



OXFORD

French Romance of the Later Middle Ages

Gender, Morality, and Desire

ROSALIND BROWN-GRANT

French Romance of the Later Middle Ages

Gender, Morality, and Desire

ROSALIND BROWN-GRANT

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Rosalind Brown-Grant 2008

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Brown-Grant, Rosalind.

French Romance of the Later Middle Ages : Gender, Morality, and Desire / Rosalind Brown-Grant.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-19-955414-0

1. French literature--To 1500--History and criticism. 2. Romances--History and criticism. 3. Sex role in literature.
4. Ethics in literature. 5. Desire in literature. I. Title.

PQ155.S48B74 2008

843'.209--dc22 2008027673

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed in Great Britain
on acid-free paper by
the MPG Books Group

ISBN 978-0-19-955414-0



Es treshaults
et courageux
fais de nos
anciens predecesseurs
escrie pour exemple et
memoire ala loenge di
ceulx rament a la
cognissance de mon

debilite et obscurcy entende
ment vne matiere. la quelle
sera discutee en rude et co
mun stile ou proce de ce
present traitie. Comme
il soit ainsi que tous les
temps de ma vie de tout
mon cuer ay desire sa

Frontispiece of the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Histoire des Seigneurs de Gavre*, reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (MS 91, fo. 1^r).

For Steve, always my first and closest reader

Preface

Whilst French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have long enjoyed a privileged place in the literary history of France, romances from the later middle ages have been largely neglected by modern scholars, despite their central role in the chivalric culture of the day. In particular, although this genre has been seen as providing a forum within which ideas about masculine and feminine roles were debated and prescribed, little work has been done on the gender ideology of texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This study seeks to fill this gap in the scholarship by analysing how the views of gender found in earlier romances were reassessed and reshaped in the texts produced in the moralizing intellectual environment of the later medieval period.

In order to explore these topics, this book discusses fifteen prose romances written in the century from 1390, many of which were commissioned at the court of Burgundy. It addresses key issues in recent studies of gender in medieval culture including the construction of chivalric masculinity, the representation of adolescent desire, the social and sexual roles of husbands and wives, and power relations between the sexes. In addition to offering close readings of these texts, it shows how the romances of the period were informed by ideas about gender which circulated in contemporary works such as manuals of chivalry, moral treatises, and marriage sermons. It thus aims not only to provide the first in-depth study of this little-known area of French literary history, but also to question the critical consensus on the role of gender in medieval romance that has arisen from an exclusive focus on earlier works in the genre. Moreover, the book concentrates on the historico-realist romances which predominated in the late medieval period, works which made limited reference to the supernatural and instead presented their heroes and heroines as real-life figures. It therefore examines texts which followed very different narrative conventions from the Arthurian stories which are often regarded as the norm in medieval romance.

Rosalind Brown-Grant

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for awarding me funding to take extended research leave in 2001, during which period the foundations of this study were laid. I would also like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for awarding me a Major Research Fellowship from October 2004 to September 2006 which allowed me to complete this study in its entirety. I am deeply indebted to the three colleagues who kindly agreed to act as the referees for my applications to these funding bodies: Simon Gaunt, Angus J. Kennedy, and Roberta L. Krueger.

I am equally grateful to Marie-Claude de Crécy, Rebecca Dixon, Liliane Dulac, Thelma Fenster, Jane Gilbert, Marie-Anne Hintze, Karen Pratt, and Craig Taylor for generously agreeing to read particular chapters of the book or articles which have been incorporated into it; as I am to Adrian Armstrong, Catherine Attwood, Estelle Doudet, Miranda Griffin, Sylvia Huot, Angus J. Kennedy, Elizabeth L'Estrange, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne for their help in answering queries or their contribution to the discussions of various papers which I gave at seminars and conferences in the early stages of preparing this study.

Parts of Chapters 3 and 4 of this book have previously been published elsewhere and I would like to express my gratitude to Bernard Ribémont, editor of the *Cahiers de recherches médiévales*, and to Brepols, for their kind permission to incorporate this material into the book. I would also like to thank the Masters and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for permission to reproduce the miniature contained in Corpus Christi College MS 91, fo. 1^r.

I would also like to express my thanks to the staff at OUP, on both the commissioning and editing sides, who helped to prepare the typescript for publication, and to the anonymous readers who offered useful suggestions for its improvement.

