faithful condensation quite after the manner of English adapters from the French”.

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<sup>236</sup> GIBBS (1966:19), op. cit. Legge (1963).

COOPER (2009:174) does not only replicate the concepts expressed by Legge and Gibbs but she also highlights how Middle English translations and adaptations from Old French are to be defined less “courtly” than some original Middle English romances (thus not originated from Old French source texts):

“Even those English romances that are close adaptations of French originals tend to be more down to earth, more action based, removed from the more self-indulgent or fantasy elements of the courtly ethos: they are ‘popular’ not merely because of their choice of the language that was accessible to most. Adaptation such as *Ywain and Gawain* and *Sir Tristem*, the latter taken from the Anglo-Norman of Thomas, are both shorter and sparer than their originals, and imply rather than spell out their emotional interest. It is something of a paradox that the Middle English romance that we would perhaps be most likely to describe as courtly, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, has no direct French source at all”.

These remarks turn out to be very significant, as they enable us to define a group of common specific features shared by the first English adaptations from French and, at the same time, to definitely recognize these features in the narrative and style of *Floris*.

As was seen in the introductory section, critics agree that *Floris and Blancheflour* must have been composed around 1250<sup>237</sup>. This early date makes KOOPER (2005:1) assert that *Floris* is the second oldest romance in English after *King Horn* (c. 1225-50), a meaningful evidence leading us to suppose that the “popularity” of the form featuring our romance could have inspired other later texts of the same genre.

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<sup>237</sup> See the introduction.

In his article “The Development of Middle English Romance” PEARSALL (1988:11) contributes to corroborating this evidence, introducing his argument as follows:

“The initial date for the discussion is not difficult to arrive at, for it is simply the date, on paleographical evidence of the Cambridge MS fragment Gg.4.27, containing *King Horn* and *Floris and Blancheflour*, the earliest extant Middle English Romances”.

It is furthermore significant that a remarkable number of romances which have been categorized by PEARSALL (1988:22) as belonging to the same subgroup of *Floris and Blancheflour* and dating back to the first quarter of the fourteenth century<sup>238</sup> - among which *Ywain and Gawain*, *Sir Orfeo*, the *Lai le Freine*, *Sir Landeval* and *Sir Degare*- do not only share the aforementioned features of the “popular romance” but adopt the same metre (all are in short couplets) and very likely address to the same kind of audience:

“These romances are markedly more urban and delicate than the last group, and were designed for a somewhat more sophisticated stratum of the audience, perhaps for women. They deal less in battle, more in love and in the supernatural, and the narratives are shaped to a purpose.

[...] *Ywain*, an abridgment of Chretien’s *Ywain*, is less interested in sentiment and not at all interested in Chretien’s psychological speculations. [...] and, like *Floris*, bears all the marks of carefully contrived professional adaptation for more popular consumption”.<sup>239</sup>

The hypothesis of a probable influence of *Floris* on the above-mentioned romances gains more reliability if we consider that they are all preserved in the same manuscript which preserves *Floris*

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<sup>238</sup> This subgroup is defined by PEARSALL as made up of “some early ventures into French love-romance”.

<sup>239</sup> PEARSALL (1988:22-23).

*and Blancheflour*, i.e. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (the Auchinleck Manuscript) in a position quite close to each other.

These considerations lead us to suppose that *Floris and Blancheflour* could have contributed to setting a trend, thus exerting an influence on later romances. It might have represented a sort of model even for texts which were translated so much later (fourteenth century) such as the *Lai le Freine*, *Sir Landeval* and *Sir Degare* and which were meant to address an aristocratic audience.

The question of the role played by *Floris and Blancheflour* can be profitably addressed also by considering that most of the Middle English romances were actually translations or adaptations from French/ Anglo-Norman original poems (the most known *King Horn* itself very probably derives from a poem in French)<sup>240</sup>.

COOPER (2009:167) points out that the concept of *originality* for English medieval texts, especially as far as narrative material and literary genre is concerned, is not easy to outline, as "many of the great narratives that feature in Middle English literature were already in existence":

"The ubiquity of literary translation in medieval England was further encouraged by the belief that there was no particular virtue in originality. Many of the great narratives that feature in Middle English literature were already in existence: stories of biblical history and of the fall of Troy, of King Arthur and Charlemagne, not to mention saints' lives, local legends and folktales. The skill lay in recasting classical material to cater for contemporary interests, in upgrading popular material for audiences of high cultural sophistication (often including women), or in adapting French texts for a broader appeal among English-speaking audiences".

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<sup>240</sup> It is presumably based on the Anglo-Norman story *Romance of Horn* (1170). The story was retold in later romances and ballads, and is considered part of the Matter of England. The poem is currently believed to be the oldest extant romance in Middle English. HERZMAN, DRAKE, SALISBURY (1999).

The primary role of translation in Middle English literature seems to be indeed a matter of fact, as SCANLON (2009:4) points out,

“[...] Indeed, translation would become a keynote of most of the writing in English to follow, including that of figures like Langland and Chaucer, whom posterity would judge the most important and original. Even if we were to view translation as purely a derivative exercise – and the Middle Ages definitely did not – it would not do to view Middle English as simply a descendant of Anglo-Norman. Anglo-Saxon England possessed by far the most active and sophisticated vernacular literary culture of the time in all of Western Europe. The Conquest did not immediately destroy all of it and some residue remained to influence later vernacular writing both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, although how much and in what way are questions we may never be able fully to answer”.<sup>241</sup>

PEARSALL (1989:34) interprets the English inheritance of plot material and subjects from Old French and Anglo-Norman as “insatiability of appetite for new stories”. On the basis of what was seen so far, this “insatiability” could yet derive from a necessity rather than an option and could be ascribed to the fact that the English native literature was not able to provide enough or adequate plot-material and literary genres in order to fulfil the public expectations.

Other considerations based on some textual and contextual clues seem to strengthen the hypothesis that our text is likely to have played a major role in the literary polysystem of medieval England, whether from a stylistic or ideological point of view.

The metrical classification represents, for example, a useful basis for comparison. The octosyllabic couplet displayed in *Floris and Blancheflour*, intimately connected with the development of the romance in France, was used in later English romances such as *Havelok the*

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<sup>241</sup> SCANLON (2009:4).

*Dane* (end of the thirteenth century) or *Ywain and Gawain* and *King Alisaunder* (both early fourteenth century).

Although the couplet appears to have yielded to the tail-rhyme-stanza as the popular medium for English romances during the fourteenth century, it goes on being used as the most common narrative metre, as proved by some popular late Middle English romances like *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Orfeo* (both late thirteen-early fourteenth century) or *Gamelyn* (1350-70).<sup>242</sup>

As GIBBS (1966:24) points out, couplets enjoyed such a revival in the surviving fifteenth-century romances and spread that it is not really possible to assign the use of the couplet to any particular area or areas of the country.

Beyond the textual and metrical levels, it is interesting to remind that *Floris and Blancheflour* is one of the earliest Middle English romances to introduce one of the most exploited motif in the Literature of medieval England, that of the Orient and of the exotic setting.

*Floris* actually contributed, together with other English romances<sup>243</sup>, to setting a trend, that of the so-called “matter of the Orient”, which “allowed the exploration through an admired if imperfectly known culture of personal issues seemingly insoluble in the reality of European society”.<sup>244</sup>

The idea of the Orient is indeed a major motif in Chaucer, the father of the English Literature and medieval romance. References and allusions to the Orient throughout Chaucer’s works are easily detectable.

It is said of Chaucer’s physician pilgrim in the *Canterbury Tales*, the Doctor of Physik that:

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<sup>242</sup> For a complete list of the Middle English romances by title, see The Online Database of the Middle English Verse Romances, <http://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk/>.

<sup>243</sup> Among the most celebrated: *The Seven Sages of Rome*, *The Lyfe of Alisaunder* (both dating back to the early fourteenth century) and *The Destruction of Troy* (1350-1400).

<sup>244</sup> BARRON (1987:182).

“Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,  
And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,  
Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,  
Serapion, Razis and Avycen,  
Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn” (general prologue, pp.429-433)

Suggestions of the influence of Arabic scientific thought are even evident in medieval imaginative literature as, for example, in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Book of the Duchess*.<sup>245</sup>

#### **6.1.1. The analogy with Chaucer’s *Troilus*: echoes and resemblances**

The case of Chaucer’s works is particularly interesting because it enables us to draw parallels with the earliest Middle English translated romances and, particularly, with *Floris and Blancheflour*. In his “Studies of Medieval English Romances”, WINDEATT (1988: 137) discusses the qualities of the romance during the Chaucerian period, and points out:

“There were many echoes and resonances from their accumulated sense of ‘old romaunce’, and such echoes from medieval English romances recur through the *Troilus* in the nature of some archetypal episodes, formulas, gestures and ceremonies, in the handling of the narrative, the narratorial voice, and the attitudes to love.

Study of the patterns and formulas of both language and narrative plot in romance has encouraged the discernment of ‘type-scenes’ and episodes within the structure of romance”.

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<sup>245</sup> For a more accurate depiction of the theme of the Orient in Chaucer and medieval romance see HEFFERNAN (2003).

WINDEATT (1988:140-141) has identified a number of passages in the text of *Floris and Blancheflour* that bear a striking resemblance to formulae widely employed in some of the most notable Chaucer's romances. In particular the author considers some of the expressions of sorrow and confession used in *Troilus*, which particularly echo the stock language of our romance:

“In Chaucer's use of gesture or body-language in *Troilus* there are also many parallels with stock gesture and *formulas* of the English Romances. All the sore sighing that recurs in *Troilus* ('she wepte and siked sore' IV.716) echoes a recurrent token of distress in the narratives of the romances (e.g. *Floris and Blancheflour*: 'Sore he wept and sore he sight' 256. Repetead at 270<sup>246</sup>)”.

Although some of the sighing in *Troilus* comes through from his source text, Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, WINDEATT (1988:141) observes that there is much addition reminiscent of the patterns of “popular” romance and here particularly of the romance of *Floris and Blancheflour*.

A significant case in which Chaucer's *Troilus* echoes some standard emphases and gestures from *Floris and Blancheflour* can be detected in scenes displaying the hero's act of thanksgiving after the consummation. As WINDEATT (1988:142) observes, the incidence of adding kneeling and prayerful thankfulness in *Troilus* is a noticeable difference from *Filostrato*. Here, when Pandaro comes to Troilo, the hero emotionally throws himself on his friend's neck. Chaucer instead has his Troilus solemnly kneel to his friend and 'gan hym thonken in his beste wise/ An hondred sythe, and gan the tyme blesse/ That he was born to brynge hym fro destresse' (III. 1594-5).<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> The edition to which WINDEATT refers to is that of SANDS (1966).

<sup>247</sup> All quotations from the *Troilus* are taken from Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*: A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus' (London, 1984).

Chaucer's inclination to elaborate these moments of greeting may recall some of the typical moments of greeting or reunion in romances like *Sir Triamour* ('Twenty tymes he dud hur kysse/Then made they game and blysse', ll. 160-1<sup>248</sup>) and *Amis and Amiloun* ('þan was Sir Amis glad & bliþe/ & þanked him a þousand siþe', ll.1438-9<sup>249</sup>), both dating back from the late thirteenth century.

These recurrent type-scenes are frequently displayed in the oldest *Floris and Blancheflour* (ms. A 'And gaf his hoste an hundred schilinge/to his hoste and his hostesse/ J nam h[i]s leue and gan hem kesse/And gernehe haþ his oste bisozt [...]', ll.152-5'<sup>250</sup> or 'Boþe þiseswete þinges for blis/Fallezdoun, here fet to kis, J criez hire merci, al weping [...]'<sup>251</sup>, ms. A, ll. 514-16 or again 'Nou boþe þis children alle for bliss/ Fil þe Amerales fet to kis', ms. A, ll. 824-5).<sup>252</sup> The hypothesis of *Floris and Blancheflour*'s influence on *Amis and Amiloun* gains reliability if we consider that both romances are contained in the Auchinleck manuscript (A) and in a position quite close to each other.

WINDEATT (1988: 138) also detected that "many romance plot-structures similarly contain a sequence involving the confession to a confidant of the hero or heroine's being in love and the confidant's plan to gain the beloved". This type-scene contained in *Floris and Blancheflour* (ll. 385-424, 443-704<sup>253</sup>) is particularly suggested by some incidents in romances such as in *Sir Degrevant*,

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<sup>248</sup> *Sir Triamour*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, Percy Society 16 (London, 1846).

<sup>249</sup> *Amis and Amiloun*, ed. MacEdward Leach, EETS, O.S. 203 (London, 1937).

<sup>250</sup> DE VRIES (1966) ms. C displays the same type-scene using similar wordings (it lacks two lines here): 'He gaf his oste an hundred schillinge...../ And gerne he haþ his oste bisozt [...]', ll. 126-7

<sup>251</sup> DE VRIES (1966).

<sup>252</sup> DE VRIES (1966).

<sup>253</sup> Lines correspond to SANDS's edition (1986).

an original Middle English Romance composed between 1385 and 1410 (ll. 520-608, ll. 803-939)<sup>254</sup> and in two stanzas of *Octavian*, a fourteenth-century Middle English verse translation and abridgement of a mid-thirteenth century Old French romance of the same name (ll. 1093-1116)<sup>255</sup>. Windeatt remarks that such a type-scene is developed even more fully in *Troilus* during the protagonist's conversation with Pandarus dominating the latter half of the book.

Furthermore, the 'cares colde' of Troilus, recurrently mentioned through the poem ('And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde', V 1747) is again echoing a phrase frequent and characteristic in *Floris* (ms. C 'Nu aiþer haþ oþer itold/ Of here sorege J care cold', ll. 545-6).

A fact that leads us to consider the resemblance between *Floris* and *Troilus* not accidental is that the fragment containing *Floris and Blancheflour* (Gg. iv.27.2, i.e. ms. C) was previously bound up with Gg.iv.27, the well-known Chaucerian Manuscript, which contains various works ascribed to Geoffrey Chaucer, among which the *Bookes of Troilus and Cresseide* (fol.14a).

In using the narrative voice and in effecting transitions in the narrative, Chaucer seems sometimes to echo the procedures of the English *Floris and Blancheflour*.

WINDEATT (1988:143) himself points out that,

“When the narrative shifts back and forth between the separate lives of Troilus and Criseyde in Book II, it is Chaucer who has the poem's narrating voice articulate the transition in a way without equivalent in Filostrato but with many parallels in the English romances”.

The use in *Troilus* of such transition formulae as 'Now lat vs stynte of Troilus a throwe, /That rideth forth, and lat vs torne faste/Unto Cryseyde' (II, ll.687-9) or 'Now lat hire slepe, and we oure tales

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<sup>254</sup> *Sir Degrevant*, ed. L. F. Casson, EETS. O.S 221 (London, 1949).

<sup>255</sup> *Octavian*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, *Six Middle English Romances* (London, 1973).

holde/Of Troilus [...]’ (II, ll. 932-3), closely recalls the familiar narrative transitions contained in *Floris*, such as for example ‘Now let we of Blanche flour be/And speke of Floris in his contree’ (ms E, ll. 203-4).

In *Troilus* the gestures and attitudes of sensitive people afflicted by suffering in love are observed with a detail and grace which parallel *Floris*. Just as Troilus –in a scene taken over from Filostrato- lies turning restlessly in bed (‘To bedde he goth, and walwith ther and toneth’, V, 211), so Floris goes to bed feeling himself anguished: ‘Floriz gez to his rest/On Blanche flour he pozte mest./ Ac reste ne mizte he hadde none, /Fort þe dide slep him nome’ (ms. C, ll. 63-66). The same lines are repeated at ll. 119-122.

WINDEATT (1988: 134) remarks the fact that, especially in the earlier books,

“the developing relationship between Troilus and Criseyde [...] is not rewritten with such chivalrous romance texture: Troilus sends Criseyde no horses. But Chaucer does add moments to his Italian source narrative in which his lovers solemnly see their feelings as vested in significant and symbolic objects. [...] The brooch given to Criseyde by Troilus as a ‘remembraunce’ of himself at leaving is already in Filostrato, but after the consummation the lovers ‘pleynging entrechaungeden hire rynges’ (III. 1369)”.

