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TAYLOR (Jane H. M.), « The beauty of Absolom. Manipulation of detail and construction of meaning in two late-medieval *mises en prose* »

RÉSUMÉ – Les mises en prose de la fin du Moyen Âge bénéficient désormais d'études portant sur les préoccupations esthétiques et idéologiques des prosateurs et de leurs patrons. On a surtout privilégié les transformations majeures qu'ont subies ces ouvrages : nouveaux épisodes, interpolations, ajouts, excisions. Isoler le menu détail de l'opération traductrice permet pourtant souvent de saisir au vol les transformations et de comprendre leur spécificité. Cet essai se penche sur deux mises en prose bourguignonnes.

ABSTRACT – The *mises en prose* of the later Middle Ages are at last being explored for what they tell us about the ideological and aesthetic preoccupations of prosateur and patron. To concentrate, however, as has been usual, only on larger transformations can mislead. The study of the detail of *mise en prose* – at the level of lexis and syntax – reveals conscious and careful textual manoeuvres designed to fit the new version to the preconceptions or the preferences of a court. This essay addresses two Burgundian *mises en prose*.

## THE BEAUTY OF ABSOLOM

### Manipulation of detail and construction of meaning in two late-medieval *mises en prose*

Le projet de ces lectures (...) me vouait, on le voit bien, aux scrupules d'une minutie, à l'attrait soutenu d'une petitesse, fût-elle labile, fuyante (...). Mais le petit n'est-il pas quelquefois le plus précieux<sup>1</sup>?

The incomparably beautiful Enide glimpses, for the first time, the knight who will become her husband. She blushes, with due maidenly modesty: never has she seen so handsome a man, *tant bel homme*. And in one of the three redactions of the fifteenth-century Burgundian prose *Erec*, the adapter/translator<sup>2</sup> feels the need to underline the moment: his original, he adds, *le compte*, tells us that Erec's beauty could be convincingly compared to that of Absolom: "car dist le compte qu'il pouoit estre acomparé a la beaulté d'Absolon"<sup>3</sup>.

- 1 J.-P. Richard, *Microlectures*, Paris, Seuil, 1979, p. 11 ; like my own here, his readings, he says, "relève[nt] d'une insistance, d'une lenteur, d'un vœu de myopie" (p. 7).
- 2 I use the terms "translator", "adapter", and *prosateur* indiscriminately: most theorists of translation would now agree that intralingual is as valid a form of translation as is interlingual (see R. Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", *Selected Writings*, The Hague/Paris, Mouton, 1971, 5 vol., vol. 1, p. 261).
- 3 I use the edition by M. Colombo Timelli, *L'Histoire d'Erec en prose: roman du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Geneva, Droz, 2000. Colombo Timelli edits both surviving versions of the *mise en prose*: the *B* version, and the incomplete *P* version. Here, I cite the *B* redaction of the text, p. 113. It is notable that the *P* version makes no mention of Absolom at this point: simply, the *prosateur* notes that Enide "onques n'ot veu plus beau chevalier". Colombo Timelli discusses, at length, the relationship between *P* and *B*, and the Oxford fragment *O* (p. 49-66); she concludes that *B* on the one hand, and *P* and *O* on the other, derive independently from an archetype *a*. I give references to *Erec en prose* henceforward in the text, prefixed *Erec* with the appropriate version.

Now, Absalom is, of course, in the Middle Ages, a standard comparator for male beauty<sup>1</sup>. We have only to look, for instance, at that compendium of medieval commonplace, Eustache Deschamps's complete works, to see how easily Absalom trips off the poetic tongue: the poet has two of his ventriloquized ladies compare the beauty of their lovers to that of Absalom, and the biblical hero acts as one of the indices of the fragility of human existence (even Absalom's beauty could not save him from death...)<sup>2</sup>. But what is particularly interesting in what might seem, at first sight, a detail, a mere commonplace, something like an example of Barthes's *détail non notable*<sup>3</sup>, is the phrase *dist le compte* – because this is much more significant than simply a standard medieval cliché. The comparison does indeed appear in the *compte* by Chrétien de Troyes which our *prosateur* is translating. But it does so, in the original verse version, very much later: when Erec is at the height of his chivalric glory, after his marriage to Enide and when he is requesting permission from Arthur to return to his own kingdom of Carnant:

Or fut Erec de tel renon  
 qu'on ne parloit se de lui non;  
 nus hom n'avoit si boene grace  
 qu'il sanbloit Ausalon de face  
 Et de la lengue Salemon<sup>4</sup>.