Finally, I am as ever hugely indebted to my husband, S. H. Rigby, for his unfailing support and untiring willingness to read and comment on successive drafts of my work. It is to him that this book is fondly dedicated.

Note to the Reader

Abbreviations of primary sources appear in the Bibliography. All line, page, or folio references to primary romance texts will be placed in brackets and will immediately follow quotations given in the body of each chapter. All line, page, or folio references to other primary texts will appear in the footnotes.

Contents

<i>Note to the Reader</i>	xi
Introduction: Reassessing Late Medieval Romance	1
(i) The 'Waning' of Romance in the Late Middle Ages?	1
(ii) Recent Approaches to Late Medieval Romance	4
(iii) Gender and Romance	9
 1. 'Récits d'Armes et/ou d'Amour': Love, Prowess, and Chivalric Masculinity	 15
(i) Late Medieval Discourses on Chivalry: Vocation, Rulership, Companionship, and Love	17
(ii) Problematizing Premarital Love in Late Medieval 'Récits d'Armes et d'Amour'	29
(iii) The Congruence of Passion and Politics in <i>Ponthus et Sidoine</i> and <i>Cleriadus et Meliadice</i>	31
(iv) The Politics of Love Unveiled in <i>Rambaux de Frise</i>	36
(v) Chivalric Prowess and the Threat of Female Autonomy in Versions of <i>Blancandin</i>	39
(vi) The Trauma of Unrewarded Love-Service in <i>Jehan d'Avennes</i>	44
(vii) Heterosexual Love versus Homosocial Duty in <i>Gilles de Chin</i>	55
(viii) Male Doubling and the Displacement of Desire in <i>Olivier de Castille</i>	63
(ix) Conclusion	76
 2. Youthful Folly in Boys and Girls: Idyllic Romance and the Perils of Adolescence in <i>Pierre de Provence</i> and <i>Paris et Vienne</i>	 79
(i) Views of Adolescence in the Late Middle Ages	81
(ii) The Adolescent in Conflict: Youthful Disobedience versus Parental Authority	88
(iii) The Adolescent in Love: Youthful Sensuality versus the Demands of Chastity	103
(iv) The Adolescent in Exile: The Pursuit of Love versus Adherence to Social Duty	113
(v) Conclusion	127

3. Husbands and Wives in Marital Romance: The Trials of Male Adultery, Bigamy, and Repudiation	129
(i) Late Medieval Views of Marriage: Canon Law, St Joseph, and Marital Practice	132
(ii) Sex and the 'Singleman': Sterility, Adultery, and Companionate Marriage in the <i>Roman du Comte d'Artois</i>	143
(iii) Exemplary Wives: Bigamy, Fidelity, and the Pursuit of Salvation in <i>Gillion de Trazegnies</i>	155
(iv) Like Father, like Son? The Child as Model for the Repudiating Parent in Tales of the Seigneurs de Gavre	162
(v) Conclusion	177
4. Incestuous Desire versus Marital Love: Rewriting the Tale of the 'Maiden without Hands' in Versions of the <i>Manekine</i> and the <i>Roman du Comte d'Anjou</i>	179
(i) Representing Incest: Courtly Passion, Brute Impulse, and Index of Tyranny	182
(ii) Representing Marital Desire: Spousal Affection, Male Aggression, and Reasoned Political Choice	196
(iii) Conclusion	213
Conclusion: Romance in a Moralizing Culture	215
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
(i) Primary Texts	219
(ii) Secondary Sources	223
<i>Index</i>	247

Introduction: Reassessing Late Medieval Romance

(I) THE 'WANING' OF ROMANCE IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES?

If the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are commonly regarded as the apogee of French society and culture in the middle ages, then it is a critical commonplace that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were an era of ineluctable decline. At best, this turbulent time in French history has been judged as a period of transition between, on the one hand, the renewal represented by the twelfth-century intellectual renaissance and the development of the universities in the thirteenth century and, on the other, the advent of humanism and rise of political absolutism in the sixteenth century.¹ At worst, it has been dismissed as an age of violence, corruption, and social disintegration.² The most influential of these negative interpretations has, of course, been that of Johan Huizinga, whose analysis of this period in terms of an increasing divergence between its supposed chivalric ideals and its actual military and social practice, and of the pernicious effects wrought on the country by papal schism, civil and external warfare, pestilence, and famine, has cast a long shadow over studies of late medieval France and Burgundy.³ For Huizinga, behind the facile emotions, ostentatious displays of wealth, and vainglorious adherence to empty convention and ceremonial which he saw as symptomatic of this period in French and Burgundian history, stood only a backward-looking belief in outmoded hierarchies.