The motif of the ring recurs in more than one episodes in *Floris*: the magic ring that the Queen gives to Floris before leaving (ms. E ‘Haue now þis ylke ryng./While it is pyn, douzt noþing/Of fire brennyng ne water in þe see/Ne yren ne steele shal dere thee’ ll. 375-8) is the same ring that Floris and Blanche flour repeatedly interchange in the final scene to protect one’s beloved from being burned by the flames (ms. C ‘He droz forþ a riche ring/ His moder him gaf at his parting.’) ‘Haue þis ring, lemman min;/ þu ne mizt nozt deie þe while he is þin./ þe ring he haueþ forþ arazt,/And to

Blancheflur bitagt./ “þe ring e schal neure aredde me,/ For deþ ne mi ihc se on þe”/þe ring heo wolde aze reche,/And to Floiz him biteche./Ac for al þat heo miȝte do,/He him nolde aȝen ifo [...] ll. 683-694).

The hypothesis of a probable influence of *Floris* on Chaucer’s literary language gains more reliability if we consider Hibbard Loomis’s theory. In her famous article “Chaucer and the Auchinleck Manuscript”<sup>256</sup>, she proposes that Geoffrey Chaucer read the Auchinleck manuscript which would have become the direct inspiration for his famous satire on verse romance, *The Tale of Sir Thopas* (from *The Canterbury Tales*). Her hypothesis is based partly on circumstantial evidence (Auchinleck was produced in London between 1331 and 1340 and Chaucer was born in the city at about this time, in 1340), combined with her claim for verbal similarities between *The Tale of Sir Thopas* and the Auchinleck stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*.

Wiggins highlights in particular how the romances within the Auchinleck manuscript remind the kind of literary environment and linguistic milieu with which authors of the later fourteenth century, Chaucer included, were acquainted:

“Auchinleck preserves, and to some extent allows us access to, the kind of literary culture and literary language with which Chaucer grew up and was influenced by and which can be seen transformed and refracted in his own writings. Chaucer's interest in, for example, Breton lay, estates satire and chivalric and metrical romance are all apparent in *The Canterbury Tales* and all attest to close familiarity with the type of language and traditions represented in Auchinleck. This is not at all to say that Chaucer read Auchinleck itself, but that the contents of the manuscript are representative of the kind of literary environment and linguistic milieu with which writers of the later fourteenth century were familiar.

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<sup>256</sup> HIBBARD LOOMIS (1940:111-128).

That is, Auchinleck is especially valuable for understanding the development of English literature because it offers an insight into an English vernacular literary culture which preceded and was influential upon Chaucer and his generation".<sup>257</sup>

## 6.2. Concluding remarks

The identification of the same or similar archetypal episodes and recurrent formulae/motifs between texts can be actually misleading where it lumps together quite dissimilar romances because of some superficial coincidence of plot-material but it is mostly through the formal and stylistic aspects of texts –in combination with the others- that the history of romance and the interrelations between texts can be most objectively analysed.

In this respect one should notice that the evidence of the influence that our romance exerted more or less directly on later translations and even original works, leads us to assume that it held a leading position over the late Middle Ages. This major role can be accounted for if one considers that the position of translated texts was apparently not so threatened by the appearance of original works, mainly for the reason that the English romance establishes as free-standing and national genre at a later stage (fifteenth century) if compared to the literature of other European countries.

As CHISM (2009:58) points out, introducing the question from a historical point of view:

“Many Middle English romances translate or draw from French, Anglo- Norman, or Latin works, and in fact Middle English writing in general is a latecomer to medieval culture. This belatedness is an effect of the Norman Conquest (1066) when William the Conqueror displaced the indigenous English nobility and established a French-speaking monarchy and ruling class, endowing his own nobles and

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<sup>257</sup> WIGGINS, the Auchinleck Manuscript: Importance (2003:3).

installing Norman bishops and archbishops in England. This long eclipse of literary English means that the first romances written in England were written in Latin, French, and Anglo-Norman”.

Chism continues explaining that, when romance writers began to use English again, it was partly to bring these stories to wider audiences, and partly to retain audiences among the gentility and aristocracy themselves as the native knowledge of French began to decrease among them. These writers drew, naturally enough, from the stories already circulating both in England and elsewhere in Anglo-Norman, French, and Latin:

“Almost every Anglo- Norman romance has a Middle English version. Yet these were not simple translations<sup>258</sup> but rather free reimaginings of their sources turned to the needs of new situations and audiences. Middle English writers seized upon, redirected, parodied, and criticized the conventions of their sources in an astonishing variety of registers, from the blunt utility of *King Horn* to the intricacy of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”.<sup>259</sup>

These remarks lead us to suppose that, unlike in other contemporary literary polysystems in Europe, in the polysystem of medieval England translations and adaptations- particularly those from Old French and Anglo-Norman- tend to retain a position which is not peripheral at all, at least until the second half of the fourteenth century and as far as texts of secular nature is concerned. This does not mean that no original works had been produced during the Middle English literary phase nor that native narratives did not have any impact or influence on later works; but rather that the production of translated texts was so developed to place alongside - or even overcome- the

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<sup>258</sup> It is actually a matter of fact that every translation is the result of a process of reworking and reshaping of the source text into the target text on different levels, including the textual level and the socio-cultural one. To use the term “simple translations” is definitely shallow and misleading.

<sup>259</sup> CHISM (2009:59).

production of original medieval English works between the twelfth and the fourteenth century.<sup>260</sup>

As CHISM (2009:59) indeed points out,

“While translations of continental romances continued throughout the period, many original narratives were also written – *Gamelyn* is one example – adapting the genre to specifically English contexts and audience”.

The author claims that it is only in the fifteenth century that English literary authority has to be considered completely and officially established:

“The definitive emergence of Middle English tradition in the fourteenth century would be followed by an even broader and more voluminous outpouring in the fifteenth, such that one might well argue that it was the fifteenth century that cemented the literary authority of English once and for all”.

Broadly speaking, we can thus conclude that translated texts (especially those based on courtly-chivalric French originals) have –at least in part- contributed to shaping the centre of the polysystem in medieval England, as England at that time did not boast yet an already well-defined established code, shaped exclusively by the composition of original works.

It can be assumed that the influence of translated texts was considerable in a quite young literary polysystem which was not already completely established. As a result, texts produced during and after a period in which the practice of translation plays such a major role tend to adopt the models and the norms established by the first translated texts.

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<sup>260</sup> As PERSALL (1988:17, note 11) detects “of the fifty romances listed above, all but twelve would have a direct French source, extant or putative”.

However, the evidence that I collected does not enable us to say that our text has unequivocally assumed a primary position within the Polysystem of Middle English literature but leads us to assert that it certainly helped to establish a model in stylistic and ideological terms for later translated texts and for a few cases, as probably happened with Chaucer's *Troilus*, also for works which do not have an Old French counterpart.

*Floris* seems to well represent that group of Middle English translations and/or adaptations from Old French which displays an example of courtly-chivalric romance for later adaptations, translated not only from French but also, for example, from Italian (see Boccaccio's *Filostrato*). The parallelisms identified above (as far as narrative type-scenes and recurrent stock formulae are concerned) between *Floris* and other later romances belonging to the same genre, lead us to assume a quite significant impact of the first on the polysystem of Middle English literature.

To view a translation in relation with other texts within the whole structure of the polysystem helps us to better evaluate not only the features of each translated text but also the mechanisms regulating the development of the literature of the target culture.

Furthermore, an awareness of the dynamics regulating the relations between different texts belonging to various genres within the wider context of the polysystem is crucial in order to evaluate and compare texts belonging to the same cultural and linguistic repertoire.

It remains only to admit that new evidence and further evaluation of the more neglected aspects may contribute to revealing additional significant connections between our text and the tradition.

The main lines of reasoning, particularly the general lines of resemblance, though only tentatively sketched out here, have some objective basis and may serve as scaffolding for others to build on.

**Appendix I. The English manuscript tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour*: an investigation of the relationship between the four witnesses.**

## **List of Abbreviations**

Acc. accusative

EM. East Midland

Dat. dative

For Ex. for example

Fem. feminine

Masc. masculine

Nom. nominative

KT. Kentish

ME. Middle English

Mod. E. Modern English

Ms.(s.) manuscript(s)

OE. Old English

OF. Old French

ON. Old Norse

Pl. plural

Sg. singular

Pers. personal

Pres. present

Pret. preterit

Pron. pronoun

WM. West Midland

V O. verb-object

O V. object-verb

## Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to briefly discuss some of the most striking examples of textual criticism revealing considerable divergences or significant resemblances between the four witnesses preserving the Middle English tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour*.

