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THE ART OF CONCEALMENT: *LA CHÂTELAINE DE VERGI*

THE *CHÂTELAINE DE VERGI* ends with an epilogue which casts a retrospective glance at the action accomplished by the end of the narrative and draws from it a moral lesson which is introduced by the figure of *exclamatio*:¹

944 Ha! Dieus! trestout cest encombrier
et cest meschief por ce avint
qu'au chevalier tant mesavint
qu'il dist ce que *celer* devoit
et que desfendu li avoit
s'amie qu'il ne le deïst
tant com s'*amor* avoir vousist.
Et par cest *example* doit l'en
s'*amor celer* par si grant sen
c'on ait toz jors en remembrance
que li *descouvris* riens n'avance
et li *celers* en toz poins vaut.
Qui si le fet, ne crient assaut
des faus felons enqueureors
qui enquierent autrui *amors*.

In evidence here is that same omniscient narrator by whose tyrannical authority every element of this astonishingly tight-knit text has been controlled, in such a way that the audience's reaction seems to have been carefully predetermined.² The moral perspectives of the tale are so rigorously established and imposed as to appear to exclude alternatives. We are to see the action of the tale as *cest encombrier/et cest meschief*, the experience of which is naturally negative ('au chevalier mesavint'). The next four lines typify the author's style of comprehensive and explicit analysis — comparable only with that of Thomas in his *Tristan* (which also has a moralizing epilogue)³ — whereby he determines our appreciation of events as if by the surreptitious provision of a gloss. The narrator claims, after all, to be furnishing us with an *example* (951). In this *example* the key concept appears to be *celer* (947, 952, 955 — as opposed to *descouvrir*, 954) which alone supplies a defence against *enqueureors* (957), busybodies, who

'enquierent autrui amors'. The thematic parameters of the story are established by the term *amor* (950, 952, 958), so that there is no doubt that the *enquereors* in this instance may be identified with the traditional enemies of courtly lovers, the *losengeors*. The gravamen of the epilogue is, then, that if a love relationship is to be preserved against a world conceived as essentially hostile, absolute secrecy is a *sine qua non*. Is this the view with which the text begins?

Although there is no clearly delimited prologue,⁴ there is nevertheless an introduction which is as proleptic as the epilogue is retrospective. Its congruence with the epilogue is easily demonstrable. The thematic parameters are again established by *amor* (6, 11, 16, 21 [*ama*] in a remarkably symmetrical distribution, 23, 26, 27, 29, 41 + 12 [*fin amant*]) and the central notion of *celer* emerges with equal consistency (3, 14, 41 + its opposite *descouvir*, 5, 10, 25):

- Une maniere de gent sont
 qui d'estre loial *samblant* font
 et de si bien conseil *celer*
 4 qu'il se covient en aus fier;
 et quant vient que on s'i *descuevre*
 tant qu'il sevent l'*amor* et l'uevre,
 si l'espandent par le pais
 8 et en font lor gas et lor ris.
 Si avient que cil joie en pert
 qui le conseil a *descouvert*,
 quar, tant com l'*amor* est plus grant,
 12 sont plus mari li fin *amant*
 quant li uns d'aus de l'autre croit
 qu'il ait dit ce que *celer* doit;
 et sovent tel meschief en vient
 16 que l'*amor* faillir en covient
 a grant dolor et a vergoingne,
 si comme il avint en Borgoingne
 d'un chevalier preu et hardi
 20 et de la dame de Vergi
 que li chevaliers tant *ama*
 que la dame li otria
 par itel couvenant s'*amor*
 24 qu'il seüst qu'a l'eure et au jor
 que par lui seroit *descouverte*
 lor *amor*, qu'il averoit perte
 et de l'*amor* et de l'otroi
 28 qu'ele li avoit fet de soi.

Indeed, the introduction ends with the implied identification of prosperous or enduring love precisely with concealed love:

- 40 Ainsi le firent longuement
 et fu l'*amor* douce et *celee*
 que fors aus ne le sot riens nee.

It emerges that the only difference between the introduction and the epilogue is that the proposed desirability of concealment is presented inductively in the first and deductively in the latter.

