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Woven Words:

Clothwork and the Representation of Feminine Expression and Identity in
Old French Romance

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PhD French

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Declaration of Own Work

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work. Where I have reproduced material and ideas from other sources, this has been fully acknowledged and referenced. I can also confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Morgan Boharski

16 March 2018

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This is for my father, from whom I inherited a complete inability to sew a stitch.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the ways in which cloth and clothwork are represented in Old French romance in order to highlight how they relate to feminine voice, expression, and identity. By focusing mainly on medieval romance from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the field of research is narrowed to a period in which vernacular literature was redefining literacy. On the basis that literacy is not confined to the ability to read and write in Latin, clothwork is presented as a medium of literate expression, that being a form of readable knowledge or communication not codified in written word or language, and in the works of such authors as Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, and Jean Renart, amongst others, the presentation of clothwork fits this classification. My research focuses on gendered performance and gendered objects highlighting the divide between masculinity and femininity in materiality. Beginning with a contextualised and historical understanding of feminine clothwork, authority, and gendered biases in the Middle Ages in France, the Virgin Mary's associations with clothwork leads into an exploration of how the identities of women are tied to the cloth that they work or possess. From this basis, feminine voice in clothwork comes to the forefront of discussion as seemingly inaudible women make themselves heard through the use of needles and thread, telling their stories in cloth and tapestry. Throughout this study, an exploration of mother-daughter relationships is highly significant to the comprehension of feminine education and tradition in clothwork. The *chansons de toile* included in *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* by Jean Renart underline the dichotomy and tension between oral and written culture, tying feminine voice to feminine clothwork and exploring the representation of this in the written text. Finally, Christine de Pizan's intimation of the importance of feminine tasks and brilliance concludes this study in order to better understand the ways in which the literature of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance departs from the medieval presentation of clothwork as a typically feminine activity underlying and encapsulating a woman's identity and expressive power.

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'You got to figure out which end of the needle you're gon be, the one that's fastened to the thread or the end that pierces the cloth.'

- Sue Monk Kidd

The Invention of Wings

Introduction: With Needle and Pen: Writing Women's Work

'Much of the social history of early America has been lost to us precisely because women were expected to use needles rather than pens. Yet if textiles are in one sense an emblem of women's oppression, they have also been an almost universal medium of female expression. If historians are to understand the lives of women in times past, they must not only cherish the Anne Bradstreets and Martha Ballards who mastered the mysterious ways of quill pens, they must also decipher work composed in yarn and thread.'

-Laurel Thatcher Ulrich
*Cloth, Clothing, and Early American Social History*¹

Threading the Needle

The above quotation by social historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich was one of the first inspirations that led to this study on feminine expression and voice in clothwork. Though in the article entitled *Cloth, Clothing, and Early American Social History*, Ulrich is referencing the early American textile industry and this present study is concerned with clothwork included in the romance literature of the High Middle Ages² in France, both works endeavour to stay true to the history of women by 'decipher[ing] work composed in yarn and thread.' Whereas Ulrich encourages her fellow historians to look past the women who write with pen and paper, such as Anne Bradstreet, this study equally stays true to the literary heroines who work cloth in romance, focusing for example less on Marie de France's gender and activity and more on Fresne's, the literary protagonist of Marie de France's *lai* of *Le Fraisne*. This current research will conclude by reevaluating the works of female authors Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Cloth, Clothing, and Early American Social History', in *Dress: The Journal of the Costume Society of America*, 18:1 (1991), pp. 39-48 (pp. 39-40).

² The period of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries.

in order to view their ideas as the end result of a progress that is illustrated by the unsung sewing heroines of Old French romance. While the women of these romances do write in cloth, communicating outside of the domestic sphere through needle and thread, this study is focused on the ineffable tether that exists between a female body or feminine voice and a piece of cloth or clothwork. This link between the feminine and clothwork has been explored by scholars such as E. Jane Burns, Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, and Rozsika Parker in such a fashion that its importance in terms of a feminine perspective on history is clearly understood, placing an emphasis on the impact of clothing in narrative, the historical embroidery of women, or the ways in which woven textiles can and should be read as written text. The present research is both a literary and cultural study, and demonstrates the ways in which clothwork reflects medieval women as a social product of their environment. Building from the research on women's textile production of previous scholars, this study endeavours to heighten the understanding of the medieval perception of women's expressive power, social construction, and agency insofar as they are inexorably tied to clothwork. Through the presentation of feminine clothwork in medieval literature, particularly romance narrative, this research will show how women speak through and are identified by cloth and clothwork.

Feminine identity, voice, and resistance all come to the forefront of discussion as the female characters in the romances included in this study move between poles of activity and passivity. Ulrich cogently introduces an important dichotomy present in the relationship between women and clothwork, that of oppression and expression, and this dichotomy likewise exists in the portrayal of feminine clothwork in medieval literature alongside other striking dichotomies of subject and object, entrapment and

empowerment, and voice and voicelessness. Philomena, in her eponymous tale attributed to Chrétien de Troyes, moves from sexualised object to speaking subject through her clothwork, Fresne in *Galeran de Bretagne* loses and regains her identity through a luxurious cloth and she even succeeds in crafting an identity for herself in a silk sleeve, and Lienors from Jean Renart's *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* both sings and speaks of her story all in relation to her own embroidery. Feminine clothwork thus perpetuates and propels the actions of these romance heroines onwards in order to give them identity, voice, and agency, all the while, at times, equally taking away that agency.

This study is critical to our understanding of how to read cloth as feminine in medieval romance and how we can weave that reading into the historical context of the High Middle Ages in France. It begins with a contextual understanding of the ways in which femininity is positively portrayed as both virtuous and industrious, particularly in the personae of the Virgin Mary and Minerva, and ends with a departure from the High Middle Ages and an exploration of how the themes presented throughout the romance literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries can be appropriated yet rewritten by the pens of female writers, namely those of Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé. From the *lais* of Marie de France in the twelfth century to the poetry of Louise Labé in the sixteenth century, this study spans the representational nature of clothwork through the romance literature of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, up to a point of direct rejection of domestic tasks by the female writers of the Late Middle Ages³ and the early Renaissance.⁴ This rejection occurs at a moment when

³ The period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries up to the year 1500.

⁴ The period of the Renaissance in France generally spans the late fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

clothwork, particularly spinning, becomes a symbol of domestic femininity that is seen as restrictive, rather than as a symbol that encourages or represents expression and agency. For example, in the sixteenth century, Madeleine des Roches, in *Sonnet 8* of her *Œuvres*, which are dedicated to her daughter, admits: 'J'ayme mieux escrire que filer' (I prefer writing to spinning) (l. 14),⁵ and her contemporary Louise Labé (explored further in Chapter Five) urges her female readers to 'eslever un peu leurs esprits par-dessus leurs quenouilles et fuseaus' (raise their minds a bit above their spindles and distaffs).⁶ Both of these writers are reacting to a change in the system to which they belong due to economic developments in the textile industry as well as to a resounding call for a woman's right to an education. In Madeleine's *Epistre à ma Fille*, she states that 'Les hommes ont toute l'autorité' (Men have all the authority) (l. 9), but 'Tu es au temps pour apprendre bien née' (You are born in an auspicious time for learning) (l. 59).

This study is thus focused on what occurs before this change in the Renaissance by critically examining how clothwork is interwoven through certain *lais* of Marie de France⁷, *Cligès* and *Philomena*⁸ by Chrétien de Troyes,

⁵ Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother to Daughter*, ed. by Anne R. Larsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁶ Louise Labé, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by François Rigolot (Paris: Editions Flamarrion, 2004), p. 42. All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally printed in 1555. My translation.

⁷ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke and trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990). Originally composed in the late twelfth century.

⁸ Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans: suivis des chansons avec, en appendice, Philomena*, ed. by Michel Zink (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Both *Cligès* (c. 1176) and *Philomena* (mid-to-late twelfth century) are taken from this edition.

Jean Renart's *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*⁹, the *Ovide Moralisé*¹⁰, *Le Mort le Roi Artu*¹¹, Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*¹², and finally Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*¹³. These eight medieval literary works have been chosen for this study because they all present strong, female characters whose literary trajectory is driven by the manipulation or deployment of cloth. Using these works, this study shows a progression in how clothwork as a form of feminine expression moves from quintessence to identity to voice, and how it is used didactically as well as symbolically throughout the Middle Ages.

The parameters of time period, language, and genre limit the content of this study as the Old French romance literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular provides the richest field of examples of women and clothwork in narrative, and the examples included from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (the *Ovide Moralisé* and the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*) are recreations to or inspired by Classical mythology and

⁹ Jean Renart, *The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole (Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole)*, ed. and trans. by Regina Psaki (New York: Garland, 1995). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally composed in the early thirteenth century. Throughout this study, I have made slight changes in typography from Psaki's version for clarity.

¹⁰ *Ovide Moralisé: poème du commencement de quatorzième siècle*, ed. by C. de Boer, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1920). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally composed in the early fourteenth century.

¹¹ *La Mort le Roi Artu: Roman de XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Jean Frappier (Geneva: Droz, 1954). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally composed c. 1225.

¹² Renaut, *Galeran de Bretagne*, ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 2009). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally composed in the early thirteenth century.

¹³ Christine de Pizan, *The Livre de la Cité des Dames of Christine de Pisan*, ed. by Maureen Cheney Curnow (Ann Arbor : Xerox University Microfilms, 1979). All subsequent references to the original text throughout this study from this edition. Originally composed c. 1405.

literature¹⁴, most especially that of Ovid, and tend to be viewed more as didactic texts than as literary narrative. The *Ovide Moralisé*, for example, is an Old French retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, yet it is highly embellished and contains a medieval Christian gloss, and the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* includes many examples of women from classical mythology that are rewritten from a medieval feminine perspective. This significant period of change occurring in the early fourteenth century when romance literature was not being as widely produced,¹⁵ historically coincides with crucial developments in the daily lives of medieval women in relation to their education, their work, and their domesticity.

'Aprennez fille a coudre et a filer' (Daughter learn to sew and spin) ¹⁶

The title of this section comes from a *chanson de toile* included in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, which portrays a mother and a daughter singing and stitching together. The mother admonishes the daughter for being distracted with thoughts of love and encourages her to better herself through

¹⁴ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) p. 530: 'In content [...] and even in forms of thought, the medievals appear to have consciously imitated their ancient predecessors.'

¹⁵ Though there is no accepted date as to the end of the production of Old French romance, there is a period of development at the beginning of the fourteenth century in which more didactic texts, such as the *Ovide Moralisé* or the works of Christine de Pizan, were replacing both the *chansons de geste* and romance as the popular form of published literature, though, as Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr. notes, there were some instances of romantic compositions into the fourteenth century, including the Alexander legends composed by Jacques de Longuyon and Jean Brisbarre, Jean Maillart's *Comtesse d'Anjou* (c. 1316), and Jean Froissart's *Meliador* (c. 1380), often referred to as the last chivalric romance (Holmes, *A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1948) pp. 321-330). It is not necessarily that romances had ceased to be produced, but rather that they had ceased to be as widely produced, popular, and in the same style as during their high point of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

¹⁶ Renart l. 1162.

her needlework, and this line from the *chanson* embodies the young medieval woman's education. Though throughout medieval Europe there were varying degrees to which young women, particularly women of the higher social classes, were educated, the generally agreed-upon caveat to a noblewoman's education was that it was performed in and revolved around the care and keeping of the home. In noble households, girls would have learned to sew and spin and care for the home from their mothers or mistresses, underlining a sense of feminine community in the education of women.¹⁷ Désirée G. Koslin states that 'female virtue and fine needlework had been equivalents since ancient times'¹⁸ in her discussion of embroidery, which would have been taught to young women by older women as a means of feminine and domestic occupation. While mother-daughter relationships are relatively under-represented in much of the Old French romance literature that survives today, the way in which those relationships *are* visible gives the modern reader a glimpse into the inner reaches of the home wherein the education of the daughters in matters of the household would have taken place. Carloyne Larrington notes that peasant women, for example, 'would be likely to have learnt much from their mothers and grandmothers, passed down in oral form'.¹⁹ Due to the fact that much more emphasis was placed upon a young woman's education in tasks that benefitted the household rather than tasks such as the study of the arts and sciences which would have benefitted her mind, this emphasis on orality in

¹⁷ Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002) p. 16.

¹⁸ Désirée G. Koslin, 'Embroidery', in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia, Vol. I: A-J*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson & Nadia Margolis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) pp. 311-5 (p. 311).

¹⁹ Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 190.

these feminine relationships becomes all the more significant in regards to the literature discussed in this study, which is entirely in the vernacular.

Education varied significantly based on the social status of the young woman, and as this study is focused on the heroines of Old French romance who are resoundingly characterised by their inherent nobility, any discussion of a young woman's education must be understood from a noble perspective. Chrétien de Troyes' characterisation of Philomena as an Athenian princess, for example, outlines a slightly exaggerated instance of the average educated woman (that of a woman who could read and write in Latin and Greek, which would not have been historically accurate) in order to cast his character in a more intellectual light. After Chrétien has described Philomena's supreme skill in weaving, he states that: 'Des autors sot et de grameire\ Et sot bien feire vers et letre\ Et, quant li plot, li antremetre\ Et del sautier et de la lire' (She knew authors, [Latin] grammar, and how to compose verse and letters well, and when it pleased her, she played the psaltery and the lyre) (ll. 194-7). This is a portion of the embellished retelling of Ovid's original myth included in his *Metamorphoses*, which makes no mention of Philomena's education or her skill in anything aside from weaving, and other medieval authors, such as Chaucer, who likewise retold the story of Philomela in *The Legend of Good Women*, cast her as traditionally uneducated: 'But with a penne coude she nat wryte.\ But lettres can she weve to and fro' (ll. 2357-8).²⁰ While in all of the versions Philomena can communicate through weaving, a task that would typically have been included in her feminine education, Chrétien de Troyes alone portrays her as learned in Latin and able to read, and one can deduce from this that her high

²⁰ Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 626.

social status may give insight into the medieval education of a noblewoman in France in regards to learning to read and write.

There is a considerable amount of discussion by male authors from the High Middle Ages as to how a young woman ought to (or ought not to) be educated. Some authors, such as Geoffroy IV de la Tour Landry,²¹ state that it is fine for a woman to learn to read because it keeps her from being idle, whereas other authors, such as Paolo da Certaldo, think that it is dangerous for women to learn to read and that they should only be taught if they are planning to enter a convent.²² This introduces the major divide that existed in the education of young women, that being whether they were intended for marriage or for the convent, and this would most likely have been decided by the patriarch of the household. As Larrington notes 'In the late Middle Ages, those aristocratic girls not destined to take the veil might be taught to read the vernacular by their mothers or nurses.'²³ This is crucial as all of the literature in this study is composed in the vernacular rather than in Latin, and as noblewomen were included in the readership of vernacular literature, whereas they were mostly excluded from learning to read Latin, this would have opened up the possibility of accessibility to literature and the changing definition of feminine life. Jennifer Ward notes that aside from Paolo da Certaldo's strong view that women should not learn to read, 'Other writers considered reading as a useful occupation to prevent idleness, although some expressed anxiety about the effect of romances on young girls',²⁴ and this is significant in terms of the changing genre of literature in the Late

²¹ Author of the *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* which is an instruction manual for his young daughters written c. 1371.

²² Ward, p. 17.

²³ Larrington, p. 189.

²⁴ Ward, p. 17.

Middle Ages, as romance begins falling out of favour to be replaced by more didactic or religious texts written in the vernacular, such as the *Ovide Moralisé* and the works of Christine de Pizan. Thus, the ways in which women in Old French romance are portrayed in terms of education depends on and extends from the historical education of young women during the High Middle Ages, and the proto-feminist literature of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance that calls for equality in education for women is a direct result of the rejection of the domestic education performed well into the fifteenth century.

Looms, Wombs, and Rooms

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the commercial economy of clothwork was predominantly based in guilds across Europe where the masters were chiefly men, and the women were relegated to the more time-consuming tasks of spinning, carding, and combing wool, tasks which were paid at a fraction of the cost of the weaving done by the men, though, as Jane Whittle notes, 'it took eight to ten times longer to spin the yarn than to weave it into cloth.'²⁵ Craft guilds changed the social makeup of the Middle Ages drastically by moving cloth production from the private to the public sphere and giving men more power and influence in workshops as they became the producers of the final product and were employed as masters of the guilds. David Herlihy comments on this development, stating: 'The guild almost everywhere limited participation of women in the trade it represented; usually, it grudgingly allowed only the widows or daughters of masters to

²⁵ Jane Whittle, 'Rural Economies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 311-26 (p. 318).

practice the art. And women were altogether excluded from guild offices.²⁶ Textile and cloth production then went from being a predominantly feminine act, controlled and carried out by women, to being a masculine-dominated craft, reinforcing the patriarchal hierarchy. The *gynaeceum*, or women's workshop, that had once prevailed in Classical Antiquity through to the early Middle Ages in cloth and textile production, was now being replaced by these masculine-dominated guilds, and Whittle notes that: 'While the years around 1000 saw [...] an expansion of the cloth industry, they also saw the disappearance of the *gynaeceum* and the entry of men into cloth production'²⁷ which changed the face of the trade itself drastically from one of a domestic or feminine control to one of masculine dominance. However, though the economic and productive value of clothwork may have become less feminised, the tasks of spinning, silkwork, and embroidery remained decidedly feminine. Whittle, in her discussion of the tasks allotted to women after this development in the cloth industry, states that 'spinning with a distaff and a drop spindle had one advantage: it was a portable occupation that could be combined with other activities such as watching over children or animals.'²⁸ This is emblematic of the different working context of men and women, as women are continuously tied to the domestic sphere without disruption. Additionally, the task of spinning is conducive to supporting a woman's role as a mother, which would have been of the utmost importance in the Middle Ages. The connection between clothwork and motherhood repeats itself through much medieval literature and imagery, from the portraiture of the Virgin Mary in Books of Hours, to the *chansons de toile*

²⁶ As referenced in Maureen E. Mulvihill, 'Guilds, Women in', in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, ed. Wilson and Margolis, pp. 384-90 (p. 385).

²⁷ Whittle, p. 318.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

included in Renart's romance of *Guillaume de Dole*, to the defense of women in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*. Thus, it is crucial to understand the emblematic portraiture of femininity in regards to domestic work.

With regard to the romance literature included in this study, while the change in the type of clothwork that women were performing due to the growing influence of guilds would not typically have affected the lives of noblemen and women, it does become increasingly important in relation to the domestic and enclosed sphere of women. While working-class men were running guilds and weaving tapestries and working-class women were spinning and carding for those guilds, noblewomen would have been inside the home, perhaps in the garden, but surely enclosed and working on virtuous activities such as embroidery alone or with other women. The work that the female characters in the Old French romances perform in these enclosed spaces is often the more feminine and noble forms of embroidery and sewing, except in the case of Philomena where she weaves a tapestry; this difference is due to the fact that this particular romance is a Classical retelling, hence she performs a more Classical form of clothwork. However, even in the case of Philomena, both her own work and the work of the seamstresses with whom she is entrapped after her rape are described as feats of great decoration, another detail which is not included in the original Ovidian myth. The female characters are thus portrayed accurately according to the context of the time period, performing more decorative tasks with needle and thread rather than with warp and weft. This portraiture of a noblewoman's work also lends itself crucially to the topic of spatial constriction, as the feminine tasks involved in clothwork are all tied to the home and the women's quarters. The female characters in these Old French romances are always enclosed, often guarded, and frequently veiled or

covered, and this portraiture is a direct response to the medieval attitudes towards virtue and chastity, which are characteristics introduced frequently in the content of the narratives. The enclosed nature of the heroines underlines their domestic identity as well as their exclusion from their autonomous creation of a public identity. Though the *gynaeceum* as an industrial working space falls out of fashion in the early Middle Ages, the women's quarters, the inner-most sanctum of the home, continues to be portrayed throughout the literature of the High Middle Ages. This space denotes empowerment just as much as it denotes entrapment; this is where women can talk, work, raise their children, and devote themselves to God, but the walls of their rooms or their gardens are physical markers of their limitations. Whether medieval women viewed these physical barriers as protection or deterrents, one can never know, but the attitudes of the female characters in romance literature can help modern audiences to better understand what expression and agency could and could not be contained by walls or doors.

Hands that Weave and Hands that Write

The progression of this study moves from feminine paragons to *écriture féminine*, exploring through the lens of medieval romance how women are identified, express themselves, and communicate through their clothwork. Chapter One opens this study with a contextual understanding of the medieval perception and reception of the Virgin Mary and Minerva. Both of these women will be examined as the feminine ideal, united in their weaving, their virtue and motherhood, and their wisdom. Tracing the portraiture of these two feminine paragons through the twelfth to the

fifteenth centuries creates a basis for the understanding of femininity insofar as it is idealised throughout this period. This chapter will bring together aspects of idolatry, in art, literature, personal experience, and circumstances of worship in order to build a comprehensive picture of how medieval women would have interacted with or have been compared to the works and characteristics of these feminine models of virtue. Close readings of the anonymously composed *Ovide Moralisé* and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* and *Epistre Othea* provide ample literary evidence for the reception of the Virgin Mary and Minerva in the Late Middle Ages, as they are frequently used in vernacular didactic texts that would potentially have been read and received by women, and this examination alongside imagery and historical accounts provides a crucial understanding of the presentation of quintessential medieval femininity.

Chapter Two focuses on instances in romance narrative in which cloth and clothwork come to represent feminine identity and female bodies. Close-readings of *Piramus et Tisbé* from the early fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, the anonymously penned *La Mort le Roi Artu*, and the stories of Fresne found in both Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne* and Marie de France's *lai* of *Le Fraisne* will provide illustrative examples of a common theme of feminine identity in cloth. I define the material of these instances as *clothbodies*, inviting a discussion of how a woman's identity is bolstered, manipulated, or even undermined by the way in which her body and her identity are treated in these tangible objects that are physically divorced from the female body. This discussion of clothbodies diverges significantly from E.

Jane Burns' readings of sartorial bodies in Old French romance²⁹ and brings about new developments in this field of research.

Chapter Three diverges from these previous examples that encompass more broadly-understood feminine identity and cloth and begins to explore the ways in which feminine voice can be found in cloth and clothwork, a theme that will be continued in Chapter Four. This chapter analyses three romances: *Philomena* attributed to Chrétien de Troyes, the *lai* of *L'Aüstic* by Marie de France, and Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*. These three romances present the female character as dichotomously voiced and voiceless throughout the tale, moving between poles of object and subject in the development of her own story. Both *Philomena* and *L'Aüstic* from the mid-to-late twelfth century provide early examples of Old French retellings of Ovid's original myth of *Tereus, Procne, and Philomela*, which is crucial to our understanding of the development of the eponymous female character's agency and medieval reception. Furthermore, the discussion of Lienors and her cunning embroidery in *Guillaume de Dole* provide another example of an empowered escape from a destructive situation imposed on a woman by the patriarchal system in a later text from the early thirteenth century. The development of female autonomy, voice, and agency obtained through clothwork here shows a change from utility to expression.

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the significance of mother-daughter relationships, which do not often appear in Old French romances. By discussing these types of relationships in Marie de France's *lai* of *Le Fraisne*, Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*, and Jean Renart's *Le Roman de la Rose ou*

²⁹ E. Jane Burns, 'Introduction: the Damsel's Sleeve: Reading through Clothes in Courtly Love', in *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Romance* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) pp. 1-16.

de Guillaume de Dole, one can begin to understand the influential and educational role of mothers in the Middle Ages. In all of these literary narratives, the relationships are based in cloth and clothwork, underlining the parameters of this particular domestic relationship. Furthermore, this chapter provides an analysis of the ways in which the feminine voice and lyrics of the *chansons de toile* are included in *Guillaume de Dole* as a means of understanding the impact of the ventriloquised feminine voice. The mother-daughter relationships and the lyric embroidery of Renart introduce the dichotomy of oral and written culture, ultimately highlighting the transience and femininity that characterises orality in the rapidly changing culture of the thirteenth century.

Chapter Five concludes this study by analysing the way in which clothwork is included in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* and how it shows a marked progression from the themes explored in Old French romance, namely clothwork as a marker of feminine identity and expression. This chapter will depart from the literature of the Middle Ages in order to explore the ways in which feminine excellence, identity, and voice are codified by Louise Labé, in her *Œuvres Complètes*, in which she attempts to rewrite the masculine codes of poetry from a feminine perspective. Both Christine and Louise urge their respective female audiences to move towards a place of introspection, allowing them to understand the goodness and greatness inherent in their feminine nature. Christine de Pizan rewrites the women of the past in order to send a message of inspiration and solidarity to women of the present, and Louise Labé calls on her fellow Renaissance women to rise above their domesticity and demand for themselves esteem, equality, and education in order to change the system for women of the future. Throughout this study, examinations of feminine identity, voice,

agency, and authorship in relation to cloth and clothwork will show a progression of ideals and values present in the Middle Ages in a fashion that has not previously been explored.

Chapter One: Creating a Feminine Paragon: the Virgin Mary's and Minerva's Woven Wisdom

'A myth of such dimension is not simply a story, or a collection of stories, but a magic mirror like the lady of Shalott's, reflecting a people and the beliefs they produce, recount and hold. It presents their history in a certain light and in a way that singles them out.'

- Marina Warner
*Alone of All Her Sex*¹

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of two female characters of religion and myth, the Virgin Mary and Minerva, and how their respective legends and imagery are appropriated in the Middle Ages as examples of feminine paragons. These two women will be examined in terms of their associations with weaving, motherhood, and wisdom in order to position them within the medieval French context in which the literature involved in this study is produced. This is a time period in which women's associations with learning and literature would have been restricted, if existent at all, thus it is crucial to understand the ways in which women, and noblewomen in particular, would have had access to these two paragons of femininity. In medieval literature, the male perspective on women is clear, both its praise and misogyny, because men could write about and reflect on their environments; however, how women perceived themselves or other women, including female role models, is not readily available in the same way. Therefore, by looking to the Virgin Mary and Minerva, as models that argue against many of the misogynistic tropes of the Middle Ages, one can begin to understand how these women would have been interpreted by a medieval woman. In

¹ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) p. xxiii.

reference to ubiquitous Marian imagery as well as two late medieval didactic texts written in the vernacular, this chapter will piece together the ways in which the Virgin Mary and Minerva are held up as virtuous examples to medieval women, and how their portrayal sets a foundation for medieval perceptions of the feminine activity of clothwork and of the associations with motherhood and wisdom.