Such negative assessments of the historical climate of the later middle ages have also had a lasting effect on views of the literary culture of this period.⁴ Thus, although Huizinga may have been writing over eighty years ago, his opinions are still being echoed in general surveys of French medieval literature in which the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are usually seen as a literary 'golden age', one in which most of the major genres that were to dominate the culture of medieval

¹ Beaune 1985.

² Tuchman 1978.

³ Huizinga 1955 (1st published in English in 1924).

⁴ Kilgour 1937.

France—the *chanson de geste*, romance, hagiography, and the fabliau—were invented or developed into their classic form.⁵ In this received wisdom, the following two centuries saw an irreversible decline in the quality of works belonging to these genres: for example, epic tales grew interminably long and derivative as they were reworked into prose and hagiographical texts became ever more condensed and formulaic as they were gathered into compendia such as the *Légende dorée*. Lyric and drama alone have escaped being evaluated by scholars according to this pattern of a superior twelfth- and thirteenth-century ‘before’ and an inferior fourteenth- and fifteenth-century ‘after’,⁶ with the lyric being deemed to have developed new stanzaic forms in the late middle ages,⁷ and drama being regarded as having reached its peak in this period in terms of its inventiveness, variety, and range.⁸ It is thus no accident that these two genres have received the most attention from scholars in what is otherwise a denigrated and neglected period of French literary history. Indeed, critics’ tendency to judge texts of the past by the subjective criterion of modern literary taste has meant that they have shown a lack of enthusiasm even for those genres such as the allegorical poem, courtesy books, and treatises on warfare and chivalry which did flourish in the later middle ages.⁹

Of all the earlier genres which continued to be written and rewritten in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is romance which has undoubtedly received the worst reception from modern scholars. In part this is due to the fact that most late medieval works of this type were written in prose, a form which critics have tended to interpret negatively as a symptom of ‘bourgeois realist’ influence on aristocratic culture.¹⁰ Romances of this period have thus largely been dismissed as repetitious tales of ‘armes et amours’, the dying gasp of an exhausted literary tradition, with only the odd late fifteenth-century exception such as Antoine de La Sale’s *Jehan de Saintré* or the anonymous *Jehan de Paris*, which are routinely praised in literary histories for having broken with the generic conventions of their time and for having anticipated the future development of the novel.¹¹ As Michel Zink has put it: ‘Personne ne lit plus les romans du xiv^e et xv^e siècles. On les juge sans les connaître à travers la folie de Don Quichotte, dont on les tient

⁵ Muir 1985; and Berthelot 1989.

⁶ See Muir 1985, p. 209: ‘For the next two centuries, the exploits of Arthur or Charlemagne and their followers, or the antics of Renart and his fellows, [...] are endlessly retold but only rarely revitalised. [...] Other genres, such as lyric and didactic poetry and drama, were more fortunate.’

⁷ Paden 1998.

⁸ Muir 1985, p. 208.

⁹ See e.g. Ashley and Clark 2001, p. x: ‘The perceived nonliterariness of conduct literature—its didacticism, its supposedly simple rhetoric—has resulted in its marked absence until recently from literary histories.’

¹⁰ Hatzfeld 1963 attempts to rehabilitate the literature of the 15th cent. as being more than just a ‘littérature de transition’, but his impressionistic defence of the period’s ‘aristocratic solemnity’ and ‘bourgeois naturalism’ simply restates as positive characteristics what previous critics had dismissed as negative in works of this kind.