If the introduction and epilogue are so congruent with each other, are they, then, equally congruent with the body of the narrative? Does the picture fit the frame? We know that the classical economy and concentration of this rigorously constructed masterpiece are primarily assured by a semantic network of key lexical terms⁵ and we may observe at the outset that it is with a key term that the introduction begins, namely *samblant* (2),⁶ and that the action of the narrative is set in motion by a significant cluster (49, 52, 53, 54):

48 [...] la duchoise l'enama
 et li fist tel *samblant* d'amors
 que, s'il n'eüst le cuer aillors,
 bien se peüst apercevoir
 par *samblant* que l'amast por voir.
 Mes quel *samblant* qu'el en feïst,
 li chevaliers *samblant* n'en fist.

In other words, things are not what they seem. This text displays an insistent concern with semiotics no less than does Beroul's *Tristan* and demands a high degree of vigilance in any attempt to read the signs. Our first task, therefore, is to establish whether the key terms which we have already identified as constituting the congruity of introduction and epilogue are significantly distributed throughout the text, so that we might speak of a coherent correlation of picture (narrative) and frame (introduction and epilogue).

Faced with the dilemma of whether to reveal, under pressure from the Duke, his love for the Châtelaine, thereby freeing himself from the charge of having made a pass at the Duchess, the Knight is told by the Duke:

316 'Bien voi que ne *vous fiez* pas
 en moi tant com vous devriiez.
 Cuidiez vous, se vous me disiez
 vostre *conseil celeement*,
 qui jel deïsse a nule gent?'

These words seem to constitute an effective recall of the opening of the *Châtelaine*:

I Une maniere de gent sont
 qui d'estre loial *samblant* font
 et de si bien *conseil celer*
 qu'il *se* covient en aus *fier*.

The terms *se fier*, *conseil* and *celer* provide an obvious link, though it should be noted, of course, that for the audience *celeement* exceeds the limits of the original *celer*, as prescribed by the Châtelaine, since here in the context of the Duke's words it must necessarily allow for a third party to be privy to

the *conseil*, whereas precisely that eventuality was originally excluded (*celer* signifying 'conceal from a third party'). After the Duke has witnessed the lovers' tryst with his own eyes (cf. Beroul's opening orchard scene and contrast Beroul 265f with *Chât.* 495–96) the Knight declares,

498 'mes por Dieu vous requier et pri
que cest *conseil celer* vous plaise'.

The fundamental epistemological problem — what can we trust? — re-emerges in the relationship of the Duke and the Duchess. Disgruntled at not being able to extract from her husband the knowledge which she so ardently seeks — does the Knight have a lover? — the Duchess tries every manner of enticement and intimidation she can, complaining,

621 '... je voi bien a cel *samblant*
Qu'en moi ne *vous fiez* pas tant
Que *celaisse* vostre *conseil*'.

Again, the same crucial terms: *se fier*, *celer*, and *conseil*, to which is now added a fourth: *samblant* (cf. 2). When the Duchess does succeed in persuading the Duke to reveal that the Knight has a lover, the narrator observes that she was anything but pleased:

663 mes ainc de ce *samblant* ne fist,
ainçois otroia et promist
au duc a si *celer* ceste oeuvre [= *conseil*]

The catalytic event thus seems to be described with remarkable consistency at key points, i.e. the introduction, the interview of the Knight with the Duke, and that of the Duke with the Duchess. Once the injunction to *celement* is broken, the result is catastrophic — and here, too, the introduction chimes well with the narrative, for *meschief* is described as occurring amongst lovers

13 quant li uns d'aus de l'autre *croit*
qu'il ait dit ce que *celer* doit.

Here the theme of concealment is linked to that of appearances and reality (*croit*) and the tragic effect of the story derives from the Châtelaine's *believing* something which turns out to be mistaken, namely that the Knight has revealed their secret (*descouvrir nostre conseil* 771, *descouvert/ nostre conseil* 809–10) as a consequence of no longer loving her.

744 'Bien voi que il ne m'aime mie,
quant il me faut de couvenant'.

The famous monologue of the distraught Châtelaine recycles the key terms once more. The repeated *fine amor* (784, 808) takes up the *fin amant* of the introduction (12), itself confirmed by *fins amanz* (439) when the Châtelaine and the Knight have their tryst.