Chapter One situates the literature examined in this study within the context of the Middle Ages, explores how the historical context sets up the medieval expectation of femininity. All three of the aspects of femininity explored in this chapter (clothwork, wisdom, and motherhood) arise in the discussion of the subsequent four chapters of this present study. There is an oscillation in relation to these feminine attributes and activities, as they move from a definition of 'baseness' (purported by male authors), to virtue and goodness (purported by authors of both sexes in romance literature), and back again to 'baseness' in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (professed by female authors, such as Christine de Pizan, Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, and Louise Labé). Particularly in relation to clothwork, misogynistic texts present a denigration of this type of work in its attribution to women; however, these feminine paragons (Minerva and Mary), and the way in which they are presented, counteract that misogynistic denigration by highlighting the virtuous and productive nature of women when they are associated with clothwork. Through the portrayals of these paragons, clothwork is shown to represent feminine identity, depict voice, and incite female agency, which are all topics of discussion in later chapters.

In terms of the Late Medieval didactic texts included in this study, one must first look to the Classical example upon which they are based. According to Jeremy Dimmick, 'Ovid for the Middle Ages stands as the

single most important window into this imaginative world of secular contingency, power, passion, and the scope and limits of human art.² Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in particular, was a supremely important text in the Middle Ages in terms of inspiration, and many authors took it upon themselves to rewrite these myths and legends in the vernacular, and, even more importantly for the discussion of this chapter, with a Christian gloss. The rewriting of the Classical context in which these myths were originally produced in order to teach and preach moral lessons in the medieval context becomes increasingly important in regards to the interpretations produced by various authors. In this chapter, both the anonymous, but most likely male, author's recreation of the *Ovide Moralisé* from the early fourteenth century and Christine de Pizan's subsequent *Epistre Othea* (c. 1399-1400) will be analysed insofar as they contain representations of Minerva and the Virgin Mary emblematised as feminine paragons of virtue or knowledge.

The adoption of Classical ideals and characters allowed the authors of the Middle Ages to rewrite this highly regarded literature in a Christian context, and any supposed un-Christian morals or virtues could be glossed accordingly, reflecting the ideals, morals, and values of the Middle Ages.³ The *Ovide Moralisé* turns the 12,000 verses of Ovid's original into some 72,000 verses, filling the pages with Christian morals and using the Classical characters as allegories for Christian virtues. It was not uncommon for allegorical characters to be included in medieval literature, some based on Classical characters, such as in Jean de Meun's continuation of Guillaume de

² Jeremy Dimmick, 'Ovid in the Middle Ages' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 264-87 (p. 266).

³ For further reading on the subject of the Classical influence on the medieval curriculum and education, see: Rita Copeland, *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume I: 800-1558* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Lorris' *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1275) wherein Virtues and Vices come to have faces, voices, and relationships within an imagined and allegorical garden in order to teach about the Art of Love. The Classical gods, and even Ovid himself, are likewise invoked or referenced in other, earlier, medieval texts, such as Marie de France's *lai* of *Guigemar* wherein the female protagonist of the tale, standing next to a wall that depicts 'Venus, la deuesse d'amur' (Venus, the goddess of love) (l. 234) throws into the fire a book thought to be Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* (*The Cure for Love*), referenced by Marie as 'Le livre Ovide, u il enseigne \coment chascuns s'amur estreigne' (The book of Ovid, where he teaches how one battles with love) (ll. 239-240). Thus Ovid, and many of his works, were well-known and reproduced in the Middle Ages, but for the purposes of this chapter, the didactic texts of the Late Middle Ages remain the focus, as they contain the most overt moralistic glosses to Classical figures, such as Minerva, and references to contemporary Christian values, embodied by such figures as the Virgin Mary. These later texts are even more important in terms of the characterisation of these figures due to the fact that they are being produced during and after a time in which young noblewomen may have been taught to read in the vernacular, and they may thus have had access to texts like these. It is commonly accepted, for example, that Christine de Pizan had some access to the *Ovide Moralisé* and was inspired by it in her later works, such as the *Epistre Othea*.

Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea* is her first allegorical work, which highlights her extensive knowledge of Latin and Greek and in which she imparts Christian morals through a glossing of Classical characters. Prior to the publication and writing of the *Epistre*, Christine had only produced poems as she began her role as an author. This work, according to Christine herself, is a letter which the goddess Othea (personified as Wisdom) sends to

Hector of Troy when he is fifteen years old in order to teach him the ways of chivalric duty. She instructs the young Trojan through verse text referencing Classical characters, most especially those found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and provides a prose allegory and prose Christian gloss in order to refashion the Classical deities for didactic purposes, particularly in her address to the 'tres noble prince excellent, \D'Orliens duc Loÿs de grant renom, \Filz de Charles roy quint de cellui nom' (most noble and excellent prince \Duke of Orleans, Louise of great renown, \Son of Charles, fifth king of that name) (l. 12-14)⁴ Christine glosses Othea as 'sagece de femme' (the wisdom of woman) and 'la vertu de prudence et sagece' (the virtue of prudence and wisdom).⁵ Though the work itself is dedicated to a man and contains a story of a young knight learning the ways of chivalry, Jane Chance notes that 'it is possible that Christine's vision grew in part from her desire to rewrite the genealogy of the gods from a female perspective in the *Letter of Othea*', therefore it is not solely significant that it is the Classical tradition rewritten from a medieval perspective, but also that the main character, the *writer* of the letter itself is female, namely Othea, characterised as the wisdom of woman, which becomes vastly important in both Minerva and the Virgin Mary's associations with wisdom and learning.

Minerva, both in her characterisation as a weaver and a symbol of wisdom, is often referred to by many names throughout this present study, including Athena, Pallas, and Tritogeneia. When the Romans came into contact with the Greeks during a period of syncretisation, they incorporated

⁴ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre Othea*, ed. by Gabriella Parussa (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999) p. 195. All subsequent original text references in this study come from this edition and all English translations are by Jane Chance from Jane Chance, *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), and are referenced as: Chance, p. 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200; Chance, pp. 36-7.

the myths and attributes of the Greek gods into their own deities. For example, Jupiter took on much of the Greek past and the qualities of Zeus, Diana of Artemis, and Neptune of Poseidon. Though both names of these gods and goddesses continued to be used, the Roman names were more often employed in the Middle Ages, especially in the personification of a particular deity's characteristics, due to the influence and pervasion of Latin texts. This may have been due to the expansion of the Roman Empire in Europe and to the fact that Latin texts were widely known and used by clerics and scholars during the Middle Ages. One Roman deity that was often personified and employed for her morality in the Middle Ages is Minerva, cast as the goddess of weaving, wisdom, and warfare. An essential facet of Minerva's depiction is that she has more of the characteristics of her Greek counterpart, Athena, than of her original Roman portrayal. In fact, as Susan Deacy points out: 'The image of Athena had a major impact upon the iconography of Minerva, so much so that what Minerva looked like prior to her association with Athena is not known. In terms of appearance then, the goddesses are identical.'⁶

Christine de Pizan, in the *Epistre Othea*, even references the marriage of the two goddesses into one in a lesson to Hector as he becomes a chivalric ideal. Christine writes as Othea: 'Adjouste Pallas la deesse \Et mes aveucques ta prouece. \Tout bien te venra se tu l'as, \Bien siet o Minerve Pallas' (Embrace Pallas the goddess \And reap with your prowess. \All will go well for you if you have her, \Minerva sits well with Pallas.)⁷ Christine further glosses this particular part of her text by saying:

⁶ Susan Deacy, *Athena* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008) p. 136.

⁷ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, p. 223.

Aprés dit que il adjouste Pallas avec Minerve qui bien y siet, et doit on savoir que Pallas et Minerve est une mesmes chose, mais les noms sont pris a .ij. entendemens, car la dame qui ot nom Minerve fu aussi surnommee Pallas d'une isle qui ot nom Pallence, dont elle fu nee, et pour ce que elle generaument en toutes choses fu sage et maintes ars nouvellement trouva belles et soubtilles, l'appellerent deesse de savoir ; si est nommee Minerve a ce qui appartient a chevalerie, et Pallas en toutes choses qui appartiennent a sagece.

(After it says that he joins Pallas with Minerva, who sits well there, and he should know in it that Pallas and Minerva is a similar thing, but the names are taken for two intentions. For the lady who had the name Minerva was also surnamed Pallas from an island that had the name Pallence, from which she was named; and because generally in all things she was wise and invented many new arts, beautiful and subtle, they named her goddess of wisdom. So she is named Minerva in that which appertains to chivalry, and Pallas in all things which appertain to wisdom.)⁸

Thus Minerva as Athena, especially in her association with Wisdom, was adapted to fit into a medieval structure in which she was held as an example of learning and virtuous femininity. As Minerva becomes a fixture in the art and literature of the Middle Ages, her various characteristics are celebrated and construed as Christian morals. As Susan Deacy states: 'Athena's postclassical appeal was motivated by the ease with which she could be slotted into the Christian system of values. Her ancient associations with intelligence, craft, and justice were adapted in such a way as to connect with such concepts as Justice, Prudence, and above all, Wisdom.'⁹ Minerva is repetitively used as an allegorical figure throughout the literature of the Middle Ages, but particularly in the Late Middle Ages, and her portraiture as Wisdom is found especially in the *Ovide Moralisé* and Christine de Pizan's

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Deacy, p. 145.

Epistre Othea. Additionally, her associations with weaving are repeated in the myths that surround her invention of the craft, such as is found in Christine's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (examined further in Chapter Five). In order to then understand how Minerva would have been positively understood and appropriated in the Middle Ages, it is necessary to look at how she is included in the literature that spans the time period of the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, most especially in Classical recreations of her variant myths as well as in Christian reaction.

The characterisation and portraiture of Minerva provides one half of this chapter on perceived notions of femininity in the Middle Ages, and the other half relies on the ways in which women would have associated themselves with or have been associated with the Virgin Mary, and furthermore how Mary exemplifies the medieval feminine ideal. These examples are not so easily found in Old French romance literature, but in the didactic texts of the Late Middle Ages as well as in earlier sermons, Mary's various attributes and virtues are often portrayed as a means of imparting morals about femininity in particular. In relation to the way in which a woman can view herself through the imagery and worship of the Virgin Mary, for example, the philosopher and theologian Pierre Abélard (1079-1142) 'in his sermon on the Assumption of the Virgin, exhorted women to consider how their attainment of paradise is made natural because of their commonality with Mary.'¹⁰ And while other medieval philosophers and theologians may not have agreed with this entirely or held and preached the same idea, it remains significant that this connection between medieval women and Mary was being illustrated as early as the eleventh century, and

¹⁰ Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) p. 68.

as Penny Schine Gold notes: 'Other twelfth-century sermons held up Mary's spiritual virtues, in particular, her virginity, her humility, and her obedience, as models for women.'¹¹ Hildegard von Bingen (twelfth century) often invoked the Virgin at the Annunciation in her works, and this leads to our understanding that 'women as earthly manifestations of Mary, therefore become active participants in their own redemption, and in that of the world,'¹² and this comparison, particularly from the pen of a female writer, shows an obvious leaning towards women taking their redemption into their own hands through their daily activities. The correlation between women and the Virgin Mary that is reflected in devotional texts that would most likely not have been accessed by laywomen encourages modern scholars to find the ways in which these ideas and teachings may have been reflected in the world around them, such as in devotional imagery found in Books of Hours or cathedral decorations.

The Virgin Mary was a highly accessible figure for women in the Middle Ages as her imagery and invocation were not limited to Latin literature, and this is clearly seen in the swelling of the cult of the Virgin in the twelfth century. This century, according to Jacques Dalarun, 'marked the high point of Marian Devotion as well as the flourishing of cathedral-building: it was the age of 'Notre Dame','¹³ and her public intercession and iconography was just as important as her private invocation, cogently illustrated by Denise-Renée Barberet: 'she [Mary] is publicly honoured in the

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹² Denise-Renée Barberet, 'Mary, Blessed Virgin, in the Middle Ages', in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia, Vol II: K-Z*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson & Nadia Margolis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) pp. 617-27 (p. 621).

¹³ Jacques Dalarun, 'The Clerical Gaze' trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, *A History of Women in the West II: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) pp. 15-42 (p. 24).

soaring magnificence of the cathedrals erected in her name and privately in the miniatures in illuminated prayerbooks and other manuscripts.¹⁴ As much as the Virgin was represented outside of the home and on cathedrals, so too was she represented in Books of Hours, which were often owned by women.¹⁵ According to Barberet, 'Books of Hours — so-called because the prayers contained within were divided for recitation according to the eight canonical hours of each day — were intended for the private contemplation and spiritual connection of their viewers,'¹⁶ and this highlights a crucial aspect of these prayerbooks; they were intended to be viewed, not necessarily read for content. For the vast majority of women who could not read at all or could not read well, these highly illustrated books would have shown them illustrations of certain episodes of the Virgin Mary's life that constituted a direct reflection of their own daily lives.

From this brief introduction of these two medieval paragons of femininity, it is clear that women's access to the Virgin Mary revolved much more fully around their daily occupations, which, for most likely the vast majority of women, did not include study on the allegorical representation of Minerva. While this chapter does provide a conjecture as to how femininity may have been codified in these two female characters through their portraiture as weavers, mothers, and figures of wisdom, it does not attempt to prove that medieval women would have necessarily typified these characters as their main objects of inspiration for their daily lives. Rather, this chapter contextualises the medieval view of femininity through two

¹⁴ Barberet, p. 621.

¹⁵ Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix, 1995) p. 234, and Sarah Penketh, 'Women and Books of Hours', in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. by Lesley Smith & Jane H.M. Taylor (London: The British Library, 1997) pp. 266-80 (pp. 270-1).

¹⁶ Barberet, p. 624.

archetypal women insofar as their actions and portrayals relate to the daily lives of women. It is crucial then in terms of context for this study to understand how the daily lives of women may have been reflected by their environment and by the popular literature of the time period. The *Ovide Moralisé* is currently accepted as a widely known text in the Middle Ages and Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea* is said to have been her most popular work in her lifetime,¹⁷ therefore the constructs of femininity found in these didactic texts are important for the framework of this study, especially as vernacular literature came to be more accessible to laypeople towards the end of the High Middle Ages, including women. This chapter will explore exemplary clothwork, motherhood, and wisdom as a means of defining the socially constructed ideals of femininity, which is further reflected in subsequent chapters of this study concerning identity, voice, agency, and authorship.

Working like Women

The Virgin Mary and Minerva are repeatedly portrayed as women who are associated with cloth and clothwork. Historically, the Virgin Mary's association with Chartres Cathedral is based on the cathedral's possession of her *chemise*, and in imagery she is often portrayed spinning thread for the temple veil at the time of the Annunciation, based on the text the *Protevangelium of James*, not to mention her portraiture as a weaving mother in many Books of Hours. Minerva, likewise, as the goddess of weaving, retains this epithet throughout the literature of the Middle Ages, and she is always regarded highly for this craft and skill. Her portraiture is used repeatedly to establish codes of good and honorable values in relation to the

¹⁷ Chance, p. 5.

female sex by male authors, but is equally presented by Christine de Pizan as emblematic of values which should be encouraged in all humans regardless of gender. Where the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* does not take the time to denounce Minerva as a goddess, choosing rather to present her as allegory, Christine often explains Minerva's definition as a goddess to be simply due to the fact that she was a woman of surpassing intelligence and virtue. In the *Epistre Othea*, Christine states of Minerva: 'pour la grant science qui fu en ceste dame l'appellerent deesse' (for the great knowledge which existed in this lady, they called her goddess), and in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* she likewise writes that Minerva:

'fu une pucelle de Grece et fu surnommee Pallas. Ceste pucelle fu de tant grant excellence en engin que la folle gent de lors, pour ce que ilz ne savoyent pas bien de quelz parens elle estoit et luy veoyent faire des choses qui oncques n'avoyent esté en usaige, disdrent qu'elle estoit deesse venue du ciel.

(was a maiden from Greece who was also known as Pallas. This girl was so supremely intelligent that her contemporaries foolishly declared her to be a goddess come down from the heavens, since they had no idea who her parents were and she performed deeds that had never been done before.)¹⁸

Minerva is therefore presented by a Christian female author as a mortal woman, rather than as simply an allegorical symbol of excellence or wisdom. She is, however, continually represented, by Christine and other medieval authors, as a woman of surpassing skill in the art of clothwork.

¹⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Livre de la Cité des Dames of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Maureen Cheney Curnow (Ann Arbor : Xerox University Microfilms, 1979) p. 739. All subsequent original text references in this study come from this edition, and all English translations are by Rosalind Brown-Grant from Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind Brown Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1999) and are referenced as: Brown-Grant, p. 66.

Minerva was not the finest wool-worker by chance; the goddess is said to have invented the art and craft of making wool. She taught humans how to shear sheep and use the gathered wool to make clothing. She took them out of their animal pelts and gave them the tools and knowledge to make woollen clothing. By giving this task to humans, she gifted them with a form of artistry, and most importantly, weaving was accessible to all social classes and to both men and women until the shift in the textile industry around the eleventh century, which served to exclude women from mass production. However, in the Classical period, as women took to working wool, this task became a marker of femininity and came to identify women's virtuosity and rank. According to Ruth Mazo Karras: 'In ancient Rome, too, the connection of textile production with virtue appeared. The epitaph for an aristocratic wife — "she worked wool" — emphasised that instead of gallivanting about, taking lovers, attending parties, being concerned with her dress and toilette, she was engaged in productive labor on behalf of the family.'¹⁹ *Lanam fecit* (she made wool) the epitaphs would read, and this was the most distinctive honor a woman could receive. A woman who earned that honor was deemed virtuous, and this virtue of hard work in the name of the family, and to an extent, virginity or fidelity, became particularly important in the Middle Ages as women were consigned to the domestic and private sphere where they would work cloth, particularly in the forms of embroidery or spinning, enforcing their physical separation from any temptation that could lead them astray.

¹⁹ Ruth Mazo Karras, "'This Skill in a Woman is By No Means to Be Despised': Weaving and the Gender Division of Labor in the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) pp. 89-104 (p. 92).

Perhaps one of the most well-known myths involving Minerva that casts her as an exemplary weaving woman comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the tale of her punishment of Arachne, who so excelled at artistically weaving that she became so bold as to boast that she had learned the art all on her own, though in reality Minerva had taught her the craft. Ovid tells of Arachne's superb skill and fated folly:

Her dainty thumb, the slender spindle, or
Embroidering the pattern—you would know
Pallas had trained her. Yet the girl denied it
(A teacher so distinguished hurt her pride)
And said, 'Let her contend with me. Should I
Lose, there's no forfeit that I would not pay.' (VI. ll. 20-25)²⁰

Though medieval laywomen would not have been able to read, nor have had access to, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the myths included in his work 'were a source of widespread inspiration in the Middle Ages'²¹, and women would most likely have come into contact with some form or version of the most well-known stories, whether orally or in vernacular translation; for example, this story is included and glossed in both the *Ovide Moralisé*, the *Epistre Othea*, and the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*. While Arachne's characterisation in the *Cité des Dames* will be further explored in Chapter Five of this study, the way in which her story is glossed from a Christian perspective in the *Ovide Moralisé* and the *Epistre* in relation to Minerva will begin the discussion of the goddess' excellence in weaving.

²⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). All subsequent references to this text are from this edition.

²¹ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985) p. 228.

In relation to the expressive power of weaving inherent in the myth of Arachne and Minerva's famous battle, Ann Bergren deems Arachne's choice of medium commendable, stating that: 'Arachne's tool of resistance – weaving – constitutes the proper medium in which to frame an argument with the power structure, for weaving is "the female's signmaking art *par excellence*."' ²² Arachne chooses to communicate her message and make signs of rebellion through her weaving and through a craft that Minerva herself invented. After both Arachne and Minerva have spoken through their tapestries, Minerva punishes Arachne for her hubris by turning her into a spider, and her weaving loses its communicative value as, according to Christine, she 'vant[e] de filer et tyssir, a tous jours mais filler[a] et tistr[a] ouvrage de nulle value' (shall spin and weave work of no value). ²³ In terms of feminine expression in clothwork, the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* makes mention of the expressive capabilities of weaving when he begins to gloss the original myth. He writes:

Ore est raisons que ie vous die
 Que signifient les peintures
 Qi furent fetes aus tistures,
 Si com les fables vont contant,
 Si vous espondrai le contant²⁴ (VI ll. 428-32)

(Now it is reasonable that I tell you what the paintings that were made from weaving signified, just as the fables are told, I will explain to you the content.)

²² As referenced by Kathryn Sullivan Kruger in *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textile Production* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001) p. 69.

²³ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, p. 289; Chance, p. 90.

²⁴ *Ovide Moralisé: Poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle*, ed. by C. de Boer (Amsterdam : Johannes Müller, 1920). All subsequent references to this text are from this edition, and all English translations are my own.

The author equates the content of the tapestries with the content of fables, showing the expressive power of women through the clothwork. This aspect comes to the forefront of discussion in Chapter Three of this study, but here it remains crucial that Minerva and Arachne's inherent ability to construct a voice for themselves in cloth is not lost nor understated by the author in this instance. As a feminine and weaving paragon, Minerva is presented as an individual who can express herself through clothwork, intimating that other clothworkers equally have this capability.

In order to illustrate the medieval vernacular restructuring of Ovid in this respect, it would be prudent to look more closely at the myth of Arachne included in the early fourteenth-century version of the *Ovide Moralisé* insofar as it characterises and glosses Minerva, referred to throughout this portion of the text as Pallas. Pallas, after hearing the boastings of Arachne, comes down from Mount Olympus in disguise and questions the girl about her weaving, asking if her teacher was indeed 'Pallas, la deesse sage, \Qui controuva l'art de lanage.' (Pallas, the wise goddess, who invented the art of woolwork) (VI ll. 65-6). Arachne denies that she was ever taught by Pallas, and the goddess then casts aside her earthly disguise and challenges Arachne to a competition wherein they weave feats (Minerva) and faults (Arachne) of the gods. In the medieval version of this tale, Minerva describes herself as *la deesse sage* that invented weaving, immediately identifying and allying herself with both wisdom and clothwork. What is interesting, however, is that this epithet is not only given in the direct telling of the tale by the author of the *Ovide Moralisé*, but he also glosses Pallas repeatedly as: 'Pallas, la vaillant et la sage, \Trouva l'art de tistre en lanage' (Pallas, the valiant and the wise, invented the art of weaving wool) (VI ll. 321-2).

Where Arachne and Minerva both produce tapestries, they do so with a different intent: Minerva's weaving is presented as useful and coming from a place of intelligent manipulation, whereas Arachne's weaving is used to gain glory and fame. In the gloss of the *Ovide Moralisé* this difference is unmistakably imparted by the author, and as both of the characters are female and performing a feminine act, it becomes a moral for feminine excellence: produce good works, but do not be boastful and do not reach beyond your means. The author casts this moral clearly in his description of Pallas' weaving, which he blatantly states is decidedly better than Arachne's, but not because of its lavishness, more because of its inherent quality:

D'autre façon et d'autre guise
 Tissi Pallas, la bien aprise,
 Une tele plus profitable,
 Meillour, plus fort et plus durable,
 Qui de vertus fu toute ordie. (VI ll. 423-7)

(In another fashion and in another way, Pallas weaves (she had taught her [Arachne] well) a work more profitable, better, stronger and more durable, upon which all the virtues were woven.)

Pallas weaves the virtues, she weaves lasting and profitable works, and the author is quick to highlight this, whereas Ovid, in the original tale, states Pallas could find no fault with the work of Arachne, thus he does not define for his reader whose final product was the better of the two, only that one of the two women had more power. The importance of the *Ovide Moralisé* resides in the author's intent to clearly impart a moral message through these Classical tales, and he does this in such a way that it is inevitable that the reader should glean the 'correct' interpretation. In his Christian gloss of the tale he writes: 'Pallas, qui bien le veult gloser, \Note devine sapience, \Ariagne fole outrecuidance' (Pallas, who is well worthy of

glossing, denotes divine wisdom, Arachne foolish egotism) (VI ll. 354-6). Thus, the author continually refers to Minerva in relation to her superiority in intelligence and her reputable relationship with cloth and clothwork. This dichotomous relationship between Minerva and Arachne, between *Sapience* (Wisdom) and *Folie* (Folly), highlights certain perspectives on feminine excellence in the Middle Ages, particularly in its comparison to Christine de Pizan's own gloss of the myth in her *Epistre Othea*, wherein she rewrites it as a lesson for a good knight not to be boastful as Arachne 'trop se outrecuida de son savoir [...] se vanta contre Pallas' (too overweening in her wisdom [...] boasted to Pallas).²⁵ Othea states that it allegorically portrays how a good knight should not be boastful, nor should a woman boast to her mistress, divorcing the characterisation of Folly from its depiction as an inherently feminine vice.

Taking his moral musings one step further, the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* glosses Pallas as the representation of Jesus Christ himself, imbuing the original pagan myth with further Christian teaching:

Pallas est en terre venue
 Couverte d'une obscure nue,
 Quar sous l'ombre d'humanité
 Vint au monde la deïté
 Pour les vices desraciner
 Et pour le monde endoctriner
 En la voie de droite vie. (VI ll. 369-75)

(Pallas came to the Earth covered by a new disguise, thus under the shadow of humanity, the goddess came to the Earth to root out vice and to indoctrinate the world in the way of righteous life.)

²⁵ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, p. 289; Chance, p. 90.