My aim is indeed that of giving a little contribution to the ongoing process of classifying the English manuscript tradition of the romance and to identify hypothetical stemmatic relationships between the manuscripts examined.

I first make some preliminary remarks on general similarities and discrepancies between the manuscripts (handwriting, physical make up, format, etc.) and then concentrate on the language of the translations, focusing on some significant instances taken from the texts.

Special attention is devoted to such features that are of importance in establishing the affiliation between the four Middle English witnesses. No attempt is made to treat the phonology, morphology and syntax of the four texts exhaustively but to record few useful examples contributing to establish the relationship between the manuscripts.

On the basis of the linguistic material offered by the texts and through the identification of some significant examples of omission and rewriting within the witnesses, I suggest subtle differences and surprising concurrences that help to distinguish the links in the chain of texts.

I thus propose a *stemma codicum* of the English manuscript tradition which summarizes and illustrates my hypotheses and suppositions.

This study takes into account two different editions: De Vries's edition of *Floris and Blancheflour*<sup>261</sup>, a readable text of the four English witnesses preserving the romance, and the one

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<sup>261</sup> DE VRIES (1966).

edited by Kooper and published online on the University of Rochester Libraries website<sup>262</sup>. This last one is merely based on manuscripts A and E<sup>263</sup>.

## **1. Some preliminary remarks**

Codicological and paleographical analysis provides some additional information about material and binding as well as structure, arrangement and handwriting of the manuscripts.

A quite detailed description of the physical make up of A, C, E and V has been already provided in chapter 4. Here just a rapid overview for each manuscript is given.

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (the Auchinleck manuscript) is a folio volume of three hundred thirty-two vellum leaves, written in double columns, except the first six folios.

The manuscript has suffered significant mutilation, probably because of the beautiful miniatures it contained. Most of these have been extracted and a considerable number of leaves cut away. Some of the missing leaves - eight in all – have been later recovered<sup>264</sup>.

By means of the catchwords (thirty-seven surviving nowadays) it is possible to reestablish the gatherings of the manuscript. The Auchinleck would have been originally divided into fifty-two gatherings of eight leaves each for the present content of the manuscript<sup>265</sup>.

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<sup>262</sup> KOOPER (2008).

<sup>263</sup> Specifically lines 1-366 are based on the Egerton Manuscript; lines 367-1227 on the Auchinleck Manuscript.

<sup>264</sup> DE VRIES (1966:1) points out that four were found by David Laing and were used to bind paper notebooks. Now they are preserved in the University Library of Edinburgh MS 218. The other four were discovered more recently. They can be found now in the Library of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. For a more accurate presentation of the eight leaves recovered see SMITHERS (1949:XVIII).

The scribe who copied the text of *Floris and Blancheflour* had a cursive bookhand described as an early idiosyncratic form of *Anglicana Formata* showing some evidence of Chancery training. Bliss comments that "the length of *f*, *r* and long *s* (all of which run well below the line), shows the influence of Chancery hand"<sup>266</sup>.

This is highly significant with regard to manuscript production: it may imply that the scribe worked within Chancery and would have supplemented his regular work with freelance copying. The appearance of this hand also argues strongly against the belief that Auchinleck was a monastic production, endorsing, instead, the likelihood that it represents an enterprise that was lay and commercial.<sup>267</sup>

The handwriting is clear and legible; the larger capitals are blue with filigree tracing in red and the initials of each line -which are clearly marked off from the rest of the line- touched with red<sup>268</sup>.

Cambridge University Library, MS Gg. 4.27.2 (C) is a single quire of fourteen vellum leaves written in double columns throughout. The scribe of C has a clear and sharp handwriting. Two lines are sometimes written as one, especially at the bottom of a folio, in an effort to save space; as a result additions above the line are fairly common. There are large red and blue capitals and paragraph signs. The initials, sometimes hardly distinguishable from capitals, are written apart from the rest and rubricated. There are few corrections, apparently in a contemporary hand<sup>269</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> Cfr. DE VRIES (1966:1-2).

<sup>266</sup> DE VRIES (1966:3).

<sup>267</sup> This hypothesis is shared by DE VRIES (1966: 3) and WIGGINS (2003).

<sup>268</sup> For a very accurate codicological description of the Auchinleck manuscript, see WIGGINS (2003).

<sup>269</sup> A more detailed description of the physical make up of C is given in DE VRIES (1966: 3,4).

The text preserved in British Museum MS. Egerton 2862 (E) is copied in a very informal running hand. The most remarkable feature is the presence of end flourishes, tags or hooks added to many letters, in particular *-n*, *-m*, *-d*, *-g*, *-h*, *-f*, especially as the scribe was not consistent in his use of them.

It is a folio volume of one hundred forty-eight vellum leaves with some margins containing scribbling; one is particularly interesting as it quotes the name of “Thomas Waker”, perhaps one of the former owners<sup>270</sup>.

British Museum MS. Cotton Vitellius Diii (V), on the other hand, is written in a very fine book hand. In its present state, it is a small folio volume of twenty-six vellum leaves written in double columns. Of the four hundred forty-five lines contained in the present-day edition, only some one hundred eighty are completely legible.

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<sup>270</sup> DE VRIES (1966:4).

## 2. Analysis: comparing and contrasting the four witnesses

In order to compare the length of the four witnesses thoroughly, it would be useful to take as starting point the beginning of C, which corresponds to E 373 and A 710. As the total length of E is 1083 lines and that of A 861, we find that for that part of the narrative which A, C and E have in common, A has 855 lines, C has 824 and E has 711 lines.

V has to be considered a mere fragment, as it lacks a too wide amount of lines. Nevertheless it is useful as it shows that the beginning of E (which is not in A and C) is condensed and in some parts more reduced (in its first 137 lines, V has eighteen lines that are unrepresented in E).

One of the first remarks to make, just observing the arrangement of the four texts, is that each one (A above all) has some lines peculiar to itself, which are entirely unrepresented in the other witnesses. This is for example the case of A 101-4 269-72, 352-53 (here C, E and V lack the text). Sometimes the same lines are repeated in different passages within the same text: for example A 103-104 recall A 183-184.

A 103-104:

[...] *Florice ne sparede for no fe*  
*Inow þat þere ne scholde be,*  
***Off fisci, of flessch, of tendre bred,***  
***Bope of whit win and of red.***

A 183-184:

[...] *þourgh tokning of þat ilke ring*  
*Florice hadde þer god gestning*  
***Of fichss, of flessch, of tendre bred,***  
***Bope of whit win and of red.***

It seems furthermore that lines A 103-104 (as well as C 27-28) are used out of context if compared to lines A 183-184, which correspond to those in the other witnesses (cfr. A 103-104, E 519-520, V 169-170).

A similar instance can be found at A 269-272. The same words are repeated in C, but some lines earlier:

A 269-272:

*zif þe[r] comez ani man*  
*Wizinne þat ilche barbican,*  
*But hit be bi his leue,*  
*He wille him boþe bete and reue.*

C 243-246:

*And ef þer comeþ eni man*  
*Bipinne þilke barbican,*  
*Bute he him zeue leue,*  
*He wule him boþe bete J reue.*

The incidence of a large number of repetitions, especially within the same witness, can be attributed to a presumed oral transmission of the text. This hypothesis was supported by TAYLOR (1927), who stated the problem as follows:

“These MSS. are copies of a lost original. Their text may have been transmitted in one or two ways: either by means of scribal copies or by writing down versions recited by minstrels who memorized the original. [...] The wide discrepancies between the four manuscripts of the romance indicate that the latter process is the more probable”.

On the whole it seems to me that the hypothesis of the oral transmission could be taken into account. I am led to think that such replications and recurrences might be attributed to the will of scribes of reproducing faithfully the lines that they had heard during the oral performances of minstrels (well-known for containing forms of repetitions used to emphasize some passages, drawing the public's attention).

However, I am rather inclined to believe that copyists and scribes on their own were -in the act of copying- intentionally led to insert details or to embellish parts of the story with additional lines, which could even recur in more than one passage within the same text.

I thus think that these recurring lines cannot be explained as due to mechanical errors at all: the repetition of the same passage after eighty lines cannot be accidental nor unplanned. It rather implicates awareness from the writer, who sculptured his own, new, modified version of the story.

A similar but more striking case is detected in C: it has a considerable number of lines peculiar to itself which in A, E and V, where available, are recorded in similar wordings or not found at all.

