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Anne BERTHELOT

Tracking Down a Medieval Author : A Detective Story, Or, Did Baudouin Butor Write the *Roman de Perceforest* ?

One of the worst curses under which French medievalists suffer is the lack of documented authors for the texts in their canon. They have to do with tantalizing tidbits, clutching at straws, as it were. Marie de France is named so because one line in one of the texts attributed to her reads “Marie ai nun, si sui de France”: “My name is Mary, I am from France”. And this is about all. We are not even sure that all three texts assigned to her are indeed by the same author, or, if we want to be particular about it, whether this author is a woman. With Chrétien de Troyes, we at first sight seem to have more luck: not only does the Prologue of his second romance obligingly give a complete list of what he wrote until then, the writer also signs all of his works with elaborate puns on his name (he boasts that “Chrestien” will remain famous “as long as Christianity will endure”). However, the *Cligès* Prologue does not give precise titles – which do not exist in the Middle Ages anyway –, more like a list of topics, and critics have been trying in vain to identify the corresponding romances or “lays”. As for the name “Chrétien”, what are we to do with a kind of hagiographic romance signed “Chrestien”, or with an adaptation of one of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the story of *Philomela*, that mentions the name “Chrestien li Gois”? Maybe it is our Chrétien, Chrétien writing when still an untried author who has not yet acquired his surname, Chrétien whose name and surname have been mangled as often happens through the manuscript transmission. Conversely, maybe it is simply *not* the same author at all; besides, even if it is, it does not help a lot: apart from this list of titles, we have absolutely no information about the man or the writer. We do not even know whether we should believe “Godefroy de Loignies” when he pretends to have finished up the *Knight of the Cart* when Chrétien tired of writing this apology of courtly, meaning adultery, love. We do know the names of two patrons of Chrétien’s, Marie, countess of Champagne, and Philippe, count of Flanders, because Chrétien dedicates two of his romances to them. Any biography of the Champenois writer, however, would have to rely heavily, to say the least, on contextual information: what was life at the court of countess Marie, what were the other writers at the time, what did it mean to write a verse romance in vernacular in the second half of the 12th century?

Nevertheless, we are at least reasonably certain that there was a writer called Chrétien de Troyes, who wrote five “Arthurian” verse romances. But, when it comes to attributing the long prose romances composed around 1220 to precise authors, the difficulty grows enormously. We may admit, although it is already a leap of faith, that the knight Crusader Robert de Boron, who around 1204 wrote a verse romance telling for the first time the Christian version of the Holy Grail story (and, most probably, started this

Roman de l'Estoire de Joseph's sequel by composing the first few hundred lines of a *Roman de Merlin*), was the one who chose to put his own text into the prose form becoming fashionable at the time. Even if we go so far as to accept this same Robert de Boron as author for the first "Grail trilogy" that was edited by Bernard Cerquiglini in 1980 with the title *Roman dou Graal (Joseph, Merlin, Perceval)*, we cannot extend this attribution to the various *Suites*, or sequels, to the Merlin that appear in the Cyclic *Lancelot-Grail*. This *magnum opus* consists of five main texts, the *Estoire de Joseph*, the *Merlin* and its sequel, sometimes called *Premiers faits du roi Arthur*, the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del saint Graal (Quest for the Holy Grail)*, and the *Mort le roi Artu (Death of King Arthur)*. Of course, you cannot exactly speak of one cycle, since there are so many variants and different manuscripts, and the status of the enunciation voices are among the most shifting elements of this vast and polymorphous corpus.

Although the whole thing was most probably written over a time span of at least twenty or thirty years, and the prose version of the *Merlin* postdates the verse fragment by about twenty years, Robert de Boron is nevertheless presented as the main author for the *Merlin* and the *Suite* – something that is highly improbable. Once again, however, we are almost sure there was indeed a Robert de Boron – although his name is suspiciously close to the place name where the Holy Grail originates from, and his supposed account of crusading does sound rather fictitious than true. But, by the same token, we are almost sure that Robert de Boron's cousin, the so-called Helye de Boron, who pretends – in the first person – to be both a clerk and a knight, and to have been asked by his cousin to help him with the writing of some parts of the "big story" of the Grail, did NOT exist. This is an entirely fictitious figure: an author whose statements about himself are somewhat more informative than the ones we have about *real* writers – but who just happens not to be *real*, and whose very plausibility leads us to doubt the *reality* of his cousin Robert himself.