Pallas is glossed as the figure of Christ multiple times throughout the *Ovide Moralisé*, and this particular gloss shows her as the embodiment of Wisdom. This aspect of Minerva remains important throughout the Middle Ages when, very much in contrast to the Virgin Mary, she is frequently masculinised, made to be read and understood as the embodiment of more masculine virtues. However, while she is here compared to the masculine figure of Christ, she is likewise shown to 'root out vice' through her performative act of weaving. While many authors of the Middle Ages may attempt to overrun her femininity with masculine glosses and interpretations, Christine de Pizan clings to Minerva as a feminine ideal, even in her more masculine attributes of wisdom and aptitude in matters pertaining to war. She is 'une dame de moult grant savoir' in the *Epistre* and not 'une deesse sage' (VI. l. 63. My emphasis) as in the *Ovide Moralisé*, and she cannot be divorced from her female, human nature.²⁶

While Minerva's associations with weaving and clothwork are well-established in the literature of the Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary's are less easily visible in this same medium. One needs to look more closely at artwork, particularly the artistic representation positioned within churches and in Books of Hours, in order to find this connection. However, it is still easily understood in how the daily lives of women may have been augmented by this feminine portraiture. The stories of Mary's early life can be found most elaborately portrayed in the *Protevangelium of James*, an apocryphal gospel written sometime in the 2nd century A.D., and there is little mention of her life throughout the New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. According to the *Protevangelium*, Mary, herself, was a miracle child, the daughter of Anne and Joachim who were too old to

²⁶ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, p. 222. My emphasis.

conceive a child, though they were desperate to be parents. However, God recognised Anne's great devotion, and she became pregnant with Mary after promising that if she was allowed to conceive, Anne would dedicate her child to the service of the Lord. Thus began Mary's unflinchingly religious upbringing in the temple.²⁷ However, upon reaching the age of menstruation at twelve, Mary was made to live with the elder Joseph in order to preserve her cloistered and virginal existence as well as to keep the temple clean and free of the stain of Eve's sin.

After a time away from the temple, Mary is asked to return in order to take part in the spinning of thread for a new temple veil. All the young girls who were to help spinning the thread drew lots to see which colours they would prepare and spin, and Mary was given the red and purple threads, the noblest and richest of colors. The story, as told in the *Protevangelium*, continues with Mary taking her thread and returning home in order to spin it, and she begins with the scarlet. When she has finished spinning the scarlet thread, she goes outside to draw water from the fountain and is there visited by an angel who tells her that she is to become the mother of the Son of God, and at this point in the story, Mary accepts, and she then returns to finish spinning the purple thread. In terms of reception of this tale in the Middle Ages, there is no literature known today that contains this particular story; however, in much of the iconography of the Annunciation, Mary is seen spinning or holding red thread with a basket at her feet, seemingly representing this myth. This iconography still exists in churches today, such as in an eleventh to twelfth century mosaic housed in the Byzantine *Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta* on the island of Torcello in Italy. As Gail

²⁷ The story of Mary's upbringing would have been well-known in the Middle Ages from the 'bestseller' *The Golden Legend* by Jacopus de Voragine which was compiled c. 1260.

McMurray Gibson illustrates in her chapter included in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*:

These attributes were encountered also in Western art as significant paraphernalia of the stage setting of the Annunciation until a change took place in the first half of the thirteenth century. At about that time the spinning attributes either were discarded or were relegated to second place in favor of the attributes of study, lectern and book. It is, however, possible to trace reading/spinning Madonnas deep into the sixteenth century.²⁸

Gibson comments further on this change and defends this iconography of the Virgin spinning:

Although the Virgin of the Annunciation came to be transformed in the course of medieval art from an industrious spinster to an inspired theologian, the spinning motif should not be dismissed as an inferior detail that gradually came to be superseded by the tradition which saw her as the fountainhead of the Messiah's wisdom. The spinning of the veil (as well as the weaving), even though it did not have the sanction of the canonical Gospels, remained a meaningful emblem of the Virgin.²⁹

Thus, while the iconography of Mary holding a book is significant on the cusp of the Late Middle Ages when ideas of female readership are changing, her initial portraiture as a virtuously spinning maiden holds a fair amount of power and authority in relation to connections that might be made with or by medieval women. According to the gospel of James, Mary is performing women's work as an expression of her devotion to God at the time of the

²⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson, 'The Thread of Life in the Hand of the Virgin' in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold, & Constance S. Wright (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990) p. 47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Annunciation, reflecting the daily lives of medieval women in service of their families.

This veil for the Jerusalem temple carries significant weight in the entire story of Christ's Passion. From the moment the angel announces to Mary that she is to be the Mother of God, the temple veil is being created. At the time of the crucifixion, the Gospel according to Matthew tells us that 'Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold *the veil of the temple was rent in two* from the top even to the bottom: and the earth quaked and the rocks were rent.'³⁰ This veil is out of context in this Biblical passage, yet if viewed in relation to the story of the Virgin Mary's spinning included in the *Protevangelium*, it is placed in parallel to her earthly roles as a mother and clothworker. The temple veil that the Virgin Mary has had a hand in weaving at the time of the Annunciation and Jesus' conception is symbolic of Christ's human body on Earth. Mary weaves the veil at the time of conception, and once Christ dies, the veil is torn in two just as his spirit is divided from his body. Furthermore, Christ's representation as wool is frequent in the Christian tradition, not least in his portrayal as the Lamb of God. Strikingly, in Proclus of Constantinople's *Homily I* from the seventh century, as referenced by Tina Beattie, Mary's womb is compared to a loom, upon which Christ, as the wool, 'the ancient fleece of Adam, the interlocking thread the spotless flesh of the Virgin', is woven by the Holy Spirit into the Word of God. 'The weaver's shuttle was propelled by the immeasurable grace of him who wore the robe; the artisan was the Word'³¹, and this is a perfect, early example of the Virgin's connection with weaving as well as

³⁰ *The Holy Bible Douay-Rheims Version, Challoner Revision the Old and New Testaments* (Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org, 1998) Matthew 27.50-51. My emphasis.

³¹ Tina Beattie, 'Mary in Patristic Theology', in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (London: Continuum, 2007) pp. 75-104 (p. 103).

with Wisdom. Her creative, virtuous, and devotional power stems from her very femininity.

In terms of later medieval imagery, Christ is referenced twice in the *Ovide Moralisé* as descending 'comme pluie en laine' (like woollen rain) into the womb of the Virgin Mary. The first instance of this imagery comes in the author's gloss of the story of Athamas and Ino. This myth tells the story of how Ino hated her stepchildren, Phrixus and Helle, whom Athamas had with Nephele, a cloud nymph, and plotted to have Phrixus sacrificed in order to fix the famine that Ino had secretly produced by corrupting the seeds so that they would not grow. Before the sacrifice, Phrixus and Helle are saved by a flying golden ram sent by their birth mother and are carried away. Helle falls into what is now known as the Hellespont, and Phrixus is delivered to the King Aetes, to whom Phrixus gives the Golden Fleece of the ram, which figures crucially in the tale of Jason and Medea. The author of the *Ovide Moralisé* glosses this myth:

C'est l'aiguel pur et net et monde
Qui porta la toison doree
Dou ventre a la vierge honoree,
Descendi comme pluie en laine. (IV ll. 3091-5)

(It is the pure lamb born to the world that brings the Golden Fleece; from the belly of the honored Virgin, descended like woollen rain.)

There has not been, up to this point, much discussion of the expression repeated twice in the *Ovide Moralisé*, that of *comme pluie en laine*, which could be interpreted as raining wool, perhaps meaning raining very hard from a modern perspective.³² However, the connection of the lamb, the Fleece, and the woollen rain in this particular passage calls to mind the idea referenced

³² Equated with the German expression: 'Es regnet Bindfäden' (It's raining strings).

by Beattie, of Mary's womb being equated with a loom upon which the fleece of Adam is woven into the Word of God. The second instance of this phrasing in the *Ovide Moralisé* only enhances that interpretation as it occurs in the gloss of the story of Danae who was impregnated with Perseus by Jupiter, who, in this myth, descended in a golden shower while Danae is trapped in a tower.

La tour ou elle iert enfermee
Nous done a entendre la cele
Dou ventre a la vierge pucele,
Ou Diex vault comme pluie en laine
Descendre, et prendre char humaine
Et soi joindre a nostre nature. (IV ll. 5585-90)

(The tower where she [Danae] was enclosed gives to us an interpretation of the cell of the belly to the virgin maiden where God deemed worthy to descend like woollen rain, and take on human flesh and join himself with our nature.)

In this example, Mary's womb is likened to the tower in which Danae is enclosed, and it is only penetrated by Jupiter, or in the case of the Virgin Mary, by God. God descends *comme pluie en laine* in order to take on his human form as Jesus Christ. Crucially, he is not described as *pluie en or*, which would be the correct equivalent of the original tale, but the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* has attempted to distance the original, pagan tale and adopt a new allegorical presentation of the Annunciation. While it may be a stretch to say that this could all connect back to the spinning story of the Annunciation in the *Protevangelium*, the fact that in much of the artwork depicting the Annunciation the Virgin was shown spinning points to the possibility that this connection between Mary's feminine task as the Mother of God was inherently connected to her feminine task of clothwork.

A further example of the Virgin Mary's connection with clothwork takes the form of a physical relic, rather than a literary story or an allegorical reference. In contrast to Minerva, who has been stripped of any pagan religious connection she might have had, Mary is able to be venerated through her relics, and her *chemise* at Chartres Cathedral incited pilgrimage for many medieval men and women. According to previous research on Chartres' history of pilgrimage, 'a church dedicated to Mary seems to have existed on this site from at least the sixth century. Christian Marianism at Chartres swelled in the late eighth century when the church was given a piece of cloth reputedly once belonging to Mary.'³³ This piece of cloth was argued to be either the shirt that Mary was wearing when she gave birth to Jesus or possibly her veil, and so is referenced as either her *chemise* or *le voile de la Vierge*.³⁴ In either case, it carried incalculable meaning for those pilgrims who journeyed to gain the protection of the Virgin in their everyday lives. For example, this piece of cloth, which many women are thought to have replicated by holding up their own skeins to the original *chemise*, was said to protect women in childbirth and men in warfare.³⁵ While Mary's connection to warfare here is very interesting, especially in her association with Minerva as the goddess of warfare, her protection of women during childbirth is crucial to her cultic representation and her identification as a female paragon. Further discussion on the significance of identity in cloth will be presented in Chapter Two of this study, but to view the *chemise* of Chartres as a symbolic and physical replacement of the Virgin Mary at the cathedral opens up an

³³'Chartres (Eure-et-Loir, France)' in *Pilgrimage: From the Ganges to Graceland: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Linda Kay Davidson & David Martin Gitlitz (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002), pp. 99-101 (p. 100).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ E. Jane Burns, *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography of Women's Work in Medieval French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) pp. 159-69.

understanding of the power of physical objects in relation to reliquisation and fetishisation. While Mary's *chemise* is certainly tied to her own identity as the mother of Christ, there are multiple physical examples of material that stand in for Mary's own body. Due to the Assumption of the Virgin, which was widely celebrated on August 15th during the Middle Ages, there is no physical *body* of Mary's to which one could make pilgrimage or venerate. As Marina Warner states:

Most perplexing of all, there was no knowledge of her [Mary's] grave—no body to venerate, no relics to touch. The disappearance of Mary's body delayed her cult, for there was no shrine, where she, in person, could be venerated. But it inspired the most fertile imaginings, for with the absence of historical data, free rein could be given to speculation along lines engraved in the symbolic fabric of Christianity.³⁶

This very cogently outlines the possibility for widespread pilgrimage to Mary's *chemise* in Chartres, at a time of Marian devotion, such as in the twelfth century. This cloth was treated as if it were Mary's true body, and its reliquisation allowed for the veneration of the medieval population.

Relics possessed by a particular church incite visitation by pilgrims and the faithful. Jesus Christ, too, left no trace of his body after his assumption into Heaven. Thus, relics that touched him were venerated in the place of his body; for example, pieces of the True Cross are reported to be housed in many churches around the world. It is interesting that, along with her milk, the most common relics of the Virgin involve her clothing, something that has touched her body, and, quite possibly, something that was made with her own hands. Moreover, the lack of a shrine allowed

³⁶ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 82.

women especially to find her in their everyday, domestic lives rather than in a far-away burial place to which they must make pilgrimage. They would have had access to the Virgin Mary in the iconography that surrounded them, as well as in their daily practices of clothwork and devotion.

Women in the Middle Ages imitated the Virgin Mary's devoutness and holiness, and in their own clothwork women could use daily occupation to meditate on religion and have a relationship with God. As women were not allowed to take part in the service of Mass, save to take communion, Mary represented devotion and bequeathed to ordinary women a means of serving the Lord in their everyday lives. According to Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq and in relation to religious edification:

The woman of the world was deprived of her last refuge. Power and knowledge both became masculine preserves. Women, long excluded from warfare and priesthood, were excluded from literacy as well. The Bible could not be translated, and women did not read Latin unless they were nuns. In this respect, too, they were second-class children of God. They had no alternative but to occupy themselves with oral tradition, with old wives' tales.³⁷

Women could not meditate on the Bible as they were not permitted or not learned enough to read it, and another form of religious edification had to be available to them in order for them to learn how to lead good and devoted lives. Images certainly provided an alternative education for women who could not read the Bible, and Marina Warner reminds her readers that 'most believers until modern times were illiterate, and the walls of the churches were their Bible.'³⁸ Women were then reliant on the pictorial representation

³⁷ Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, 'The Feudal Order', trans. by Arthur Goldhammer in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. by Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 202-49 (pp. 248-49).

³⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. xxiv.

of the Virgin Mary's life and the oral traditions that would have surrounded her, such as on Marian feast days when devotional texts of the Virgin would have been read aloud at Mass. The visuals of Mary working cloth, reading the Bible, or sitting upon or *as* the Seat of Wisdom became the images for female imitation. Brian Stock speaks to the importance that devotional texts offer to a devout Christian as 'reading, study, and meditation based upon them, offered him a technical instrument for helping to restore the lost spiritual unity with God.'³⁹ Without the ability to meditate on Biblical passages and connect with God through them due to a lack of literacy, women, particularly noblewomen who had the time to devote to prayer and meditation, would have needed an alternative for religious devotion. Two major alternatives to reading and studying the Bible came in the form of books and beads, the book being the previously mentioned Books of Hours and the beads referring to the Rosary.

The praying of the Rosary is a practice of devotion, and in the Middle Ages it was especially linked with Mary's cultic devotion. According to Anne Margreet W. As-Vijvers in her chapter focused on the Van Hoof Prayer book's presentation of three sisters clothing the Virgin Mary through their praying of the Rosary, 'by the twelfth century, prayer exercises already consisted of the repetitive recitation of *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias* as acts of devotion or penance.'⁴⁰ The praying of the Rosary, a repetition of prayers (most of them being the *Ave Maria*), can be understood to induce a meditative state, convincingly expressed by Sarah Jane Boss as 'the repetition

³⁹ Stock, p. 87.

⁴⁰ Anne Margreet W. As-Vijvers, 'Weaving Mary's Chaplet: The Representation of the Rosary in Late Medieval Flemish Manuscript Illumination' in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Kathryn M. Rudy & Barbara Baert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007) pp. 41-79 (p. 47). The Van Hoof Prayer book was made in Flanders c. 1500.

of a prayer over and over again is a technique for lulling the mind into a meditative state in which [...] it may become attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ Boss further likens the act of group recitation of the Rosary to the recitation of a sea shanty, claiming that: 'The recurrent pattern of verse and response induces a sense of being caught up in the flow of something greater, and thus liberates the meditator to throw him- or herself completely into the task. It is probably the case that the two most ancient forms of song are those used for ritual and those used for work.'⁴² This interesting comparison begs the question in this study: what about the meditative connection between the rosary and women's work?

The passing of beads tied together with string from finger to finger is much like the motions of knitting, sewing, and embroidering, mimicking the action of rhythmically passing the thread along one's fingers. Viewed as particularly virtuous, these types of women's work were seen to keep women from remaining idle so as not to let their minds wander beyond their enforced parameters. Paolo de Certaldo, an early fourteenth-century writer, provides a medieval point of view on this particular issue by stating that husbands should 'never allow [their wives] to be idle, for idleness is a great danger to both man and woman, but more to woman.'⁴³ However, the rhythmic act of working cloth, especially when performed by a group of women, encouraged the singing of songs or telling of stories to help keep the rhythm and pass the time; thus, songs of work, including women's work, were products of meditative repetition. While the praying of the Rosary was,

⁴¹ Sarah Jane Boss, 'Telling the Beads' in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. by Boss, pp. 385-394 (p. 386).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Three Medieval Views of Women: La Contenance des Fames, Le Bien des Fames, Le Blasme des Fames*, ed. and trans. by Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 66.

in the Middle Ages, most likely a solitary activity for women, the meditative trance that it induced through the beads and thread that passed along a person's fingers was much like the meditative work done by women as they worked cloth. Though this meditation when working cloth may not have always been religiously contemplative, there is an aspect of clothwork that was seen as virtuous. If women were working cloth in their private chambers, they were not out in the world being corrupted by vice, which Paolo de Certaldo warns against, as seen in his quotation above, and which calls back to the Roman epitaph inscription of *lanam fecit*. Praying the Rosary then, in oral repetition of the *Ave Maria*, allowed medieval women to connect with the Mother of God in a very tactile way, even in the domestic sphere where they would have remained and raised their children.

Virgin Mothers

Medieval laywomen, unlike religious women, would have had much of their time occupied with the care and keeping of their children. In terms of exemplary mothers, the Virgin Mary can be easily understood as a paragon of maternity, whereas Minerva is known for her virginity rather than her motherhood. Therefore, laywomen can easily connect to the Virgin Mary through this shared experience. On the other hand, it would be easy to see how perhaps Minerva's perpetual virginity and her having never given birth might then make her less appealing as a role model and less accessible to the general population of laywomen and mothers. However, Minerva's influence in her role of wool-working is actually enhanced through her own tale of miraculous motherhood, which is included in the *Ovide Moralisé* and interestingly only peripherally mentioned in Ovid's original *Metamorphoses*.

Ovid writes: 'Once upon a time \A baby, Erichthonius, was born \Without a mother. Pallas hid the child \Safe in a box of wickerwork' (II ll. 553-5). The original tale of Erichthonius' birth is said to come from Callimachus' epic of *Hecale*, which only fragmentally survives.⁴⁴ The original story of Erichthonius' birth happens when Athena asks the smith-god Hephaestus to make arms for her, and he attempts to rape her, but she escapes him, and he ejaculates on her leg. She, disgusted, wipes the semen off her leg with some wool and throws it to the ground, from which Erichthonius is born, and she takes him into her care. This miraculous birth, through wool, semen, and earth endows the goddess of weaving and wisdom with a maternal portrayal that is represented in art from the Classical period, such as in an Attic cup located at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, wherein Gaia (the goddess of the Earth, the Mother of All) can be clearly seen presenting Erichthonius to Athena.⁴⁵ He is placed in her care, and she keeps him as her son. An important detail of this particular story that has not often been addressed is that Athena wipes away the semen of Hephaestus from her leg with *wool*, seemingly playing her part in his birth through her own craft and a terrestrial object. In the *Ovide Moralisé*, however, this woollen connection is excluded, but the story is told in much greater detail than in Ovid's original:

Vulcans, li despis et li vilz,
 Qui forga les foudres Jovis,
 Et pour la laidour de sa face
 Perdi des damedieus la grace
 Et lor compaignie ensement,
 Convoita Pallas folement,
 Si la requist de lecherie,
 Mes el ne s'i consenti mie :
 Ne volt son pucelage enfreindre.

⁴⁴ From A.D. Melville's footnote on p. 388 of his edition to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

⁴⁵ *Birth of Erichthonius*, c. 470-460 BCE, Attic red-figure stamnos, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inventory No. 2413.

Lors la cuida Vulcans contraindre
 Par force, et volentiers l'eüst
 Corrompue, s'il li leüst,
 Mes onques ne la pot conquerre,
 Ains espan di son germe en terre.
 La germe en terre se forma :
 Un enfant, qui double forme a,
 Que l'en claimme Euritonium,
 Nasqui de cele emission.
 Ce fu merveilles, quant sans mere
 Fu nez de la semence au père.
 Ma dame prist cel enfançon,
 Qui estoit de double façon :
 Cors d'ome ot et piez de serpent. (II ll. 2221-43)

(Vulcan, the despised and the villainous, who forged the thunderbolts of Jove, and who because of the ugliness of his face lost the grace of ladies and their company as well, coveted Pallas madly, and he desired her lustfully, but she never consented to it: she did not want to lose her virginity. So Vulcan believed he could take her by force, and he would willingly have corrupted her if he could! But he could never conquer her, so he spilt his semen on the ground. The semen on the earth formed an infant who had a double form who was then named Erichonius, born of that emission. It was marvellous, how without a mother, he was born of the semen of his father. My lady [Pallas] took this little infant, who was of a double fashion: the body of a man and the feet of a serpent.)

The Christian gloss for this particular tale is more focused on Vulcan than on Minerva but he says in reference to Minerva, that 'Virginitez, c'est uns tresors \ Plus chiers et plus fins que nulz ors' (Virginity, it is a treasure, more precious and finer than any gold) (II ll. 2793-4) and that Vulcan, being driven by the Devil: 'Cuida par fole outrecuidance, \ Forcier contre la sapiance \ Et contre la vertu devine' (Believed because of foolish egotism, pit himself against Wisdom, and against divine virtue) (II ll. 2889-91). Here, Minerva is allegorically linked to Wisdom and divine virtue yet again. This child, born of Gaia, the Mother of All as Mother Earth, can be seen to represent

humanity. If Gaia becomes an allegory for Eve, as the mother of all, and Adam becomes Hephaestus, driven by the Devil to commit a sin against God, then one could link Erichthonius, as a child of a double nature, half-man and half-serpent, to a human corrupted by original sin. While Minerva is not glossed by the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* as the Virgin Mary, there is an obvious link particularly in the dual nature of Erichthonius. Minerva cares for the child as his mother, and Mary is seen as the mother of all Christians in that she gave birth to Jesus Christ, thus she came to save and rectify the double nature in humans. St. Ambrose (d. 397) states that 'in giving birth to Christ she [Mary] also yielded Christians borne in her womb with Him, and thus could be equated with the figure of the Church (*Ecclesia*) itself.'⁴⁶ Where Eve is the Mother of All, Mary is the saving mother of all Christians.

Minerva's care of Erichthonius in the *Ovide Moralisé* is quite maternal, and there is an element of maternity to Minerva's presentation in the *Epistre Othea* as well. Othea's presentation of the goddess Minerva to Hector is glossed:

Minerve fu une dame de moult grant savoir et trouva l'art de faire
armeures [...] Et pour ce que moult sceut Hector armeures mettre
en oeuvre, et ce fu son droit mestier, l'appella Othea filz de
Minerve, non obstant fust il filz a la royne Hecuba de Troye.

(Minerva was a lady of very great wisdom and invented the art of
armor-making [...] And because Hector could well put armors to
work, and this was his right craft, Othea called him the son of
Minerva, notwithstanding he was the son to queen Hecuba of
Troy.)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Barberet, p. 618.

⁴⁷ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, p. 222; Chance, p. 50.

Christine presents the allegory of Minerva as a mother: 'Ce qui est dit, que armeures bonnes et fortes lui livrera assez la mere au bon chevalier, nous pouons entendre la vertu de foy qui est vertu theologienne et est mere au bon esperit' (By this which is stated, that well-made and strong armors will be delivered to the good knight, we may understand the virtue of faith, which is a theological virtue and is mother to the good spirit),⁴⁸ and in this way Minerva becomes allegorically linked to the mother of a good spirit, which further links her with the Virgin Mary's action as the mother of Christ who came to save the souls of those corrupted by vice. In Jane Chance's interpretive essay entitled *Christine's Minerva, the Mother Valorized*, included in Chance's critical edition and translation of the *Epistre Othea*, she states:

For Christine, Minerva is a prototype for all women – the mother of Hector, self-created, wise and valorous, a self-sufficient and resourceful armor-maker who can defend herself against attack. She also fulfils the ideal role for women, as the prudent mother who educates her children and nourishes their virtues in order to protect them from assault.⁴⁹

Though Minerva may not be cast as a natural mother, her femininity embodies all the virtues of a good mother in the gloss of Christine. Chance further notes that 'for Christine, good mothering is good guidance or direction – education: in the Middle Ages, the mother, at least for women and young boys, was the chief educator.'⁵⁰ This portrayal of mothers as educators becomes increasingly important throughout this study, as mother-daughter relationships, insofar as they are included in romance literature, express a symbiotic relationship grounded in the domestic sphere; the

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Chance, p. 50-1.

⁴⁹ Chance, p. 124.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 127.

daughter excels because of the teachings of her mother, and the mother excels through the success of her daughter as she enacts those lessons throughout her life (see Chapter Four). Minerva embodies the feminine activity of education even though she is not the natural mother of Hector or of Erichthonius, and this becomes even more important in regards to her association with wisdom.

