
Drawn from the author’s doctoral research, this monograph belongs to the field of narratology (inspired, in particular, by Marnette 1998) and aims to analyze the figure of the narrator in three Old French romans in verse: Partonopeu de Blois, Florimont, and Bel Inconnu. As explained in the introduction, the choice of such romances relies not only on similarities in plot, but also on the peculiar presence of metaleptic intrusions by the narrator, who establishes similarities and oppositions between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels by means of comments on the story itself and on his relationship with the beloved lady, the first dedicatee of the work.

After the introduction, the work is divided into three main sections, which are in turn tripartite; these are followed by the conclusions, an extensive bibliography, and the indexes.

The first section studies the liminal space of the prologue, in which the enunciator addresses the dedicatee and becomes the narrator. Although Partonopeu de Blois opens with a homage to God and Florimont addresses an audience of noble and courteous gentlemen, all three romances include a dedication to the beloved lady. In this light, the enunciator exists as both lover and narrator and the creative act of narration, considered a true gift of love, is inextricably linked to the lady. This is made explicit in Bel Inconnu, for instance, where the will of the dedicatee influences the very course of the tale. In its epilogue, it is said that Guinglain will only know happiness in love if the narrator receives the favors of his beloved. Besides such dedicatory space, the prologues also share a similar attention to the question of genre, or rather literary form. Although the three romances belong to the same narrative genre, they stand at the crossroad of various literary forms — e.g., Bel Inconnu employs the terms cançon, roumant, and conte d’aventure — which allow the narrators to insert lyrical interventions. The transition from the dialogic discourse of the prologue to the proper narration is marked by a change in verb tenses as the present indicative of the prologue gives way to the imperfect or the simple past of the narration.

1. According to Genette’s theorization (cf. 1972, 2004), metalepsis consists in any kind of interference between extradiegesis and diegesis, or between diegesis and metadiegesis: in short, it is a phenomenon of contamination between the various narrative levels.
The second section focuses on the directing function of the narrator, who exhibits his role as omnipotent orchestrator of the diegesis either through metatextual interventions, which emphasize the passage from one episode to another / from one character to another, etc., or through the technique of entrelacement (Partonopeu, Florimont). The narrator also asserts his role of creator through various strategies of managing narrative tension, such as preteritions, prolexes, and reticences. For instance, in Florimont and Partonopeu, the narrators do not fully describe the erotic scene in which the protagonists are involved under the pretext of ignoring what has happened as they were not present in the intimacy of the couple's room. The narrative illusion is thus broken through a metaleptic mechanism (cf. Perret 1988). This section then divides the narrator's intrusions into two types: impersonal and subjective. Intrusions of the first type mainly consist in the use of paremiology — whose didactic-moralizing function brings the three texts close to the genre of the Speculum principis — while subjective intrusions imply the narrator's direct intervention in the text as he explicitly comments on the events of the adventures and/or the characters. The last chapter of this second section concerns the delegation of the diegesis to internal narrators. The antagonist too can be considered an intradiegetic narrator as he can oppose and alter the course of the main plot, also provoking new vicissitudes, by means of crafting a false tale (in the tale). Among the characters in charge of narration often figures the Melusinian fairy type, who represents the perfect double of the narrator given her omniscience and omnipotence over the hero’s destiny. This is a kind of mise en abyme of the narrator’s role (cf. Grüber 2021): the fairy’s account too thus becomes a form of metaleptic writing.

The third section addresses the polymorphism of the narrator who often assumes the role of courtly lover, inserting his own personal experience as well as lyrical interventions in the tale. In this context, the hierarchy between these pseudo-autobiographical additions and the narration seems to be reversed as the romance itself becomes nothing more than a pretext to conquer the dedicatee. Precisely by virtue of this overlap between romance and love speech, the characters become doubles of the narrator and his beloved. The heroines of the three novels — described as hyperbolically beautiful and initially inaccessible but then available to the lover — seem to stand for role models (or “identification traps”, [236]) that the narrators want to propose to their dedicatees. Also, the interior

---

2. The concept of metalepsis in modern narratology is inextricably linked to that of infraction, rupture, transgression, short-circuiting, etc. For an interpretation and discussion of metalepsis in medieval production that departs from the idea of infraction see at least Uhlig 2018 and 2019.
monologues assigned to the three heroines in which they voice their hesitations just before conceding themselves to the protagonists can be considered literary ambushes set by the narrators to their reticent beloved. In fully identifying themselves with the compliant heroines, the female dedicatees are expected to more easily follow their example and return the narrator's love. By the same logic, the male character is a double of the narrator himself, with whom he initially shares the role of mal aimé, only to become the embodiment of the narrator's erotic desires once he has secured himself a night of love with his lady. The metaleptic porosity of the text, its openness to the exchange between diegetic and extra-diegetic levels, is also somehow ironical in proposing an anti-heroic vision of the narrator who fails where his own character succeeds. The last chapter is dedicated to the figure of the narrator-author, unveiled anytime the narrator shows his writing skills and poetic savoir-faire through the use of enumerations, wordplays, and daring metaphors. In Partonopeu de Blois, the narrator-author even relies on metalepsis as he explains the change of verses from octosyllabic to alexandrine through a commentary which emphasizes his creative process.

Benedetta Viscidi
Université de Fribourg

Works Cited


3. For a critical reflection on the possibility of irony, see Marnette, forthcoming in Medium Aevum.