

Book Review

Malicote, Sandra. *Image and Imagination: Picturing the Old French Epic*. Lanham, Maryland: UP of America, 2010. Pp. 173. Fig. 45.

This brief monograph studies the relationships between word and image primarily in BNF fr 25516, a mid- to late-thirteenth-century manuscript containing *la geste de Saint Gille* (*Elie de Saint Gille* and *Aiol*) as well as *Beuves de Hanstone* and *Robert le Diable*, two adventure tales. The *Aiol* poem has previously been attributed to the court of Countess Jeanne of Flanders or Constantinople. Both epics recount stories of the First Crusade, the Latin Empire at Constantinople, the Fourth Crusade, and the Reconquest and foundation of Christian Kingdom of Portugal, and were written perhaps at the time of the marriage of Jeanne in 1212 to Ferrand, son of the King of Portugal. Later Flemish versions (1230s) are definitely connected to her court. An important part of Malicote's argument is the connection between the program of illumination and rhetorical practices that reflect the courtly literary climate of the Arrageois region. Malicote asks whether programs of manuscript decoration have significance for individual epics, cycles, or even the genre. She provides a review of the limited number of scholarly works on the reciprocal relationship between images and texts for lyrics, Old French verse narratives, the manuscripts of Chrétien, and on marginalia; and she notes there is much less interdisciplinary work on epics beyond the compilation of images of the Roland legend by Lejeune and Stiennon and the papers from the 1997 Naples meeting of the Société Rencesvals. She does not mention recent work on illustrated saints lives (C. Hahn), iconology (W. T. J. Mitchell, O. Pächt and Alexander), or even work on texts and im-

ages in glass (M. Caviness, W. Kemp) that would have offered her good methodological models.¹

Chapter One studies *Aiol*, the third work in the codex, and demonstrates that division into twenty-seven episodes indicated by three-line lettrines corresponds neither to Rychner's *séance épique* nor Duggan's view of the intermediate stage of recording oral performances. Malicote's goal is to show that the careful *mise en page* of eleven illustrations is a rhetorical (learned, written) construction. She asks why the epic is decorated, where the ideas came from, who decided what would be illustrated, what the relationship is between illumination and the rhetorical development of the narrative, and how it contributes to understanding the poem. The first questions are answered more generally by reference to Jeanne's court; on the others, Malicote offers very credible observations on the role of the illuminations as synecdoches, as markers of major divisions, and as "visual equivalents of rhetorical and dialectical topoi and techniques of amplification" (7). She notes that the first illustration of the noble family being taught by a hooded hermit named Moysés resembles a historiated initial, modeled after liturgical manuscripts, which gives weight to the major theme of the epic, the re-establishment of law and order, also signaled by his holding the two tablets of the law. The argument (dialectic) of the epic is developed through contraries, and thus the theme is echoed by the last illumination depicting the traitor, Macaire, as

¹ Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986); Otto Pächt, *Book Illumination in the Middle Ages*, preface J. J. G. Alexander (London: Harvey Miller, 1986); Madeline Caviness, "Biblical Stories in Windows: Were They Bibles for the Poor?" in *The Bible in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bernard S. Levy (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992) and "Reception of Images by Medieval Viewers" in *A Companion to Medieval Art*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); Wolfgang Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, trans. Caroline Saltzweid (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

he is about to be drawn and quartered. A second beginning of the poem is signaled by the second illumination depicting the newly knighted Aiol: part one is his *enfance*; in the second, his departure with several knights signals his service to the crown; the third shows Aiol with a Saracen princess in the epic bride quest; and, for the fourth division, Aiol is depicted with Mirabel and King Louis. This part is the rhetorical development of the first three, and several illuminations function as *amplificatios*.

Chapter Two treats *Elie de St. Gille*, the first epic in the manuscript and the story of Aiol's father, Elie. Two interesting observations are made about the illuminations. The opening one shows Julien, Elie's father, in an apparent *disputatio* with the countess about his son's future. The *disputatio* creates a dialectic between agnatic and dynastic modes of succession and sets this epic apart from those primarily concerned with warfare. The fascinating part of the first image is that Julien is depicted with the *bonnet* of a doctor/jurist and with horns, similar to the horns on the figure of Moysés, depicted in the first illumination of the *Aiol*. The horned Moses is a commonplace, and Malicote says this reinforces Julien's teaching authority without saying why he is depicted as a jurist. The hinge image for *Elie* is of the dwarf, Galopin, carrying his dying lord to the tower where the Saracen girl will cure him. This develops a dialectic of "animate/inanimate," an idea drawn from Eugene Vance's *From Topic to Tale*.² As in *Yvain*, the *Elie* poet writes a serious version of healing through love, here informed by formal argumentation. The link back to agnatic and dynastic succession of the first image is not made clear by Malicote.

Chapter Three returns to *Aiol*, demonstrating that the poet defends traditional "true stories" of high courtly tradition against the foolish jongleurs. The prologue indicates that the truthfulness of the tale can be attested by the noble audience itself who were witnesses to the events of

² Eugene Vance, *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).

the crusades and also by the existence of much older Byzantine stories that the poet brings into the vernacular. This chapter sets out straightforwardly the author's argument, uncluttered with other critical studies, that *Aiol* responds to the parodic and scatological work *Audigier*. Here, Malicote makes much of the fourth illumination of the manuscript that had not been discussed earlier. It is an example of *amplificatio* on the mocking of Aiol's appearance by an offal-tossing bourgeois crowd and an aloof king watching from his tower. While the text of *Aiol* may have been composed in the early thirteenth century, the production of the manuscript itself, based on certain marginalia and the sophisticated use of illumination as *amplificatio*, is connected to the court of Jeanne's nephew Gui de Dampierre at a time when Adenet le Roi, famous for railing against jongleurs, was court minstrel.