The Virgin Mary, in stark contrast to the figure of Minerva, is easily understood in terms of her maternal connection. Emulation and devotion to Mary is a means for women to move past their determination as daughters of Eve (Eve's Fall being the conception of their roles as reproductive beings) and become virtuous and devoted mothers in the care and religious upbringing of their children. However, due to the fact that Mary was supposedly absolved by God of the pain and delivery of childbirth and retained her virginal nature even in her maternity, women were inherently separate from her. This dichotomous relationship is soundly illustrated by Denise-Renée Barberet:

To envision the Virgin as such [a figure that bridged and joined the divine and the human] raises interesting and complex questions about the relationship of ordinary women to her. The Virgin's most significant act—conceiving and giving birth to Christ—is the embodiment of the most physical and exclusively female act possible. And yet, representative of all women as she is, the Virgin is absolutely unlike any of them for doctrinal reasons, a distant and always unattainable paragon for women.⁵¹

Though Mary's eternal virginity even after childbirth was unattainable for her mortal devotees, she continued to protect those who had not been so divinely blessed as to have the pain of childbirth taken away. The protection

⁵¹ Barberet, p. 620.

she offered, mentioned previously in relation to her *chemise* or *voile*, is maternal, and thus allowed mortal women to connect with her by imitating her motherly duties. Being a mother was not simply constituted by childbirth, but continued on in the caring and education of the child in question. Mary had been repeatedly represented as caring for the baby Jesus in many Books of Hours and other works of art, and all the depictions placed her in the home wherein she weaves and knits the clothes that Jesus wears. According to Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, there are many 'thirteenth- and fourteenth-century portraits of Mary using five needles to knit the seamless tunic [that] have survived from all parts of Europe, from northern Germany to the Iberian Peninsula.'⁵² This holy tunic was said to have been knitted by Mary for Christ when he was an infant and to have had a magical element to it, in that it grew as Jesus grew, and he wore it throughout his lifetime until his crucifixion.⁵³ This type of imagery, as well as the previous connections made between Mary's womb and a loom, exemplify the linkage of maternity and clothwork in the image of the feminine. As Ruth Mazo Karras states on the subject of Mary's portraiture as a clothworker in Books of Hours: 'Here textile production and meeting the needs of the family is clearly connected with feminine virtue: what better way for a woman to employ her time than with creating a garment for the Christ child?'⁵⁴ In this way, motherhood, and not simply the act of giving birth is emblematised by the Virgin Mary, much as Minerva is presented by Christine de Pizan as a mother through education and protection.

⁵² Françoise Piponnier, 'The World of Women', trans. Arthur Goldhammer in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. by Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 323-35 (pp. 327-328).

⁵³ Gibson, p. 50: 'The medieval legend tells that Mary herself made the seamless tunic for Jesus when he was a child, and that the garment magically grew along with his body to adulthood.'

⁵⁴ Karras, p. 101.

Christine also presents the reproductive qualities of the Virgin Mary in the *Epistre Othea* in her allegorical glossing of Isis, an Egyptian goddess who was worshipped as an ideal mother. Christine includes her in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* as the woman who invented the art of cultivating and gardening. In the *Epistre Othea* Christine likewise states in her gloss that ‘Ysis, dient autressi les poetes que elle est deesse des plantes et de cultivemens et leur donne vigueur et croissance de multiplier.’ (Isis, as the poets also say, is the goddess of plants and of cultivation, and she gives them strength to multiply and grow.)⁵⁵ Furthermore, in her allegorical gloss, Christine likens Isis to the Virgin Mary in her immaculate conception of Jesus Christ:

La ou il dit que Ysys, qui est plantureuse, doit ressembler pouons entendre la benoite conception de Jhesucrist par le Saint Esperit en la benoite Vierge Marie, mere de toute grace, de qui les grans bontez ne pourroient estre ymaginees ne dictes entierement.

(There where it says that the good spirit ought to resemble Isis, who is a planter, we may understand the holy conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the holy Virgin Mary, mother of all grace, from whom the great bounties may not be imagined and said wholly.)⁵⁶

In allegorical symbolism, Christine draws a link between an Egyptian goddess of motherhood and the Christian mother *par excellence*, the Virgin Mary. The fructification imagery associated with Mary as the Mother of God is common in these types of didactic texts, and the author of the *Ovide Moralisé*, in one of his longest commentaries concerning Mary, and in direct

⁵⁵ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre*, 238, my translation.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-9; Chance, p. 60.

opposition to his discussion of Eve's eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, writes:

La mere au roi de paradis,
La sainte, la vierge pucele,
Marie, Dieu mere et ancele,
Fu l'anste, et Jesse la racine,
Dont Jhesus par vertu devine
Vault au monde nestre et venir,
Pour nous repestre et replevir
Dou fruit de vie pardurable.
Marie est l'anste delitable
Qui porta le fruit precieus. (IV ll. 6489-98)

(The mother of the King of Paradise, the saint, the virgin maiden Mary, God's mother and servant was the branch, and Jesse was the root from which Jesus was born and came to the world, by divine virtue, so that we might repent and to guarantee us the fruit of eternal life. Mary is the joyous branch that carries the precious fruit.)

In this connection, not only is Mary the one who gives human life to Jesus Christ, but she is also the one that allows his roots to be traced back to Jesse, an idea that is used throughout the canonical gospels as a means of legitimising the line of Jesus by tracing his descent through genealogy. This iconography is likewise represented at Chartres Cathedral in a stained-glass window dating from 1140 or 1150. Mary is in a seat of prominence in this *vitrine*, just underneath Jesus Christ who is at the top of the tree, connecting him to the kings of the past, identifiably David and Solomon. Mary's depiction as a mother in genealogy as well as the in care and upbringing of Christ is important in understanding her motherhood as an essential facet of a constructed, medieval femininity.

In their displays of virtue and virginity, both the Virgin Mary and Minerva are described as maternal, mothers in their own respective ways.

Though their perpetual virginity would not have been physically possible for the average laywomen as her role in the family would have centered around her ability to bear and raise children, the virtue of these paragons of femininity, displayed through their motherhood, would have been an inspiration for medieval laywomen. In Classical artwork, Minerva is presented with the infant Erichthonius, and though this imagery did not appear often in medieval artwork, the story was morally important as seen by its inclusion in the *Ovide Moralisé*. In relation to the Virgin Mary, however, artwork surrounding her portraiture as a mother would have been ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, from illuminations in Books of Hours to cathedral decoration. Mary's motherhood is an inherent part of her character and is the reason for her veneration. This facet of Mary and Minerva then, while not necessarily providing a means of devotion like the practice of clothwork may have done when compared alongside other tactile devotional crafts such as praying the Rosary, does allow for the initial association with these paragons of femininity through the bearing and educating of children. Late Medieval didactic texts foster a connection between the Virgin Mary, Minerva, and medieval women who may have had access to vernacular literature. Women certainly would have had access to the Virgin Mary as a paragon of femininity in artwork and prayer, which would have allowed them to ameliorate their relationship to her through their emulation of Mary's virtuous and intellectual practices, of weaving and of the acquisition of wisdom.

A Wealth of Wisdom

Though Minerva herself never gave birth, the story of her own birth is remarkable in terms of everlasting virginity, particularly in conjunction with Mary's supposed virginal conception by Anne. Tritogeneia, another name for Minerva, is the daughter of the mighty Zeus and 'Metis the Titaness, who is, Hesiod tells us without equivocation, "wisest of all, of gods and men."⁵⁷ Metis is said to be the embodiment of cunning, and helped Zeus defeat the Titans. Minerva then inherits her mother's wise and intelligent attributes and becomes the goddess of wisdom. In fact, Minerva is not born traditionally, but rather she springs forth from the head of Zeus. She is born from the seat of wisdom, as referenced by Pierre Brulé,⁵⁸ and as Hesiod tells the story in his *Theogony*:

Zeus as king of the gods made Metis his first wife, the wisest among gods and mortal men. But when she was about to give birth to the pale-eyed goddess Athene, he tricked her deceitfully with cunning words and put her away in his belly on the advice of Earth and starry Heaven. They advised him in this way so that no other of the gods, the eternal fathers, should have the royal station instead of Zeus. For from Metis it was destined that clever children should be born: first a pale-eyed daughter, Tritogeneia, with courage and sound counsel equal to her father's, and then a son she was to bear, king of gods and men, one proud of heart. But Zeus put her away in his belly first, so that the goddess could advise him of what was good or bad.⁵⁹

Born from the head of her father, the Seat of Wisdom, and from her mother's body inside of her father, Minerva inherently embodies wisdom. As Athena Parthenos, the goddess of literary arts, she was seen to be endowed with

⁵⁷ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 73.

⁵⁸ Pierre Brulé, *Women of Ancient Greece*, trans. by Antonia Nevill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) p. 21.

⁵⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, ed. and trans. by M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 29.

certain characteristics that made her assignment to this work fitting. From the beginning, from the time of her conception and the story of her birth, Minerva has been associated with Wisdom.

Wisdom and Philosophy are often personified as women in the Middle Ages,⁶⁰ and it is interesting that in the Greek tradition both Metis and her daughter Athena are associated with wisdom and learning. Pierre Brulé comments on this feminine aspect of wisdom by stating that: 'Metis in Greek means "cunning intelligence" – a suitable name for the mother of the wily Athena – and we can speculate that at one time the story was one which told of the transmission of a purely feminine wisdom.'⁶¹ This equally recalls Christine de Pizan's initial glossing of Othea in her *Epistre (as sagece de femme)*, and in this way, femininity, often connoting the passive object in the literature of the Middle Ages, finds an active voice through the personification of wisdom. From the various stories of Minerva's feats and attributes, including that of Arachne, she is known as both wise and a worker. She uses her power, skill, and judgment to be rated among the highest of the gods, and her inclusion in much of the literature of the Middle Ages casts her as Wisdom incarnate and fits her into the Christian tradition. Warner illustrates the change from Athena to Minerva and Minerva's acceptance into Christianity:

Athena is not the only deity of the Greeks to transubstantiate in this way what a priest might call the conscience of a man, or an analyst, the unconscious. But because she stood for ideals approved under Christianity, she could be retained in

⁶⁰ Such as in Boethius' *De consolation philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy) (c. 524) which was repeatedly translated in the Late Middle Ages, and Christine de Pizan's *Dame Raison* (Lady Reason) in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (c. 1410), and the personification of *Raison* in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. Wisdom is also personified as feminine in the Books of Solomon, or the Wisdom texts of the Bible.

⁶¹ Brulé, p. 28.

undiminished splendor. Nevertheless she had to undergo several new transformations in keeping with her character as the goddess of change. Her later metamorphosis in humanist classical myth as Minerva, patron of the Arts, exercised a charm over the imagination of women in particular who, in the tradition of Penelope, felt that they must live in light of their minds and foster their native skills of hand and eye.⁶²

Warner, in this particular excerpt, points to the correlation between women's work and Christian ideals, not to mention the ways in which women's minds could be enlightened through their work, which is something that Christine de Pizan presents through her descriptions of women's work in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, explored further in Chapter Five of this study. Minerva embodies an inclination that women have towards handiwork and is shown as a nexus of skill and work, skill rightly defining a woman's ability to learn and grow through her daily activities. Minerva could be emulated by medieval women because of the way in which vernacular didactic texts presented her virtues. Recalling the story of Arachne and Minerva's epic tapestry battle in the *Ovide Moralisée*, one can see that the medieval glossing of the original tale associates Minerva with the virtue of *devine sapience*, or divine wisdom: 'Pallas, c'est Sapience' (Pallas, that is Wisdom) (II l. 4414) and 'Quant Pallas, devine sagesce, \C'est Jhesucris, qui l'ame adresece' (When Pallas, divine wisdom, [is mentioned] it is Jesus Christ who the spirit

⁶² Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 102. In Classical mythology, Penelope is the wife of Odysseus (of Ulysses) who stayed faithful to him even though he did not return home for over twenty years after the Trojan War. She guarded her chastity and virtue by keeping potential suitors at bay with a clever trick involving her weaving. She told the suitors that she would choose one of them as soon as she finished weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. Every day she would weave the shroud, and every night she would secretly unweave it, elongating the production of the shroud in order to give her husband more time to return home and retake his *oikos*, or household. Penelope, in the Middle Ages, was used by such authors as Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan, as the epitome of a chaste and virtuous wife, and her inherent connection to the domestic household would not have been lost on the average medieval reader.

addresses) (V ll. 3938-9). The second quotation included here, just as with the glossing that compared her act of coming to Earth in the guise of a human to that of Jesus Christ taking his human form in order to root out vice among mortals, allies Minerva with the masculine, which distances her portrayal as Wisdom from women. Though *Sapience* is often personified as feminine in literature, it is seen as a more masculine trait, and though Mary is also associated with Wisdom, the author of the *Ovide Moralisé* allies Minerva with Jesus instead because of the imagery of her descent from Mount Olympus (Heaven).

In Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea* and her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, however, Christine retains the goddess' femininity, and in her *Livre des faits d'armes et de chevalerie* (c.1401), Minerva is used as a feminine construct, and is invoked specifically for her gender. Christine, as a female author, has a special connection to Minerva in their shared femininity when she speaks of the more masculine attribute of chivalry:

Et pource que cest chose non accoustumee et hors vsage a
femme qui communement ne se seult entremettre ne mais
que nouilles fillasses et choser de mesnage, Je supplie
humblement audit treshault office et noble estat de chevalerie
que en contemplacion de la soye dame minerue, nee du pais
de grece, que les anciens pour son grant scauoir reputerent
deesse.

(As this [writing of warfare] is unusual for women, who generally are occupied in weaving, spinning, and household duties, I humbly invoke, in speaking of this very high office and noble chivalry, the wise lady Minerva, born in the land of Greece, whom the ancients esteemed highly for her great

wisdom.)⁶³

Christine qualifies her invocation of Minerva in particular due to the fact that the goddess is known as a wise woman who would understand Christine's attempt to reach beyond her gendered boundaries, namely those skills of clothwork, in order to make use of the pen. Christine does not here denigrate the acts of clothwork, but rather she cites them in order to contextualise her gender and the limitations that are placed upon her because of it.

Furthermore, Minerva, equally as the goddess and inventor of weaving, understands this facet of women's work just as much as she evokes the knowledge and wisdom that men claim to have as their own preserves. In this particular quotation from the *Livre des faits d'armes et de chevalerie* then, Christine allows herself to be perceived as a woman, and she invokes a weaving and wise woman as her guide through her work, which casts Minerva clearly as a female paragon rather than one who is allegorically glossed as a male figure, such as is found in the *Ovide Moralisé*.

In terms of the early medieval invocation of Minerva as the embodiment of Wisdom, Pierre Abelard, in his *Historia Calamitatum*, introduces his views on this aspect of Minerva as she guides him to pursue a different career than would be expected in a man. He states that he wishes to 'renounce the glory of military life [...] and withdraw from the court of Mars in order to be educated in the lap of Minerva.'⁶⁴ Minerva's wisdom was thus not only imparted through ancient stories retold by a Late Medieval author

⁶³ As cited by Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn in *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) p. 192 with reference to Sumner Willard for the English translation.

⁶⁴ Peter Abelard, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. and trans. by Betty Radice, rev. by M.T. Clanchy (London: Penguin Ltd., 2003) p. 3. The original Latin reads: 'Martis curie penitus abdicarem ut Minerve gremio educarer.'

or received by a medieval audience, but was also included in Latin texts, to which women, particularly laywomen, would not have had access. However, this quotation is important for several reasons, the first being that Minerva is a figure that moves throughout the centuries from Classical Antiquity into the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance rather than being reinvented and revisited solely for the purposes of rewriting Ovid. Secondly, the way in which Abelard feminises Minerva is important as she juxtaposes with the masculine arena of war by Abelard's assertion that he wishes to learn in her lap, evoking a domestic and mothering sense. The lap, a space of development that could be considered decidedly feminine when related to motherhood, is crucial to a child's development, particularly in its association with education, which would have been the mother's domain. In this quote, Abelard seemingly rejects the public and masculine sphere of Mars, who represents the warfare that called away so many of the young men in the Middle Ages, and Minerva's more masculine side, as the goddess of warfare, is rejected as well in favour of her association with Wisdom; Abelard prefers to dedicate his life to the learning that the domestic lap of Minerva can provide. He equates Minerva's lap with sagacity, but equally important is the connotation of the lap as a place of safety and comfort provided by the mother, and crucially, in medieval portraiture of the Virgin Mary, her lap is a place imbued with both maternal comfort and wisdom in its description as *sedes sapientiae*, the Seat of Wisdom.

The Virgin Mary is often portrayed as the idealised woman in the Middle Ages, and it was during the twelfth century especially that Mary began to gain a more widespread and popular cultic following. During Mary's cultic development, she acquired a connection to *sophia* and Wisdom, which could be seen to explain the abrupt change in her portrayal as a

weaving woman to a reading woman at the time of the Annunciation that took place around the year 1300. In terms of devotional images, this is an especially important detail in the change of representation of the Annunciation, wherein weaving is being superseded by the book. Penny Schine Gold notes, in relation to changing Marian iconography, 'when a change in a common image does occur, the fact that the weight of tradition has been overcome indicates a significant impetus to change.'⁶⁵ Thus, it may be that the year 1300 marks a time in which more women may have been learning to read in the vernacular. This could equally be linked to a change in liturgical devotion, as according to Sarah Jane Boss, 'an identification between Mary and Wisdom became common in [the high Middle Ages] because of the use of Wisdom texts in Marian liturgies,'⁶⁶ which associates the devotional aspect of the Virgin more strongly with Wisdom than would have been seen in the daily lives of women. Where in the earlier period, women's religious education was highly pictorial and interpretive, in the later period, it moves to a more literary edification, through Books of Hours and didactic texts. This shift from imagery and orality to written texts is also represented in romance narrative, seen especially in Chapters Three and Four of the present study.⁶⁷ Sandra Penketh explores the importance of the imagery in Books of Hours and how they relate to women in her chapter included in *Women and the Book*.⁶⁸ She states that they were aids to private devotion, as much as the Rosary, and that 'it was often the mother who

⁶⁵ Gold, p. 44.

⁶⁶ Sarah Jane Boss, 'The Development of the Virgin's Cult in the High Middle Ages' in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Boss, pp. 149-72 (p. 169).

⁶⁷ Philomena 'writes' pictographically in order to communicate with her sister, Lienors, Fresne, and Flourie learn through vocal communication with their mothers, Lienors and her mother sing aloud *chansons de toile*, and all of these forms of communication are *written* into romance narrative.

⁶⁸ Penketh, pp. 266-80.

taught her child the basics of reading and writing and, in fact, books of hours were frequently employed as “first reading books.”⁶⁹ That is not to say, however, that women in the later period did not rely on images for religious education, as iconography in churches and in the home would have been continually important and contemplative for the medieval woman.

The Seat of Wisdom is an important iconographical example of the Virgin Mary’s emblematic portrayal of Wisdom as a virtue attributed to the masculine, but often personified as feminine. The Seat of Wisdom depiction has been likened to the *Sedes Sapientiae* of King Solomon,⁷⁰ but more importantly, according to Boss, ‘in an image of the Seat of Wisdom, however, the Virgin is not just enthroned: she is herself a throne. For Christ is enthroned on her lap, and this is the primary meaning of the title “Seat of Wisdom” as it is applied to the Virgin in Majesty.’⁷¹ In fact, as Boss further references, Adam of St. Victor wrote a hymn to Mary in the twelfth-century in which he states ‘You are the throne of Solomon’.⁷² Her representation as a throne and equally of sitting on a throne much like the throne of the wise King Solomon endowed Mary with attributes like wisdom and knowledge, and this connection is likewise emblematised in the iconography of the Tree of Jesse, wherein Mary descends from the same root as Solomon in order to produce the Messiah. The representation of the Christ child on Mary’s lap can be understood as his enthronement upon her and is a crucial comment upon the transfer of Wisdom from mother to child. Christ himself does not

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

⁷⁰ *The Holy Bible*, 2 Chron 9.17-19: ‘The king also made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. And six steps to go up to the throne, and a footstool of gold, and two arms one on either side, and two lions standing by the arms: Moreover twelve other little lions standing upon the steps on both side: there was not such a throne in any kingdom.’

⁷¹ Boss, ‘The Development of the Virgin’s Cult’, pp. 166-7.

⁷² Ibid., p. 168.

sit upon the Throne of the wise King Solomon; he sits upon his mother, who sits upon this throne, thus she is an intermediary means for the transfer of Wisdom. As Ilene Forsyth mentions in relation to the common wooden-figure statues of the *sedes sapientiae*: 'As a mother, she [Mary] supports her son in her lap, yet as the Mother of God she serves as a throne for the incarnation of Divine Wisdom.'⁷³

While Chartres was an important site of pilgrimage for Marian devotion due to the location of her sacred *chemise*, the cathedral was also endowed with certain images and devotional artwork and architecture that present iconography of Mary of the Seat of Wisdom. As Janet Snyder states: 'At Chartres, the *sedes sapientiae* appears in varied forms from the enthroned Virgin on the twelfth-century right tympanum of the cathedral's west façade to stained-glass images of the thirteenth-century Virgin and child in the apse clerestory window and elsewhere,'⁷⁴ and this, especially in relation to Marina Warner's presentation of the illiterate layperson using the walls of churches as his or her Bible, shows how the iconography that surrounds the churchgoer could inform them about the virtues exemplified by certain saints, including the Virgin Mary. Of particular interest in terms of Mary's association with Wisdom is the aforementioned tympanum. The Virgin is portrayed enthroned, and the Christ child sits enthroned on her lap. Surrounding her in this position are various aspects of wisdom and knowledge which are described by Warner: 'On the Portail Royal of Chartres cathedral, on the archivolt framing the Virgin enthroned as the Seat of Wisdom, the Seven Liberal Arts appear to make a clear statement about the

⁷³ Ilene H. Forsyth, as cited by Gold in *The Lady and the Virgin*, p. 49.

⁷⁴ Janet Snyder, 'Cloth from the Promised Land: Appropriated Islamic *Tiraz* in Twelfth-Century French Sculpture', in *Medieval Fabrications*, ed. by Burns, pp. 147-64 (p. 161).

educational ideals of the twelfth century.⁷⁵ Though the pilgrimage was linked to the Holy Virgin's idealised clothwork, the images produced at this location in her veneration were commonly linked with her Wisdom. Laywomen were, for the most part, excluded from learning the Seven Liberal Arts in the twelfth century, unlike their male counterparts. However, those who made the pilgrimage to Chartres were not exclusively male. The female pilgrims who wished to gain protection from the *chemise de la Vierge* may have viewed these images of Mary as the Seat of Wisdom and Mary surrounded by the Seven Liberal Arts. As this particular image on the south *portail* was an image of educational ideals, it calls into question what it might have meant to the women who viewed it, though they were undoubtedly excluded from this calibre of education.

What is perhaps most striking in the relation of Minerva and Mary in terms of their connection to Wisdom and learning is that the presentation of this aspect of their characters mimics exactly that which is found in their associations with weaving; Minerva is more often represented in literature, whereas Mary is more commonly represented in religious iconography and imagery, which could be seen to have served as the literature of the illiterate laywoman. As the Virgin Mary would have been more widely accepted in terms of feminine emulation as the Christian mother *par excellence*, it is perhaps telling that she was most easily accessible in the daily lives of women, in her embodiment of Wisdom and even more so in her role as a mother and an educator. Minerva's association with wisdom, however, was much more accessible for medieval men, as it is included more readily in literature than in iconography. However, female writers such as Christine de

⁷⁵ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 181-2. The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages are as follows: grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy.

Pizan encoded her wisdom as maternal and feminine, allowing women to emulate her through their shared gender. In this way, Minerva and Mary are paragons of femininity even in their associations with the more masculine reserves of wisdom and education.

Conclusion

This chapter brings together three facets of Minerva and the Virgin Mary that are widely represented in the didactic texts of the Late Middle Ages and in medieval iconography: weaving, motherhood, and wisdom. These three attributes of these female paragons, however, are not isolated from each other, and they overlap frequently in discussion. This clearly shows that these attributes are not necessarily reserved for these two women, but are embodied by the feminine. Medieval laywomen could connect with Mary as a mother, and from this basis, Mary's daily activities in her clothwork and her iconographical representation as the educator and as the incarnation of wisdom would have spoken to them of their own daily lives. This connection, which is equally evoked by the medieval presentation of Minerva, would have led woman to emulate not only the actions of these paragons, such as weaving, but also the virtues that these activities encouraged, which becomes increasingly more important throughout this study, as the way in which women are discussed throughout Old French romance in relation to their clothwork frequently hinges on the depiction of their virtue and agency.

Mary and Minerva's constant definition as virtuous women is inextricably linked to their performative actions, and they are often defined through their own clothwork or the clothes that adorn their bodies, which is

the focus of Chapter Two of this study. Arguably, the most important words of the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition are those that she speaks to the angel when she agrees to be the mother of God. These words coincide with both her clothwork and her wisdom in iconography, as she is either spinning the thread for the temple veil or reading liturgy at the time of the Annunciation. Her feminine voice is therefore connected with both clothwork and wisdom, though she does not, as Minerva does, speak through her clothwork. Both the representation of Minerva and Mary's voices, however, become important in the discussion of Chapter Three, wherein Philomena weaves a message in pictures (in the same way as Minerva), and Chapter Five, wherein Christine de Pizan uses her voice to counteract the pervasive misogyny of the Middle Ages through her association with learning and the book.

While much of the literature of the Middle Ages includes examples of base women written from the perspective of misogynistic authors, the Virgin Mary and Minerva are continually represented as feminine ideals throughout that literature. Though they both are perpetual virgins, which inherently sets them apart from the majority of medieval laywomen, their domestic and educative attributes set examples for women, which they can easily follow in their daily lives. Clothwork, motherhood, and education, are important subjects in relation to femininity throughout the romance literature of the High Middle Ages, and, as seen in this present chapter, the didactic texts of the Late Middle Ages. From an historical perspective, the lives and activities of women are constantly reflected in the imagery that surrounds them, and in the texts that intend to portray them.

Chapter Two: An Identity in Stitches: Fragmentation and Agency in Clothbodies

'I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and
I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in.'

- Virginia Woolf
*A Room of One's Own*¹

Introduction

This chapter will explore the identifying quality of cloth as it is applied to four different characters in French literature from the High Middle Ages: Tisbé from *Piramus et Tisbé*, Soredamors from Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, the *demoisele d'Escalot* from *La Mort le Roi Artu*, and Fresne from both Marie de France's *lai* of *Le Fraisne* and from Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*. This chapter contains a crucial exploration of the feminine identity found in cloth that is associated with the bodies of these Old French female characters and the stitches produced by their fingers. It is an assessment of the physical manipulation of cloth by women that forms a public identity for them, whereas their domestic homes and the patriarchal dominion to which they belong impose a private identity upon them. A closer look at these aforementioned female characters will reinforce the argument of constructed public identity in cloth through instances of self-definition and status symbolism. Cloth is a fundamental means of female empowerment and identification in these romance narratives. As the first chapter brought to light, the Virgin Mary's many woven relics illustrate the connection between woven material, the female body, and virtue. Similarly, this chapter draws links between a woman's employment of cloth and who she is or who others outside of the domestic sphere perceive her to be.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001) p. 29.