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- 1 Biblically, Absalom was, of course, the son of David; 2 Samuel 14:25 describes him as the most beautiful man in the world. He was, however, something of an ambiguous figure: he led a revolt against his father, during which he died ignominiously hanging from an oak tree.
  - 2 *Œuvres complètes*, ed. le marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1878-1903, 11 vol.; see vol. 3, p. 233, 239, 286; vol. 4, p. 347; vol. 10, p. lxiix, liv.
  - 3 I refer, of course, to Barthes's article « L'effet de réel », *Communications*, 11, 1968, p. 84-89 (reprinted in Barthes, *Le Bruissement de la langue*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, p. 167-174); Deleuze also insists on the visibility of detail: no detail, he considers, can be significant unless it strikes the reader with a certain *violence*; see his *Proust and Signs*, transl. R. Howard, New York, George Braziller, 1972, p. 1. My focus here, deliberately, is precisely Barthes's *détails non-notables* which, I consider, are frequently as revealing as those which, in Deleuze's words, force themselves upon the reader. Note also, of course, Michel Charles's caution that "les notions de principal et d'accessoire, de fonction et de détail, ou d'élément signifiant et insignifiant se relativisent fortement" ("Le sens du détail", *Poétique*, 116, 1998, p. 387-424).
  - 4 I use, for reference to Chrétien's *Erec*, Mario Roques's CFMA edition of the Guiot version, Paris, Champion, 1952; here, l. 2207-2211; references henceforward in the text, prefixed CTE.

And it is this insignificant, *non-notable* fact, easily overlooked, that, in the context of a study of detail, is interesting<sup>1</sup>. First, it demonstrates a close and detailed reading of the original, on the part of the adaptor – but much more important, it is evidence of a judicious reading, and more particularly of a process of deliberate, undisguised textual management. The adaptor has taken the trouble to promote a standard, cliché'd comparison, and transferred it from authorial comment to, indirectly and by implication, Enide's gaze<sup>2</sup>. In this paper, I want to argue as I have done elsewhere, with the translation of *Erec*, and indeed with that of *Cligès* to which I shall also refer, as well as to other *prosateurs*, for the translators' awareness, and deliberate and sophisticated manipulation, of the detail of source texts. I want to suggest, in other words, and rather contrary to assertions I made in a previous article<sup>3</sup>, that the editorial moves of the *prosateurs* of the late Middle Ages are self-conscious acts – and that this self-consciousness is to be detected at the level of fine detail, as much as on the larger scale of interpolation or deletion. *Prosateurs* apologise,

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- 1 In an interesting article, Michel Charles interrogates the notion of what might constitute, in the Barthes-ian sense, a "détail notable" or "non-notable"; ultimately, he concludes that any detail, however apparently innocuous, may emerge from hermeneutic manoeuvres on the part of the writer, or may invite such manoeuvres on the part of the critic, in that, to use Charles's terminology, "[ils] entrent dans le champ herméneutique"; see his "Le sens du détail". Two articles in the volume *Le Parti du détail: enjeux narratifs et descriptifs*, ed. M. Ricord (= *Etudes romanesques*, 7, 2002) show how revealing a focus on detail can be in relation to medieval texts: P. Chiron, "Réversibilité du détail dans *Jehan de Saintré* d'Antoine de La Sale (1456)", p. 65-78, shows how a romance which revels in detail invites such a focus; A. Guillaume, "*Ponthus et la belle Sidoyne* et les rédactions A et B de *Pontus und Sidonia*: importance du détail/détails d'importance pour l'étude comparée médiévale", p. 49-62, shows how the analysis of detail, as well as that of larger transformations, is also fundamental to our understanding of the processes of interlingual translation.
  - 2 Daniel Arasse, to whose work this paper is indebted, makes the point, in relation to painting, that « un détail "vu" peut ne pas avoir été "fait" »; that is, that we as spectators may notice, and draw conclusions from, a detail quite unintentionally included by the painter. My argument, here, is that the *prosateur's* transposition of the Absolom comparison is indeed "fait". See D. Arasse, *Le Détail: pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture*, Paris, Flammarion, 1996, p. 7.
  - 3 "The Significance of the Insignificant: Reading Reception in the Burgundian *Erec* and *Cligès*", *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 24, 1998, p. 183-197, at p. 184. In this article, I suggested that "the grammar of *mise en prose* is probably largely internalised", and focused on larger instances of rewriting as evidence of what I called "acculturation"; here, I want to follow the logic of the term "grammar" (and indeed the logic of my title in the 1998 article), and suggest that "detail" ("le menu détail") can also offer, in the analysis of *mises en prose*, a fruitful field for the investigation of translatorial policy and strategy.

anxiously, for the fact that their translations are not word-for-word<sup>1</sup>, but it is often precisely the relation between translation and original, even at the level of word and detail, that is valuable to our understanding of the poet's own understanding of a text. Moreover – and the point is an important one – to read comparatively, as between verse text and *mise en prose*, is often to note oddities, surprises, which could be classed with Michael Riffaterre's "ungrammaticalities" or "catachrèses"<sup>2</sup>: that is, unexpectednesses which disconcert the attentive reader who expects a smooth and uninterrupted progress through a work, and which serve as signals that the surface text needs further investigation. To notice these apparently inconspicuous details, then, is to question just what are the pragmatic presuppositions behind them – and this is a fruitful manoeuvre that allows us to hypothesise as to the translators' aesthetic or ideological presuppositions and strategies.