Our initial impression is therefore that *to all appearances* there is a satisfying solidarity of introduction with narrative and that the central

insistence on the need for secrecy is cogent. It is at this point, however, that I should like to offer and test a series of contrary propositions.

My first suggestion is that the narrative frame (introduction and epilogue) metaphorically resembles *une maniere de gent* of the opening (1) in simply, but fallaciously, giving the appearance (*samblant*) of reliability. As the whole distinction of appearance and reality implies, we need to be on our guard against too credulous a response to the familiar. Does the introduction, a critical moment in any text, really deserve our trust? May it be that it is already ironically subverting its own proposition concerning the significance of the *example*, namely that insistence on concealment is always desirable, by presenting us with a moral lesson which close attention reveals is *not* illustrated by the story proper at all? And could the narrative frame be ironic in a further sense? If the story of the Châtelaine does *not* illustrate or justify the argument for concealment, it might be said that the very existence of this discrepancy does, for the incongruity of story and 'moral' might of itself suggest that the literary text does not require a gloss by an implied author (a 'third party') and that such a gloss should therefore be suppressed. The text's *sen*, like *conseil*, derives from the intimate collaboration of *two* parties, the audience and narrator, and should therefore be concealed, concealed, that is, from the prying of commentators, glossators and such like, whose *additamenta* should be suppressed.

If we take the introduction of the *Châtelaine*, therefore, as self-referential, we can see how it argues for its own suppression, since the story does *not* illustrate what the introduction claims it does. This gives rise to an ironic inversion of text and doxa, or text and gloss, in which the text ironizes the gloss by revealing its deficiency and implying that its teaching in this instance should be applied only to itself. When the argument of the introduction is thus 'revealed' to the reader, it constitutes, in its fallaciousness *as applied to the story*, a *meschief* (15, 945), whilst paradoxically supporting the conclusion 'que li descouvriens riens n'avance/et li celers en toz vaut' (945-55) *when applied to the introduction-epilogue itself*. Concealment becomes a defence against mis-readers (*enquereors*) searching for a *sen* they cannot understand. Was it not Augustine in the *De doctrina christiana* who provided a similar defence of obscurity and Marie de France who repeated the idea? This reading of the narrative frame (introduction-epilogue) as self-referential presupposes a deficiency in the frame's applicability to the narrative which is based on yet another act of concealment. What the frame in fact conceals, or suppresses, is any reference to the conflict of loyalties which besets the Knight and without which his position cannot be properly appreciated. There is a sense, therefore, in which the introduction-epilogue already implements its own recommended strategy of concealment and by so doing argues for its own suppression.

The introduction–epilogue articulates the concealment theme in terms of a code which is remarkable chiefly for the rigidity of its formulation and the exclusive opposition it contains:

954 ... li descouvrirens *riens* n'avance
et li celers *en toz poms* vaut.

The code functions as a defence against the enemies of love — the *faus felons enquereors*. In the narrative proper, however, it is marked by no such function; rather, it is the Châtelaine's personal test of her lover's loyalty, as part of a *covenant*. She granted him

23 par itel *covenant* s'amor
qu'il seust qu'a l'*eure* et au jor
que par lui seroit *descouverte*
lor amor, qu'il averoit *perte*
et de l'amor et de l'*otroi*
qu'ele li avoit fet de soi.

This is confirmed by her monologue:

808 'Ha! fine amor! est ce donc droiz
que il a ainsi *descouvert*
nostre conseil, dont il me *pert*?
qu'a m'amor *otroier* li dis
et bien en *covenant* li mis
que a cele *eure* me *perdroit*
que nostre amor *descouvreroit*!'

In other words, the *covenant* concerning concealment is designed to permit a signal, which by its negative nature will be too late when it comes. There is nothing in the text about protection. Secrecy is simply the Châtelaine's assurance that she is still loved by the Knight. In her monologue she makes it clear that without him she will die. The introduction, on the other hand, says nothing at all about *her* love for the knight, allowing her to resemble the imperious *dompna*.