The five romances discussed in this chapter are all connected in their inclusion of *clothbodies*, which I define as a piece of cloth or clothwork that incites an understanding or treatment of a woman's identity or body that is separate and disconnected from her physical body. This definition differs from E. Jane Burns' term of sartorial bodies² in that clothbodies are tangible and temporal indicators of a woman's identity or body, and they are physically divorced from a woman's natural or social body, meaning that they do not change the physical makeup or the social perception of a woman. Additionally, once the clothbody is reassigned to the female body that it defines, it ceases to exist as an identifiable marker of the female character. This is not a study of how the clothing adorning female bodies modifies female social status or incites gender fluidity, rather it is a study of how a woman's identity can exist in material separately from her physical body insofar as the cloth is treated by male protagonists as if it were a physical body. This treatment exemplifies how a clothbody can be identified by various characters in romance *as* physically replacing the woman's body. Where Burns' sartorial bodies are 'produced by a relatively seamless interaction between cloth and flesh'³, the clothbody causes a disruption in the female protagonist's identity in its physical separation from her body and in the way in which it is treated and recognised by other characters within the narrative. Each of the following female characters' stories is unique, yet each woman is defined in one way or another by her respective clothbody.

² E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) p. 12: 'Sartorial bodies are not tangible objects with an independent existence in literary texts. They emerge from a reading practice that conceives of clothes as an active force in generating social bodies'

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Another crucial aspect of this argument lies in the fact that all of the female literary characters (or a cloth of their making) explored in this chapter move outside of the home, either physically or in the form of a clothbody. Furthermore, their identification in cloth, even when their physical body is outside of the domestic sphere, shows a certain anxiety about the ability to disguise oneself and the feminine manipulation of fabric. These women are not defined by their facial features or by their chivalric accoutrement as men in romance are, rather it is fabric, typically sumptuous fabric that reflects their bodies and identities. Each woman has an identity within the home, and in each case the patriarch of each respective household imposes an identity upon a woman. The challenge for these women is the inability to identifiably exist without that domestic tether; each case differs in the identity that is being created (lover, noble, daughter, and so on), yet all are defined by cloth. Thus, the employment of cloth and anonymity of each of these women when they are traveling alerts the reader to a further societal anxiety about feminine autonomy and moral conduct. Their clothing and clothwork become representative of their bodies due to the fact that their physical bodies are unable to be recognised outside of the domestic sphere, particularly by their male lovers, shown clearly by their stipulated presence in the public sphere as they are described as disguised, veiled, or enclosed.

This chapter examines agency in clothwork and the medieval perception of autonomous and independent women in an important way. Where Chapter Three will explore the ways in which voice and 'written' expression can be found in cloth, this chapter focuses on the ways in which female agency can be undermined by male perceptions of and interactions with cloth that is gendered feminine. While there are instances in which the female characters attempt to actively move or communicate, there is an

underlying current of patriarchal limitation and restriction that disallows them from being represented as particularly autonomous or successful in their plights. Each of the following romances ends in either the death or marriage of the female character, signaling a tension between strong female characters and *independent* female characters. This chapter is not an exploration of voice, then, but rather a study of how the fragmentation of female identity associated with clothbodies underlines the importance of the classification and rightful identification of female-sexed bodies. At the end of each romance, there is no female character that continues to be represented by her respective clothbody: it is her physical body that meets its silent end in death or marriage. In the following five instances of female manipulation of cloth, one can see the very identity of these female characters stitched in cloth, and the way in which that identity disappears or is displaced.

Tisbé

As Chapter One and subsequent chapters including examples of women's clothwork in romance will illustrate, the Classical World and its literature served as an important basis from which medieval authors could glean inspiration for their own works, moulded to fit into the themes of their present locations and time periods. A rewriting of *Pyramus and Thisbe* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, dated around 1170 and included in the *Ovide Moralisé*, is an example in which the classical tale is imitated in a different and Christian context. This is the story of two young lovers separated by a wall that contains a crevice through which they can communicate with and catch small glimpses of each other. However, their parents do not approve of their love affair and forbid them from being together. As a precursor to Romeo

and Juliet, Pyramus and Thisbe decide to run off together, meeting outside of their homes under a tree. The climax of the original tale reads as follows:

It was dark, and deftly Thisbe turned the lock
And reached the street *unseen and, closely veiled*,
Came to the tomb and sat beneath the tree.
Love made her bold. But lo! a lioness,
Her jaws all bloody from a recent kill,
Came to the spring nearby to slake her thirst.
In the bright moonlight Thisbe watched her come
And fled in terror to a shadowy cave,
And running dropped her shawl. The savage beast
Drank deep and quenched her thirst, then, turning back
Into the woods, chanced on the delicate wrap
(But not the girl!) and with her bloody jaws
Tore it. Arriving later, Pyramus
Saw the beast's footprints plain in the deep dust,
And staggered and turned pale; then found the shawl
All bloody on the ground, and cried [...] ⁴ (IV. ll. 91-107, my emphasis.)

The anonymously penned Old French version, *Piramus et Tisbé*, is much longer and more involved in the early passion of the two protagonists, yet the storyline is kept intact, and the lovers come to the same disastrous end as in the original Ovidian version. When Piramus sees Tisbé's *guimpe*⁵, all bloody on the ground surrounded by the lioness' tracks, he interprets this to mean that his lover has been killed. Thus, the blood upon the cloth represents blood upon Tisbé's lifeless body. In this scene of recognition, Piramus 'Trueve la guimpe *defolee* \ Et de nouvel ensanglente, \ Cuide que soit du sanc s'amie'⁶ (He finds the *torn* veil newly covered in blood and

⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 77.

⁵ 'Guimpe', in *Old French – English Dictionary*, ed. Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, & Brian J. Levy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 355: 'wimple, head-dress; veil; pennant fixed to a lance'.

⁶ *Ovide Moralisé: poème du commencement de quatorzième siècle*, ed. C. de Boer. (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1920). All English translations are my own.

believes it to be the blood of his friend) (IV ll. 922-4, my emphasis). This *guimpe*, in lieu of communicating an intended message from Tisbé, serves as a clothbody for the woman herself. In this moment of recognition, Piramus, with the inability to gaze upon the physical body of Tisbé, replaces her identity and body with this cloth.

For this *guimpe* to be understood as a clothbody, it must be codified as a tangible and temporary disruption of Tisbé's body and identity. In the first case, this cloth is not attached to Tisbé's physical body, and neither exist in the same physical space in which they are codependently legitimised by the gaze of Piramus, meaning that the clothbody is allowed to exist independently from Tisbé. This legitimisation is significant as Tisbé is without identification from the moment that she leaves the patriarchal domain of her father. Wandering into the liminal space of the forest, where her father's name and influence do not reach, Tisbé becomes unidentifiable and trapped between classification as a daughter and classification as a wife. This tension of misidentification is clearly seen in the description of Tisbé's initial and active movement; in Ovid's version she slips into the night 'unseen and closely veiled' (IV l. 94), and in the medieval retelling she is described as moving 'Sole par nuit' (Alone by night) (IV l. 860). She is alone and incognito, unseen in the night, unprotected and unlegitimised by the gaze of a male character.

In this scene, Tisbé does not exist in any patriarchal sphere, and once the clothbody becomes representative of her physical body, she can no longer turn back and rejoin the household of her father. As seen in the excerpt above, when Piramus finds the veil it is described as 'defolee' and 'nouvel ensanglantee'. The word *defolee*, here translated as 'torn', equally calls to mind the term 'deflower', or in modern French 'déflorer', and the fact that

the veil is also newly covered in blood hints at the fact that this *guimpe*, while signifying a dead body to Piramus in one instance, likewise alludes to Tisbé's loss of virginity in the tearing and bleeding of her hymen. Tisbé recognises the part she plays in risking her good name and maidenhood early on in the tale when she visits a temple of Venus in order to pray to the goddess of love to allow her the opportunity to talk to Piramus. She says to herself, 'Tisbé, fole, veulz tu desver? \ Veulz ta chasteé violer \ Et ton lignage vergonder? \ Non faire!' (Tisbé, you fool, are you crazy? Do you want to lose your chastity and forsake your family? Don't do it!) (IV ll. 464-7), and yet she equally states, speaking indirectly to Piramus, 'vos vo ge mon pucelage' (I want to give you my virginity) (IV l. 259). The idea that she should have agency over her own chastity is interesting here, but as the end of the tale makes clear, it must be her father and family that give their consent and approval. In choosing to leave her father's home under the cover of night to meet and run away with her lover, she loses both her chastity and her patriarchal identification. In this attempt at agency the author is quick to tell (in Tisbé's own ventriloquised voice) his audience that she forsakes and shames her family. This is a treacherous and damning action as both her metaphorical and actual death (wherein she takes her life once she discovers Piramus) are born of this treason. Tisbé herself speaks of her mistake once she finds the near-dead Piramus clutching her *guimpe*; she cites herself as the cause of Piramus' death saying, 'Nuit pale, \ Qui enseigne me feïs male, \ Quant sui issue de la sale' (Pale night that shows me what I have done wrong in leaving the room) (IV ll. 1085-7). It is her movement outside of the home that has determined her fate, and the *guimpe* has played its part as a stand-in for both her chastity and her physical body.

In terms of how the character of Piramus reads and treats this *guimpe* as Tisbé's body, one must look to their agreement to meet outside of the home. When the two lovers are still in the homes of their respective parents and speaking through a crevice in a wall, Piramus tells Tisbé that when they leave and go to the forest: 'Se trouverai le vostre cors' (There I will find your body) (IV l. 812). He determines in this conversation that he will find her *cors* (body) in the location of their rendezvous. What Piramus eventually finds of her is only her veil covered in blood, and this cloth represents her body for Piramus. Tisbé is indeed the veil in the eyes of Piramus as he states:

'M'esperance, m'amours, m'atente! \ Hé, Diex, quel duel me represente \ Ceste guimpe que voi sanglente!' (My wish, my love, my intended! Oh, God, what horror is shown to me by this veil that I see covered in blood!) (IV ll. 946-8).

At the realisation of his lover's presumed death, Piramus, clutching Tisbé's veil, drives his sword through himself. Tisbé, after overcoming her initial fright, returns to the spot where she is to meet Piramus, and upon seeing the fate of Piramus, recognises herself in her abandoned and blood-soaked *guimpe*. She understands his thoughts and his actions in the way that he clutches her representative dead body.

Le jovenciel ot sanglotir,
 Plaindre, geindre, trere souspir,
 Voit la guimpe come il la touch
 D'ores en autres a sa bouche,
 Et quant ele aperçoit la plaie,
 N'est merveille s'ele s'esmaie. (IV ll.1045-50, my emphasis.)

(The young man covered in blood, whimpering, moaning, and sighing, *she sees the veil and how he touches it*, having already had it at his mouth, and when she sees the wound, it is no wonder that she begins to grieve.)

The veil, as a representation of a lifeless Tisbé, is thus not only identified and understood by Piramus, but by Tisbé herself. Tisbé is passive in her

reassigned identity; she did not purposefully drop her *guimpe* in order to communicate with Piramus. However, when she returns, Piramus opens his eyes and sees that she is alive. At this point, the *guimpe* ceases to define her for Piramus, but because Piramus is dying and because Tisbé has lost the protection of her father's household, she has no other choice but to mimic the actions of Piramus. 'Mors nos joindra, ce m'est a vis.' (Death will join us, this is my view) (IV l. 1106), she says, and Tisbé takes the sword that pierced the heart of her lover and pierces her own heart, making her physical body like that of her clothbody: mutilated and blood-stained.

Now that the temporality and independent existence of the *guimpe* has been established, it is crucial to regard the treatment of the clothbody by Piramus. A critical aspect of this particular Old French poem is a theme that is repeated time and again in the contemporary romance literature: the fetishisation of a piece of cloth in the place of a female body. In both the Classical and Old French versions of the story, Piramus kisses the *guimpe* before killing himself, allying the kisses with the love he feels for Tisbé. In Ovid's version he: 'seized the shawl and bore it to the tree, \ The shady trysting tree, and poured his tears \ And kisses on the soft familiar silk' (IV. 116-8), and in the Old French version, Piramus kisses the cloth and the blood and clutches this clothbody of his lover in death as a representation of Tisbé herself:

Si a la guimpe sus levee
En son la more de l'espee,
Beise la guimpe et puis le sanc;
Tresperce soi parmi le flanc ;
Tresque de l'autre part del cors
Fet aparoir l'espee fors.
Entrues qu'il muert *bese la guimpe.*
Si faite amours a mort le simple ! (IV ll. 1009-16, my emphasis)

(Here he lifts the veil up to himself with the point of his sword, and he *kisses the veil and then the blood*. He stabs himself in one side and out the other, showing the strength of his sword. And as he dies, *he kisses the veil*. Here love makes death all the easier!)

Piramus treats the *guimpe* as he would treat the physical body of his beloved, and so the veil temporarily physically replaces Tisbé. Here, cloth is seen to physically embody a female protagonist, particularly in the mind of her male counterpart. It is in this moment of misunderstanding due to a hastily dropped piece of fabric that the action of this tragic romance takes place. Tisbé's *guimpe* defines her as a lover in the eyes of Piramus, and because the veil is spattered with blood from the kill of the lioness, it defines her as a dead or defiled woman, sacrificed for love. She, in escaping the house of her father in order to marry her lover, has died a most tragic death, and that story can be read through the cloth that her lover clutches as he takes his own life. Moreover, Tisbé is absent from this moment of physical love, the clothbody serving its purpose for her lover, and she is denied the opportunity to enact reciprocal love for Piramus, which undermines her agency in love.

Tisbé has attempted to identifiably exist in a liminal space, between the house of her father and the house of her lover, between identification as a daughter and identification as a wife. She firstly symbolically dies through the gaze of Piramus upon her bloody *guimpe*, and then physically dies as she takes her own life, unable to exist without the definition of a patriarch, her father whom she has forsaken or Piramus, her now lifeless lover. From the moment she left the house of her father, she became unrecognisable as herself, and the identity of her body is passively reassigned to her veil, only to be rejoined with her body once it is too late to remedy her mistake. She

does not belong to either household at the end of the tale, and the disruption of her identity that the clothbody causes brings about her tragic end. Tisbé exemplifies a feminine inability to physically and identifiably exist outside of a domestic space, thus she is replaced by a physical feminine object that takes on the representation of her female body. The following example of Soredamors contrasts with this tale of Tisbé's death, as Soredamors does not physically leave the domestic sphere, even in a transitional period such as Tisbé; however, she is easily comparable with Tisbé in the way in which her clothbody takes away her agency, as it is interpreted and treated as if it were her physical body without her knowledge or consent.

Soredamors

In *Cligès*, Chrétien de Troyes begins the story of a knight named Cligès by first recounting the story of his mother and father, Alixandre and Soredamors. Alixandre is the Prince of Greece, and he refuses any other knighthood than that given by King Arthur of Britain. While in the service of King Arthur, Alixandre falls in love with Soredamors, the niece of Sir Gawain. Soredamors, though she scorns the very idea of love, finds herself falling in love with Alixandre. Both characters keep their love a secret, telling no one, especially not each other, but on a voyage to Brittany with King Arthur they are often in each other's company and fail to hide their emotions. However, Queen Guinevere mistakes their lovesickness for seasickness upon the ship, and so their love for each other remains a secret. The queen has great admiration for Alixandre, as does King Arthur, who knights him before they have returned from Brittany so that Alixandre may serve him well in the battle against the treacherous *cuens Angrés* (the Count

of Angers) whom Arthur left in charge of the kingdom in his absence, and who is now determined to take the kingdom for himself permanently.

Wishing to congratulate Alixandre on his knighthood, Guinevere unknowingly gifts him a shirt into which Soredamors has embroidered her golden hair next to *fil d'or*:

Fere li veult .I. bel servise,
Molt fu plus granz qu'ele ne cuide.
Trestouz ses escrits cerche et vuide
Tant c'une chemise en a traite
De soie blanche, molt bien faite,
Molt deliee et molt sutil.
Es coutures n'avoit nul fil
Ne fust d'or ou d'argent au meins.
Au coudre avoit mise ses mains
Soredamors, ce m'est avis,
S'avoit entre Cousu par fis
Lez l'or de son chief .I. chevol
Et en la manche et au col,
Por savoir et por esprover
Se ja porroit ame trover
Qui l'un de l'autre en devisast,
Tant clerement i ravisast,
Car autant ou plus que li ors
Estoit li cheveus clers et sors.
La reïne prist la chemise,
Si l'a Alixandre tramise.⁷ (ll. 1144-64)

(Guinevere wishes to give [Alixandre] great favour, even greater in fact than she could have known. She rummages through all the trunks which she empties until she pulls out a well-made shirt of white silk, very fine and elegant. One could see no thread in the sleeves that was not of gold or at least silver. It is my understanding that Soredamors had worked on its sewing. She had crossed together parts of the golden thread with one of her golden hairs on the sleeves and at the collar with the intention of seeing if anyone could distinguish the one from the other by looking at them close up because her hair, as much as or even more than gold, shone and glowed. The queen

⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans: suivis des chansons aec, en appendice, Philomena*, ed. by Michel Zink (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994). All English translations for *Cligès* are my own.

took the shirt, and she took it to Alixandre.)

After days of battle, Alixandre is in the quarters of the queen because he has delivered prisoners of war to her for their trial, and it is here that Soredamors recognises the *chemise* that Alixandre wears and her own handiwork in the embroidery. Where the *fil d'or* has faded from its wear in battle, the golden hair of Soredamors has only grown more brilliant. She struggles internally with the question of whether or not she should approach him about the shirt, but is eventually saved from her dilemma by the entrance of the king and queen. In the presence of both of the lovers, the queen realises her error in mistaking their lovesickness for seasickness as they pale and blush in each other's company on land. Guinevere also recognises the shirt in this moment and sees the faded *fil d'or* and 'Si li sovint par aventure \Que fete avoit cele costure \Soredamors, et si s'en rist.' ('She suddenly remembers that it was Soredamors who had sewn this shirt, and she begins to laugh.') (ll. 1559-61) Guinevere questions Soredamors about her hand in embroidering the shirt that Alixandre wears in the presence of both lovers, and Soredamors blushing identifies the embroidered hair in the *chemise* as the product of her own handiwork.

La pucele a del dire honte,
Neporquant volentiers li conte,
Car bien veult que le voir en oie
Cil qui de l'oïr a tel joie,
Quant ele li conte et devise
La feture de la chemise,
Que a grant peine se retarde,
La ou il le chevol esgarde,
Qu'il ne l'aoure et encline. (ll. 1601-9)

(The girl is shy to tell him the story willingly even though she wishes [Alixandre] to hear the truth, that which he would have so much joy to hear. When she tells him and describes the creation of the shirt, he refrains with

great difficulty to adore and show reverence to the shirt while contemplating the hair.)

Though Soredamors is passive in one instance—the shirt having been given without her knowledge or consent—her agency is found in her admitting to the action of the embroidered hair. She does not speak out to Alixandre when she realises that he is wearing the *chemise* that she has worked on, even though she wishes to address him (and engages in a tumultuous inner struggle over it). Even in the above excerpt, one can see that she still does not tell him all that she wants to tell him; she refuses to admit her love for Alixandre, even in this moment of confession. Guinevere, who in this particular work is portrayed as a woman of equal influence as her husband (as seen by Alixandre’s attempt to bring prisoners of war directly to her rather than to Arthur) possesses the power to facilitate the vocal exchange between the two lovers. It is she who creates the moment in which Soredamors allows herself to admit to Alixandre that the handiwork and hair embroidered in the *chemise* are her own. Thus, at the behest of Guinevere, Soredamors uses her female agency to define herself as the creator of the shirt, that which Alixandre subsequently fetishises and which then in turn becomes her temporal clothbody. Guinevere, through this gift of the shirt to Alixandre at his knighting and her insistence that Soredamors tell him the truth of the shirt’s making, creates this instance in which Soredamors is physically replaced by the *chemise* in Alixandre’s eyes and hands.

For once Alixandre has left the queen and Soredamors, he falls to kissing the *chemise* over and over again as if it were Soredamors herself: ‘Plus de .C.M. foiz le baise, \Quant de la reïne est tornez’ (He kisses it more than one hundred thousand times upon returning from the queen) (ll. 1622-3). Through this action, Alixandre replaces the physical body of Soredamors

with the silken fabric of the shirt, and it is the fact that she has embroidered her golden hair into it that makes his fetishising of her clothbody all the more fervent. By kissing the shirt, a physical act on the part of Alixandre, the shirt comes to symbolise Soredamors for him, and he even sleeps with the shirt, holding it all through the night: 'Toute nuit la chemise enbrace, \ Et quant il le chevol remire, \ De tout le mont cuide estre sire' (All through the night he embraces the shirt, and when he muses over the hair, he thinks himself the master of the world) (ll. 1630-2). Thus, as E. Jane Burns states, 'the product of her [Soredamors'] careful handiwork becomes a highly fetishized replacement for the lady herself'⁸; and just as Piramus kisses the *guimpe* of Tisbé that is covered in what he supposes to be her blood, Alixandre, in a less tragic turn of events, kisses the *chemise* that contains the hair of his lover, merging her body with cloth.

Though Soredamors has willingly mingled a piece of her body (her hair) with cloth, her agency in love is diminished as she is unable to reciprocate her love for Alixandre, and this leads to a disruption in the trajectory of her identity insofar as it is associated with her true physical body. Her clothbody is acted upon as if it were her physical body, splitting her identity in two. In this way, her agency is equally diminished, as there is no language through which she can communicate with Alixandre even though he is able to enact a language of love upon her clothbody, moreover without her knowledge or consent. He is able to engage with the clothbody in private (seen above) and in public through the wearing of the shirt in battle. In this way, the *chemise* can be seen to become a sartorial body for Alixandre, yet it remains a clothbody for Soredamors as it was not actively

⁸ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 64.

employed by her in an attempt to adorn the body of Alixandre and it never adorns her own body. In terms of movement of the clothbody, Soredamors, unlike Tisbé, does not physically travel outside of the domestic space, but Alixandre does wear the shirt that contains her hair outside of the home and, moreover, in the male-dominated arena of battle. While he is in battle, Soredamors hears from the window what she believes to be Alixandre's tragic end:

Or cuide bien que mar fu nee
Soredamors, qui ot le cri
Et la plainte de son ami.
De l'angoisse et de la douleur
Pert le memoire et la coulor,
Et ce la grieve molt et blece
Qu'ele n'ose de sa destrece
Demostrer semblant en apert. (ll. 2076-83)

(But Soredamors believes herself truly cursed as she hears the cries and laments for her friend. The torment and the pain remove all her sense and colour, and it overwhelms and bruises her so that she cannot dare to openly show her distress.)

Soredamors' belief that Alixandre has perished in battle occurs after she knows that he wears and possesses the shirt that she has embroidered; however, it is before she has told him of her love for him and before she has had a chance to equally participate in the physical love that Alixandre has already enacted upon the shirt. Thus, as with Soredamors' initial hesitation to reveal to Alixandre her creative power in embroidering the *chemise*, she here realises that she must continue to hide her feelings, even those of mourning, for he does not know what his wearing of her hair and dying with it on his body means to Soredamors. In the end, she does love and is loved by Alixandre, who survives the wounds of battle, and *Cligès* continues on with the story of their son.

Once Soredamors and Alixandre both pronounce their love for each other and are married, a social act of patriarchal belonging, Soredamors ceases to exist as her clothbody, and her true physical body is now adored and cherished by Alixandre. She is now defined (as wife, and later, mother) under a patriarchal roof, and her clothbody fades away. It is a temporal replacement for her physical body in the tangible treatment of it by Alixandre, and he identifies the *chemise* as Soredamors. Because his fetishisation of the clothbody is not a suitable permanent means of his participation in courtly love, it cannot continually stand in for the female protagonist. Through their marriage, the tension caused by the indeterminate and fragmented identity of Soredamors is rectified. She is definable and defined by the court, by Chrétien de Troyes, and by the audience as the wife of Alixandre and eventually the mother of the great knight Cligès. This romance is crucial to understanding the difference between a clothbody and a sartorial body, particularly in its opposition to the following episode contained in *Le Mort le Roi Artu*.

La Demoisele d'Escalot

Similar to Alixandre in *Cligès*, Lancelot in *La Mort le Roi Artu* also wears a cloth linked to feminine identity into a masculine arena—a tournament—and the lady who gives him this cloth, like Soredamors, does not physically leave the domestic space. While the *demoisele d'Escalot's* part in *La Mort le Roi Artu* is brief, her actions are significant in terms of female identity in cloth. At the very beginning of this final, anonymously-penned installment in this particular Grail cycle, King Arthur has decided to hold a tournament in Winchester. He is warned by Agravain that Lancelot and

Guinevere are having an affair, and King Arthur, unbelieving, tells him to prove that this is true. Lancelot, wanting some solitude after telling Guinevere that he must now take a vow of chastity, rides away to stay the night in Escalot, and Agravain believes that this is to see Guinevere; however, he finds that Lancelot is staying with a *vavasour*⁹ in Escalot instead. The *vavasour*'s daughter, unnamed in this version but referred to as *la demoisele*, is madly in love with Lancelot and makes a request of him. Without knowing what she asks, he agrees to ride in the forthcoming tournament with a silk sleeve atop his helmet, 'en leu de panoncel', instead of a plume or pennant, as a means of showing her favour and his devotion to her. He is worried that Guinevere will see this as a betrayal, but as he has already promised to do so, he rides in the tournament with the *manche*, or sleeve atop his helmet (a sartorially masculine object).

Vos m'avez otroié que vos porteroiz a ce
tornoiement ma manche destre en leu de
panoncel desus vostre hiaume et feroiz d'armes
por l'amor de moi. (v. 14)¹⁰

(You have promised to wear my right sleeve on
your helmet at the tournament instead of a
plume, and to bear arms through love for me.)

In performing his favour for the *demoisele*, he is completely unrecognizable as himself to the other people at the tournament, and thus Guinevere is not initially angry with him. However, people cannot stop talking about the knight with the sleeve, and Gawain attempts to find out the

⁹ The vassal or tenant of a baron.