The significant number of common errors shared by A, E and V against C might suggest two things mainly: either C underwent independent scribal variations, detaching from the other three manuscripts of the presumably same group (this is the case in which the readings in C turn out to be unoriginal, thus corrupt), or it might belong to another manuscript family, whose is the representative against the other three witnesses.

Since the space I have at my disposal is restricted, I will limit myself to focus on some very few selected remarks, including significant comments on lexicon, phonology, morphology and some few observations on syntax.

All my hypotheses are inferred on the basis of a careful reading and comparative examination of the four witnesses; however they still remain suppositions and conjectures which cannot be demonstrated or rejected on the basis of incontestable clues.

For the sake of clarity I decided to divide the variants<sup>271</sup> examined into two main categories: substantial variants and formal variants.

The first group is made up by those variants which affect the “substance” of the reading, as ROSSI (2003:11) points out:

“‘Varianti sostanziali’ sono quelle che riguardano la sostanza della lezione, per esempio casi di sinonimie [...], cambio d’ordine delle parole. [...] Sempre sostanziali sono le varianti che mostrano spostamenti di frasi o di sezioni, aggiunte o eliminazioni di testo (se riguardano porzioni ampie del testo si parlerà di ‘macrovarianti’).”

The second category is represented by those variants which concern the linguistic form of the reading, with ROSSI’s (2003:11) words:

“‘Varianti formali’ sono quelle che riguardano la forma linguistica della lezione, la sua superficie, e si possono suddividere in varianti grafiche (*umano e humano*), fonetiche (*buono e bono*), morfologiche (*questo e chisto*) utili a caratterizzare i testimoni che le presentano”.

The necessity of distinguishing the substantial variants from the formal variants depends on the fact that only the first ones contribute to discriminate a group of manuscripts and can be used to establish family relationships between the codices. In particular, the so-called *errores significativi*

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<sup>271</sup> As ROSSI (2003:11) points out, “con ‘variante’ si indica una lezione in forma diversa a un’altra e dotata di senso”.

are, as FROGER (1968:70) points out, “l’effetto e il riflesso delle relazioni genealogiche dei manoscritti”<sup>272</sup>

## 2.1. AEV – C

### 2.1.1. Substantial variants

Let’s focus on the following example, where lines in C detach from those in A, E and V for their different grammatical structure and lexical choices. Here Daris, the bridge keeper, asks Floris the reason of his sorrow:

C 187-88:

*“[...]zef þu toldest me þi gref,  
to rede þe me were lef.”*

A 203-4:

*“[...]Child, woldest þou tel me þi gref,  
to helpe þe, me were ful lef.”*

E 537-38:

*“[...]Childe, woldest þow telle me þy gryf,  
to hele þe, me were ful lyf.”*

V 189-90:

*“[...]Child, woldest þou telle me of þi gref,  
to helpe þe me were wel lef.”*

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<sup>272</sup> The *errores significativi* distinguish the *errores coniunctivi* or *Bindefehler* from the *errores separativi* or *Trennfehler*. As MAAS (1950:58) points out, “la maggior parte degli errori congiuntivi non ha valore separativo, [...] la maggior parte degli errori separativi si può utilizzare nello stesso tempo come errori congiuntivi”.

Lines in C visibly distinguish themselves from those in AEV. These last ones share the present conditional form (2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sing.) *woldest* (M.E *willen*), followed by the infinitive *tel(le)*. In C the scribe uses an agiler verb construction using instead one lexical verb, *toldest* (2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sing. conditional).

Moreover, while AEV employ a direct speech construction, introduced by the vocative *Child(e)*, C uses an indirect speech construction, introduced by the conjunction *ȝef (if)* and followed by the personal pronoun *þu (you)*. As a result, in C the subject precedes the verb (*þu toldest*), while in AEV the subject follows it. (*woldest þou*).

Further remarkable distinction is in the use of *rede* (C) rather than *hel(p)e* (AEV): the first one seems to represent the right reading if compared to the French source text “[...] *après, se jou puis et jou sai, volentiers vous conseillearai*”<sup>273</sup>. The form *hele* in E is very probably a scribal error for *helpe*.

Another significant instance can be found at C 203-4, when Daris gives Floris advice on how to enter the impenetrable tower of Babylon and reach his beloved Blancheflour; the bridge keeper warns him that it will be a risky enterprise:

C 203-4:

*Ne þer nis non so riche king*

*þat dorste entermeten of eni such þing, [...]*

A 217-8:

*þat alperrichchest kyng*

*Ne dorste beginner swich a þing;*

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<sup>273</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:82, ll. 1673-4).

E 551-2:

*And þe alderrychest king*

*Durst not begynne suche a þing.*

V 201-2:

*þe alre richest kinge*

*Ne dorste biginne swch a þing.*

Here again C differs from AEV firstly from a syntactic point of view: C has a consecutive clause (*so...þat*) while the other witnesses preserve a simple independent clause (Mod.E. *the most powerful king of them all would not dare such a thing*). As a result, C displays the expression *so riche king*, which in AEV is replaced by the relative superlative (A: *alperrichchest*, E: *alderrychest*; the form *alre richest* in V is very probably a scribal error for *alderrychest*).

A further remarkable aspect is detected in the use of *beginne* (Mod.E. *begin*), shared by AEV against *entremeten* (which corresponds to modern English *undertake* and which undoubtedly enjoys more prestige, as it derives from OF. *entremetre*).<sup>274</sup>

One of the most striking passages where C detaches from AEV is revealed at l. 174. Here C has, almost certainly, the right reading against AEV, as these last ones share a common example of misunderstanding which probably goes back to an assumed common antecedent.

C 174: *So god in nauede ihc wel zore.*

A 194: *So god I ne hadde zore.*

E 530: *So good ne had y mony day zore.*

V 180: *So god inadde wel zore.*

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<sup>274</sup> The space at my disposal does not allow me to exhaustively illustrate all the examples found; other similar instances in which C strikingly distances from A,E,V are detectable at C 193-196 cfr. A 124-128, E 470-474; C 653-656 cfr. A 674-677, E 932-935, V 411-414.

In this line AEV share the kind of error that is most unlikely to have arisen independently and might go back to a common antecedent.<sup>275</sup> The right reading in C (*So god in nauede ihc wel zore*) is replaced by some presumably corrupted alternatives in AEV. The string in C, substantive (*in*: Mod.E. *house*) + verb (*nauede*: pret. neg. 1<sup>st</sup> pers. sing of *habben*, Mod.E *have*) is misunderstood and re-decoded in A and V as *I ne hadde (Inadde)*, where *I* is clearly re-interpreted as 1<sup>st</sup> personal singular subject. E displays *ne had*, lacks the object and postpones the subject (*y*). It reports besides the expression *mony day*, absent in the other witnesses. All the three translations are hardly understandable here and come out to be corrupt if compared to C.

There is furthermore a significant number of items in C which seems to derive from the French source text, while AE (and V where available) substitute the same terms with corresponding nouns of English origin. This is the case of *feire* (Mod.E *market*) in C 216, against A 228 *scheping*, E 562 *chepyng* and V 212 *chepinge*. *Feire* clearly corresponds to the French *foire*: *A totes est la foire plaine*<sup>276</sup> .

C 216: *þe feire is þer illiche plener.*

A 228: *þat scheping nis þe[r] inne plener.*

E 562: *þe chepyng is ylyche plener.*

V 212: *þat þe chepinge is illiche plener.*

The same phenomenon occurs at C 330, which is a literal translation from the Old French text:

C 330: *Forþ he wule setten his resun.*

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<sup>275</sup> “La variazione comune a due o più manoscritti, perché venga assunta come errore con valore connettivo (errore congiuntivo) allo scopo di definire un gruppo omogeneo di codici, o un sottogruppo, deve avere caratteristiche tali da documentare che, «secondo ogni probabilità», come scrive MAAS (1950:55), i copisti non possono averla prodotta indipendentemente gli uni dagli altri”. LUISELLI FADDA (2000:197).

<sup>276</sup> D’ORBIGNY (2003:90, l.1805).

It perfectly traces the French *sempres vos metra a reson*<sup>277</sup>; here A and E are both corrupt and have two lines.

Similarly, the term *spusen* in C 788 recalls the French *espouser* ([...] *s'amie li fait espouser*<sup>278</sup>) against *wedded* displayed in both A 828 and E 1070.