Detail: the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman distinguishes, usefully for my purpose here, between the *fragment* and the *detail*. The fragment, he says, is the mere ghost of an irrecoverable whole, whereas detail

obliges us to consider the work *as a whole*: it imposes presence, it creates value by means of a response, and it sets up a point of reference<sup>3</sup>.

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- 1 See for instance Raoul de Presles, in 1375: "Si ie ne ensuy en ceste translation les propres mots du texte, [...] il me sera pardonné comme vous m'avez commandé pour la matiere esclaircir que ie ensuyve la vraie simple et clere sentence et le vrai entendement sans ensuyvre proprement les mos du texte"; quoted by F. Guichard-Tesson, "Le métier de traducteur et de commentateur au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après Evrart de Conty", *Le Moyen français*, 24-25, 1985, p. 133-167, at p. 153.
  - 2 See his *Semiotics of Poetry*, London, Methuen, 1978, chapter 1, «L'intertexte inconnu», *Littérature*, 41, 1981, p. 4-7, and «Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive», *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. M. Worton and J. Still, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 56-78.
  - 3 "The Art of Not Describing: Vermeer – the Detail and the Patch", *History of the Human Sciences*, 2, 1989, p. 135-169, at p. 136 (Didi-Huberman's italics) – although he cautions against treating every detail as a "cipher" offering *the* key to interpreting the enigma of the text... Note that the French original, "L'art de ne pas décrire, une aporie du détail chez Vermeer", appeared in the Belgian journal *La Part de l'Œil*, 2, 1986, and that there is a related, but not, I think, quite identical section, "Question de détail, question de pan", printed as an appendix to Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image: question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*, Paris, Minuit, 1990, p. 273-318; this latter is translated into English in Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, University Park PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005, p. 11-52. Hegel also addresses the question of detail v. fragment, but concludes that there is no difference

Once detected, in other words and if its significance is to be understood, the presence of a detail demands its repositioning in a larger hermeneutic context: it provokes, indeed requires, a response, and that response is likely to involve an understanding of the text as a whole. The little comparison that I have quoted here does, I believe, precisely that: it refracts the source text in ways which illuminate the translator's very particular, and very focused, reading. Chrétien's original, here, consists of a lyrical description of Enide, too long to quote in full and which occupies some twenty lines (*CTE*, l. 421-441): Enide is a miracle of Nature, the very embodiment of beauty in conformity with the norms of medieval literary portraiture<sup>1</sup>. The description quite deliberately, and explicitly, solicits a male reader's gaze<sup>2</sup>: Enide, we are told, is dressed in rags through which the loveliness of her body can be glimpsed (*CTE*, l. 402-410)<sup>3</sup>; she is, says Chrétien unapologetically (*CTE*, l. 439), "fete por esgarder". But nothing, at this point in Chrétien's text, represents the female gaze, Enide's first glimpse of Erec; we are given no hint as to his appearance; simply, we are told that because Enide does not know him, "vergoigne en ot et si rogi" (*CTE*, l. 447). Compare this with the fuller context of the Absolom comparison – which, I stress, appears very much later in the text, well beyond the first meeting where Enide's beauty is the primary focus:

Quant ceste pucelle de tant haulte façon voit Erec le gentil chevalier, elle commence soy hontoier et rougir pour ce que jamés elle ne vist tant bel

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other than semantic: see *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1874, and see J.-P. Mourey, *Philosophies et pratiques du détail: Hegel, Ingres, Sade et quelques autres*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 1996, esp. p. 46-54. One is reminded here, of course, of Dallenbach's *mise en abyme*: the process whereby a particular detail may illuminate the whole: "Est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une relation de similitude avec l'œuvre qui la contient"; see his "Mise en abyme et iconicité", *Littérature*, 29, 1978, p. 116-128, at p. 118.

- 1 See A. M. Colby, *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature: An Example of the Stylistic Originality of Chrétien de Troyes*, Geneva, Droz, 1965, p. 14-72, and on Enide specifically, p. 138-144. Enide is presented in a ragged dress through which Erec can glimpse her "biax cors".
- 2 I am painfully aware that I am simplifying the question of male and female gaze – not least in leaving aside Lacan's discussions as addressed by, among others, Slavoj Žižek; see the latter's *Looking Awary: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1995.
- 3 No trace of this faint lasciviousness in the prose text which says merely "de son atour elle estoit povrement parée" (*Erec*, B version, p. 111; the P version is equivalent).

homme, car dist le compte qu'il pouoit estre acomparé a la beaulté d'Absalon.  
(*Erec*, B version, p. 111-113)

Where Chrétien's Enide, in other words, blushes from a sort of social embarrassment – a young girl, a *pucelle*, faced with any unknown young man – the *prosateur's* heroine blushes out of recognition of startling male beauty. And this unexpected moment – entirely the *prosateur's* reading – sets in train, I believe, a recasting of the relationship between the two lovers.