¹⁰ *La Mort le Roi Artu: Roman de XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Jean Frappier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1954). All English translations for this text are provided by James Cable from *The Death of King Arthur*, trans. by James Cable (London: Penguin Group, 1971) and will be referenced as: Cable, p. 30.

true identity of this knight. He recognises Lancelot's shield, and proceeds to tell King Arthur that Lancelot and Guinevere cannot be having an affair because he is taken by the fair maiden to whom the sleeve belongs. Gawain then sets off for Escalot and is so taken with the *demoisele* that he attempts to seduce her, and he finds out that she is in love with Lancelot and that she is the owner of the sleeve. When Lancelot, still recovering from his wounds of the tournament, is brought to Escalot to recover, the *demoisele* confesses her love for him and tries to convince him to marry her. He refuses repeatedly, and leaves quickly for Camelot. She is so distraught that she goes to bed and never gets up again, dying seemingly of a broken heart.

E. Jane Burns uses this episode to introduce her work of *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* and to illustrate her discussion on sartorial bodies, and while this instance of the *demoisele's* sleeve can certainly be seen from this point of view, there are a few aspects of the silk sleeve that must be addressed under the term of clothbody rather than sartorial body. Burns suggests that:

When a lady gives her sleeve or scarf, by contrast, she enacts a different kind of bodily fragmentation, aptly deploying a portion of her own dress to assert visibly *her* amorous desire through cloth. In this instance, the medieval heroine's body is no longer represented as seductive flesh covered, however thinly, by costly clothes. Rather, clothing is something she deploys to suggest the possibility of an alternative system of female passion, pleasure, and love service, signaling the lady's will, her command, her gift and contract. Instead of shaping her body, this key article of female attire marks the lady's potentially substantial influence in shaping the course of courtly love.¹¹

¹¹ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 10.

The way in which the lady gives her silk sleeve away in order to raise her social status and enact her love through the cloth is unequivocally understood as a sartorial body, and her attempted active participation in a courtly love relationship is easily understood. However, her activity is undermined and her agency is diminished, as can be seen by the ways in which this silk sleeve can be interpreted as a clothbody.

As a sartorial body, when the lady gives her silk sleeve to Lancelot to wear during the tournament, it is meant to define her possession of Lancelot's heart and represent her love. She truly does, to use Burns' own words, forge a new body from 'sartorial corporeality' as an extension of 'the flesh of [a] literary protagonist symbolically and ideologically.'¹² However, as a clothbody, it is entirely detached from her own physicality, thus it does not adorn her body and it is a tangible object given to another person. By deploying the fabric in this way, it gives her the agency to exist outside of the home, though she is never physically outside. Moreover, the lady 'exists' then in the very masculine environment of the tournament, and Lancelot undertakes the task of moving the lady from the domestic to the public sphere as he removes her sleeve from the home and chooses to place this representation of her on his helmet during the tournament. Burns illustrates this point by stating that, 'the lady's sleeve serves as a surrogate for her inspiring presence'¹³ wherein the cloth takes the place of the lady herself. This is crucial to understanding the sleeve as a clothbody and as a sartorial body as those present at the tournament read the cloth as representative of a woman of high status. However, this sleeve becomes solely a clothbody in its inability to exist continually as representative of either Lancelot's invisible

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

identity or the *demoisele's* pretended identity. The clothbody ceases to hold its power once the true identities of both Lancelot and the *demoisele* are discovered.

As Lancelot rides in the tournament the silk sleeve becomes his sartorial body as it is seamlessly linked to his physical body; however, it can also be read as his clothbody in that his identity is temporarily subsumed by the cloth in that it completely redefines him and temporarily disrupts the trajectory of his true identity. He is no longer Lancelot del Lac, he is *cil chevalier qui porte cele manche*, and though he continues to be seen as a great knight, matching only his own true reputation, no one recognises him. He is referred to as the knight with the silk sleeve atop his helmet, and thus the identity of the *demoisele* supersedes his own identity as Lancelot del Lac. In response to King Arthur's question of who the knight who is winning the tournament can be, Gawain states: 'Certes, sire, je ne sei qui cil chevaliers est qui porte cele manche desus son hiaume' (Indeed, my lord, I do not know who that knight is who is wearing the sleeve on his helmet) (v. 20), and Gaheris adds, 'ge ne cuit pas que gel connoisse; mais tant di ge bien que c'est li mieudres chevaliers del monde au mien escient ne que ge onques veïsse, fors seulement Lancelot del Lac' ('I do not think I know him, but nevertheless I can say that he is the best knight in the world I have ever heard of or seen, except only to Lancelot del Lac') (v. 20, my emphasis).¹⁴ Burns points out how in this episode the lady dresses the knight up in her own clothes, facilitating 'border crossings of both gender and class'¹⁵ respectively. However, while the *demoisele* does succeed in *annonce*-ing herself as a woman of high status through the replacement of the *panoncel* with her feminine sleeve, without

¹⁴ Cable, p. 36.

¹⁵ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 5.

the reciprocal love of Lancelot it ceases to act in the way that she intended. The sleeve can no longer stand on its own as a love token, nor as an embodiment of her pretended identity. Moreover, once her physical body is identified by Gawain as the owner of the *manche*, the sleeve ceases to act as a clothbody, ceases to identify her, and she physically dies of heartbreak. Thus, the interference of both of these very masculine characters undermines her ability to exist within this cloth and allow it to permanently change her social status.

Likewise, the clothbody does not continually define Lancelot, as he is divorced from the classification placed upon him by the audience of the tournament once Gawain discovers who he is. His refusal to engage in a courtly love relationship with the *demoisele* completely removes him from any connection to the sleeve that might exist. Thus, the *demoisele's* actions and voice are undermined by Lancelot's nonparticipation. The femininity of the object itself, a delicate, silk sleeve, cannot permanently subsume the hyper-masculine armour of Lancelot, and this can be understood as a message of the instability that arises when women attempt to write their own courtly love story. Where Burns' definition of the sleeve as a sartorial body paints an inspiring picture of feminine voice and agency, of a feminine object subsuming a masculine identity, the author of *La Mort le Roi Artu* portrays the anxieties of this type of performance, and the *demoisele* fails in her attempt at autonomy. This silk sleeve is then seen as a clothbody in its temporality, particularly in its temporary disruption of the identity of two of the characters. Firstly, no one at the tournament realises that the sleeve belongs to the daughter of the *vavasour*, thus she is excluded from this particular scene of courtly love; a knight wears the favour of a maiden, and no one recognises it as hers. Secondly, Lancelot is not defined as himself,

thus his wearing of the sleeve does not carry the impact that the *demoisele* intended, but rather disrupts Lancelot's identity. It is only when he is discovered as the wearer of the sleeve that it matters whether or not he loves the *demoisele*, and as he does not, the sleeve exits the romance, as does the woman.

The argument of identity in cloth is then crucial in the thirteenth-century work of *La Mort le Roi Artu*, as the lady creates a sartorial body and attempts to control an external situation through the use of cloth, a cloth whose material further denotes her assumed noble status. Through this temporarily acquired power, the lady asserts her feelings for Lancelot and places the marker of her adoration on his body—a very masculine body in armour—and in so doing she causes his true identity to be erased and replaced with the identity of the sleeve. She, unlike the two previous examples of Tisbé and Soredamors, actively employs her own sartorial identity in cloth by rewriting her nobility through the use of silk material. However, because this silk sleeve is divorced from her physical body and placed in the hands of a male protagonist, the *demoisele* loses her autonomy and control over the situation and her clothbody's perception. As seen in the story of Tisbé, fabric cannot carry a woman's identity forever, and when Lancelot does not return her love and make her his bride, the *demoisele d'Escalot* can no longer survive outside of the domestic sphere in her assumed noble identity. In the following example of Fresne, there is another instance of a feminine existence of identity in fabric. Fresne's noble status is not feigned, as with the *demoisele d'Escalot*, but it has been lost, and she fashions for herself a public identity in cloth.

One of the most compelling examples of a woman identified by cloth is that of the medieval heroine, Fresne, whose story is told in two different works from roughly the same time period: the *lai* entitled *Le Fraisne* by Marie de France and Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*. While both versions have the same root in the story of twin girls, parted at birth, one to be raised at home with her true parents—Coldre¹⁶—and the other—Fresne—who is abandoned and raised in a convent, the stories diverge in their telling of the feats of Fresne.¹⁷ Though Renaut's version is later than that of Marie de France, Phillip Walter states that, '[c]omme ce roman [Galeran de Bretagne] contient des éléments inconnus de Marie de France, on peut supposer l'existence d'une tradition folklorique commune et antérieure aux deux textes.'¹⁸ There is a popular and recurring theme throughout Old French literature of a child torn from its home and identity and forced to grow up and find his or her true self.¹⁹ Where Marie de France claims that she took inspiration for her *lais* from stories she had heard, citing an oral tradition, *Galeran de Bretagne* resembles much more the courtly romances of such authors as Chrétien de Troyes or Jean Renart.²⁰ In order to understand the ways in which this one story's interpretation can change and diverge from another due to its variant

¹⁶ Coldre's name in *Galeran de Bretagne* is Flourie.

¹⁷ Marie de France's *lais* are dated in the late twelfth century, and Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne* is dated in the early thirteenth century.

¹⁸ As referenced by Bernard Sergent, *L'origine celtique des Lais de Marie de France* (Genève: Droz, 2014), p. 81.

¹⁹ Examples include *Octavian*, *Le Chevalier au Cigne*, the lay of *Emaré*, the lay of *Dégaré*, and *Pastorella* from *The Fairie Queene*, and various medieval fairy tales and oral traditions of the legend of foundlings.

²⁰ Renaut, *Galeran de Bretagne*, ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 2009) pp. 9-12. It was thought that the author who calls himself 'Renaus' at the end of *Galeran de Bretagne* was in fact Renart, the author of *L'Escoufle* and *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* (also treated in this study). Jean Dufournet refutes this claim in his introduction to *Galeran de Bretagne* by citing Lars Lindvall's study on the topic.

forms, it would be pertinent to begin with an exploration of Marie de France's more well-known version of the tale of Fresne.

In the *lai* of *Le Fraisne* by Marie de France, a jealous woman accuses her neighbour of adultery because she has just given birth to twin boys. She spreads a rumour that the only way to give birth to twins is to have lain with two different men, and as fate would have it, the jealous woman gives birth to twin girls not long after she has publicly shamed her neighbour. In fear of being seen as an adulteress and reaping the consequences of her sin of slander, the woman secretly abandons one of the baby girls under an ash tree near a convent, where the child is raised; this child is Fresne. The mother has wrapped the baby in a decorative, silk cloth with an *anel*, or ring, to alert whoever finds this child that she is of noble birth. The mention and description of the cloth are of particular importance:

En un chief de mult bon cheinsil
envelopent l'enfant gentil
e desus un paile roë;
sis sire li ot aporté
de Costentinoble u il fu;
unques si bon n'orent veü. (*Fraisne*, ll. 121-6)²¹

(They wrap the child of noble birth in a fine cloth of linen and cover her with a silk cloth adorned with rosettes that the lord had brought back from a sojourn in Constantinople. No one had ever seen such a beautiful cloth.)

The elegance of the cloth and the way in which it is described here leads to the conclusion that it was most likely not worked on by Fresne's mother, but imported as a luxury item by Fresne's father. It does, however, connote

²¹ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke and trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990). All English translations are my own.

Fresne's noble identity as an 'enfant gentil', and its definitive luxury aids Fresne's eventual redefinition as a member of the family that abandoned her.

Fresne is found in an ash tree by a porter of an abbey, and she grows up in the convent and falls in love with a passing knight named Goron; however, she cannot marry him because she does not have a known, noble pedigree, thus she becomes a mistress in his household. Goron's vassals pressure him to find a suitable wife so that he can produce heirs, and he is soon betrothed to another woman, Fresne's twin sister. Fresne, out of love and devotion to Goron, prepares the marriage bed that he will share with his new wife, and as she has deemed the coverlet unsuitable, she remakes the bed with the cloth that her mother wrapped her in as a child, one of the only markers of her lost nobility that she possesses:

Quant le lit orent apresté,
un covertur unt sus jeté.
Li dras esteit d'un vieil bofu.
La dameisele l'a veü.
N'ert mie bons, ceo li sembla;
en sun curage l'en pesa.
Un cofre ovri, sun paile prist,
sur le lit sun seignur le mist.
Pur lui honurer le faiseit. (*Fraisne*, ll. 407-15)

(When the bed was prepared they covered it with a faded silken cloth which Fresne saw. It was not very good, it seemed to her, and it weighed upon her mind. She opened a trunk and pulled out her cloth of silk which she placed on the bed of her lord to honour him.)

This *paile*²² is a marker of her true identity, something that she has kept with her throughout her life. In this moment of complete sacrifice and selflessness, Fresne is shown as a good and noble woman; she would give

²² 'Paile' in *Old French-English Dictionary*, ed. by Hindley, Langley, & Levy, p. 464: 'rich silken brocade, embroidered silk(s)'.

anything to make the life of Goron better and honour him. Moreover, 'le sacrifice volontaire de Fresne devient la source de son bonheur.'²³ After Fresne has made this sacrifice, her mother enters with Coldre to prepare her for her wedding night and recognises the cloth upon the bed, at which point she sends for the woman who placed it there and finds Fresne, her long-lost daughter. Though Fresne's mother has not made the cloth, it speaks to her of her past actions. Fresne's mother, upon seeing the beautiful *paille sur le lit*, recalls what she has done and 'Idunc li remembra de li; \tuz li curages li fremi' (And in this way she remembers her [Fresne], her emotions cause her to tremble) (*Fraisne*, l. 427-8). Her employment of the cloth is still crucial to its classification as a clothbody representative of Fresne. Once her mother makes the connection between Fresne's physical body and the cloth, and her nobility is rediscovered, the cloth is an identifying object of nobility that allows Fresne to marry the love of her life, for she now perceivably belongs to a higher social status than she did before the reunion with her family. Her selflessness and good behaviour lead to the ultimate reward, and Fresne marries Goron, remaining his wife forevermore.

The story of Fresne's birth and abandonment in *Galeran de Bretagne* is fundamentally the same but diverges from the *lai* in many ways, beginning with the way in which she meets Goron, known as Galeran in this version. Galeran is the nephew of the abbess who raises Fresne as her goddaughter at the convent, and the two grow up together and fall in love. Once they have professed their feelings for each other and to their shared godfather, Galeran's parents die, and he must leave the convent and Fresne. Galeran must become a great knight to rule Brittany, and he is away for years at a time. He consistently sends messengers back to the convent in order to tell

²³ Ernest Hœpffner, *Lais de Marie de France* (Paris: Boivin, 1935) p. 117.

Fresne that he has not, and never will, forget her. The abbess becomes suspicious and does not approve of Galeran's intention to wed Fresne, who is without any noble identity save the objects and money with which she was abandoned in the ash tree. She confronts Fresne and banishes her from the convent. In this way, Fresne is forced to make her own way in the world, and she travels around France finding lodging and work both as a minstrel and a seamstress. A mother and daughter take Fresne into their home, and she teaches the daughter, named Rose, to work cloth, as Fresne is an incredibly gifted seamstress. Galeran loses hope that Fresne is alive, and upon pressure to marry and produce heirs for his kingdom, he chooses a woman he has encountered who looks exactly like Fresne in every way: her twin sister, Flourie. When word spreads far and wide that Galeran is to marry Flourie, Fresne becomes distressed and decides to arrive at the wedding herself to see if Galeran still loves her. En route, she cuts up the opulent cloth in which she was wrapped as an infant and sews it into a beautiful dress to wear at the wedding.

Fresne fait un tapiz a terre
Qu'el leur fait destrosser, estendre:
Sus va son drap tailler et fendre;
Prent le, sel fent et si le taille;
Oncques ouvriers a mains de taille
Ne taille robe comme ceste.
En pencee a qu'elle s'en veste;
S'en a taillé mantel et cote.
En son cuer l'en tient Rose a sote:
S'a fait oultrage, ce ly semble.
De fil d'or et de soie ensemble
Ont la robe si bel cousue
Com s'elle fust ainsi tissue,
Car l'euvre com davant y pert;
Si sont li quartier si apert,

Ou les ymages sont pourtraictes,
Com s'elles fussent arsoir faictes (*Galeran*, l. 6744-60)

(Fresne puts a rug on the floor with the intention of measuring and cutting up her cloth. No clothworker had ever measured and cut a dress like this. Thinking of how she would dress herself, she also measures a coat and a tunic. In her heart, Rose thinks her mad: what she has done seems ridiculous. Together they sew the dress with golden thread and silk, and it seems that it had been woven so as to be a dress. Nothing is lost from the work as it previously was, so much so that the quarters and the embroidered pictures look as if they had been made the previous evening.)

When she arrives at the wedding, her face covered by *un gyumple blanche*, everyone marvels at her beauty, and her mother, Gente, recognises the fabric of the dress on this veiled figure and remembers her act of abandoning her child. Through the recognition of the cloth, Gente finds her long-lost daughter, confesses her sin to her husband, and Fresne is reunited with Galeran.

There is a particular emphasis on two pieces of cloth in the romance of *Galeran de Bretagne*, one being this opulent and identifying *paille*, and the other being a *manche* upon which Fresne embroiders her own image to send to Galeran when they are separated and she is still living at the convent. Both of these pieces of cloth can be interpreted as clothbodies of Fresne, though the cloth from her infancy diverges slightly in this classification. By making the cloth into a dress, it becomes a sartorial body for Fresne, more in line with Burns' classification of the deployment of cloth in dress physically connected to the body to create a public social status. Fresne wears a fabric that she knows to identify her as a noble woman as she states: 'Ce drap note moult hault linage, \[...\] Bien le me moustre ceste enseigne \ Qui me tesmoigne a gentil fame' (This cloth indicates a noble birth [...] it is the decisive proof that confirms that I am a noble woman) (*Galeran*, l. 3970; ll. 3974-5). This highly

feminine object of embroidered silk is recognised by Fresne as a marker of her true identity, and, in an effort to realise her true self, she physically wears the identifying cloth against her skin, thus creating a social body for herself as she enters the wedding.

Crucially, Galeran does not initially recognise Fresne by the cloth that she wears - that recognition comes from her mother, she who has made the cloth in which she wrapped her baby, she who says: 'En cest drap esprouvé mon cuer' (In this cloth, I placed my whole heart) (*Galeran*, l. 7463). This cloth carries a shared language between mother and daughter, and while, from the perspective of Fresne, it can be viewed as a sartorial body, in the recognition and treatment of the cloth by Gente, the fabric is a clothbody, for both her daughter and for herself. The first time that Gente recognises the fabric of the dress at the wedding is described as such:

D'une pensee se confront
Et d'une chose se prent garde,
Que le drap de la robe esgarde;
Sil va visant destre et senestre;
Si se merveille que puet estre
Qui celi fist le drap avoir,
Qu'elle voit bien et scet de voir
Qu'elle y a les ymages faictes
Et les hystoires enz pourtraictes;
Bien scet que li drapz est de s'euvre. (*Galeran*, ll. 7112-21)

(One thought confronts her, one thing puts her on her guard, that of the fabric of the dress that she sees and examines from every angle. She wonders how it could be that this woman has the cloth that she sees now and knows from sight that it was she who made those images and embroidered those stories. She knows without a doubt that the cloth is her work.)

It does not initially occur to Gente that the woman wearing the dress is her daughter, thus it is divorced from the physical body of Fresne. Gente equates

the cloth with herself, inciting an important moment of relived memory. She remembers the work that she put into the cloth and remembers that she has been separated from the cloth by wrapping her daughter within it. This cloth speaks to Gente of a time long forgotten and recalls the initial description of the cloth in the beginning of the romance:

Encore en ce quartier ot Gente
Les eslemens par grant entente
Pourtraiz de soye et de fil d'or,
Le ciel, le feu luysant com or,
L'eaue et la terre avec partie
De ce dont Dieu l'avoit garnie ;
Toutes merveilles y avient,
Plus beau drap querre n'esconvient,
Mieulx tyssu, plus long ne plus lé ;
Ploié l'ont et envelopé
Et mis en ung drap de samit ;
Soubz le chief a l'enfant petit
L'ont par le gré la dame mis :
Ou qu'en le let, s'il n'est maumis,
Bien pourra l'en du drap veoir.
L'enfant est né de grant pouoir. (Galeran, l. 543-58, my emphasis)

(In the last trimester, Gente, by a work of rare ingenuity, had portrayed in silk and golden thread the sky, fire as brilliant as gold, the water, and the earth with a part that was full of the creatures God had made and placed there. It lacked no wonder, and a more beautiful cloth could never be found, nor a better fabric, none longer nor larger. They fold and envelope the baby in a cloth of samite. Underneath its head, they place a pillow according to the will of the lady. Leaving the baby where no misfortune could befall her, *one could see well by this fabric that she is of noble birth.*)

Thus, the first mention of the cloth is a brilliant portraiture of Gente working the cloth, and when Fresne is reunited with her mother, memory is a key element in the reconnaissance of the mother and daughter. The baby is not meant to die, but rather the sacrifice of giving such an opulent and well-

made cloth to her daughter shows a maternal aspect to Gente, and Fresne is meant to be recognised as a noble child once she is discovered in the ash tree.

Equally, when Gente confesses her sin to her husband, Brundoré, she talks of a baby that she abandoned who was wrapped 'd'un chier drap, qui travaillier \Me fist plus de quatre ans entiers' (A beautiful cloth, on which I worked for more than four whole years) (*Galeran*, ll. 7438-9). She induces the memory of her husband as well, saying:

Et se vous cuidiez que je mente,
Que que je mettoie m'entente
El drap de soie et d'or pourtraire,
De ce vous vueil je sage faire,
Maintes foiz venistes seoir
Delez moy pour l'euvre veoir,
Si devisiez les hystoires. (*Galeran*, l. 7447-7453)

(And if you believe that I am lying about how I applied myself to the illustrations in silk and gold thread on the cloth, those which I wish you to remember well, many times you came and sat next to me to see the work and guess at the stories.)

Gente reminds her husband of her clothwork; she reminds him of her virtuosity and duty after confessing her abandonment of their child. Thus, after admitting that she has done wrong, she reminds him of all that she has done right. She shows herself within her clothwork, which she sent away from her long ago, and equally associates her abandoned daughter with that clothwork, showing how the cloth is the material counterpart to their daughter. Brundoré, in this way, is able to read his memory of this clothwork and associate it further with the identity of his missing daughter. Fresne's noble and patriarchal identity are tied to the cloth that she wears, the cloth that her mother has made, and therefore she is able to rejoin her noble family.

The female characters explored in this chapter are all searching to belong somewhere or to someone, and once they do, the cloth that represents them is no longer needed as a marker of identity. They have been incorporated into a particular patriarchal sphere by which their identity is defined, thus the clothbody is truly an interim marker of physical identity. In *Cligès*, Soredamors is no longer physically treated as the hair-embroidered *chemise* once Alixandre has taken her as his wife. The *demoisele d'Escalot* does not receive reciprocal love from Lancelot, and therefore she does not continue to be defined by her silken sleeve and the identity that she has created therein ceases to be. Tisbé falls between being defined as a daughter and being defined as a wife, and the identity that was embodied in her *guimpe* is lost once Piramus sees her again as she takes her own life. Fresne, though she has lost her noble identity as an abandoned child, regains her patriarchal identification through her clothbody, and the cloth then loses its identifying significance because her physical body is once more recognised by her mother, and she is reincorporated into the patriarchal family by her father. Fresne, once she regains her noble status through patriarchal recognition, becomes defined as 'wife' in her marriage to Galeran. In fact, the clothbody of the dress seems inseparable from her ability to be traditionally identified as the noble daughter of Brundoré and Gente in that 'Tout aussi com Fresne est vestue \De sa robe qui riche est tant \La mainent au moustier hasant' (Just as Fresne is clothed in her rich dress, they go quickly now to the church) (*Galeran*, ll. 7688-90). Fresne does not take off the clothbody until it has served its purpose in returning her lost noble identity, at which point she is properly identified by two patriarchal households, firstly her father's, in order to be a suitable wife for Galeran, and then secondly Galeran's as he takes her as his wife.

The tension of unidentified women in Marie de France's *lai* is underlined by the implication that Fresne cannot produce legitimate heirs for Goron. His vassals compare the two sisters to their eponymous trees, the ash tree (*le frêne*) and the hazel tree (*le coudrier*) stating their unforgiving attitude towards Fresne's lack of nobility: 'Pur le Fraisne que vus larrez \en eschange la Coldre avrez. \En la coldre a noiz e deduiz, \li fraisnes ne porte unkes fruiz' (Leave Fresne to have Coldre in exchange. For the hazel tree gives nuts, and the ash tree does not bear any fruit) (*Fraisne*, l. 347-50). In this type of language, it is clear that they prefer Coldre to Fresne. However, the social anxiety underlined in *Galeran de Bretagne* manifests itself as an unease regarding the capabilities of a self-sufficient and independent woman that is rectified by her assignment to the house of her beloved. This resolved tension is seen in the fact that, after this wedding, after the clothbody created by her mother ceases to exist, Fresne no longer speaks. Where she once traveled throughout France independently and successfully, vocally defending and representing herself to her godfather, her godmother, and many people on her journey, her story ends, as does her voice, in marriage. In fact, the second piece of clothwork that is given a significant focus in *Galeran de Bretagne*, the silk *manche* through which she communicates with Galeran when they are separated, is lost indefinitely within the plot of the romance.