And then there is Gautier, or Walter, Map: the last two books of the *Lancelot-Grail* are attributed to him, and he undoubtedly existed. There is only one small problem: he is a relatively famous Latin writer, active in the second half of the 12th century at King Henry the 2nd court, and he was probably long dead when the *Quest* and the *Mort Artu* were written – not to mention the fact that he would probably have been very indignant at the very idea of his writing anything in vernacular (as opposed to the noble Latin language)! Let us not even consider the case of Lucès de Gast, the "official" author of the *Prose Tristan*, or of the anonymous narrator of the *Prose Estoire del saint Graal*, who explains at length, in the very strange time-collapsing Prologue of t/his romance, that he does not want to reveal his name in order not to shame the noble lineage he belongs to: these, at least, are not even dubious cases; they are fictitious *personae* that linger on the border between narrative and narrative frame.

Altogether, identity scams and mirror games of this kind are not restricted to Arthurian romances: in fact, the most bewildering effect is achieved by the famous *Roman de la Rose*, started around 1225 by Guillaume de Lorris, interrupted mid-sentence, presumably because of this first author's death, and continued some fifty years later by the well-known polygraph writer Jean de Meun. We actually owe this minimal information about its writers to the text itself, more precisely to a short sequence close to the middle of it, the so-called god of Love's discourse: there, an intra-diegetic character, an entirely fictitious figure, takes control over the narration and tells the main protagonist, the "narrator-lover" who has been speaking in the first person since the very first sequence of the romance, everything about the various poets who have

deserved Love's praise. Among them, Guillaume de Lorris, who died without achieving his work, even before his successor Jean de Meun, who will finish it, was born. This is all very nice, but if Guillaume is dead and Jean not yet born, who is writing the God of Love's discourse? And who is the narrator-lover the God of Love is addressing? We have here a very fine example of unassigned text, a drifting text whose authorship is constantly in jeopardy.

Besides, the very notion of author in the Middle Ages, or at least during the 12th and 13th centuries, is far from being clear-cut: it is almost impossible to make the distinction between the writer proper, the scribe who copies a single manuscript, and the compiler who creates a whole significant new "macro-text" by combining several previous works. Where does qualification as an "author" start? Where does it end? At a time when the notion of literary property, not to say "copyright", does not exist, and when writing anything but comments on the Bible is considered sinful and diabolical, the position of author of a vernacular text is not a comfortable or an enviable one. Some of them deny responsibility, referring their readers to some sources from which they borrowed their story; others affirm they are only acting as scribes for some kind of divine inspiration, according to the typological model of the four Evangelists and their winged symbols. Either to enhance the credibility of their work or to escape the accusation of sinful pride, writers tend to distance themselves from their scriptural activity.

Even Merlin, the Devil's son redeemed by his saintly mother, does not write directly his new Gospel of the Holy Grail: rather, he dictates it to his mother's confessor, the holy hermit Blaise. At the other end of the range, the obviously very cultivated Wolfram von Eschenbach pretends he does not know how to read or to write, and declares he got the story of the Grail not from Chrétien de Troyes (who made a mess of it, according to the German author), but from a highly suspicious figure, "Kyot der schantiurre". Kyot's surname may mean the Singer or the Enchanter: in any case, it has more to do with orality and the magic value of the word than with literary creation as understood in the modern period. And Kyot himself got his information about the Grail from a certain Flegetânis, not only a pagan but an astrologer, who *read* everything pertaining to the Grail in the stars – although certainly not as a written text in any of the known languages of man!