C 788: And ***spusen*** hem wip one gold ringe.

A 828: J þe Amerale here ***wedded*** to Queene.

E 1070: And Amyral ***wedded*** hur to Queene.

Another point in which A, E and V generally agree against C is the sequence of events; C describes Floris and Blancheflour's act of kissing the emir's feet before the young man brings his beloved to the altar. The sequence is overturned in A and E (V is not available here):

C 785 et seq.:

*Nu boþe togadere þes childre for blisse*

*Falleþ to his fet hem to kisse*

*He let hem to one chirche bringe*

*And spusen hem wip one gold ringe*

A 822 et seq.:

*To one chirche h[e] let hem bringge*

*J wedde here wiz here owene ringge*

*Nou boþe þis children alle for bliss*

*Fil þe Amerales fet to kis.*

E 1064 et seq.:

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<sup>277</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:106, 1.2104).

<sup>278</sup> D'ORBIGNY (2003:164, 1.3139).

*To a chirche he let hem bryng,  
and dede let wed hem with a ryng.  
Boþ þese twoo swete þinges ywys  
Fel his feet for to kysse.*

The two lover's act of kissing the emir's feet precedes the wedding scene in the French text too:

FR 3131 et seq.:

*Andoi li sont keü as piés,  
a grant joie li ont baisiés.  
[...]Aprés, quant l'ot fait chevalier,  
mener les fait a un mostier  
s'amie li fait espouser.*

That of C has to be assumed, indeed, the right position if we consider that in the lines before the emir releases the children from his sentence of death, giving them the chance to tell their story. Kissing the emir's feet is Floris and Blancheflour's act of thankfulness for having been spared.<sup>279</sup>

There is furthermore a number of lines in AE and V, when possible, which totally lack in C. A significant example is found at A 77-8 which perfectly corresponds to E 129-30:

A 77-8:

*Sone so Florice com to londe,  
Wel zerne he þankede Godes sonde.*

E 129-30:

*Sone so Florys com to londe,*

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<sup>279</sup> The same phenomenon occurs even more visibly in the passage describing the enchanting atmosphere of the emir's orchard and the extraordinary properties of its water. The description is found in A 298-305, E 617-625 and V 264-271, whereas the analogous passage in C occurs some lines further on (302-308). At this point A, E as well as V lack the text. Again there is no correspondence between AEV and C.

*þere he þanked Goddes sonde.*

These lines are completely unrepresented in C, as it occurs for a passage preserved at A 694-7, E 954-7 and V 439-42:

A 694-7:

*Twaie sarazins forþ hem bringe  
Toward here deþ, sore weþinge.  
Dreri were þis schildren two;  
Nou aiþer biwepeþ oþeres wo.*

E 954-7:

*Two serieauntes hem gan bryng  
Toward hur [deep], al weþyng.  
Drery boþ þese children goo;  
Ayther bemeneþ oþeris woo.*

V 439-42:

*Tweize seriauns hem forþ bringe  
To fonge here dom sore weþin[ge]).  
Dreri weren þe chyldren.....  
Her eyþer bywepeþ oþer.....*

Even if there is not a complete equivalence among the lines preserved in the three witnesses, they visibly recount the same text passage, which does not find any correspondence in C<sup>280</sup>.

Generally, when there is an extensive omission in C, this is supplied by both E and A and, when available, by V too<sup>281</sup>. Occasionally C seems to have added lines (e.g. C 189-90 or 265-267) where A and E are shorter and more concise.

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<sup>280</sup> Other examples of this kind can be detected at A 49-52, E 409-11; A 247-50, E 575-78, V 230-33.

One more striking example is that of the pillar in the garden of the emir's palace, where Claris, Blancheflour's friend, fills her basin with water. The pillar is mentioned in all four witnesses in a passage that is quite uniform and therefore probably goes back to the English original: A 594, C 597, E 875, V 349. It is yet curious that only in C the existence of the pillar and its functioning has been introduced three hundred lines earlier (C 223-30), when Daris, the bridge keeper describes the city of Babylon and the emir's palace to Floris:

C 223-30:

*In þe tur þer is a walle;*

*Supe clear hit is wiþ all.*

*He urneþ in o pipe of bras,*

*Whider-so hit ned was.*

*fram flore into flore*

*þe strimes urneþ store,*

*fram bure into halle,*

*þe strimes of þis walle.*

### **2.1.2. Formal variants**

As was mentioned above, C deserves special consideration: it approaches the French source text more nearly than A or V, displaying readings or entire lines/passages absent in the other witnesses. Furthermore it seems to have preserved a number of archaic features which go back to typically Old English phonological and morphosyntactic traits.

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<sup>281</sup> This if for example the case of C 100-101, 290- 291, 316-317, 554-555, 628-629, 656-657, 672-673, 720-721.

### 2.1.2.1. Phonological traits

The following are some of the most significant phonological traits which make C distinguish from the other witnesses:

- 1) Mainly in C, long vowels are graphically written as single ones (as it happened in Old English), while in A/E they are recorded in double letters. This is easily perceivable observing the following contrasts: *anon* (A 464, C 154)/ *anoon* (E 194); *bo* (A 759, C 547)/ *boo* (E 1013); *breme* (A 826, C792)/ *breeme* (E 1071).
- 2) C retains the typical Old English verb forms, such as *seo*, pres. 1<sup>st</sup> sg. (C 44, 100, 168) against *se* (A 44, 188, 213) and *see* (E 404, 524, 649).
- 3) C displays a considerable number of words which has not been affected by homorganic lengthening: ex. *wimman* (C 707)/ *woman* (E 3, 247); *hadde* (C 477, 547) /*had* (E 31, 32); *wille* (C 61, V 103)/ *wil* (A 416), *wyl* (E E 46); *whanne* (C 340)- *wenne* (V 40)/ *when* (E 241).
- 4) C is not affected by some common M.E. changes in the spelling and pronunciation of English vowels, such as raising phenomena of /u:/>/au/: ex. *Blancheflur* (C 480)/ *Blancheflour* (A 475, E 779); *huse* (C 21)/ *hous* (A 25, 35).<sup>282</sup>. /o:/>/u:/: ex. *god* (C 70, 174)/*good* (E 26, 143); /u:/>/ou/>/au/: ex. *duteþ* (C 606)/ *douteþ* (E 881) - *doutez* (A 607).

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<sup>282</sup> These changes represent the very first traces of what is generally known as Great Vowel Shift, a process of raisings and diphtongisations which distinguishes the phonologies (and in many cases also the spelling system) of Late Middle English vowels from those ones of Early Modern English. The phenomenon of the Great Vowelshift took a long time to completely establish, approximately from 1350 to 1700.

- 5) C retains O.E. long diphthongs *ēa* and *ēo*, like in *heorte* (C 113), while A and E affect monothonghization, reducing *ēa* and *ēo* into *a* and *e* respectively. (cfr. A 59, 89, E 116, 253 *hert(e)*).
- 6) In many words, C retains final *-e*, destined to disappear after the loss of unstressed syllables and weak final endings. This is revealed by a comparison with the other witnesses. Ex. *bute* (C 14, 554)/ *but* (A 266, 271; E 10, 594); likewise final inflection *-n* has not been lost in the unstressed possessive pronouns preserved in C: ex. *mine-myne* (C 144)/ A 64, 115, 116: *my* (E 45, 67, 85).

#### 2.1.2.2. Morphological traits

More than in any other texts, one can detect in C a number of instances of the preservation of grammatical gender and case; this is shown by the use of inflected forms of definite articles and personal pronouns.

- 1) C displays the archaic and typical Southern pronoun *heo* (feminine, 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. nom) against the more ambiguous form *hi* (identical to the masculine form) and the Mod.E. alike feminine 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. pron. *she*, the predominant form in the East-Midland speech.

C 468: *And whi heo makede suche bere.*

A 457: *þat hi makede so loude bere.*

E 764: *and why she made suche a bere.*

- 2) C also retains archaic forms of the paradigm of the demonstrative adjective *þes* (Mod. E *this*), which in AE (and V where available) are generally replaced by the definite article **þe**:

C 92: *þis child he sette next his side* (*þis*: neutral sing. accus.)