What I have said here reverts, knowingly, to the question of “authorial intentionality” on the translator's part, and “intentionality”, of course, has been the subject of some critical dispute at least since 1946 when Wimsatt and Beardsley invented the phrase “intentional fallacy”, and stated, with glorious certainty, that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art”<sup>1</sup> – and more recently, since Barthes and Foucault proclaimed “the death of the author”<sup>2</sup>. This is not the place to trace the evolution of the controversy<sup>3</sup>, but I want to argue that “detail” provides the ideal locus where the attentive reader of a translation or an adaptation is led, inevitably, into postulating the agency of a “personality” – the translator/adapter<sup>4</sup>. Now, we know nothing of the present translator: at most, we understand him to have an attachment, in some capacity, to the court of Burgundy.

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- 1 W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”, *Sewanee Review*, 54, 1946, p. 3-18.
  - 2 Roland Barthes's “La mort de l'auteur” was first published in 1968 in the journal *Manteia*, 5, p. 12-17 (and is available in Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, p. 61-67); Foucault's paper-debate “Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?” was first given in 1969, and is now available in id., *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 789-821. Barthes's dictum, “donner un Auteur à un texte, c'est imposer à ce texte un cran d'arrêt, c'est le pouvoir d'un signifié dernier, c'est fermer l'écriture” (“La mort de l'auteur”, p. 68), was the clarion call to New Criticism. Barthes, of course, was to acknowledge later how far the reader “needs” “la figure de l'auteur” – although he specifies that the *figure* “n'est ni sa représentation, ni sa projection”; see his *Le Plaisir du texte*, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p. 45-46.
  - 3 For a recent exhaustive study, see S. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1992. Virginie Greene discusses, and takes issue with, the relevance of the “death of the author” to medieval texts in particular: see her *The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
  - 4 Marine Ricord sets out a pertinent question on this topic: see her introduction to *Le Parti pris du détail* (see above, p. 245, n. 1), p. 3-11: “le détail est-il un fait voulu par l'auteur? ou bien, perdu dans l'économie générale de l'œuvre, échappe-t-il au regard conscient de l'artiste lui-même?” (p. 6). In the specific case of *mise en prose*, and perhaps of translation more generally, I will argue that the former is the case.



As a consequence, we cannot bring to bear any of the external evidence as to his “intention” of the kind which was judged especially misleading by Barthes and his colleagues. On the other hand, the study of “detail” in rewriting offers, valuably, internal, textual, evidence of a translator’s “grammar” of *mise en prose*, because such a translation can be compared, tacitly, with what might have been: a direct, unmediated, word-for-word translation. The divergence between the potential and the realised allows us, I believe, to speak legitimately of intention, and to attempt to provide heuristic models for the choices that the translator/adaptor has made<sup>1</sup>.

Let me provide another example, from the same text, of “detail”<sup>2</sup>, this time from the crucial scene where Enide weeps with dismay at criticism of Erec for having abandoned chivalry in favour of uxoriousness. Chrétien precedes this key moment with another long (too long to quote in full here), carefully composed paean of praise<sup>3</sup>: Enide is more beautiful than any other lady in the world; she is “gentix et enorable, / de saiges diz et aointable, / de bon ere et de boen atret” (*CTE*, l. 2413-2415). No-one can accuse her of “folie, / ne malvestié, ne vilenie” (*CTE*, l. 2417-2418); she is admired for her *largesse* and her *savoir*; no-one can find ground to condemn her:

Tuit l’amerent por sa franchise:  
 qui li pooit feire servise,  
 plus s’an tenoit chiers et prisoit;  
 nus n’an pooit rien mesdire:  
 el réaume ne an l’empire  
 n’ot dame de si boenes mors. (*CTE*, l. 2423-2429)

Now, compare our translator’s translation/adaptation of this long description:

*Chastement* se continst Enide avec son mari Erec et, combien que plusieurs aguetemens fussent par envie mis sus elle, il n’y eust oncquez engin d’homme

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- 1 To quote Michel Charles again (see above, p. 244, n. 3): methodologically, I propose to discuss the *mise en prose* of *Erec* in terms of choice and selection, against a range of potential translations: “plutôt que de supposer qu’un texte est susceptible de plusieurs interprétations, on supposera que le texte (réel) est un agencement ou une combinaison de *textes virtuels*. L’interprétation est alors la sélection et l’actualisation d’un de ces textes” (“Le sens du détail”, p. 394, my italics).
  - 2 Again, Charles is useful: a detail, he proposes, “est ce que l’analyste, en fonction d’une stratégie de lecture explicite, laisse au second plan” (“Le sens du détail”, p. 433).
  - 3 See *CTE*, l. 2409-2429.

ne de femme tant sceut de mal pincer qui sur elle trovast une tasche de laidure. Car d'estre bonne, saige, devote, sobre, large aumoniere, *cremant Dieu et bien gardant son bonneur*, elle passoit toutez aultres princesses. Et ausi Nature ne eust jamés mis son entente a former ung tant soubtil ouvrage s'elle ne eust eu vertu divine qui luy eust aidié a la composer de *matere non corrupte a pechié ne malice*, dont Erec en fu tant affollé en amourz qu'il ne lui souvint oncquez puis de porter armez, jouter ne tournoier. (*Erec*, B version, p. 170)