But even if the *covenant* and concealment *were* designed for protection and not essentially as a test, would they save the lovers from the danger represented in the *Châtelaine de Vergi*? The danger, in fact, is twofold and the introduction and epilogue are chiefly remarkable for the thorough-going manner in which they conceal it. The first danger is the dilemma posed by a conflict of loyalties, in which the sort of rigidity recommended in the introduction–epilogue actually becomes *impossible*. Absolutely nothing in the introduction prepares us for the fact that the Knight is caught in an insoluble *jeu parti*. As Constant might have said, 'Sa situation était sans ressource'. The second danger is that this situation is caused not by *enquereors*, but by a *mulier perniciososa*, a maleficent woman who lies at will and systematically prosecutes a vendetta based on lies. It is vital to note that the Duke is just as much the victim of these two dangers as the Knight — the courtly code doesn't come into it.

It is, therefore, worth sketching some of the moral complexities illustrated in the *Châtelaine de Vergi*, complexities about which the introduction and epilogue are completely silent, and worth showing how the strategy of concealment exacerbates them rather than provides a shield against them as suggested in the epilogue.

From the outset there is no mistaking the central irony of the poem's action, namely that it is the injunction to concealment which is the root of all the problems. As a result of his frequent appearances at court the Duchess simply falls in love with the Knight (48 *l'enama*) — that is a basic *donnée* of the story. The Knight, though, gives no sign (*samblant*) that he understands (*apercevoir*) her signals (49–56). She tempts him to seek love in an 'haut leu' (63, 71) i.e. herself, but he disclaims any such ambitions (73–80). To encourage him the Duchess pointedly refers to herself as 'haute dame honoree' (86), but the Knight equivocates (88 'Ma dame, je ne le sai pas') and, getting more desperate, avers that he could never love in a manner that might bring dishonour to his lord.

Conscious of failure, the Duchess ill-temperedly retreats (99–100) and promptly decides to take her revenge. In other words, the Knight unwittingly makes a powerful enemy who privately declares war on him (the Duchess is disloyal to her own feudal lord and husband and further disloyal in initiating a vendetta covertly). How, we may ask, could concealment assist the Knight? The answer, of course, is that it couldn't, since it is concealment which actually creates the conflict in the first place.

Concealment produces the fatal conflict in two ways. First, the discreet evasiveness of the Knight's speech, which conceals that he is already 'fixed up' with a partner, provokes the Duchess to a major assault in the shamelessly direct declaration of lines 84 ff., and the continuing obliqueness of his reply humiliates her. Better to have revealed the truth — without naming the Châtelaine (nobody in this poem has names anyway). Secondly, and more important, indeed crucial to every subsequent event, the Knight's concealment of his liaison permits the fatal argument *ex silentio* which alone gives credibility to the Duchess's otherwise implausible lie that the Duke's trusted vassal, the Knight, has conceived a passion for her and attempted to seduce her:

134 'Et si puet estre chose vraie
qu'il ait pieça a ce penssé:
de ce qu'il a aillors amé
novele oïe n'en avon'.

(cf. 215 f. & 254–57)

It is this fundamental act of concealment which alone leads the Duke to entertain, even temporarily, what is an outrageous lie. In such circumstances it is difficult for the listener to endorse the courtly world's insistence on *amor celee* or its preference for verbal decorum which amounts to elegant indirection. Both rebound on the Knight in a radical

manner. But the root of the problem has nothing to do with failure to conceal love:

Heav'n has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,
Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorned.

Pique at getting such a lukewarm reception, shame at seeing that the Knight has discerned her readiness for adultery, jealousy at the idea that he may love lower down the social scale (confirmed in 659 f.), or just plain evil (see the blatant untruths in 125 ff. and 645 f.)? At any rate neither the Knight nor the listener is in any way prepared for the Duchess's malice and implacability and for her treachery (unlike the second Iseult, she has not been wronged). Could the Knight have yet been saved?