Confronted with these and many other enigmas about authors in the 12th and 13th centuries, the modern reader-critic strives for firm ground, and tends to be overjoyed, to the point where he/she forgets to be prudent about it, when he/she is presented with a text boasting an author, or an author claiming he did indeed write a text. On the other hand, and for a very long time, anonymous works the enunciative status of which remains uncertain were barely considered as "real" works of art. Even now, the impossible quest for the author is still an alluring part of medieval studies, and it just happens that two texts, one going back to the very end of the 13th century, the other written most probably during the second quarter of the 14th, appear to present something like a typical case of what one can call "wandering authorship". One could say that in the *Roman des Fils du roi Constant* we have an instance of too much author and not enough narrative, while the *Roman de Perceforest*, despite several narrative layers, is hopelessly lacking an author. Their being so strangely complementary is not, however, the only reason for bringing them together.

Baudouin Butor represents in many ways the perfect opposite of these *personae* of fictitious writers generated, as it were, from inside out by the Arthurian prose romances. Actually, he did not exactly write *an* Arthurian romance, nor did he ever come close to

integrating the canonical *corpus*; he was, however, a die-hard fan of anything Arthurian and wanted to try his hand at writing such a romance. In his case, what we *do* have is a lot of peripheral information: his name, the name of his patrons, the precise date when he had the vision that drove him to make this original literary attempt, and the reasons why he did feel it was necessary to write such a novel. In fact, we have *four* beginnings, four Prologues, as it were, although the last one is admittedly very short. Each of these Prologues, except for the last one, basically repeats the same information, with a remarkable emphasis on the first-person narrator: "I, Baudouin Butors, above mentioned, I again want to..." (*Je, dessus dit Baudouin Butors, je encore...*). The first two Prologues contain precise and convoluted references to Baudouin's patrons, important people who did, or did not, ask him to enter this course of writing. Indeed, inside very few lines, Baudouin manages to convey much about a difficult political situation in the county of Avesnes (Northern France, close to Flanders). What does not seem very clear is how a "tale of Britain" will contribute to easing the tensions between allies and contenders for the ruling of Avesnes and Flanders.

In the third Prologue, while basically preserving the same pattern as in the first two ones, Baudouin brings in two new elements: he gives the precise date when he began working on this endeavour (the day of Saint Mary's Purification, in January 1294) and he justifies it, not anymore by a wish to obey the command, or at least earnest wish, of a patron, but by the fact that he was told to do so, and given the source material for it, by a wonderful child who appear to him in a dream vision. This, as mentioned before, is almost a *topos* of fiction writing in the 13th century: you need to have an external source, which you derive your inspiration from, and if at all possible you need to be given the task of writing by an undeniable authority, so that there is no chance you are dabbling in this dubious activity (writing) on your own whim, without necessity, and without the security provided by an already well-known, often-told topic. In that case, however, the model book proposed by the figure in Baudouin's vision is not that well "authorized". Baudouin falls short of saying that the child in his dream is Christ – which might be construed as sacrilegious – and rather suggests it is in fact the *puer senex*, the wise child, Merlin. At the late end of the 13th century, however, without the complete apparatus of excuses and justifications put into service by the Pseudo Robert de Boron, placing a new romance under the patronage of Merlin is certainly not sufficient to avoid suspicion. Besides, the *topos* of the dream, although it has been (and will continue to be) used to introduce allegorical truths, books whose contents are not quite supposed to be taken literally but to be interpreted in a moral or theological sense, does not appear as the best vehicle to authorize what pretends to be a perfectly truthful account of real facts – an episode, untold until then but nevertheless completely exact, of the great *chronicle* of Arthur.