What I italicise here are three phrases, again apparently innocuous: chastity, godliness, sinlessness, in the description of a lady of birth and heroine of a romance, might easily pass unnoticed. In context, however, those phrases are representative, I believe, of a consistent and strategic rewriting of the translator's source text to provide, contrary perhaps to received opinion which has preferred to see the *prosateur* as heaping blame on Enide, an exculpation or at the very least a careful, and sophisticated, reassignment of blame<sup>1</sup>. I am suggesting a process of reading, here, which has analogies, perhaps, with the process of "gradual envisioning" which Didi-Huberman describes in the discovery of a painting by Fra Angelico in the Convent of San Marco in Florence: a process in which, progressively, details, *signes*, emerge from the darkness of the cell and the fadedness of the painting, and which gradually coalesce to make the painting both *visible* and ultimately *lisible*<sup>2</sup>. As with the painting, close attention here to the *menu détail* of the *mise en prose* shows us a *prosateur* having a more nuanced, a more sophisticated translational strategy than is commonly supposed, and which, in particular, allows him a certain critical distance from the source text.

Take, for instance, what the translator makes of Erec's abandonment of all the exercises of chivalry. At the end of his rapturous account of Enide's beauty and virtues, here, Chrétien makes it abundantly clear that it is sexuality, uxoriousness, that has led the hero astray:

Mes tant l'ama Erec d'amors  
que d'armes mes ne li chaloit,

1 I am led here, in other words, to nuance the article by Martha Wallen in which she argues that the *prosateur*, unequivocally, attributes blame for Erec's abandonment of chivalry to Enid: "The Burgundian adapter systematically eliminates those aspects of the crisis which mitigate Enide's guilt, in both the substance and the manner of his narration"; see her "Significant Variations in the Burgundian Prose Version of *Erec et Enide*", *Medium Aevum*, 51, 1982, p. 187-196, at p. 189.

2 Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image: question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art*, chapter 1: "L'histoire de l'art dans les limites de sa simple pratique", p. 21-64.

ne a tornoiemant n'aloit:  
 a sa fame volt dosnoier,  
 si en fist s'amie et sa drue:  
 en li a mise s'antendue,  
 en acoler et an beisier;  
 ne se quierent d'el aeisier. (CTE, l. 2430-2438)

Chrétien's vocabulary makes Enide, unequivocally, a sexual object – *dosnoier*, “faire l’amour”; *druue*, “amante”; *acoler*, *beisier*<sup>1</sup> – and in a medieval context of sexual ethics where an excess of sexuality, even with a wife, is dangerous and reprehensible<sup>2</sup>, it seems unarguable that our *prosateur* is pursuing a carefully defensive strategy designed to stress Enide's blamelessness: she is so chaste that no-one has been able to detect her in wrongdoing; she is profoundly God-fearing, allowing no stain on her honour; Nature herself has made her free of any taint of sin. Our *prosateur*, in other words, by altering a few mere words, a detail or two, is transforming what Arasse calls “the economy” of his source<sup>3</sup>: exonerating Enide, quite deliberately and explicitly, from the blame that might well attach to her in Chrétien's original, as distracting Erec, by a certain undefined and reprehensible, eroticism, from his duty and calling as knight and king.

Now, this process of what one might call “heuristic rewriting” is detectable in the other Burgundian prose translation of a Chrétien poem, *Cligès* – but because it is not impossible that this latter and the Burgundian *Erec et Enide* are the work of the same *prosateur* who might therefore, logically, be employing the same translational methodologies<sup>4</sup>, and in order to show that to concentrate on the transposition of detail is as valid, and as valuable, for the study of *mises en prose* more

1 For *dosnoier*, see Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, II, p. 746; for *druue*, see Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, II, p. 776, and see Tobler-Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, II, col. 2020-2021. Both terms imply, as Glyn Burgess suggests, “sensual, irresponsible love” (*Chrétien de Troyes, Erec et Enide*, London, Grant and Cutler, 1984, p. 47).

2 See for instance the theologians quoted by A. Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992; R. Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, London, Routledge, 2012; M. McGlynn and R. J. Moll, “Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages”, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. V.L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage, New York and London, Garland, 1996, p. 103-122.

3 See Arasse, *Le Détail*, p. 357.

4 *L'Histoire d'Erec*, ed. Colombo Timelli, p. 9, note 10.

generally, I shall turn now to comparisons between another pair of texts: the thirteenth-century Jakemés's verse *Le Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la dame de Fayel* and its fifteenth-century prose counterpart, *Le Livre des amours du Chastellain de Coucy*)<sup>1</sup>. These latter texts are, of course, notorious for their incorporation of a *cœur mangé* episode<sup>2</sup> into a fictionalised version of the life-story of a blameless, and historically attested, hero-*trouvère*<sup>3</sup>. Briefly, the poet, Renaud Châtelain de Coucy, falls in hopeless love with the Dame de Fayel, but the latter's husband, the Seigneur de Fayel, discovers the secret and becomes wildly jealous. After many vicissitudes for the lovers, Renaud takes the Cross and departs on crusade: he is wounded by a poisoned arrow, but before he dies, he asks his companion Gobert to take out his heart and give it to the Dame de Fayel as an earnest of his undying devotion. Unfortunately, the husband waylays Gobert, takes possession of the heart, has it cooked and served to the lady in the course of a feast; the lady dies of grief, the husband is driven into