¹¹ Berthelot 1989; Kelly 1993, pp. 75–6; Lacy 2000; and Baumgartner 2005.

responsables [...]. On soupçonne en eux une forme qui a perdu son sens et qui se répète en remaniements et en compilations interminables et dépourvus d'invention.'¹²

Yet, if these unfavourable judgements of French history and literature in the later middle ages have long held the field, they have begun to be challenged in recent years.¹³ Whilst acknowledging the widespread gap between the social realities of the late medieval period and the ethical ideals propounded in the culture of the day, many historians have argued that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries should be characterized not as a period of decadence and decline but rather as one which witnessed a *revival* of the chivalric and courtly ideologies which are usually held to be the glory of the earlier centuries.¹⁴ Thus, in addition to the continuing popularity of traditional jousts and tournaments based on Arthurian models, new modes of combat in which knights could demonstrate their prowess were actually invented in this period. Whilst the *emprise* involved knights flaunting some treasure on their armour which had been given to them by their ladies and challenging others to win it off them in battle, the *pas d'armes* entailed setting up a pavilion with a beautiful lady in it next to a river-crossing or an entry to a forest and defending her against all comers for a specified period of time.¹⁵ Similarly, rather than seeing the late middle ages as a period of terminal intellectual decline before the glories of the Renaissance, literary scholars now give full credit to the role played by chivalric literature, whether fictional forms such as romances, or non-fictional works such as knightly biographies, manuals of chivalry, and chronicles, in setting out models of behaviour to which fourteenth- and fifteenth-century aristocratic readers actually seem to have aspired rather than just being elaborate fantasies. Besides, as Larry D. Benson has observed, chivalry and courtliness had, in a sense, always been backward-looking, and even the texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which first formulated these concepts had evoked a mythical Arthurian heyday of knighthood that had never actually existed.¹⁶ Thus, far from this being simply an age of pessimism and decline, which produced only a literature of escapist fantasy or melancholic inspiration, many late medieval writers appear to have responded to their turbulent times rather differently, producing works aimed at persuading their audience to model their actions on those of ideal chivalric and courtly heroes.¹⁷ As can be seen in the biographies of fifteenth-century knights such as Jacques de Lalaing, whose actions in turn became the stuff of fictionalized history, these models exerted an ideological and emotional fascination over their contemporary

¹² M. Zink 1988, p. 197. See also M. Zink 1983.

¹³ Thomasset and M. Zink 1993; and Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner 2003. See also Boudet 1997.

¹⁴ Benson 1976; Keen 1977; and Vale 1981.

¹⁵ Barber and Barker 1989; Bouchard 1998; and Flori 1998.

¹⁶ Benson 1976, p. 147.

¹⁷ Stanesco 1988*b*; and Colombo Timelli 1992*b*.

audience.¹⁸ For this reason alone, the chivalric culture of this period, of which romances constitute a major part, deserves to be given serious consideration by modern critics. Our aim, after all, as literary historians, should surely be neither to denigrate nor to rescue such works from the past on the basis of subjective value judgements, but rather to gain an understanding of the role that these works played in their own literary and cultural context.

(II) RECENT APPROACHES TO LATE MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

Indeed, scholars are finally beginning to analyse romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in their own terms, rather than simply comparing them unfavourably with those of a putative 'golden age', or regarding them as the literary reflection of an era of supposed crisis and decline.¹⁹ One of the main signs of this revival of interest is the appearance of a number of modern critical editions of romances such as *Ponthus et Sidoine*, *Jehan d'Avennes*, and the Burgundian prose reworkings of *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, which previously had to be consulted either in manuscript or early printed book form, or in unsatisfactory editions from the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰ However, much work remains to be done before the complete corpus of late medieval romances becomes available to scholars in an accessible and reliable form.²¹

In addition to being able to work with an increasing number of authoritative editions, specialists in late medieval romance have greatly benefited from a growing modern understanding of the general literary culture of the day, one which has for so long been derided by critics as lacking in originality and invention. One of the key features that modern scholars have identified as innovative in this period is the body of work created by the scribes and translators who were employed by Charles V in the middle decades of the fourteenth century.²² These clerks, who included Nicole Oresme, Simon de Hesdin, and Jean Corbechon, produced a vast array of vernacular translations of moral, political, didactic, and encyclopedic texts by authors such as Aristotle, Valerius Maximus, and Bartholomaeus Anglicus. These translations were aimed at a literate aristocratic audience, one that sought an ethical dimension to its reading matter.²³ This interest in ethics, which has now been linked by literary historians to the advent of humanism in late medieval France in terms of a rediscovery of the works of classical antiquity and a burgeoning confidence in the vernacular as

¹⁸ Rychner 1950; and Pickford 1959.

¹⁹ Stanesco and M. Zink 1992.