Baudouin is clearly a man of his time, in that he knows the rhetoric of authorization and credibility used to present purely fictitious texts as historical documents, and is also conscious of the questioning going on about these techniques in the last twenty years before he starts writing. He appears, in many ways, as a nostalgic of Arthurian lore, at a time where the great Breton romances have all been around for at least one generation and the genre is starting to fall out of fashion. His Prologues, trying to make different demands and goals coexist in the same rhetorical frame and insisting in a somewhat clumsy manner on the mastery of the first-person author-narrator, nevertheless betray a growing sense of unease both toward the Arthurian material and toward the usual patterns in defining authority. This is further apparent when the would-be author

attempts to start his narrative proper. The four “drafts”, as they have been called by Lewis Thorpe, their first (and until now, last) editor, are in fact four different beginnings, four failed efforts that peter out after a few hundred lines. Actually, despite the care and solemnity Baudouin evinces in the writing of his prologues, these fragments are no more than that: pastiches of classical Arthurian texts, inserted in the margins of a long manuscript containing various texts without any resemblance to the drafts.

The global title “Roman des fils du roi Constant” (*Romance of King Constant’s sons*) is extrapolated – by Thorpe – from the second draft, the longest (almost 1,000 lines), that deals, indeed, with the little known adventures of King Constant’s two younger sons while they are exiled in Brittany. In fact, Louis-Ferdinand Flûtre, who did edit this episode only in issue 94 of *La Romania* (1974), called it “Pandragus and Libanor”, from the names of the two protagonists. The sequence features a number of interesting elements: for instance, the first occurrence of the “Sleeping Beauty” motive, where a young lover happens to gain access to his ladylove imprisoned in a tower, lays with her and begets a child on her without the young woman being conscious of it; or, the intervention of a supernatural figure, maybe a demon, who helps the lover in the hope of reaching his own (dark) goals afterward. It is also somewhat disorienting, featuring for instance one “wise child” Merlin, born before the beginning of the tale, and preparing the birth of another one, as if the Devil, having missed at first, were trying to redress his failure by creating a second Antichrist. Then again, this relatively short narrative wreaks havoc with the usual Arthurian genealogies: King Ban of Benoïc is still Lancelot’s father – but he is also the father of Libanor, Pandragus’ lover. Whether or not Pandragus’ child-to-be-born is another Merlin, this shuffling of generations makes Lancelot of the Lake an avuncular figure to future King Arthur, instead of a younger knight looking at Arthur as a father. With all its irregularities, Baudouin’s “second draft” shows a real mastery of the Arthurian material and a fascinating new approach to characters and situations that have by that time become almost stale.

As far as we can guess, the fourth draft would have gone in the same direction, with more or less the same characters. But the first one addresses a different matter entirely, since it tells the tale of the usurper Vertigier’s love for Sardoine, the daughter of the Saxon king. This belongs in part to the “pre-Arthurian” tradition: Geoffrey of Monmouth states clearly that Vortigerius’ marriage to the pagan Rowena caused both the arrogant invasion of the Saxons and the rebellion of Breton; nobody, however, had yet turned this story of political betrayal into a tale of courtly love. Although this rather short narrative re-uses rather cleverly the motives and the structures of courtly debates as they appear in the main texts of the manuscript, it soon becomes evident that the writer has come to a dead-end: the arch-villain of pre-Arthurian history cannot become a courtly hero.

As for the third draft, the one whose Prologue features the ambiguous vision of a child handing out the prototype of the romance to his would-be author, it stops short of telling any kind of story: after the detailed retelling of the vision, there is barely one sentence functioning more or less like a fairy tale opening: “once upon a time, when King Constant was ruling Britain...”. This is all the more frustrating because the second draft, and the title proudly situated at the beginning of the first one, open perspectives on unknown aspects of the pre-Arthurian legend that seem promising. This title especially is worth quoting:

“Ichi en apriés porrés oïr les histoires de Dafinor et Doruant et de Pierchefier, liqueil furent frere et fil au bon roi de Thailleborch.”

[Hereafter you will be able to hear the stories of Dafinor and Dorvant and of Pierchefier, the brothers and son of the good king of Taillebourg.]

Unfortunately, we are *not* going to hear anything about any of these characters, who do not belong to the Arthurian name-lists and never make another appearance in literature ... unless, maybe, you follow their tracks in the *Romance of Perceforest*. Baudouin's fourth attempt stops mid-sentence – whether because the author had enough of this rewriting, or because we have lost a few sheets of the manuscript is unclear. We may be reasonably certain, however, that the *Roman des Fils du roi Constant* never came to fulfillment – indeed, there is no such text, but a patchwork of rough sketches, tantalizing for author and reader alike.