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- 1 Jakemés's *Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel* was edited by Maurice Delbouille, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1936, and more recently by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, Paris, Champion, 2009; I use the latter, references henceforward in the text prefixed CCDF. The prose version, titled *Le Livre des amours du chastellain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel*, was published by Aimé Petit and François Suard, Lille, Presses Universitaires, 1994, and in the same year by Anna Maria Babbi, Fasano, Schena; I use the former, references henceforward in the text prefixed *Amours*. Jakemés's verse text must date from before 1285; nothing is known of the poet, but he invents a quite remarkable fiction for the hero, a well-known *trouvère*. The prose version survives in only one manuscript (Lille, Bibliothèque Municipale, fonds Godefroy 50), and seems to have been composed for Jean de Wavrin, an *habitué* of the Burgundian court, somewhere between 1450 and 1470.
  - 2 Such episodes are surprisingly widespread: see *Le Cœur mangé: récits érotiques et courtois des XI<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, trans. D. Régnier-Bohler, Paris, Stock, 1979, and particularly her final essay, p. 297-336.
  - 3 For a full and valuable summary of the development of the legend – the *Châtelain* was genuinely and historically a poet, appropriated extraordinarily by Jakemés who incorporates his verses into the *mise en récit*, and the legend itself has origins which considerably precede Jakemés's exploitation of it – see Gaullier-Bougassas's introduction to her edition of the text, and especially Simon Gaunt's chapter on the romance in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. S. Gaunt and S. Kay, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 95-108. My summary here is much too brief: Jakemés's account is far longer and more circumstantial, and focuses far more on the development of the lovers' devotion, and the growing resentment of the husband. I am not, of course, the first to discuss the *prostateur*'s techniques of *réécriture*: see especially Fr. Suard, "Le Chastellain de Coucy: du vers à la prose", *Richesses médiévales du Nord et du Hainaut*, ed. J.-Ch. Herbin, Valenciennes, Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002, p. 25-36.

exile. I want to concentrate here specifically on the final, climactic episode of the *cœur mangé*<sup>1</sup>.

In the verse text, Jakemés has the Dame de Fayel and her husband take their places at table:

Quant temps fu, si mist on les tables,  
 Si se sont au souper assis,  
 S'orent més tels come a devis.  
 Apriés siervirent li valet  
 Del més qui fu tels qu'a souhet.  
 Del coer seul la dame siervirent  
 Et de l'autre partout offrirent.  
 Cescuns volentiers en menga.  
 La dame mout cel més loa  
 Et li sambla bien c'onques mes  
 Ne manga plus savereus més. (*CCDF*, l. 8037-8046)

Now, compare this sober, simply declarative account of the sequence of events with the prose version:

Quant le soupper fu apprestés, ilz laverent et s'assirent a table; le seigneur, qui moult estoit joieulx, fist lors la milleure chiere que jamais nulz homs peüst faire, dont la dame et ceulx de layans se resoÿrent. Puis quant ilz furent assis a table, les més furent apportés ainsy comme le seigneur l'avoit ordonné a son quisynier: le seigneur fu servy et puis la dame si soubtillement que nulz ne s'en eüst sceu apperchevoir, car tout d'une couleur et d'une meisme sause le brouet dont l'assiette fu faite estoient assés samblables, fors tant que dedens l'escuielle de la dame le cuer de son amy estoit dehachié tant menuement et sy bien asavouré de chucre et de sinamonne que jamais la dame, a son samblant ne a son goust, elle n'avoit mengié milleure viande. (*Amours*, p. 220-221)

I distance myself, here, from Maurice Delbouille, who maintains that the *prosateur* is “scrupuleusement fidèle au texte qu’il translatait” and intervenes only minimally, “se contentant le plus souvent de briser le rythme de l’octosyllabe et d’effacer la rime [...]”<sup>2</sup> – and indeed from François Suard

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- 1 Although I agree with Helen Solterer, speaking of the verse romance, that to isolate this episode alone is to misrepresent a romance in which this gruesome moment, as episode, is in some ways an anticlimax: see her excellent “Dismembering, remembering the Châtelain de Couci”, *Romance Philology*, 46, 1992, p. 103-124. I also largely agree with her as to the “sacramental” analogies in the verse text – but would find that less compelling in relation to the prose version where the insistent mentions of “cœur” are much mitigated.
  - 2 In his introduction to his edition of Jakemés’s romance: Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1936, p. xc.