This silk *manche* upon which Fresne embroiders her own image serves as a means of communication between the two lovers after their separation. When Galeran first leaves the convent, Fresne mourns her loss saying that: 'Je ne le sieu ne ne convoy, \Ne je ne parole a li mie.' (I am not there nor do I go with him, I cannot even speak to him a single word) (*Galeran*, ll. 2620-1). Her physical absence from Galeran and her inability to communicate with him seems to be the crux of her misery, and the way in which she rectifies

this loss is to find a new means of being with the man that she loves, albeit not physically:

A celui que tant puet amer,
C'est le bon Galeren le Bret,
Veulst envoyer par le varlet
Une seue manche bien faicte,
Ou elle a de fin or pourtraicte
S'yimage et sa harpe a son coul. (*Galeran*, ll. 3156-61)

(She wants to send to the one whom she loves so much, that is, the generous Galeran the Breton, by way of a squire, one of her well-sewn sleeves upon which she had embroidered in fine, golden thread her portrait with her harp around her neck.)

This episode creates an important distinction from all of the other examples of feminine identity in cloth included in this chapter. Here Fresne is communicating through cloth, actively allowing herself to be perceived and gazed upon *as* the cloth. Both Tisbé and Soredamors are not in control of their lovers' perception and fetishising of their defining fabric, and their identification is passive rather than active. They acknowledge themselves in the cloth, but neither of them exercises their autonomy in a way that gives them the power of perception. The *demoisele d'Escalot*, on the other hand, does use her agency to create an identity for herself in the silk sleeve as it becomes her sartorial body rather than her clothbody. However, the difference between the *demoisele* and Fresne lies in the fact that the *demoisele* is creating an identity for herself in her silken sleeve in order to recast herself as belonging to a different social class, rather than using it to solely communicate her love to Lancelot. Fresne creates an image of herself in cloth in order to find a way to *exist* with Galeran when she cannot physically be present. She says to the messenger: 'Mettez ceste manche en vo saing, \Et dictes que je li envoy, \Si li souvendra mieulx de moy' (Put this sleeve on

your chest and tell [Galeran] that I am sending it to him so that he will remember me better) (*Galeran*, ll. 3182-4). Thus, Fresne is able to communicate with Galeran and be with him in the form of her actively created clothbody.

Nevertheless, this creation of a clothbody temporarily disrupts her identity in her physical body, and as the men in these stories of clothbodies are wont to do, Galeran takes the cloth and treats it as if it were the physical body of Fresne, kissing it over and over again. He even goes so explicitly far as to say upon receiving the *manche*: ‘Ycy est Fresne la plaisant \[...\] \Or est acreü mes tresors, \Quant j’ay Fresne cy avec moy’ (*Here is the charming Fresne, I am richer now that I have Fresne here with me*) (*Galeran*, l. 3236; ll. 3242-3, my emphasis). Additionally, after years of possessing the sleeve, Galeran justifies his treatment and adoration of the sleeve in that it not only contains the image of Fresne, but the fact that she has made it means that she has physically placed herself in the cloth. Galeran says: ‘Fresne l’a tyssue a ses mains \S’en y a fait ne plus ne mains \Qu’il a en li, si la ressemble’ (Fresne embroidered it with her own hands, she put into it neither more nor less than she is herself, and it resembles her) (*Galeran*, ll. 5297-9). She has created this clothbody and given it to Galeran, which leads to his fetishisation of this *manche* and his treatment of it in a very physical form of erotic love.

Galeren a la manche prise,
A ses yeux l’a moult trestost mise,
Baisee l’a, puis la reploie ;
En une touaille de soie
L’envelope, puis la met puer
Dedens son sein contre son cuer :
La la garda plus de sept ans. (*Galeran*, ll. 3271-7)

(Galeran takes the sleeve and immediately places it under his eyes and kisses it, then he folds it, wraps it in a silk cloth, and places it on his chest against

his heart where he keeps it for more than seven years.)

He continually treats this sleeve as if it were Fresne throughout the years that they are separated. Words like *baise*, *embrace*, *taste*, and *racole* show the physicality and sensuality of the love he feels for Fresne and how he bestows that love on the clothbody.

Souvent desploie et souvent *taste*
Galeren la manche s'amie,
Quant sa meignee est endormie ;
Souvent *racole* et souvent *baise*, (*Galeran*, ll. 3626-39)

(When his suite had fallen asleep, Galeran often unfolds and *touches* the sleeve of his friend. He often *hugs* it against himself and *kisses* it.)

In both of the above passages, it is clear that Fresne's physical absence is filled for Galeran in the form of her self-portrait in cloth. Thus, outside of her relegated domestic sphere, Fresne is identified as a lover through this clothbody. By sending this clothwork, Fresne uses her agency to convey a message of love, desire, and possession of Galeran's heart.

Moreover, the portraiture in which she chooses to embroider herself into the cloth, that of a love poet, gives her even more power and voice, which is later echoed in her movement outside of the home once she is banished from the convent. Throughout the romance, Fresne is cast as a great clothworker:

Fresne avoit a ouvrier apris :
N'ot telle ouvriere jusqu'en Pouille
Com elle est de tistre et d'aguille ;
Si sot faire oeuvres de manieres,
Laz et tissuz, et aulmosnieres,
Et draz ouvrés de soye et d'or
Qui bien valaient ung tresor. (*Galeran*, ll. 1158-64)

(Fresne had learned to work with her hands. No clothmaker from here to Pouillé was better able to embroider and sew. She is capable of making things of all sorts: ropes and belts, alms-purses and cloth embroidered in silk and gold that have the value of treasure.)

However, she is equally portrayed as a great musician. Thus, Fresne's embroidered self-portraiture as a poet with the lyre around her neck is crucial to the understanding of her autonomy when she is without the identity of her family, of the convent, or of Galeran. Fresne is empowered by her lack of definition; she actively portrays herself and gains agency in doing so.

However, a tension over her independence and lack of patriarchal identification is shown in her constant wearing of her *blanche guimpe*, which is mentioned frequently throughout the text. The reason for her wearing the *guimpe* is clearly stated by Renaut: 'D'une blanche guymple ausques lee \ Lie son chief tout environ, \ Et dessus met son chapperon, \ Pour ce qu'aucuns ne la congnoisse' (She covers her face entirely with a fairly large white veil and puts her hood on top so that no one would recognise her) (*Galeran*, ll. 6794-7), thus her true identity is hidden and further concealed in that she has changed her name to Mahaut. Through these actions of renaming and concealment, Fresne is physically effaced by the *guimpe* as her true identity resides in the *manche*. Where the sleeve pictures her face, the *guimpe* covers it, and this underlines the ability of the clothbody to replace the actual identity of a woman, causing her identity to be disrupted and split.

In this instance of the creation of the *manche* as clothbody, it is important to note that, though she does have a voice in song and written words, she chooses to 'write' to her lover in a more feminine voice of image and thread. She keeps her agency in this instance as the image 'does not in

fact depict her as an object of desire but as a desiring subject, a love poet, with the harp around her neck.²⁴ In this way, the sleeve can be understood as her sartorial body rather than her clothbody as she, like the *demoisele d'Escalot*, changes the course of courtly love. Fresne succeeds in controlling her identification outside of the domestic sphere in this way, and she actively relays a message of love to Galeran. As this self-portraiture is sent outside of the domestic home to be 'read' — and cherished — by a male lover, it defines Fresne in many variant ways; she is seen as a lover, a composer, and a learned woman. However, Fresne, by sending this image of herself out into the masculine community, allows it to replace her physically and so it becomes a clothbody that temporarily disrupts her identifiable interaction with Galeran and diminishes the agency she has created for herself. Just as Gente has lost control over what happens to the clothbody she created for Fresne, Fresne has no control over how her clothbody is treated by Galeran. Though she wants Galeran to understand her portraiture as a physical representation of herself, she takes her true self out of the love equation in this action of fragmentation. The clothbody disrupts her agency in that she has no say in how it will be treated, and she, just as is the case with Tisbé and Soredamors, is not receiving any reciprocal, physical love from Galeran.

In fact, the clothbody of the *manche* does not cease to represent Fresne for Galeran until the moment that he is reunited with the real Fresne, rather it ceases to do so when he finds a more suitable replacement for her in her twin sister. The moment he meets Flourie, and she raises her *guimpe* from her face, he immediately kisses and fetishises her as he has done with the *manche*. He states: 'Par foy, greindre resons me semble \ A la pucelle de ceens \ Qu'a l'ymage, qui est niens \ Envers li' (Well, it seems more reasonable

²⁴ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 9.

to me to embrace the girl of this house rather than the image which is nothing compared to her [Flourie]) (*Galeran*, ll. 5300-3), showing a direct correlation between the image of Fresne in her sister and the image she has made of herself in the *manche*. This is a significant moment in that Galeran had never before worn Fresne's sleeve into tournaments because he 'se doubtat ou il la peüst moult tost perdre' (fears that some misfortune would soon make him lose it) (5032-3). After he meets Flourie, and invariably exchanges the sleeve as a representational Fresne for Flourie's physical body, he does fly the *manche* in a tournament, and is inspired by the image upon it in a way that Lancelot is not inspired by the *demoisele's* sleeve. However, he then, fulfilling his prophecy, loses the sleeve. He seemingly no longer worries about losing the sleeve with the image of Fresne because he has found a new object to fetishise in her place, that object being her sister who equally reflects Fresne's image. While this significantly undermines Flourie's agency as she is initially acted upon without her consent and unknowingly exists for Galeran solely as the replacement of Fresne, it also undermines Fresne's agency in that the object that she created for Galeran in order to be with him loses its potency, and she is physically replaced by another woman. Thus, the clothbody as a tangible fragmentation of Fresne's body and identity is temporal, only existing so long as Galeran continues to view it as Fresne.

Fresne, in both *Le Fraisne* and *Galeran de Bretagne*, serves as a perfect example of a woman defined by cloth, gifted by a mother's hands and possessed by a lover. She is able to actively communicate with her lover and passively with her birth mother, and in doing so, Fresne is able to become a noble wife. She encapsulates an interesting dichotomy between the woman who is passively defined by cloth and the woman who actively asserts her

identity through cloth; these two different identifications are linked in the character of Fresne, particularly in Renaut's version. Both Fresne and the *demoisele d'Escalot* employ cloth as sartorial bodies as a means of self-definition, and both do so in order to send a message of love, though the *demoisele d'Escalot* creates a false identity where Fresne truthfully portrays her talents as a poet. However, Fresne in *Galeran de Bretagne* and *Le Fraisne* is passively identified in cloth in the same way as Tisbé; both of these female characters are able to recognise themselves in the cloth that has touched their bodies, but are not able to move past that identification in cloth until another person (the lover or the mother) has identified the cloth as an indicator of their identities. Soredamors is a special case in that she recognises herself in the cloth before Alixandre does, and it is the recognition of Guinevere that leads to the fetishising of her clothbody by Alixandre. Soredamors is unable to control the reception of her identity in the cloth that contains her hair and is passively identified in the material of the *chemise*, and moreover, just as with Fresne and Tisbé, the fetishisation of her fragmented body and identity are outwith her control and diminish her autonomy and agency.

Conclusion

With regard to female expression and voice, it is imperative that one takes into account the ways in which women define themselves and are defined by those around them, especially in considering the undercurrent of anxiety surrounding the agency and autonomy that romantic female characters possess or misuse. Though all the female characters described in this chapter differ in the way that their clothbodies are received and employed, they all share a common story of redefinition by and through

cloth, and this relates directly to their categorisation and codification into the courtly story at the end of each tale. Each woman's personal and individual movement outside of the home facilitates an instance in which they can be redefined by something other than the patriarchal spheres of their fathers, lovers, or husbands. These moments of redefinition create instances in which the woman can be physically replaced by cloth, be identified by another party in cloth, or create a new identity for herself through cloth or clothwork, however temporarily. Nevertheless, the fragmentation of the feminine body or identity included in these romances undermines the agency of each woman, as she cannot have full control over her clothbody once it is physically separated from her and placed in the hands of a male counterpart. Though each of these women are presented as strong and active characters, each of them falls into a category that incites anxiety about feminine autonomy. Tisbé takes the initiative to leave her father's home and give herself to whomsoever she wishes, and this leads to her displaced identity in a *guimpe* which causes her death and the death of her lover. Soredamors refuses to love anyone but is normalised into a marriage with Alixandre, and the catalyst for this relationship is her hair-embroidered *chemise*. The *demoiselle d'Escalot* attempts to write herself into a courtly love relationship through the active employment of a silk *manche*, but fails to succeed in capturing the heart of Lancelot and dies of despair. Fresne in *Galeran de Bretagne* moves freely outside of the domestic sphere, but always with her face hidden by a *guimpe*, and when she eventually finds her long-lost family and nobility through her *paille*, it only serves to make her a suitable wife for Galeran and her story ends. Fresne's *manche*, though actively employed as well, also undermines her as it writes her out of her own courtly romance through the fetishisation enacted upon it by Galeran.

Fetishisation of cloth occurs in three of the romances regarded in this chapter: *Piramus et Tisbé*, *Cligès*, and *Galeran de Bretagne*. In each of these tales, the male lover kisses the cloth that contains some physical part of the woman herself, and her body is replaced by woven material and her identity is disrupted. Piramus kisses the *guimple* of Tisbé that is soaked in her supposed blood, Alixandre kisses the *chemise* which contains the golden hair of Soredamors, and Galeran kisses the sleeve upon which Fresne has embroidered an image of herself. These examples of fractured female bodies raise an interesting question about the identity of women outside of the home. Each of these three female characters enacts some form of desire in the story of their clothbody: Tisbé is attempting to steer her own life and choose a suitor for herself without the approval of her family, Soredamors' work upon the *chemise* is in an attempt to see if anyone can tell the difference between her golden hair and *fil d'or*, and Fresne actively shows Galeran her desire through the embroidering of her own image. However, while this could be seen as allowing female characters to enact sexual desire and engagement with their lovers, as would be understood from Burns' definition of sartorial bodies, these women all have that desire and agency undermined by the way in which their temporal clothbodies are engaged with, treated, or identified by the male character. The women are temporarily written out of their own plot. Furthermore, that each male character can accept these pieces of cloth as a replacement for the physical presence of the women that they love, leads to the conclusion that the women could not identifiably exist in these other realms, particularly because none of them are married to their male counterpart at the time of this fetishisation. They do not belong to the men in name, thus they do not belong under their patriarchal domain. Tisbé has left her father's home, Fresne is without

familial definition as an orphan, and Soredamors is still under the patriarchal name of her uncle, Sir Gawain. As the male lovers replace these female characters with a symbolic representation, the women's powers are diminished in that they still do not physically and socially belong to their lovers, thus the love enacted upon their clothbodies does not reach their physical bodies.

This leads directly into the passive identification of women in cloth. Tisbé, for example, did not purposefully leave behind her veil in the hopes that Piramus would recognise it as belonging to her. His assumption of her death and subsequent suicide are the result of a tragic misinterpretation. In a less catastrophic turn of events, Fresne, in both *Galeran de Bretagne* and *Le Fraisne*, has her identity interpreted through cloth without her active participation. Her mother, after wrapping her in an elegant cloth, abandons her, and when they are reunited, Fresne is not initially recognised in her physical form in either version, rather her mother connects the cloth to herself and her own story and then to the physical body of Fresne. In this way, the mother identifies the woman with the cloth as her abandoned daughter. In the case of Tisbé, there is a physical replacement of a woman's body with cloth, due largely to the fact that a piece or representation of the woman's body is in the cloth itself. However, in both Tisbé's and Fresne's cases, the woman's identity is perceived in cloth, not solely because of a physical marker of the body in the cloth, such as hair or blood, but because they have belonged on the physical body of the woman and trigger memories of that cloth being on the female body. Piramus remembers seeing the veil on Tisbé's body through the crevice in the wall that separated them before their failed rendezvous. Fresne's mother remembers the act of abandoning her child and wrapping her in the luxurious cloth. Through

these cloth-induced memories, both Tisbé and Fresne are externally identified, and subsequently come to recognise themselves in the cloth: Tisbé concluding why Piramus has killed himself by the way he clutches her *guimpe* and Fresne finding her family and true noble identity.

Contrasting with the external and passive identification of Fresne and Tisbé are the examples of women who actively create an identity for themselves. The *demoisele d'Escalot* and Fresne from *Galeran de Bretagne* both actively employ cloth in order to assert an identity in the public sphere. In this way, they exist, if only temporarily, outside of the domestic sphere. In *La Mort le Roi Artu*, the lady employs a silken sleeve atop the helmet of Lancelot in order to assert her feigned nobility. It appears in the public sphere as if this unknown knight who rides with a silken sleeve as a marker of identity is promised to a very beautiful and rich woman who could afford to give away a piece of such an opulent fabric. As Burns cogently illustrates, the lady attempts to rise above her social class through the silk sleeve, and by attaching it to a very masculine and well-known figure, she hopes to move from the sphere of her *vavasour* father into the domestic home of Lancelot. Though this assertion of identity is only temporary, it is especially compelling in that she disrupts the identity of even such a great knight as Lancelot by redefining her own identity. The fact that she does not succeed in attaining a higher social standing or the love of Lancelot, however, may be a comment on society's anxiety over a woman's ability to lie and be cunningly manipulative, and thus there is a moral underlying this subversion of her true identity. In *Galeran de Bretagne*, Fresne is not only fetishised by the cloth into which she has woven her self-portrait, but she also writes her own identity in that cloth. By portraying herself with a harp around her neck, Fresne identifies herself as a poet, which seemingly becomes a reality as she

travels outside of the home as a troubadour and seamstress. Her courtly character is striking in this instance as she knows how to read and write, yet she chooses to 'write' in the more strictly feminine form of embroidery. She has made this clothbody for Galeran, and in this way, she exists with him outside of the domestic sphere, if only temporarily in this fragmentation of her identity.

Though each of these romances differs in the storyline and the outcome of the female character, they all share a common thread of identity in cloth. Some are externally identified by other characters leading to an internal identification and recognition of themselves in cloth, some are physically replaced by cloth, that cloth being fetishised in the place of their bodies, and some are even able to create an identity or a fragmentation of themselves in cloth that temporarily succeeds in existing outside of the domestic sphere. All of these instances of an identity created in cloth are significant in their ability to exist in an inanimate material source, but the temporality of the clothbodies highlights the societal anxieties surrounding female autonomy and agency. Even in moments of independence or anonymity, these women are relegated by the limitations surrounding patriarchal identification. At times without their consent, these women are identified or treated as a piece of cloth that they have made or that has touched their skin, undermining their ability to control what happens to their bodies. Nevertheless, by defining themselves or being defined by fabric, these female characters do assert their feminine presence in a predominantly masculine world.

Chapter Three: Voice, Voicelessness, and Violence in Cunning Creations

'Speaking (crying out, yelling, tearing the air, rage drove me to this endlessly) doesn't leave traces: you can speak – it evaporates, ears are made for not hearing, voices get lost. But writing! Establishing a contract with time. Noting! Making yourself noticed!!!'

- Hélène Cixous
'Coming to Writing'¹

Introduction

Finding feminine voices throughout much of Old French romance proves difficult, as often Old French heroines are relatively silent, particularly in their depiction in the public sphere. Furthermore, much of the dialogue involving a female character that takes place in romance is in relation to or incited by a more vocal male character. Because feminine voices are often muted, this chapter's intention is to look past the predictable speech acts of female characters and find voice in a more creative medium, such as in clothwork. Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, in *Weaving the Word*, has presented many literary women across cultures and time periods in order to show how they can be considered authors, as the act of weaving becomes synonymous with writing, while the woven artifact becomes representative of a text.² This parallel between weaving and writing is important, particularly with regard to Jean Renart's metaphorical clothwork in his *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, which will be further explored in Chapter Four of this study. Equally, the way in which Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé present

¹ Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in *'Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*, ed. by Deborah Jenson and trans. by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, & Susan Sellers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 15.

² Kruger, p. 55.

women's work in their own literary works, which is the focus of Chapter Five, following this weaving and writing parallel.

This third chapter examines three female characters in order to better understand how medieval authors in particular comment on voice, authorship, and agency insofar as they relate to clothwork. *Philomena*, attributed to Chrétien de Troyes, and *L'Aüstic*, a *lai* by Marie de France, both reimagine the myth of Procne, Tereus, and Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, appropriating the Classical tradition and recasting it as medieval. Both the lady from *L'Aüstic* and the character of Philomena break through the patriarchal barriers meant to contain or suppress them and use their enforced physical voicelessness to their advantage in order to speak through clothwork. Lienors, from Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, equally uses her own clothwork in order to create a time and space for herself in which she has the opportunity to audibly speak out against the patriarchal system that has ruined her. All of these female characters, through their own cunning creations, find a way to rectify their enforced voicelessness.

For these three texts, there is a significant emphasis on the dichotomy presented by the quotation of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich included in the introduction to this present study, that of oppression and expression. Each of the female characters discussed in this chapter is oppressed vocally by the patriarchal sphere in which her respective domestic sphere is encompassed. Each female character in turn, through expression in clothwork, frees herself from the patriarchal oppression that is enforced upon her, asserting her own female voice in the male-dominated public sphere and allowing her voice, her desires, and her truths to be perpetuated by the cloth that she works.

Movement is an important factor in each of these romances, not solely the physical movement of the female body between spheres, as was the case with the female characters discussed in Chapter Two, but movement of cloth as a means of communication. Where the clothbodies of the female characters in the previous chapter allow them to symbolically exist outside of the domestic sphere, the tapestry of Philomena, the embroidered *piece de samit* of the lady of *L'Äüstic*, and the embroidered objects of Lienors allow the heroines of these romances to communicate with people in the public sphere, though they do not, for the most part, leave the home. All of the objects are treated as messages, and each of these examples of female communication in cloth passes not simply from the hands of the maker to the hands of the intended recipient, but is also carried by a third party who acts as a liminal participant in the women's act of communication, a person who creates a bridge between the domestic and the public spheres.

Additionally, all three of the romances included in this chapter have a crucial element of violence in them, including rape, physical mutilation and abuse, and threat of death, and all of these are enacted by the male protagonist in response to a feminine act of agency and autonomy, which reveals underlying anxieties about the ways in which women are controlled. Philomena enacts her agency through her refusal to lose her virginity to her brother-in-law, the lady of *L'Äüstic* is seen at a window that opens into the public sphere in which her lover resides, and Lienors supposedly intentionally gives away her virtue to a lowly seneschal. These acts of agency (or presumed agency) incite violence, and the female characters all employ their clothwork in direct response to violent acts, which allows for an important discourse about the ability or inability of women to speak about the abuse and violence that has been enacted upon them. Moreover, the

feminine medium of communication and expression in clothwork to which they all resort highlights, to a certain extent, the limitations surrounding a woman's ability to be heard beyond the confines of the domestic sphere, even in matters pertaining to violence or danger.

All three examples of clothwork examined in this chapter are markers of expression born of oppression, and each artefact represents far more than creativity, especially in its communicative capacity. These romances present cunning and knowledgeable women, who, rather than resigning themselves to their domestic space and their codification as objects, reject their enforced barriers and create a voice for themselves with needle and thread in order to redefine themselves as speaking subjects. They find a way to write in a feminine voice and medium.

Philomena

A mid-to-late twelfth-century recreation³ of Ovid's original myth from his *Metamorphoses* presents a female character of vast intelligence and creativity who is raped and muted by her brother-in-law. The story begins with the king of Athens, Pandion, marrying his daughter Procne to Tereus, the king of Thrace, where they establish their home and have a son named Itys. After some time away from Athens, Procne begins to yearn to see her sister, Philomena (Philomela in Ovid's original), and Procne asks Tereus if she might be allowed to leave Thrace in order to visit Athens. Tereus refuses her request, but he says that he will go in her stead and bring Philomena back to Thrace. When Tereus arrives in Athens, Pandion does not want his

³ The composition of the *Philomena* is commonly placed around the late 1160s, pre-dating Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian works.

daughter to leave him, but Philomena overhears Tereus' request and begs her father to let her leave and be with her sister. Pandion eventually agrees and places Philomena into the care of Tereus, who, upon seeing Philomena, is so overcome with lust that he immediately takes her back to his country by boat. Once they arrive in Thrace, he rapes Philomena, and when she threatens to tell everyone what he has done, he cuts out her tongue, literally taking away her words, and imprisons her. Tereus then returns home and falsely tells Procne her sister has died on the journey from Athens to Thrace, and Procne throws herself into mourning. Philomena, from her place of imprisonment, assaulted, ruined, and voiceless, hatches a plan to free herself from her entrapment, and as Ovid tells it:

[...] On a clumsy native loom
She wove a clever fabric, working words
In red on a white ground to tell the tale
Of wickedness, and, when it was complete,
Entrusted it to a woman and by signs
Asked her to take it to the queen; and she
Took it, as asked, to Procne, unaware
What it contained. The savage monarch's wife
Unrolled the cloth and read the tragic tale.⁴ (VI. ll. 580-8)

Once Procne realises that her sister is still alive and that this is a message from her, she disguises herself as a bacchanal⁵ and makes her way through the forest to the place where Philomena is imprisoned. Philomena, as she is physically voiceless, 'made her hands speak for her voice, to swear \By all the gods in heaven that her disgrace \Was forced on her' (VI. ll. 610-2), and they return to the castle together. Once they arrive, they plot to get revenge on

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵ A follower of Bacchus, the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Dionysus, the god of wine, theatre, and festival.

Tereus for the violence he has done to Philomena, and, violence breeding more violence, they kill Itys, the heir of Tereus and son of Procne, cook him, and serve him to Tereus. When Tereus asks where his son is, Procne gestures to Tereus' stomach, intimating that Itys is 'here', and Philomena arrives covered in blood with the decapitated head of Itys in her hands. At this point in the tale, Tereus begins to chase the two sisters with a dagger in an attempt to kill them, and all three of the protagonists are metamorphosed into birds: Procne becomes the swallow, Tereus becomes the hoopoe, and Philomena is forever changed into a nightingale, regaining her voice at last.