Nothing, apparently, can be more different from this unfinished attempt at an Arthurian romance than the *Romance of Perceforest*. This one is a huge text, longer by far than the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, longer even than the *Prose Tristan*; about half of it is edited to this day, and it already reaches more than 3,000 pages. Actually, although we can surmise that the romance was written during the 14th century, the manuscripts that contain it are dated of the 15th century, and there is reason to believe that the copyists – especially the famous David Aubert, known as a compiler for the *Great Chronicles of France* – did add some sequences to what probably was already one of the longest works on record. (For instance, there are specific episodes that cannot conceivably have been written during the 14th century: a description of the witches' sabbat, complete with old toothless nasty women paying honor to the Devil in the figure of a billy-goat, appears already as very early if attributed to an interpolator toward the end of the 15th century, but is absolutely impossible in the 14th century, since notions about witches, the Devil and black magic did not coalesce before 1470 or so, prior to the great witch hunts of the 16th century.) The earliest date of the first redaction, however, is 1328, the year when Philippa of Hainaut went to England in order to marry the young king Edward (the 3rd of that name): this royal marriage is mentioned in the fictitious frame of the romance third Prologue as the occasion for the external narrator's journey to the English abbey where he discovers and acquire the book manuscript. One may suppose that the romance was written before 1346, since after the battle of Crécy, a continental glorification of King Arthur's forefathers does seem a little improbable.

The *Romance of Perceforest* is not an Arthurian romance proper; in fact, it comes to an end a little while before the unfolding of the events retold by the Arthurian *Vulgate*, in the *Merlin* and the *Lancelot*. In a striking attempt to renew a material that does not allow sequels – since all the characters are dead at the end of the *Mort Artu*, including the villain and his heirs –, the *Perceforest* goes back in time, and tells the story of the Arthurian characters' ancestors – all of them. In fact, it accomplishes a remarkable fusion, explaining how Alexander the Great and some of his minions, whom the medieval reader knows through some late pseudo epics, were waylaid by a storm and landed in Great Britain, where precisely the king had died without heir. Besides, this king, the well-named Pir (meaning "Worse" in French), has brought his kingdom to an all-time low level of sloth and *recreantise* (the negation of all chivalrous values). Alexander (who is scheduled to go back to Greece and die in a few years, if not in a few months) makes his two lieutenants Betis and Gadifer kings of respectively England and Scotland, and sets out to renew chivalry and courtliness in Britain. Betis, whose name is changed to "Perceforest" according to a prophecy, first undertakes to exterminate all the evil members of Darnant the enchanter's lineage. In order to do so, he enters the forest Darnantes (named for Darnant) and gets lost: Alexander and a number of knights, both

Greek and Briton, ride on a quest for the lost king. In the process, Alexander is wounded and spends two weeks (believing, of course, it is only one day) with a damsel expert in white magic, actually a water fairy who gets pregnant by him and will bear a child ... who will himself be Arthur's great-grand-father. This somewhat cavalier way of conflating genealogies allows to mesh together the matter of Britain and the matter of Antiquity, and to transfer Alexander's prestige to the Arthurian world, while avoiding the bleak ending of Arthur's age.