who sees him as, primarily, an abbreviator<sup>1</sup>. The first detail on which I focus relates to the portrayal of the husband, gleeful, *joieux*, happily showing *la milleure chiere que jamais nulz homs peuist faire*. Now, nothing in the verse text licenses this instance of rewriting: the *prosateur*'s little detail, however, is, I believe, a contribution to the construction of a new and individual concept of the husband, where the emphasis is firmly on the murderous "duel" between the male protagonists, and which is actualised, with yet another contrast, in the same chapter. In the verse text, when the husband explains, *par mout grant yre* (CCDF, l. 8054), what the dish consists of, he does so by referring simply to vengeance: "Et pour un peu moi revengier Vous ai ge fait son coer mengier" (CCDF, l. 8074-8075). The *prosateur*'s husband, by contrast, is concerned with questions of power and hegemony: he, the husband, has suffered distress and sleepless nights at the hands of his rival; "mais ores maintenant, la mercy Dieu, *j'en suy au deseure* [...]" (*Amours*, p. 223; my italics). Having been the victim, in other words, the husband now celebrates, explicitly and gleefully, the fact that he is the victor. What this little detail betrays, I believe – and there is again no equivalent in the verse text – is a sense of petulant, competitive rivalry which, it could be argued, is a key to a new reading on the part of the *prosateur*: a Seigneur de Fayel brooding, interminably, on the slights to which he has been subject: witness, for instance, another little addition of the *prosateur*'s, at the point where the Seigneur is threatening to hang Gobert, carrying the heart, with his bare hands "ne fust tant seulement que pour courouchier ton seigneur, *par lequel j'ay eu tant de desplaisirs*" (*Amours*, p. 215; my italics)<sup>2</sup>. In each case, we are talking of alterations to the merest detail – but I would contend that this *prosateur* is far more sophisticated, far more innovative, far more purposive than one might suppose were one simply to work at the level of major change or major rewriting.

My last example I take from the same chapter in the prose text: the final sentence of the extract above in which the *prosateur* translates the laconic description, in the verse text, of the dish the lady eats – *saverous* – by telling us that the Châtelain's heart was "dehachié tant menuement

1 In his and Petit's edition of the prose text, p. 25-27; see however Fr. Suard's later article, "Le *Chastelain de Coucy*: du vers à la prose", which isolates a number of more small-scale, detailed changes, seeing them as moves towards "realism", material or psychological.

2 Compare the verse text: "Ains vous penderai a mes mains: Se ce n'estoit pour el au mains Que pour ton seigneur courechier" (CCDF, l. 7928-7930).

et sy bien asavouré de chucre et de sinamonne que jamais la dame, a son samblant ne a son goust, elle n'avoit mengié milleure viande". Now, it would be easy to dismiss this as simply one of Barthes's *effets de réel*: ginger and sugar are, after all, among the most conventional flavourings in the cuisine of the Middle Ages, and our *prosateur* might be thought, therefore, to be providing some busy local colour<sup>1</sup>. I want to suggest, however, that behind this little detail lies an interesting predicate which only that detail reveals, and that here as elsewhere, we should assume a conscious strategy, this time relating to plausibility and, perhaps, to a certain horrified fascination with the cannibal which transcends time and place<sup>2</sup>. What I am referring to, here, is what pragmatics calls "contextual sense": I suggest that in order to understand what intention to ascribe to this extension of meaning, we need to consider assigning reference to it. In which case, we might, perhaps, pragmatically, wonder if the provision of new detail, here, is not a response to an anticipated query: "Why did the Dame de Fayel not realise that what she was eating was the heart of her lover? Was the texture or the appearance not different? Did it not have a different taste?" What the *prosateur* is offering are plausible, and disturbing, answers to these disturbing, and reasonable, questions: the heart had been – and the detail, once noticed, is unpleasant – chopped up very small; its flavour had been disguised by the (relatively exotic) sugar and spice. Our *prosateur* is, perhaps,

1 As with the word *brouet* which he also uses – corresponding to *coulis* in the verse text; see *CCDF*, l. 8022. Note that Jakemès also speaks of the way in which the heart was to be cooked: the husband goes to see his *mestre keus* (*CCDF*, l. 8019), "Et li commande estroitement Qu'il se painne esforcielement D'un couleïch si atourner Quë on n'i sace qu'amender, De ghelinnes et de capons" (*CCDF*, l. 8020-8024). But this is prospective; our *prosateur*'s displacement of the detail to the moment when the Dame de Fayel will eat the heart seems designed to extend the horror of it...

2 See among others the excellently documented and socially and politically interesting study by F. Fajardo-Acosta, "The Heart of Guillem de Cabestaing: Courty Lovers, Cannibals, Early Modern Subjects", *Exemplaria*, 17, 2005, p. 57-102, which ranges across Europe although it focuses especially on the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Occitan legend of Guillem. Fajardo-Acosta sees the cannibalism of the *cœur mangé*, here, as signifying the "primitive" and the "appropriative": that is, as having socio-political resonances to do with changes overtaking feudal and courtly societies (it is, incidentally, interesting that in the legend of Guillem, the cooking and seasoning of the heart – here, with valuable pepper – is assigned considerable importance). There had, of course, been accounts of genuine cannibalism in the extreme circumstances of sieges and famines: see for instance J. Rubinstein, "Cannibals and Crusaders", *French Historical Studies*, 31, 2008, p. 525-552. I am inclined to talk of the *prosateur*'s caution in terms of damage-limitation...