²⁰ On the manuscript traditions of late medieval romances, see Bossuat 1951, pp. 388–97; Woledge 1954 and 1975; and Ménard 1997.

²¹ Servet 1996; and Colombo Timelli 1999.

²² Krynen 1981; Lusignan 1986; and Cerquiglini-Toulet 1993*b*.

²³ Ornato and Pons 1995; and Ribémont 2002.

an intellectual medium,²⁴ was coupled with increasingly interiorized forms of lay piety which, in turn, stimulated a thirst for edifying works offering practical, moral, and spiritual guidance on virtuous forms of living.²⁵ Hence, in this period, the popularity of courtesy books and moral treatises such as Christine de Pizan's 'mirror for princesses', the *Livre des trois vertus*, or Philippe de Mézières's allegorical tract for princes, the *Songe du vieil pelerin*, works which are currently undergoing re-evaluation by modern critics for the central part that they played in disseminating to a lay audience the moralizing culture of the day.²⁶

As a result of these developments in the study of late medieval culture, we now have a far more complete picture of the literary context out of which the romances of the period emerged. For example, we can see why the literary patronage of monarchs such as Charles V and Charles VI, and of their close relatives such as the dukes of Berry and Bourbon, in whose service the clerkly translators and moralists of the period were writing, led to a greater production of moral, historiographical, and political works than of romances in the later decades of the fourteenth century.²⁷ Whilst the classic romance texts of previous centuries such as the *Prose Lancelot* continued to be copied and enjoyed, relatively few new works in the genre date from this period. Most of those that were produced at this time are Arthurian, such as the *Conte du papegau*, *Perceforest*, *Ysaïe le Triste*, and Froissart's *Meliador*, with the exception only of the prose and verse versions of the genealogical tale of Mélusine, and Christine de Pizan's courtly verse romance, the *Livre du duc des vrais amans*, to all of which excellent critical studies have recently been devoted.²⁸

This scholarly reassessment of the great Valois libraries in terms of their patrons' interest in humanism and their thirst for works of guidance on moral and spiritual self-fashioning has also been matched by a re-examination of one of the other great book collections of the period, that held at the court of Burgundy in the mid-fifteenth century. Thus, although the literary tastes of the Burgundian duke Philippe le Bon have at times been criticized by scholars for being nostalgic, frivolous, or scabrous,²⁹ recent analyses which build on the seminal but long-neglected work of early twentieth-century scholars such as Georges Doutrepont,³⁰ have shown that the 'grand duc de l'occident' in fact shared the same literary tastes for humanist and didactic works as his Valois predecessors. However, there was one crucial difference between these collections in that the Burgundian duke's tastes were also accompanied by a far greater predilection for romances. Philippe le Bon thus not only followed the lead of the French kings in ordering his own copies of many of the moral and historiographical works

²⁴ Simone 1961.

²⁵ Vauchez 1987.

²⁶ Brown-Grant 2002*b*.

²⁷ Lemaire 1994.

²⁸ Dembowski 1983; Harf-Lancner 1984; Maddox and Sturm-Maddox 1996; Régnier-Bohler 1997; Schmolke-Hasselmann 1998; Victorin 2002; Huot 2007; and Kelly 2007, pp. 127–36.

²⁹ Vaughan 1970, p. 158.

³⁰ Doutrepont 1909, 1935, and 1939*b*.

which they had in their personal libraries and in commissioning his own translations of a number of key humanist works on the practical and ethical dimensions of government,³¹ but he also accumulated an immense corpus of chivalric epics and romances. To this end, Philippe gathered round himself a group of like-minded noblemen, many of whom were members of the chivalric Order of the Golden Fleece which he had established in 1430, such as Jean de Créquy and Jean de Wavrin, who not only guided the duke in matters of literary taste but also gave him manuscripts of romances for his own collection.³² Thus, although Philippe and his fellow bibliophiles naturally had their own copies of the great Arthurian classics, they were also responsible for stimulating the production of large numbers of new works, whether *mises en prose* (also known as *dérimages*) of earlier verse texts such as those of Chrétien de Troyes, Gerbert de Montreuil, and Adenet le Roi, or original works in prose such as the tales of *Olivier de Castille* and *Gillion de Trazegnies*.³³ Moreover, as scholars have demonstrated, the court of Burgundy was not alone in the fifteenth century in taking an active interest in romance as, to a lesser degree, the court of René d'Anjou, himself an accomplished man of letters and the author of the allegorical *Cuer d'amour espris*, also saw the production of several new texts such as Pierre de la Cépède's *Paris et Vienne* and La Sale's *Saintré*.³⁴