However, since the royal succession in Britain is well documented, thanks to the *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose success and credibility remain mostly intact during the 14th century, it is necessary to explain how such an important turn in British history may have been overlooked for so long – and why and how the narrative including these events suddenly comes to light. As for the first, the intricate Prologues of the *Perceforest* offer a “simple” enough explanation: envious characters (whose identity is not revealed) wanted all memory of this glorious time to be erased, since their own achievements could not compare with it. The suppression of the *Romance of Perceforest* is attributed to a deliberate manipulation of sources by persons unknown (but apparently numerous) who systematically managed to keep all mentions to the “Alexandrian” kings and their successors from the historical records. As for the second, one of the Prologues – the third and last one, in fact – consists in a classical and obviously fictitious account of the discovery of the original manuscript: the “narrator”, while traveling in England after the celebrations of the royal wedding, came to an abbey whose abbot had recently found, in repairing a fallen wall in his precinct, a crown and a leather-bound book. The book was in Greek, of course, but the abbot was able to have it translated into Latin through the means of a Greek exile who happened to spend some time in his abbey. The abbot had parts of the text read for the enjoyment of the narrator, who immediately decided he needed the whole, in view of the importance of the county of Hainaut in the story: he wanted to make a gift of it to his lord, the count of Hainaut. After much begging, the abbot consented to have it copied in time for the narrator to take the copy with him back to the continent, where he intended to have it translated into Breton (which is a nice realistic touch, but something of a dead-end for transmission, too). Due to political uneasiness and more pressing matters, however, it was some time before the count could take an interest in this enterprise. The narrator admits to more or less losing interest in the matter, too, and justifies in that way the further delay before bringing this all-important text to the public.

All of this makes good copy, but does not further advance the telling of the true story – this wonderful original material that has been kept under wraps for so long. After warming up with a classical presentation of Great Britain according to Orosius, the 4th century Christian apologist, injecting this geographic survey with some historic elements borrowed from Caesar and Dares Phrygius, then telling the reader how the book came to light in our time and age, the author, masquerading as a narrator-editor, has come no closer to starting his true story. He seems to grow desperate, as shown by many comments on the fact that “what does not get a beginning cannot come to an ending”, and eventually “just” jumps into his retelling ... except that, for forty pages more, it really is not “his”, but a summary (still another one) of the hybrid romance-epic *Vœux du Paon*, by Jacques de Longuyon. When the new material comes in, it does so without any exterior signal, and from then on the narrator is conspicuous only by his absence. Contrary to 13th century prose romances, ripe with first-person comments and interventions (although usually very brief and of no importance), the *Perceforest* is

remarkably bland as far as enunciation markers are concerned, once the romance is really under way.

Inside the story, the frame used to justify the transmission of information is reemployed from other Arthurian and non-Arthurian romances of the preceding century: all knights – actually, almost all characters – are supposed to give a complete narrative of their adventures whenever they come back at court, under an oath of absolute truthfulness: a college of scribes, or at least one, then write down their tales. Of course, this device is not entirely satisfactory, even in the older texts: sometimes the narrative voice in the *Lancelot* acknowledges the fact that there is an undeniable gap in the steps toward information transmission. Since Lancelot, for instance, does not want Queen Guenevere to learn of the night he spent with Amite of Corbenic (who later gave birth to Galaad), he wisely refrains of telling the tale to the court, or to the scribes: but then, how does it happen that we know of it? The usual “and through him we know that nowadays” (*et par lui le resavons nus encore*) cannot be used in that case, as in many others actually, and the 13th century texts do admit this lack. The *Roman de Perceforest* does not: it seems that for him the notion of writing everybody’s adventures down in order to keep track of them for later generations is mostly a narrative trick, and one that does not require great care in implementing it. It is just a kind of “trompe-l’œil” effect, an illusory device to deal with the haunting problem of *translatio*, from one period to another, one language to another. The *Perceforest* deals much more with contents, beautiful tales about fighting and love (*beaux contes d’armes et d’amour*) than with the enunciation problems of such a complex fiction.

Now, while the *Roman de Perceforest* is a very prolix text, it remains strangely silent about the identity of its chief narrator. At a time when the writer is emerging from the shadows that have hidden him for the best of two centuries, this uncharacteristic modesty challenges the reader to look for clues leading – maybe – to the discovery of a new author. This, by the way, may be a dangerous game to play: modern critics, in their slightly exaggerated zeal for unfolding the secrets of a text, have overstepped themselves. For instance, everybody was convinced by Paul Imbs’ identification of the lady in Guillaume de Machaut’s *Voir Dit* with Péronne d’Armentières, a young woman whose existence is well documented outside Machaut’s autobiographical fiction, until Jacqueline Toulet-Cerquiglini demonstrated that the anagrammatic line previously solved as a real name and surname was much more probably meant as an allegorical construct, to be read as “personne à aimer”, *person to be loved, object of love*. Clues of this kind are conspicuous by their absence in the *Perceforest*, however. What we do have is an almost obsessive presence of a first-person narrator in the several overlapping Prologues, who suddenly disappears as soon as the story is set on track for good. Contrary to what happens in the *Roman des Fils du roi Constant*, this narrator does not sign his name, but the ratio between “hors-d’œuvre” and main part of the work is the same in both texts.