engaged in the dynamic process of making and negotiating meaning between “speaker” (the text) and “hearer” (the reader). Might his wariness have to do with fending off any implication of cannibalism (given the taste, the Dame could not be expected to understand what she was being tricked into)? I am, of course, speculating, but as we saw with my first example here, the comparison of Erec to Absolom, we should not assume *a priori* that the processes of interlingual, or intralingual, translation are internalised<sup>2</sup>. Our translators make conscious choices as to the balance of information; they assign pragmatic force to their utterances; their translations have illocutionary goals which we are, I believe, entitled at least to explore<sup>3</sup>. And perhaps our *prosateur*’s sugar and cinnamon are details which, as Mourey says, “fragilise[nt] la scène, la destabilise[nt]”: which are “énigmatique[s], inquiétant[s]”<sup>4</sup>.

Those who have worked on the ideological drive in the translation or *mise en prose* of medieval texts – and I include myself here – have tended to look for major omissions or additions or rewritings. What I have suggested here, however, is the vital importance of detail as a tool in understanding the meanings of the propositions imagined by our *prosateurs*. Because the translation of detail often involves relatively minor shifts and transpositions, it is by the same token unobtrusive and can easily be ignored by commentators<sup>5</sup>. In recent years, after much neglect,

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1 Might it be the case that the *prosateur*’s heavy insistence, in his prologue, on the nefarious role of Fortune is also designed strategically, to minimize blame especially for the Dame, if not for the Châtelain? I am grateful to the anonymous reader for this volume for this suggestion, but see also A. Combes, “Entre déférence et différence: les ambiguïtés de la mise en prose dans *Le Livre des amours du Chastellain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel*”, *Réécritures: regards nouveaux sur la reprise et le remaniement de textes, dans la littérature française et au-delà, du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*, ed. D. Kullmann and S. Lalonde, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015, p. 53-72.

2 An oversimplification which I myself have perhaps been guilty of propagating: see my “The Significance of the Insignificant”.

3 Maria Colombo Timelli undertakes a rather similar interpretative manoeuvre in her « Pour une “défense et illustration” des titres de chapitres: analyse d’un corpus de romans mis en prose au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Du roman courtois au roman baroque*, ed. E. Bury and Fr. Mora, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2004, p. 209-232.

4 Mourey, *Philosophies et pratiques du détail*, p. 80.

5 Charles, “Le sens du détail”, p. 417-422, emphasises in particular the element of authorial, and readerly, “choice” that enters into the noting of what is *notable* or *non-notable*. He would define detail, in the end, as “ce que l’analyste, en fonction d’une stratégie de lecture explicite, laisse au second plan”, and concludes that “il vaut mieux se passer de la notion, qui est proprement impracticable” (p. 423). It is interesting that as long ago as 1970, Leo



the late-medieval *mises en prose* are receiving appropriate attention<sup>1</sup>; we are now, I believe, in a position to embark more fully on the process of which Clive Scott, talking of the multiple translations of Baudelaire, says that “understanding a translation in relation to an original is a profoundly more valuable activity than assessing a translation’s proximity to a source text”<sup>2</sup>. And in such a programme, the revalorisation of “detail” will need to play an important part<sup>3</sup>...

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Spitzer was deploring the fact that “certains historiens de la littérature pouvaient prendre les positions péremptoires dont ils sont coutumiers sur l’ensemble de l’œuvre d’un poète ou la littérature d’une période sans s’attacher aux *détails des textes* [...]” (“Art du langage et linguistique”, *Études de style*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 75, my italics).

- 1 Until recently, of course, the standard overall work of reference for the late-medieval and Renaissance *mise en prose* remained Georges Doutrepoint’s 1939 study, *Les Mises en prose des épopées et des romans chevaleresques du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels, Académie royale de Belgique, 1939. This is now valuably augmented and largely replaced by the *Nouveau répertoire de mises en prose (XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. M. Colombo Timelli, B. Ferrari, A. Schoysman and Fr. Suard, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2014; in the latter, on *Erec*, see p. 215-222, and on the *Châtelain de Coucy*, p. 134-140. For excellent examples of what subtle, detailed analysis can do for our understanding of these romances, see R. Brown-Grant, *French Romance of the Later Middle Ages: Gender, Morality, and Desire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, and the volume of essays edited by M. Colombo Timelli, B. Ferrari and A. Schoysman, *Mettre en prose aux XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, especially those by D. Régnier on *Cleomadés* and M.-M. Castellani.
- 2 *Translating Baudelaire*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2000, p. 5.
- 3 I borrow the term *revalorisation* from N. Schor’s *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, New York and London, Methuen, 1987, p. 144. I do not, of course, want to suggest that this is not already the case: in a pioneering study, for instance, Jeffrey Kittay and Wlad Godzich use the analysis of detail, sometimes minor, to demonstrate how a text devised for the presence of a performer (verse) must change to make itself appropriate for a reader: see *The Emergence of Prose: an essay in poetics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, ch. 3, p. 27-45.