That the romances of the fifteenth century should have occupied an honourable place in the great libraries of the period alongside both medieval works of morality and historiography and humanist tracts on politics and ethics might at first surprise us. Yet, in fact, the distinction between fictional and didactic texts was only a narrow one, since both the patrons who commissioned these romances and the authors who wrote them saw the role of such works as being as much to instruct as to entertain. As we shall argue here, these romances could hardly remain untouched by the moralizing discourses on all aspects of human behaviour which abounded in this period given that these texts were the products of scribes and translators such as Jehan Wauquelin and David Aubert, who were also involved in the preparation of more obviously edifying works such as 'mirrors for princes' and chronicles, and of professional knights such as La Sale and Jean de Wavrin (author of the *Anciennes Chroniques d'Angleterre* to whom various romances have been attributed), who were also steeped in the moral and spiritual values of chivalric culture.

Indeed, the very choice of prose as the medium in which these romances were written, far from being a sign of 'bourgeois' contamination as has often been claimed, was itself a rational one since prose had long been associated with 'serious' genres such as biblical commentary and historiography. As the pioneering

³¹ Vanderjagt 1981.

³² On Burgundian literary patrons, see Debae 1996; Gil 1998; De Smedt 2000; and Quérueu 2006.

³³ Doutrepoint 1939b.

³⁴ Coville 1941; and M. Zink 1988, p. 217.

work of Jens Rasmussen has shown,³⁵ by the fifteenth century prose had become the preferred medium for all narratives, whether fictional or historiographical, to the extent that the generic distinctions between romance, epic, and chronicle were greatly diminished,³⁶ leaving each genre receptive to the conventions of the others in their common pursuit of maximizing verisimilitude.³⁷ The status of prose as a means of truth-telling, in contrast with the octosyllabic verse used in earlier romances which the late medieval *dérimeurs* felt to be deformed by the constraints of rhyme and the rhetoric of ornamentation, meant that it was now employed in these *mises en prose* both to commemorate the illustrious feats of the chivalric heroes of the past and to stimulate the reader to imitate these deeds and thus, in turn, to 'write' themselves into the annals of history. Finally, aside from its positive connotations of seriousness, truthfulness, and clarity, prose was deemed to be all the more indispensable when reworking texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries where much of the vocabulary and grammar of Old French had become almost incomprehensible to the contemporary audience of Middle French speakers.

Just as scholars in recent years have abandoned so-called 'bourgeois influence' as an adequate explanation for the choice of prose in these romances, so they have also been at pains to re-evaluate the actual form of these texts which have for so long been judged as vastly inferior to the verse romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thus, rather than seeing the preference for realism over the supernatural in the romances of the later middle ages as a symptom, once again, of 'bourgeois' concerns with the everyday, critics have argued that the use of prose is only one of a number of literary and narrative devices employed by the writers of these works in their aim of evoking the heroic deeds of the past in a credible and convincing fashion. Instead of lamenting the 'prosaic' form of these texts as has often been the case, modern scholars have shown how it was precisely in the interests of realism that authors of late medieval romance strove to make causal connections between episodes as logical as possible, to create characters who were psychologically plausible, and to locate plots within geographically and historically recognizable settings.³⁸ Indeed, even the way in which the text was presented on the written page in romance manuscripts has been reinterpreted as a deliberate strategy for maximizing comprehension, particularly for an audience increasingly attuned to the individual, silent reading of books rather than to their public recitation.³⁹ Hence, instead of thousands of lines of uninterrupted verse as in earlier romance, we see the division of the prose

³⁵ Rasmussen 1958.

³⁶ Morse 1980; Gaucher 1994; and Szkilnik 2003.

³⁷ Brucker 2000, p. 47, argues that, in terms of increasing realism and courtliness, 'l'épopée glisse vers le genre romanesque'; whilst Roussel 2004, p. 350, emphasizes the continuing specificity of the epic in terms of 'le choix des thèmes et des personnages mis en scène' in spite of the notable influence exerted on it by romance in this period.

³⁸ Jovanovic 1962; and Abramowicz 1996.

³⁹ Pickford 1963.