We are then confronted to similarities inside the narrative that are too striking to be passed over as simple coincidences, I will underline only a few here, leaving aside the fact that both romances are rooted in the same area, the county of Avesnes or the Hainaut; in fact, the insistence of the *Perceforest* on episodes that take place in the “Selve Carbonniere” (“ki ore est apelee Hainaut”, *which is named Hainaut nowadays*) is as surprising as the recurring references of Baudouin Butor to his patrons’ geographic definition. I have already mentioned the “official” title Baudouin Butor gives his four-fold romance: not only does it feature a “good king Pierchefier” who has no closer equivalent

in French literature than the equally “good” King Perceforest; it alludes, too, to a Dorvant, or Dornant, who sounds suspiciously like Darnant, the bad enchanter of Perceforest, while Dafinor is very close to Delfinor, the Knight of the Dolphin, a minor character in the 14th century romance. Of course, Pierchefier and Perceforest both mirror the most famous name of the Arthurian legend, Perceval, that appears in various guises in different texts: from Parzival to Perlesvaus (“Loses-the-vales”) to Par-lui-fet (“Made-by-himself”); it is, however, interesting to remark that only the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* and the Perceforest present a form with “f” instead of “v”, a change which modifies entirely the semantic field of the name. Moreover, while Arthurian-related characters are very numerous (just see Christopher Bruce’s *Arthurian Names Dictionary!*), forms that are found both in the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* and the Perceforest do not occur anywhere else.

Another troubling formal resemblance is the use of remnants of Latin declension in personal names: Pandragus in the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* is the only such variant on Pendragon, Arthur’s famous uncle; these relatively few cases in the 13th century text become almost the rule in *Perceforest*. There such a phenomenon may be explained by an imperfect translation of the Latin models in the Prologues: but it does not justify the frequent uses of such forms in the course of the narrative proper, as for instance with Pergamus, alternately called Pergamo or Pergamum. Nothing, however, is more fragile and subjective than stylistic analysis in the Middle Ages: this has been confirmed by the failed attempts of statisticians to prove that Gautier de Loignies had indeed finished the *Knight of the Cart*; if anything, their studies prove convincingly that there is no difference between the first part, written by Chrétien de Troyes, and the second, supposedly written par Gautier.

On the other hand, the comparison of motives or patterns might not seem to be more conclusive, since medieval literature is mainly based on the concept of “variation” and “variants” around a same theme. Nevertheless, in the case of our two texts, some elements that are entirely original, or at least that appear for the first time in the *Roman des fils du roi Constant*, tend to recur in *Perceforest* – and only in *Perceforest*. One such example is the “Sleeping Beauty” plot: Pandragus gains access to the tower where Libanor is imprisoned thanks to the help of a supernatural character, whose status and identity are not clearly exposed. Now, since before Lewis Thorpe more or less discovered Baudouin Butor’s *marginalia* in Manuscript BN fr. 1646, all critic agreed that the first ever apparition of the Sleeping Beauty motive was in *Perceforest* – where, admittedly, it is developed at length, much more length than in the *Roman des fils du roi Constant*. Let us not forget, however, that the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* is at best a series of sketches, none of which is completely worked out; on the contrary, the *Perceforest* exemplifies an aesthetic trend based on amplification. In the process of amplifying the Sleeping Beauty situation, it just happens that the *Perceforest* makes use of a character who has been first delineated in the *Roman des fils du roi Constant*. Pandragus needs the help of a demon to visit his lover, since there is no other way to enter the tower; this auxiliary devil does not seem to be especially evil, however. Of course, Lucifer has great hopes that the child to be born of Pandragus and Libanor, being conceived out of wedlock and by trickery, will become the new Antichrist. Nevertheless, the demon he employs to secure this goal is not a bad one; he is closer to the classical conception of sublunar spirits, neither good nor evil, haunting the human world but unable to cause real wrong. This figure is called Roussecouanne, meaning “Red pelt” or, maybe, “Red tail”, and is described with a wealth of details that remind the reader of the