A 106: *þe child he sette bi his side.*

E 448: *þe childe he set next his side.*

- 3) Inflected forms of the definite article/demonstrative pronoun survive in *þane* (C 423, 819/ V 133), *þer* (C 35, 88) and *þan*, also in the combinations *after þan*, *for þan*, *of þan*:

C 819: *Nu ze habbeþ iherd þane ende.*

C 35: *þe lefdi of þer inne vnderzat, [...]*

C 108: *[Bliþe] he was iwis for þan.*

C 387: *Seie þu wilt parte wiþ him of þan, [...]*

- 4) The accusative singular form *sumne* (Mod.E. *some*) survives in C:

C 318: *Bute if þu do me sumne red.*

E 648: *But þat y hope of þe som reed.*

- 5) Relics of the OE. declensional system are also found in nouns:

C 18: *And wiþ him his fader chaumberlein.*

A 20: *Himself and his chaumberlain.*

E 384: *With him went þe chaumberlein*

C 62: *þeȝ heo beo at þe wordless ende.*

C 415: *To fonde mid sume kunnes ginne.* (cfr A 406, E 717)

### 2.1.2.3 Syntactic traits

As far as syntax is concerned, C clearly shows a prevailing OV word-order, approaching again to the Old phase of the English language.

This aspect can be easier detected in embedded clauses, as main clauses were characterized, mainly during the OE phase, by the so-called *verb-second phenomenon*<sup>283</sup>, which can easily disguise the basic word-order.

Let's consider the following lines, in which the verb is placed at the end of the subordinate clause:

C 36: *þat he murninge sat.*

C 180: *þat þing for whi ihc am hider icume;*

C 186: *þat þu muche þe betere were.*

In the following examples we can observe that the final position of compound verbs is destined to the inflected (sometimes modal) verb:

C 176: *þat ihc þe **zulde may.*** (Mod.E: he may repay)

C 476: *þat ihc **crie bigan.*** (Mod.E: he began to cry)

C does not show a strict OV word-order, as we can find in the text a reasonable number of examples displaying a VO word-order. Although it is not consistent with respect of this typology, it is surely the text which mostly exhibits O.E. familiar word-order.<sup>284</sup>

The language of C is in most respects head-final: the verb follows its objects and the head of the phrase its modifiers (the noun follows its adjective and the genitive case):

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<sup>283</sup> The verb-second phenomenon is a specific restriction on the placement of the finite verb in a sentence. The verb-second principle requires that the finite verb (inflected verb) appears in the second position of a declarative main clause, whereby the first position is occupied by a single major constituent that functions as the clause topic.

<sup>284</sup> This inconsistency may be attributed to the fact that the passage from OV to VO was gradual and took a long time to completely establish (i.e. from about 1300 until about 1450).

C 18: *And wip him his fader chaumberlein.* (cfr A 20, E 384)

C 62: *þez heo beo at þe wordless ende.*

C 202: *Oþer half hundred of riche kings.*

C 482: *Wiltu seo a wel fair flur?*

E, on the other hand, displays a definitely dominant VO word-order. This could be ascribed whether to its late presumed date of composition (end of the fourteenth century- first part of the fifteenth century) if compared with the other witnesses and/or to assumed influences from Old Norse<sup>285</sup>, being the dialect of E affected by a significant number of northernisms, and thus supposed to be copied in an area not too far from the North of England<sup>286</sup>,

A good amount of lines in E shows the inflected verb within the clause (it usually occupies the third position, just after subordinate conjunction and subject) and the lexical infinitive at the end:

E 76: *þat þe maydens moder make hur seeke.*

E 79: *þat she may not fro hur moder goo.*

Sometimes the lexical infinitive immediately follows the inflected verb:

E 424: *þat y ne schal seche hur in Babyloyne.*

E 701: *þat he wyl falle to þy foote.*

A, on the whole, is nearer to E, showing a prevailing VO word-order.

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<sup>285</sup> During the ninth and the tenth centuries, the Vikings settled down in Northern England carrying with them their Scandinavian dialects.

<sup>286</sup> This assumption is based on a significant number of lexical “northernisms” which can be easily detected in E and which are substituted by synonyms of Old English origin in the other witnesses. One of the most striking examples is detectable at E379 (*He took his leue for to goo*) against C9 (*Floris nimeþ nu his leue*): whereas *take* derives from ON. *taka*, *nimen* comes from OE. *niman*. In Middle English we find both verbs but *take* is more easily found in areas of Scandinavian influence. Other examples of nouns of Scandinavian origin preserved in E are *awze* from ON. *agi* (Mod.E. terror, fear), *lowe* from ON. *lágr* (Mod.E. low).

The progressive shift to VO word-order is the indirect consequence of an increasing reduction of inflectional endings, which firstly affects the article. It undergoes a process of degrammaticalisation: the great range of varieties of forms is thus reduced to the invariable *þe* which is no more case-marked and does not convey information of gender and number anymore. This led on one side to a more strict word-order within the sentence, e.g. SVO (in order to easier identify the grammatical function of each element within the clause) and, on the other side, to the introduction of functional elements- mainly prepositions- to balance the loss of inflectional endings conveying morphological information.

This evolution characterizes the Middle English phase and marks the shift of the English language from synthetic to analytic. The effects of this shift are detectable in A and E where, a part from some relics of inflectional endings here and there, the use of prepositions prevails on the use of morphological affixes:

A 403: *Hou Blancheflour was fram him sold*

E 714: *How þe mayde was fro him solde*

C 412: *Hu þat maide was isold.*

E 18: “*Ne shal not Blancheflour lerne with me?*”

A 25: *þe louerd of þe hous was wel hende.*

E 389: *þe lord of þe ynne was welle hende.*

(C is not available here)

Inflectional categories can be also realized by word-internal change or stem-alternation. This phenomenon is induced by *apophony* (or *ablaut*), which accounts for the distinction between present and past tense:

A 269: *zif þe[r] comez ani man.*

A 466: "To þis coupe ich **cam**, and wolde [...]"

C 9: Floris **nimeþ** nu his leue.

C 791: þe Admiral hire **nam** to Quene.

E 422: I ne wylt where I hur **fynde** myzt.

E 933: I **fonde** peryn a naked groom.

At the same time, all redactions- C above all- make use of weak verbs, which do not modify the stem vowel but add suffixes (usually *-de* or *-te*) to the present-tense form in order to create the past tense:

C 549: Nu hi cluppeþ J **cusseþ**.

C 11: He **custe** hem wiþ softe muþe.

C 783: And Floriz he **makeþ** stoned vpigt.

C 13: Ne **makede** his moder non oþer chere.

On the whole we can thus conclude that A and E mostly displays examples of stem-alternation whereas C show a dominant tendency in using suffixation with verbs.

While C is still characterized by case marking and gender features, A and E tend to resort to prepositions and to a fixed word-order in order to convey grammatical relationships between words.

## 2.2. AV- E

### 2.2.1. Substantial variants

I have detected some correspondences that make me think of a more intimate connection between A and V. Here follow some of the most significant examples in which A and V display the same or similar lexical readings against the other witnesses.

In the following line, A and V share the same noun with some orthographic variations (*taises/teyse*). E, on the other hand, employs *fathum*, which recalls the modern English term *fathoms*. Similarly, A and V share the same adjective *wid* (Mod.E. *wide*) whereas E uses *yfere* (Mod.E. *in all, together*).

A 243: *And an hondred **taises** he is **wid**, [...]*

V 226: *J an hundred **teyse** hit is **wid**, [...]*

E 571: *An hundred **fathum** it is **yfere**.*

(C is not available here)

Other examples of this kind reveal how often A and V share the same readings, thus leading us to suggest the existence of an AV sub-group. This is the case of A 246 and V 229 in opposition to E 574:

A 246: ***In Cristiente** nis swich non.*

V 229: ***In Cristiante** nis swich non.*

E 574: ***In al þis world** is suche noon, [...]*

(C 222: ***In þe world** nis swich tur non)*

Another significant instance can be detected at A 628, V 377 (*sez, iseih*) against E 900 (*knew*):

A 628: *þan **sez** he wel sone anon [...]*

V 377: *þo **iseih** he wel anon [...]*

E 900: *And sone he **knew** anoon [...]*

(C 627: *Bi here breste he **kneu** anon [...]*)

As well as at A 182, V 168: *god(e)*, against E 518 (*faire*):

A 182: *Florice hadde þer **god** gestning.*

V 168:.....hadde þer aniht wel **gode** gistinge.