It is important to identify precisely the difficulties which he encounters. The first is untruth. The calumnies of the Duchess are without any justification and could not have been anticipated in their shamelessness. In pursuit of her instantaneously conceived vendetta she is perfectly prepared treacherously to deprive the Duke of the services of his legitimate vassal, for whom he has long had special regard and on account of whom he is now in a moral agony (144 ff.). Arguably, *nothing* could have protected the Knight against such malice, but, as we have seen, it is certain that *celement* did not help. The moral rot quickly sets in. The Duke determines to interview 'celui . . . / que sa fame li fet hair / sans ce que de rien ait mespris' (151–53; the moral résumé is typical of the narrator who keeps a tight rein on his audience). In a neat, ironic inversion of the opening motif of the introduction the Duke addresses the Knight as one who seemed to be loyal and worthy of confidence ('. . . j'ai mout longuement creü / que vous fussiez de bone foi, / loiaus a tout le mains vers moi, / que j'ai vers vous amor eüe', 160–63) but whom he must now banish from his lands. As usual, the narrator summarizes the situation in an explicit manner. If the Knight obeys his feudal lord, as he always has done, he will lose his love through permanent exile; on the other hand, he strongly resents the wrongful charge of being a 'trahitor desloial'. In other words, he is caught in a conflict of loyalties: to his lover, to his lord, and to himself. *Pour comble de misère* the Duke, surprisingly and gratuitously, implies that the Knight perhaps said more than the Duchess reported ('et tel chose deïstes vous, / peut estre, dont ele se test', 202–03). Under mounting pressure the Knight incautiously says:

207 'Rien ne m'i vaut que j'en deïsse;
si n'est riens que je n'en feïsse
par si que j'en fusse creü,
quar de ce n'i a riens eü'.

Still worried by the argument that the Knight is not publicly known to have a partner and therefore just *might* have been after his wife, the Duke resorts to the well known device of the open-ended promise which critics have

dubbed the *don contraignant* (218 ff.).⁸ The narrator adduces every mitigating factor he can think of to explain the Knight's unwise compliance: on the one hand, he desperately wants to allay the Duke's unjust suspicions; on the other, he wants to hold on to his lover, and so he complies with the request, thereby breaking the *covenant*.

233 qu'il ne pense ne ne regarde
de ce dont li dus se prent garde,
ne torment ne le lest penser
ce que li dus veit demander,
de riens fors de cele proiere.

This *jeu parti* has really nothing to do with the untrustworthiness of those who are apparently loyal or with *enquereors*, and the narrator does everything he can to show that the Knight is 'sans ressource'. When the question is revealed, the narrator again rushes to his defence:

268 Cil ne set nul conseil de soi,
que le geu a parti si fort
que l'un et l'autre tient a mort;
quar, s'il dit la verité pure,
qu'il dira s'il ne se parjure,
a mort se tient, s'il mesfet tant
qu'il trespasse le couvenant
qu'a sa dame et a s'amie a,
qu'il est seürs qu'il la perdra
s'ele s'en puet apercevoir;
et s'il ne dit au duc le voir,
parjurés est et foimentie,
et pert le pais et s'amie.

Given the promise demanded of him by the Châtelaine, and given that demanded by his feudal lord, the Knight is stuck. There is only one possible solution or way out of the impasse, and that is suggested by the qualification of l. 277 *s'ele s'en puet apercevoir*. Provided that the Duke can 'celer' the 'conseil', all might yet be well. The Duke himself anticipates this solution:

316 'Bien voi que ne *vous fies* pas
en moi tant com vous devriiez.
Cuidiez vous, se vous me disiez
vostre *conseil celeement*,
que jel deisse a nule gent?
Je me leroie avant sanz faute
trere les denz l'un avant l'autre'.

We are at once, of course, put in mind of the introduction:

Une maniere de gent sont
Qui d'estre loial samblant font,
Et de si bien *conseil celer*
Qu'il *se* covient en aus *fier*.

But the word *samblant* is missing. The Duke is *not* of this type. He is not insincere and he does not resemble those who, knowing a secret, 'l'espendent par le païs / et en font lor gas et lor ris' (7-8). The fact is that the Duke is no less a victim than the Knight — a victim, that is, of the Duchess's wickedness. As the Knight's tactical error is to offer to do anything to prove his innocence, so the Duke's mistake is to ask for *further* proof and to accompany the Knight to the tryst (both act from hyper-anxiety), for on his return he cannot help reverting, in his relief, to his customary friendliness towards the Knight:

510 moustra li dus au chevalier
plus biau *samblant* qu'ainz n'avoit fait.
(cf. 537 f.)

This is a completely unconscious breach of his undertaking,

337 'N'en ert a creature nee
Par moi novele racontee
Ne *samblant* fet grant ne petit!