Chapter Four touches on the initial illumination of *Aiol* and the branch or stalk that constitutes its border. This is an allusion to Hugh of Saint Victor's explanation of the construction of a codex, composed of many books, branches of a common root that, in this case, is the work of Bertrand de Bar sur Aube and his circle. He is referred to twice in *Beuves*. Malicote suggests that the animal marginalia of the frontispiece evoke Aesop's frivolous fables. Similar marginalia at the beginning of the *Elie*, including a hybrid boy-faced figure watching the animals, represent the heedless youth who needs advice, as does Elie. He learns from Rosemonde to move beyond childish proverbial wisdom to dialectical thinking. The *Beuves* text is the most lavishly illustrated (23 illuminations), and the discussion of the initial one that shows a woman admonishing a beardless youth posits too many allusions. This image is perhaps Beuves and his wicked mother or an allusion to *grammatica*, the harsh mistress of young scholars; this in turn evokes the work of Saxo Grammaticus, whose hero Amleth, Prince of Denmark, may resemble Beuves and hence appeal to the Flemish courts because of the disastrous marriage of Philip Augustus to Ingeborg, daughter of the king of Denmark.

Malicote's stronger point is that the initial illumination is compared to the woman at the opening of the last text, *Robert le Diable*, who makes the compact with the devil to have a child. The two initials connect the texts and signal the theme of contraries, mother/son; in both, the sons must overcome the wickedness of the mother. The last illumination shows Beuves on the left about to set out on hunt and Yosiane on the right playing her *vielle* and singing the *chanson* of Beuves. Malicote says that Yosiane's *abbreviatio* may be a guide to how to reduce a long *chanson* for public performance because the twelve episodes she mentions correspond to twelve of the poem's twenty-three miniatures. The chapter ends on the strong point that the search for characters, the translation of stories into texts in various forms, including performances, link music and text as well as illumination and text in the work of making serious "true" stories.

Chapter Five serves as a conclusion, extending the implications of previous chapters to a brief study of illuminations of *La Chevalerie Vivien* and the sole illustrated *Erec et Enide* in manuscripts, BM 192 and BNF fr 24403 respectively, that are related in time and place to fr 25516. Malicote shows the first illumination of *La Chevalerie* is placed after a few verses recounting the last scene of the preceding text and verses announcing the new one; and, in the next column, a second opening with decorated initial with pen flourish flows to bottom of the leaf. Here, as in *Aliscans* that follows, lines of text, rubric, miniature, and initial create continuity or *conjointure* and do not simply serve to "bookmark" the start of a new text. For this clever observation, we have to take Malicote at her word because there are no images reproduced. Likewise her identification of the *seated* figure as Vivien, supposedly when he is being knighted, seems odd, but there is no way to judge. As for the illuminations of the *Erec*, she answers the question of why minor events are illustrated by saying that Arthur and the White Stag are depicted because kingship is a central concern; the White Stag evokes Nature, Chartrain poetics, as well as the Psalms; and Arthur is depicted not only with a bow but also a horn, a visual allusion to the Joy of the Court, thus conforming

to Vinsauf's advice to "let the ending enter first" (103).³ The entire illumination functions as a synecdoche of the text. This is more convincing than the idea that the horn alludes to Roland, as Malicote suggests.

The last point is not major, but unfortunately typical of the tendency throughout to make broad, unsubstantiated connections (Marie de France and Chrétien enter frequently) that actually detract from Malicote's own solid, interesting arguments. Chapter One is especially difficult to read because it has too much tangential scholarship, appears to discuss the images sequentially, but skips some (only to take them up in another chapter); others receive unequal treatment, and the potentially interesting question of the difference between those that mark major divisions in the text and those that are "amplifications" is not clarified. A diagram showing the connection between the numbers of figures (the illuminations), the parts of the text, and verse numbers would have helped. The only chart included sets out the bipartite narrative structure inspired by Ryding and Maddox that obscures rather than clarifies connections between images and text. The scope of the book is ambitious because there are so many illuminations at issue (over 50); the result is that, except for a few comments about gestures, the illuminations are described very generally. Moreover, the reader cannot agree or disagree with most of the readings because the images are not clear. This is a disappointment, but it is more the fault of the press than the author. To publish a book about illuminations where most of the images are of poor quality and many are too small to read (all 23 from *Beuves*) is very unfortunate. There are no illustrations at all for the fourth poem, *Robert le Diable*, but references are made to E. Gaucher's figures (without clear citation). The book needed better copy editing to clarify documentation (xiii, xv, 52, 57-58, 79-81); missing citations (11); missing English translations (51, 73); opening quotation marks at the end of a line (69, 71); and in Chapter 2 all figure numbers in the text are off by one when compared to those in the appen-

³ *Poetria Nova* 21, l. 114.

dix, suggesting that a figure was added to the appendix without correcting the text.

Nonetheless, this work is a good contribution to both codicological and epic studies, because it shows the influence of dialectic and rhetoric on the deployment of images in a codex of epic and romance texts. For those who know the poems well, but not the manuscripts, it will offer a valuable new perspective. For those unfamiliar with the texts, it offers intriguing glimpses that inspire further study. Malicote has amply shown that “examples of illumination in the Old French *chansons de geste* studied here demonstrate that the illuminators and poets alike were above all artisanal craftsmen. [. . .] [T]he illuminations are frequently rhetorical figures themselves, as is the writing” (105).

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