E 518: *Florys had ful **faire** gestnyng.*

(C 160: *And þerfore he hauede wel **fair** gestning).*

Other significant correspondences between A and V can be noticed through a comparative reading.

In the following example, A and V share the same lexical verb, i.e. *vnderzete* (OE. *Undergetan*, Mod. E. *perceive, find out*) while E uses *vnderstonde* (OE. *Understándan, -stónden*, Mod. E. *learn, understand*). The second line is structurally the same in A and V (the only difference being in the use of the personal pronoun *þow – he*), whereas E completely reworks the sentence:

A 219-20: *For mizte þameralhit **vnderzete**,*

*Sone þow were of liue quite.*

V 203-4: *And mihste þe Amirayl hit **vnderzete**,*

*Sone of his liue he were quite.*

E 553-4: *zif Amyral myzt it **vnderstonde**,*

*He schulde be drawe in his owne londe.*

(C 207-8: *And þe Admiral hit mizte **iwite**,*

*þat he nere of his lif aquite).*

Another example reinforcing the hypothesis of a sub-group AV against E can be detected at A 160,

V 145:

A 160: *A burgeis þou findest ate frome.*

V 145: ..... gere finde þer ate frome.

E 500: *The senpere fynde at hoom.*

(C 137: *Whane þu comest to þe zate, [...]*)

### 2.2.2. Formal variants

Even when V is fragmentary, as it had been mutilated of some words or lines, it shows a higher degree of resemblance to A rather than to E:

A 238-40: *As fram þe heuene hez þe sonne J mone.*

*And in þe bourh, amide þe rīzt,*

*Þer stant a riche tour , [I] þe aplīzt.*

V 220-3: *.....schal to iwinne þat mayd al so sone*

*.....þe sonne J mone.*

*.....þe bor .....mid rīft*

*.....aplīzt.*

E 566-8: *Al shul þey die, so moot y the.*

*In þat bour, in mydward rīzt,*

*Stondeþ a toure, y the plyzt.*<sup>287</sup>

(C 219-20: *And ine þe burz, amide rīzt,*

*Beoþ twe tures ipīzt.* only two lines of this passage are preserved in C)

As far as E is concerned, it is visibly corrupt: It is actually full of blunders, mistakes and omissions of single lines or even whole passages.

A striking instance occurs at E 286, where V has twelve lines (ll.89-101) in one of the most moving passages of the poem which are totally absent in E. Sometimes E makes complete non-sense of passages by omitting one or more lines; a mere glance at the parallel texts shows the extent to which

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<sup>287</sup> Other passages in which AV display similar readings against E are detected at A 238-9, V 220-21; A 570, V 324; A 587, V 341; A 677, V 414.

E, or some anterior manuscripts, has been guilty of omission. This is for example the case of E 412 (cfr. A 54, C 50), which should obviously be preceded by a line similar to A 53 and C 49:

E 412:

*“[...]Bob of semblant J of morning”*

A 53-4:

*“[...]þou art illich here of alle þinge,  
Of semblant J of mourning[...]*

C 49-50:

*“[...]þu art hire illich of alle þinge  
Boþe of semblaunt J of murnige,[...]”<sup>288</sup>*

Even the rhymes show great carelessness on the part of the scribe, as one can observe for example at E 261-2 and 273-4.

E 261-2:

*As sone as he to þe graue **com**,  
Sone þere behelde he **þen**.*

E 273-74:

*Of Blaunche flour is þat y **meene**,  
For she was come of good **kyn**.<sup>289</sup>*

Blunders and mistakes can be easily detected throughout the text, some of the most significant:

*Floures* for *Florys* (E 740); *hele* for *helpe* (E 538), *an otter fleyz* instead of *boterfleze* (E 772).

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<sup>288</sup> The same phenomenon occurs at 896 (cfr. A 622-24, C 621-23).

<sup>289</sup> Examples like these can be easily found at E 577-8 *leide- pride*, E 650-1 *can-noon*.

The main value of E actually lies in the fact that it has preserved a good amount of lines of the beginning of the poem that are not extant in any of the other witnesses. It is yet significant that, as soon as V becomes available, its readings show that E is corrupt in many places and full of scribal errors; this makes me think of inaccuracy and imprecision of the scribe while coping the text<sup>290</sup>, and/or consider the hypothesis that the text preserved in E might be the result of a great number of stages of oral/written transmission, in which it probably underwent continuous alterations (and hence suffered omissions and blunders).

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<sup>290</sup> At l. 385, for example, he copied the word *hauyn* from the next line.

### 3. A stemma codicum hypothesis

On the basis of what was seen up to now, I propose a reliable *stemma codicum* which summarizes the results of my investigation:

a)

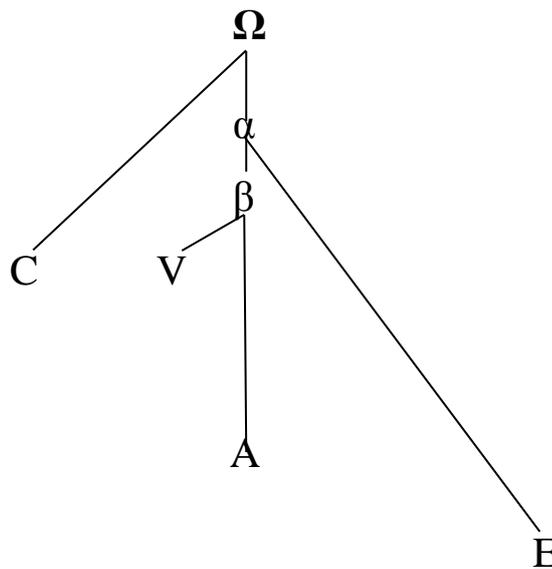


Fig. a). Hypothetical *Stemma Codicum* of the English Manuscript Tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour*.

From the analysis above we can thus conclude that:

1. Among the four witnesses, C approaches the French “original” the nearest<sup>291</sup>: there are a number of passages in C, wanting in AE(V), whose comparison with the French text shows to be original. C does not contain any serious blunders and omissions and it preserves, together with V, a number of

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<sup>291</sup> The variants in C have been evaluated with respect to the French model, as we do not possess any Middle English model.

linguistic archaic features (as far as phonology, morphology and syntax are concerned) which recall Old English, the stage of the language during which the English archetype had been presumably written. Although these remarks do represent only formal variants, they are yet meaningful from an historical point of view: the greater degree of closeness with the Old French text and the abundant presence of features dating back to the Old English language lead us to assume that there are more chances that C preserves the “appearances” of a hypothetical Old English archetype ( $\Omega$ ) rather than the other witnesses.<sup>292</sup>

2. On the contrary, E seems the least reliable: it is visibly corrupt and full of blunders and omissions. Its corrupted state could be ascribed to a large number of stages of written/oral transmission behind it. Its chief value lies in the fact that it has preserved the beginning lines of the French poem<sup>293</sup>, very probably contained in the English original too.
3. Although V is a mere fragment, it apparently preserves superior (i.e. more reliable) readings than E, showing that E is corrupt in many places. As well as C, V contains a considerable number of archaic features which has to be probably traced back to the Middle English original.
4. A contains a number of passages entirely unrepresented in the other witnesses which are probably independent additions. This can be due, as it has been assumed for E, to some stages of written, or probably oral transmission behind it. It remains however the longest and in many ways complete text.
5. The large amount of common errors in AE(V) where C shows to be original (if compared with the Old French source), and the comparatively few cases where any of these witnesses agrees with C, is

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<sup>292</sup> This hypothesis would be corroborated by the fact that C dates back to 1280 while the presumed English original would have been composed around 1250, i.e. only thirty years before.

<sup>293</sup> Again, we have to evaluate the witness E with respect to the French source text, since no English model exists.

a strong indication for an intimate connection between the three witnesses against the last one: they presumably form a manuscript group and descend from a common antecedent ( $\alpha$ ).

6. The considerable number of unoriginal readings shared by A and V leads us to establish the existence of the sub-group AV. We are led to suppose that the two witnesses probably point to a common antecedent ( $\beta$ ) which discriminates the group AV against E.

New in-depth studies on the classification of the English manuscript tradition of *Floris and Blancheflour* may contribute to reinforce or even discard my hypotheses, revealing further significant connections between the four witnesses handing down our romance.

The detection of some of the most striking resemblances and co-occurrences between the witnesses, though only roughly outlined here, have some objective basis and may serve as preliminary framework for others to build at a later stage.

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