Now it is the Duke's turn to face the *jeu parti*. The Duchess takes offence at her husband's friendliness towards her fictive seducer and retires to bed in a huff. Sensing trouble, the Duke assures her that the Knight is in the clear and adds 'Si ne m'en enquez ja plus' (549). Tactically this remark is an error, just as much as the Knight's open-ended promise of which it appears an ironic inversion, for it whets the Duchess's curiosity further. The remark is wholly benevolent in intention. In contrast, the Duchess's calculated malice, her *engin* (558), is emphasized in a flurry of narratorial activity (551 ff.) which unambiguously describes her as 'cele qui a mal i bee' (589). She now sets about impugning the Duke's loyalty and once again *concealment* appears problematic:

603 '... or voi que vous me *celez*,
vostre merci, les voz penssez'.

In an example of structural irony which is so typical of this text⁹ the Duchess now recycles the key terms of the introduction, as the Duke had done in 316 ff.

621 '... je voi bien a cel *samblant*
qu'en moi ne *vous fiez* pas tant
que *celaisse* vostre *conseil*;
et sachiez que mout me merveil:
ainc n'oïstes grant ne petit
conseil que vous m'eüssiez dit,
dont *descouvers* fussiez par moi,
et si vous di en bone foi,
ja en ma vie n'avendra!'

Now it is the Duke who finds himself in an impasse (632 ff.). Under pressure of emotional blackmail he accedes to the Duchess's request. The

narrator underlines the extent of the Duchess's deceit: first, by describing her telling an outright lie, and then by showing that it is the very decency of the Duke, who loves his wife, which traps him:

645 'estre ne porroit que fëisse
chose dont vers vous mespreisse!

647 Cil qui l'aime por ce le croit
et cuide que veritez soit
de ce que li dist . . .

The episode ends with a shameless lie. The Duchess is mortified by the knowledge that the Knight loves someone inferior to her (659 ff.):

663 mes ainc de ce *samblant* ne fist,
ainçois *otroia* et promist
au duc a si *celer* ceste oeuvre
que, se c'est qu'ele le *descuevre*,
qui il la pende a une hart.

675 Si afferme tout son porpens
que, s'ele voit ne lieu ne tens
qu'a la niece le duc parolt,
qu'ele li dira ausi tost,
ne ja *ne celera* tel chose
ou felonie avra enclose.

From this analysis I draw the following conclusions.

1. Nothing in the introduction–epilogue alludes to the fundamental problem of the conflict of loyalties and the moral complexities which ensue. This is the more remarkable when we consider that such conflicts involve the Knight and the Duke in a number of parallel situations which have been very carefully structured.
2. Nothing in the introduction–epilogue alludes to the fundamental *radix malorum*, the remorseless vendetta of an irredeemably evil woman for whom no juster fate can be devised than death. In the presence of lies, deception and malevolence there can be no simple defence.
3. Nothing in the introduction–epilogue alludes to the problematic nature of concealment which, as I have shown, creates as many difficulties as it is said to solve, being the basis of *samblant*, a key term in the text, and the source of most of the trouble.

In other words, the introduction–epilogue is hopelessly simplistic and it is so by virtue of acts of concealment which have been enumerated above. Its true significance is located at the level of self-referentiality. By concealing so much concerning the theme of concealment and thereby violating the narrative's *sen*, the introduction–epilogue successfully argues the case for its *own* concealment i.e. suppression. Concealment of the *sen* or 'moral' of

the work is the only defence against perverse, simplistic or mischievous interpretation:

953 c'on ait toz jors en remembrance
 que li *descouverts* [var. raconters] riens n'avance
 et li *celers* en toz poins vaut.
 Qui si le fet, ne crient assaut
 des faus felons enqueors [. . .].