formidable trickster of 13th century literature, Renart the fox. Now, from its very beginning (the dream of Alexander on the verge of being led by fate to the shores of Britain), the *Romance of Perceforest* features a special character, a spirit who is not quite a demon – mainly because Christ has not yet come to redeem the world, and consequently categories of good and evil are not yet clearly defined – and who helps certain knights of Britain, especially the impetuous Estonné (“Stunned”) while at the same time playing tricks on them. Unsurprisingly, at that stage, this figure, whose name is Zephyr, is nicknamed Roussequeue and is described as wearing a kind of collar of red fur. Furthermore, while Roussecouanne appears almost as a clone for Merlin, up to the point where the reader cannot be certain that he is not Merlin in disguise, Zephyr-Roussequeue is clearly the prototype of Merlin in the *Perceforest*, so much so that he takes great pains to facilitate the birth of the “real” Merlin’s great-grand-father, the famous, not to say notorious, Passelion. In that case, the symmetry cannot be explained away by supposing a common source for both romances; there is a direct line of descent from Roussecouanne to Roussequeue, from the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* to the *Perceforest*.

Of course, the main objection to attributing the *Romance of Perceforest* to Baudouin Butor is contained in this same Baudouin’s reference to his advanced years in the first Prologue of the *Roman des fils du roi Constant*; he more or less indicates he is undertaking this task in his old age, and barely hopes to be able to finish it before dying. The very pompousness of his style seems to suggest an older writer indeed, somebody who has spent years drafting contracts and official documents for some court chancellery and is recycling, as it were, the ponderous style he acquired during this civil servant career in the Prologues of the romance he has eventually decided to write. But this does not need to be an insuperable objection, since, as I hoped to have shown here, the medieval author is not always truthful when it comes to disclosing his status and identity. In fact, the obvious defects of the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* may as well be attributed to the youth of an untried author, attempting to imitate his elders without quite understanding what it would entail. It is true that there is at best a gap of some thirty-five years between the redaction of both texts: nevertheless, literary careers spanning half a century are not unheard of during the Middle Ages. Anyway, if the hypothesis of a unique author for the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* and the *Romance of Perceforest* seems a little far-fetched, we must at least accept the probability of a disciple of Baudouin Butor’s, maybe a workshop featuring several apprentices trying to put in action the literary theory taught by their master. Authorship is notoriously difficult to pin-point with any degree of precision before the 16th century; however, the resemblances between the *Roman des fils du roi Constant* and the *Perceforest* are such that we cannot deny their close relationship. The older text appears to function as a matrix for the more recent one, as if the so-called Baudouin Butor had sketched, indeed, nuggets of narratives on which the anonymous later romance expands with a vengeance. This is a unique case, and a unique opportunity to study the mechanisms of amplification and rewriting during a period that has long been neglected as far as romance as a genre was concerned.

Note de C. de Buzon (2012)

La contribution d'A. Berthelot aux actes du colloque de Tours (1990) a disparu. Nous remercions A. Berthelot de nous avoir communiqué le texte inédit de la conférence ci-dessus prononcé à l'University of Connecticut (Humanities Institute) au printemps 2005 pour un public de collègues non-médiévistes. Sur le *Perceforest*, en cours d'édition par Gilles Roussineau (Droz, Genève) voir aussi les travaux de Christine Ferlampin-Acher (*Perceforest et Zéphir : propositions autour d'un récit arthurien bourguignon*, Genève, Droz 2010). Recension d'A. Berthelot : <http://crm.revues.org/12388>