To conceal the *sen*, no longer paraded in an exegetical or didactic framing device, strengthens the hand of the author.¹⁰ In thus paradoxically arguing for its own suppression the introduction–epilogue is really doing no more than restoring the conditions for interpretation commended by Augustine in the *De doctrina christiana*. The withholding of the *sen* serves ‘ad exercendas et elimandas quodam modo mentes legentium et ad rumpenda fastidia atque acuenda studia discere volentium’.¹¹ Ancient writers, according to Augustine, concealed some things from the ‘animos impiorum’ when they ‘utili ac salubri obscuritate dixerunt’. It is well known that ‘facile investigata plerumque vilescunt’. The author of the *Châtelaine de Vergi* has wittily written an introduction–epilogue which, while proclaiming a simplistic ‘moral’, subtly acknowledges its own irrelevance and undesirability. In seeking to preserve his text from the assaults of moralizing critics he was, we may surmise, rebelling against the trend to didacticism which so heavily marks literature produced in North-East France in the thirteenth century. At the same time he may have sought to initiate a debate on a theme which finds celebrated expression in the work of a contemporary, the anonymous author of *La Mort le Roi Artu*. Gauvain there says of Lancelot,

‘il s'est toz jorz si celez vers toute gent que l'en ne pot onques savoir veraïement a cort que il amast par amors’

to which the maiden of Escalot replies,

‘tant vaut il mielz; car vos savez bien que amors descouvertes ne pueent pas en grant pris monter’.¹²

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¹ Quotations are drawn from *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, ed. by F. Whitehead, 2nd ed. (Manchester, 1951).

² See J. Rychner, ‘La Présence et le point de vue du narrateur dans deux récits courts: *Le Lai de Lanval* et la *Châtelaine de Vergi*’, *Vox Romanica*, 39 (1980), 86–103 repr. in Rychner, *Du Saint-Alexis à François Villon: Études de littérature médiévale* (Geneva, Droz 1985), pp. 289–306. See also Rychner, *Narration des sentiments, des pensées et des discours dans quelques œuvres des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Geneva, Droz, 1990) for a discussion of various passages from the *Châtelaine*.

³ Cf. T. Hunt, ‘The Significance of Thomas’s *Tristan*’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 7 (1981), 41–61.

⁴ Cf. J. P. Bordier, F. Maquère, M. Martin, ‘Disposition de la lettre et interprétation des œuvres: L'exemple de *La Chastelaine de Vergi*’, *MA*, 79 (1973), 231–50.

⁵ See D. J. Shurt, 'La Chastelaine de Vergi: The Technique of Stylistic Cohesion', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 6 (1980), 81-99.

⁶ Cf. H. Solterer, 'Le Bel Semblant: Faus Semblant, Semblants Romanesques', *Médiévales*, 6 (1984), 26-36 and L. de Looze, 'The Untellable Story: Language and Writing in *La Chastelaine de Vergi*', *French Review*, 59 (1985) [42-50], 45 f., 48; G. Mermier, 'En relisant *La Chastelaine de Vergi*', *Studi medievali e volgari* 28 (1981) [1938], 24 ff.

⁷ Cf. T. Hunt, 'Glossing Marie de France', *Romansche Forschungen*, 86 (1974), 396-418.

⁸ See R. Dubuis, 'Yvain et Iwain: Variations sur le motif du "don contraignant"', *Mélanges Charles Foulon*, 2 [*Marche Romane* 30, iii-iv] (Liège, 1980), pp. 81-91; J. Härmä, 'Les Séquences du don contraignant: Essai d'examen dans le cadre de l'analyse du dialogue', *Actes du VIII^e Congrès des romanistes scandinaves (Odense, 17-21 août, 1981)* (Odense University Press, 1983), pp. 163-73; Ph. Ménard, 'Le Don en blanc qui lie le donateur: Réflexions sur un motif de conte', in *An Arthurian Tapestry: Essays in Memory of Lewis Thorpe*, ed. by K. Varty (Published on behalf of the British Branch of the Arthurian Society at the French Department of the University of Glasgow, 1981), pp. 37-53.

⁹ See L. A. Arrathoon, 'The *Châtelaine de Vergi*: A Structural Study of an Old French Artistic Short Narrative', *Language and Style*, 7 (1974), 151-80.

¹⁰ For the possibility that the author of the *Châtelaine* is Jean Renart see E. E. Okafor, 'Les Sources et la structure de *La Chastelaine de Vergi*', *Francofonia*, 12 (1987), 65-77

¹¹ *De doctrina christiana* IV, viii, 22, ed. by J. Vogels, *Florilegium Patristicum* 24 (Bonn, 1930), p. 81.

¹² *La Mort le Roi Artu*, ed. by J. Frappier, 3rd edn (Geneva, Droz, 1964), pp. 27, 17-22.