The medieval version of this narrative is attributed to Chrétien de Troyes through its inclusion in the much later early fourteenth-century work of the *Ovide Moralisé*. The author of the *Ovide Moralisé* states in his gloss to the tale: 'De Philomena faut le conte \ si come Crestiens la raconte' (The tale of Philomena is made here just as Chrétien tells it) (VI ll. 3685-6).⁶ There are many differences between Ovid's original version and the medieval version by Chrétien, which can be attributed to the fact that the tale is now being written through a new medieval and Christian lens, much as seen in the stories of Minerva in Chapter One of this study. The changes, however, do not seem to be solely based on the fact that Chrétien is writing from a Christian perspective, and Philomena is cast as a medieval heroine of romance. Additionally, if it is understood that this particular version was indeed written by Chrétien in the twelfth century and later copied in the fourteenth century by the author of the *Ovide Moralisé*, then the original medieval text is to be taken much more as a romance rather than as a didactic text, as the entire corpus of the fourteenth-century work is meant to be, and

⁶ *Ovide Moralisé: poème du commencement de quatorzième siècle*, ed. by C. de Boer (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1920). All English translations are my own.

Chrétien, as a writer of romance, produced this recreation of Ovid in the courtly narrative tradition of the High Middle Ages.

Firstly, as was referenced in the introduction to this study, Chrétien casts his character of Philomena in a much different light than do his near-contemporary authors, such as Chaucer and Boccaccio, and certainly than does Ovid. Ovid's Philomela is hardly even lauded for her excellence in weaving her tapestry, and Chaucer's Philomena is unlearned, she cannot read or write.⁷ Chrétien, on the other hand, expounds upon the brilliance of Philomena's weaving in direct correlation with her knowledge of Latin authors, reading, writing, and music:⁸

Avuec c'iert si bone ovriere
D'ovrer une porpre vermoille
Qu'an tot le mont n'ot sa paroille.
Un diaspre ou un baudequin,
Nes la mesniee Hellequin
Seüst ele an un drap portreire.
Des autors sot et de grameire
Et sot bien feire vers et letre
Et, quant li plot, li antremetre
Et del sautier et de la lire.⁹ (ll. 188-97)

(She was truly such a good weaver of vermillion purple that she had no equal in the entire world. Arabesques, frills, and even the Wild of Hunt of Hellquin's troop she knew how to represent in cloth. She knew authors, Latin, and how to compose verse and letters well, and when it pleased her, she played the psaltery and the lyre.)

⁷ See Introduction to this study, p. 8.

⁸ The way in which these skills are listed by Chrétien highlights the Seven Liberal Art of the Middle Ages as referenced in Chapter One of this study (p. 64), in relation to the Virgin Mary's portraiture as the Seat of Wisdom in Chartres Cathedral.

⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans: suivis des chansons avec, en appendice, Philomena*, dir. Michel Zink (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994). All English translations are my own.

As referenced by E. Jane Burns in *Bodytalk* and Nancy A. Jones in her chapter included in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance*,¹⁰ this is a prime opportunity to showcase the immense talents of Philomena that lead to her eventual escape from the prison enforced upon her by Tereus. Prior to her rape, she excelled in the arts, and Burns cogently points to the importance of Philomena's expressive hands: 'one can speak with the hands to produce images in weaving as one might also produce sounds in music, gestures in hawking, words in writing, all of which could substitute for meaningful speech and voice.'¹¹ Yet even more important than the fact that she can write and speak through her weaving is that this is correlated with the fact that she can also write letters. Though Chrétien keeps to the original story and does not change Philomena's medium of communication from the tapestry, he reframes the tale and the tapestry itself in a courtly context, providing a different emphasis on the tapestry and Philomena's choice to weave her message instead of write it traditionally. The direct juxtaposition of Philomena's technique and surpassing skill in weaving with her other talents, namely her music and her writing, underlines the significance of her chosen medium of communication, and in a very similar way to the fashion in which Arachne's skill in weaving is presented throughout the Middle Ages (discussed briefly in Chapter One and further in Chapter Five), Philomena's weaving is an *écriture féminine*.

Nancy A. Jones argues that a medieval reader's discomfort with the violence in the *Philomena* comes from the revenge she enacts upon Tereus

¹⁰ Nancy A. Jones, 'The Uses of Embroidery in the Romances of Jean Renart: Gender, History, Textuality', in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 13-44.

¹¹ E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) p. 123.

stating: 'while embroidery helps to establish Philomena as a courtly heroine and skilled narrative artist, her talent later serves to bring about a violent revenge against her rapist.'¹² However, it is crucial to the foundation of this entire romance to recognise that the violence is not necessarily born of Philomena's tapestry, rather it is catalysed by the violence of Tereus; Philomena's tapestry and the narrative it tells are strictly born of the violence enacted upon her, and it is not the tapestry itself that breeds the violence enacted upon Tereus by the two sisters, but rather their killing of Itys is bred by Tereus' initial act of violence toward Philomena. Ovid describes Tereus' locking Philomena in a cabin in the woods, and there he 'revealed his own black heart \ And ravished her a virgin, all alone' (VI ll. 521-2); she calls for help, and then 'She shivered like a little frightened lamb, \ Mauled by a grizzled wolf and cast aside, \ And still unable to believe it's safe' (VI ll. 525-7). In Chrétien's version, playing into the medieval courtly narrative in which it is set, Tereus proposes his love to Philomena, believing that he will have her consent in return, but knowing that even if he does not receive it he will have her nonetheless. The narrator, having knowingly presented Tereus as 'n'est bons ne frans ne douz, \ Ainz est mauvés, fel et estouz' (not good nor virtuous nor gentle, but bad, cruel, and violent) (ll. 757-8), says afterwards: 'Mes de tant fet viaus que cortois \ Que s'amor li requiert einçois \ Qu'il li forface nule rien' (But at the very least he was courtly enough to request her love before he did her any harm) (ll. 763-5). The courtly narrative here displays rape as an inevitability in this situation, and the true nature of Tereus cannot be changed, his 'black heart' will do what it wishes. The violence is presented through the unwarranted removal of Philomena's tongue, rather than through the violation of her vagina, though Burns does

¹² Jones, p. 23.

present the two as inseparable from each other, stating 'the *Philomena* makes most explicit the link between the female orifices of mouth and vagina and does so through the agency of textiles.'¹³ This is in keeping with the conclusions about this kind of narrative; the clothwork that stems from violence in the three romances included in this chapter is never in response to rape. It is in response to violently inflicted silence.

Once Tereus has raped Philomena, she tells him that he must repent, and the narrator tells us that 'proiere rien ne li vaut' (praying serves him nothing) (l. 835); the narrator goes on to say: 'Voir dist qui dist: "Toz jorz atret\Li uns maus l'autre et sel norrist"' (I suppose it is true what they say: one evil act always nourishes another) (ll. 840-1). Without any provocation:

Un canivet tranchant a pris,
Et por ce que cele ne puisse
Conter a home qu'ele truisse
Ceste honte ne cest reproche,
Dist que la langue de la boche
Li tranchera tot a un fes,
Si n'an sera parlé ja mes.
Cui avient une n'avient sole :
La langue li tret de la gole,
S'an tranche pres de la meitié.
Or a il mout mal espleitié
Et de ce et de l'autre chose.
An la meison la let anclose,
Ou cele plore et crie et bret. (ll. 846-55)

(In order to stop her from telling anyone of this dishonour and shame, he [Tereus] takes a sharp knife and says he will sever her tongue at once from her mouth so that this deed should never be spoken. When one [bad thing] comes it never comes alone, and he pulls her tongue from her mouth and cuts off nearly half of it. Here is the criminality, in one thing, then another. He abandons and imprisons her in a house where she cries, screams, and

¹³ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 116.

moans.)

The last word of this passage, *bret*, is a participle of the modern French verb *braire*, which can be translated as 'cry', but more often is used as 'bray' describing the unintelligible noises of animals. Philomena has had her language taken away, and this very intelligent young woman is now unintelligible: she brays like a donkey. Is it any wonder, then, that she changes her chosen medium of expression to weaving? Though she may not be able to speak audibly about her terror, she still chooses not to write it in lettered form either, and this leads to a second major change from the original version to the medieval version.

In Ovid's myth, Tereus locks Philomela away alone, and in her solitude she finds a way to communicate through her weaving; however, in the Old French version, Philomena is imprisoned with two women, a seamstress and her daughter. Chrétien tells us that Tereus rejoins his companions and that 'Sel celerent plus por cremor \ Que il ne firent por amor' (They remain silent [about the affair] more out of fear than out of love [for Tereus]) (ll. 865-7), yet still they are now complicit in his actions, which, in the courtly narrative tradition, represents a masculine-dominated community wherein the woman is violated, oppressed, and entrapped, unable to free herself from her situation, which is strikingly similar to the situation of Lienors in *Guillaume de Dole* explored later in this chapter. What Tereus has done in imprisoning Philomena to work with these women, however, is to create a female-dominated society within that household, and Chrétien alludes to the patriarchal anxieties provoked by the femininity

encapsulated within the *gynaecium*, which Georges Duby discusses in *Mâle Moyen Age*.¹⁴ The narrator states:

Mes Tereüs folie fist
Qui avuec Philomena mist
Por la garder une vilainne
Qui vivoit de sa propre painne,
Car filer et tistre savoit,
Et une soë fille avoit
Qu'ele aprenoit a son mestier. (ll. 867-73)

(But Tereus commits folly by leaving Philomena in the care of a peasant who lived by her own labour because she knew how to spin and weave, and she had a daughter to whom she taught her profession.)

Though the peasant woman swears to Tereus that she will not let Philomena out of her sight, and is obviously put in place by Tereus because 'il l'an croit' (he believes her) (l. 882), the narrator highlights the potential destructive power at play in the *gynaecium*, or the medieval equivalent, which would be a woman's workshop. Presumably, Tereus' folly in the original version stems from his leaving a loom lying around a cabin in the woods where he imprisons Philomena. In the medieval version, however, it is in imprisoning Philomena with other women who are under Tereus' power, as he is sovereign, and the fact that Philomena finds a way to communicate with them hints at an anxiety about women's vocal power. Though Philomena is voiceless, she:

Fist noviaus signes et trova
Et certainement esprova
Que sa mestre tot antandoit
Quanqu'ele onques li demandoit,
Ne ja ne li fust contredite

¹⁴ As referenced by Jones, p. 17.

Nul chose granz ne petite
Fors l'issue de la meison. (ll. 1147-53)

(Made and invented new signs that proved without a doubt that her guardian understood everything that she asked of her, as she did not deny her anything, big or small, except her leaving the house.)

Though 'la parole li deffaut' (she is deprived of words) (l. 1076), Philomena finds a way to communicate with the other women in the household, and interestingly, in the original version Philomena communicates with a messenger to send her tapestry to Procne: 'when it was complete, \[she] Entrusted it to a woman and by signs \ Asked her to take it to the queen.' (VI. l.583-5) In both versions, Philomena succeeds in communicating with another *woman* through signs, most likely with her hands, and when Procne comes to rescue Philomena 'She [Philomena] made her hands speak for her voice, to swear \ By all the gods in heaven that her disgrace \ Was forced on her' (VI. l. 611-3). Thus, there is a significant emphasis placed on the hands of Philomena in her ability to continually communicate, but strictly with women in these versions. This is crucial to the understanding of why Philomena chooses to communicate through threads rather than through written words.

In Ovid's version, Philomena's tapestry is presented as a direct result of the violence inflicted on her:

'[...] her speechless lips could tell
No tale of what was done. But there's a fund
Of talent in distress, and misery
Learns cunning. On a clumsy native loom
She wove a clever fabric, *working words*
In red on a white ground to tell the tale
Of wickedness [...]' (VI 577-83, my emphasis)

This is starkly different from Chrétien's retelling in which:

Aprés i fu la nés portreite
Ou Tereüs la mer passa
Quant querre a Athenes l'ala,
Et puis comant il se contint
An Athenes quant il i vint
Et comant il l'an amena,
Et puis comant il l'esforça,
Et comant il l'avoit leissiee
Quant la langue li ot tranchiee.
Tot ot escrit an la cortine,
Et la meison et la gaudine
Ou ele estoit anprisonee. (ll. 1122-33)

(After having represented the boat on which Tereus had sailed across the sea when he came to collect her in Athens, and then how he had behaved upon arrival there, and how he took her and then how he raped her, then how he had abandoned her after having cut out her tongue: all was written in the bedsheet, and the house and the forest where she was imprisoned.)

Where Philomena weaves words in the original, she writes in pictures in the medieval version; though 'Tot ot *escrit* an la cortine' (All was *written* in the bedsheet) (l. 1131, my emphasis), she writes pictographically in order to communicate with her sister. One could say that this was so that the woman with whom she was imprisoned would not know that it was a means of escape, but as this woman is clearly a peasant seamstress, she would not have been able to read it anyway; thus, a reasonable conclusion would be that Philomena is intentionally rejecting the patriarchal means of communication through words in order to communicate with her sister through this *écriture féminine*, and as literacy in images and orality are more

linked with the feminine, a man might not be able to interpret the message that the pictures tell in the same way as a woman would.¹⁵

In relation to the oppression and expression dichotomy at play in this particular romance, it is clear that the violent treatment of Philomena by a dominant man under patriarchal protection causes a rupture in her ability to take part in discourses deemed appropriate by that same dominant arena. That is to say, she has been stripped of an audible voice, but she can portray audible sounds through her weaving.¹⁶ Though she knows how to write, Philomena rejects that masculine-codified means of communication and decides instead to write pictorially with her warp and weft. In fact, the other women with whom Philomena is imprisoned help her to create this woven expression, seen very clearly in the following passage:

A une huche vient, si l'uevre,
Ou la vilainne avoit posees
Ses escheviauz et ses fusees,
Si les prant et si les desvuide
Et comance par grant estuide
S'uevre tel come il li sist.
La vieille ne li contredist,
Mes mout volantiers li eida
Et trestot quanqu'ele cuida
Qui a tel uevre covenist
Porchacier et querre li fist.
Trestot li quist son aparoil,

¹⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'The Last Painting', in *Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*, ed. Jenson, pp. 104-131 (p. 104): 'I would like to write like a painter, I would like to write like painting.' Cixous' essay highlights the ability that painters have to capture moments, imbued with memory and, in a sense, in the framework of storytelling. The visual nature of a painting, though it captures a specific moment and memory, is left open to interpretation, in the same way that Philomena's tapestry captures her memory and relays her message, though that message is only able to be read through Procne's visual interpretation.

¹⁶ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 122: 'Harlequin's troop was thought in the Middle Ages to be a band of suffering souls who, under the guidance of Hellequin, wandered through the night making a hideous racket. To portray them fully would require images and sounds, to relay voice through weaving or to make cloth speak.'

Tant que fil inde et fil vermoil
Et jaune et vert a planté ot,
Mes el ne conut ne ne sot
Rien de quanque cele tissoit ;
Mes l'uevre li abelissoit
Qui mout estoit a feire griés. (ll. 1102-19)

(She [Philomena] goes to a trunk where the peasant woman had stored her skeins and spools, and she opens it. She takes them, unwinds them, and commences her intended work with great application. The old woman does not impede her, but voluntarily helps her and procures for her everything that she thinks necessary for such work. She seeks out all the material for her and organises the blue, red, yellow, and green thread in abundance, but she grasped nothing of what Philomena wove. Yet the work pleased her; it was a difficult task.)

This woman and her daughter are under Tereus' rule, like his companions, who stay complicitly silent about Tereus' violent actions towards Philomena; yet the women help Philomena to create a work which aids in her escape from the patriarchal oppression enforced upon her. This collaboration leads one to question whether this particular female community of women reflects ideas about historical female oppression in relation to clothwork. The working conditions in which women were placed were those of mass production for which they were paid very little. This type of enclosed working environment recalls the scene in another of Chrétien's romances, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion*, thought to have been produced later than the *Philomena*, wherein Yvain, the hero of the romance, discovers a group of female seamstresses who have been imprisoned to work:

Et Mesire Yvains sans reponse
Par devant li s'en passe et troeve
Une grant sale haute et noeve ;
S'avoit devant un prael clos
De pex de chaisne agus et gros.
Et par entre les peus laiens

Voit pucheles jusqu'a trois chens
Qui dyverses oevres faisoient.
De fil d'or et de soie ouvroient
Chascune au mix qu'ele savoit.
Mais tel poverté y avoit
Que desliées et deschaintes
En y ot de poverté maintes. (ll. 5184-96)

(Without replying, my lord Yvain passes in front of him and finds a great new, lofty hall, outside which was a yard enclosed by huge round, pointed stakes; and looking inside between the stakes he sees up to three hundred maidens engaged in various kinds of work. Each one was sewing as best she could with gold thread and silk. But they were in such poverty that many of them were bare-headed and ungirdled, so poor were they.)¹⁷

This juxtaposing imagery, of poor women working with opulent fabric, paints a picture of how the textile industry may have been viewed as exploitative in the twelfth century, a time in which men were taking over the craft guilds and women were being paid a fraction of the costs for their efforts. In relation to the mother and daughter who help Philomena to weave her tapestry, one can read their situation under the tyrant Tereus as oppression and imprisonment as well, and through their cooperative actions with regard to the tapestry of Philomena, they find a means of escape from the daily tasks for which they get paid very little but to which they must attend; as Chrétien writes: 'l'uevre li avelissoit' (the work pleased her [the seamstress]) (l. 1118).

The creative and communicative power of the tapestry is not understated by the narrator as he describes the authorial value of the work, and once the seamstress sends her daughter with the tapestry as a gift for the Queen of Thrace (Procne), the message is imbued with a literary aspect: 'Si li

¹⁷ This English translation is by D.D.R. Owen and taken from *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D.D.R. Owen (London: J.M. Dent, 1993) p. 351.

a la cortine oferte, \Et la reine l'a overte, \Si la regarde et conut l'uevre' (She [the young girl] offers her [Procne] the tapestry, and the queen unrolled it. She reads it and she knows what has happened) (ll. 1235-7). This tapestry becomes a recognised medium of communication between the two sisters as one *escrit* (writes) and the other *regarde* (reads) the tale upon the bedsheet. The intermediary messenger, in this instance the young daughter of the seamstress, blurs the boundary between the domestic sphere of the seamstress' household, which Philomena cannot escape, and the public sphere of the court where Procne resides. She allows the voice of Philomena to permeate the sphere from which she has been violently excluded, both physically and vocally, and Procne is then able to follow the path of the young maiden back to the house where her sister is imprisoned. The movement of the messenger back and forth is an aspect that Burns soundly presents as a replica of the action of weaving, stating: 'the female gaze circulates between women as a means of communication, carrying messages back and forth in a motion that resembles instead the passage of thread between two poles of the weaver's loom.'¹⁸ Philomena's initial act of weaving as a message is then replicated by the sending of the message itself, which does not conclude until Procne, who follows the young girl back to her home 'Ne de trop loing ne de trop pres' (not from too far away nor from too close) (l. 1242), arrives at the place where her sister is kept and takes her back to court in secret. Philomena herself moves from Athens, to a ship, to the hut in the woods in which she is raped, to the seamstress' house, to the castle, and again into the forest after her metamorphosis, and in the thread of her tapestry, she depicts the trajectory of her body through all of these places. Movement of thread then signifies the crucial movement of the female body

¹⁸ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 131.

as it moves through the different spaces of patriarchal oppression, and each space is imbued with a certain instance of Philomena's subjugation as a woman: her father decides her fate in Athens, Tereus becomes her master on the boat, he enacts his dominance in the hut in the woods, imprisons her to work in the seamstress' house, she is initially confined to 'une chanbre soutainne' (an isolated room) (l. 1281) as she is 'coiement' (secretly) (l. 1282) kept in the home of Tereus, and she only regains her voice and autonomy as a nightingale in the liminal space of the forest, into which the displaced power of Tereus cannot reach.

As in the original version, Procne and Philomena plot to get revenge on Tereus for the violent acts he has committed by killing his (and Procne's) son Itys. In the medieval version of the tale, especially in the gloss included in the *Ovide Moralisé*, Procne's infanticide is decried as a punishment unfitting of Tereus' crime, though she begins the process by saying to her son:

Ha, fete el, chose sanblable
Au traïtor, au vil deable!
Morir t'estuet de mort amere
Por la felenie ton pere.
Sa felenie conparras,
Por son forfet a tort morras. (ll. 1299-1304)

(Ah, she says, thing resembling the traitor, the vile devil! You must die a bitter death for the crime of your father. You will atone for his sin, you will die undeservedly for his offense.)

These words of Procne are criticised by Chrétien himself as the narrator says: 'mere ne doit son enfant \ ne ocire ne desmanbrer' (a mother should never kill or dismember her child) (l. 1318-9) However, the oppressive violence of Tereus catalyses the actions of both of these women in this tale, and both use

their own feminine attributes and actions in an appeal to reorder the system that gives Tereus his patriarchal power. Philomena uses her talent in weaving and works with other women to create a means of communicating that is unsanctioned by the powers in place; and Procne, in order that Tereus' evil deeds cannot propagate into the next generation of his heirs, removes the problem of the child that she herself has had a part in creating. Jane Chance states clearly in her introduction to Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea*, that Itys 'is *his* [Tereus'] son – the genealogies are traced patrilineally.'¹⁹ In citing Itys' likeness to his father, Procne constructs a justification for the child's death; as a son of the patriarchal problem he furthers the future of violence against women like her sister. Furthermore, both the acts of clothwork (in this particular tale) and childbirth are strictly feminine activities, and both Procne and Philomena use those activities to quell the power of their oppressor from the inside; they diminish the power of Tereus by using their feminine agency to move against the system.

Philomena regains her communicative voice through her weaving, if only in feminine discourse and dialogue with her sister, but she equally regains her audible voice in her animalistic metamorphosis. Chrétien stays true to the original Ovidian myth and metamorphoses the three main characters into birds:

Progné devint une arondele
Et Philomena rossignos.
Ancore qui creroit son los
Seroient a honte trestuit
Li desleal mort et destruit
Et li felon et li parjure,
Et cil qui de joie n'ont cure,
Et tuit cil qui font mesprison

¹⁹ Chance, p. 23.

Et felenie et traïson
Vers pucele sage et cortoise,
Car tant l'an grieve et tant l'an poise
Que quant il vient au prin d'esté,
Que tot l'iver avons passé,
Por les mauvés qu'ele tant het
Chante au plus doucemant qu'el set
Par le boschage : 'Oci ! Oci !' (ll. 1452-68)

(Procne becomes a swallow, and Philomena a nightingale. Anyone who believes the nightingale's advice would completely place shame in wicked misery and destruction. And the felon and the false witness, and those that cannot be healed by joy, and all those that hold blame and evil and treason toward wise and courtly maidens. Because the year is full of trouble and distress, when the nightingale comes at the beginning of summer, when all the winter has passed, for the hatred it bears the wretches, it sings as sweetly as it knows from the woods, 'Killed! Killed!')

This version concludes with a message that is absent from the original myth. Burns states of Philomena's metamorphosis: 'Her song, composed of a single word, evokes murder in all the complex ramifications this tale has shown it to possess. Singing the sweet song of killing, "oci, oci" (killed, killed) she reminds us how women have worked with their hands throughout this tale to speak in unconventional ways, thereby "killing" off traditions that oppress them.'²⁰ Though Philomena is singing of the death of Itys, it does clearly connect to the message of Chrétien, which links all of the violence back to the original action of Tereus. The nightingale, a symbol of love and love poets throughout much of medieval romance literature, sings that one should never commit treason *vers pucele sage et cortoise*, and this clearly shows Philomena as a strong and vocal heroine in a way that she is not in the original Ovidian version. Rather than retaining her character as a frightened lamb, Chrétien allows her to regain her voice, and the medieval symbolism

²⁰ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 146.

attached to the nightingale itself gives Philomena an important authorial agency wherein she sings of her story.

L'Aüstic

Marie de France's *lai* of *L'Aüstic* has been discussed by scholars, such as Bernard Sergent, Michelle A. Freeman, and Ernest Hœpffner, as a retelling of an oral myth that was based on Ovid's original Philomela myth, and there are certain aspects to the *lai* that would allow for this conclusion, particularly when regarded in terms of voice and violence. This *lai* tells the story of a *mal-mariée*²¹ who is in love with her neighbour, a knight. Each evening she alights from her bed, goes to the window, and exchanges words and gifts with her lover, which causes her husband to grow suspicious. He questions her as to why she goes to the window each night, and:

'Sire', la dame li respunt,
'il nen a joie en icest mund,
ki nen ot l'aüstic chanter ;
pur ceo me vois ici ester.'²² (ll. 83-6)

('Sir' the lady responds, 'he who does not listen to the nightingale sing has no joy in this world. That is why I come here.)

²¹ An unhappily married woman in the courtly narrative tradition.

²² Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke and trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990). All English translations are my own.

Her husband does not believe her, and he suspects that she is having an affair with the knight, so he goes out with a hunting party and traps the nightingale, telling his wife:

Jeo ai l'aüstic engigné,
pur quei vus avez tant veillié.
Des or poëz gisir en pais;
il ne vus esveillera mais! (ll. 107-10)

(I have captured the nightingale for whom you have risen [from bed]. Now you can sleep in peace, he will not awaken you anymore.)

This symbolic action of the husband capturing the bird is followed by the violence that he enacts upon the woman:

Quant la dame l'a entendu,
dolente e cureçuse fu.
A sun seignur l'a demandé,
e il l'ocist par engresté.
Le col li runt a ses dous meins :
de ceo fist il que trop vileins.
Sur la dame le cors geta,
si que sun chainse ensanglenta
un poi desur le piz devant. (ll. 111-9)

(When the lady heard this, she was saddened and hurt. She asked her husband for the bird, and he killed it out of wickedness. He broke the neck with his two hands; he did this so villainously. He threw the body at the lady, and her tunic was bloodied on the front, just over her breast.)

After this episode, the husband leaves the woman and she embroiders the story of what has happened onto 'une piece de samit' (a piece of silk) (l. 135) and wraps the bird inside it. This she sends to her lover as a message, and when the knight receives this he puts it into a bejewelled box and keeps it as a token of the love that they once shared.

In this case, unlike in the *Philomena* or Ovid's original myth, the nightingale and the cloth intermingle in order to produce one message, whereas, Philomena speaks to her sister firstly through her weaving, and secondly publicly through her new voice as the nightingale. In *L'Aüstic*, when the woman sends her message to her lover, it is both the cloth and the dead nightingale together that communicate with him. She says to herself: 'Ne purrai mes la nuit lever \n'aler a la fenestre ester' (I cannot get up at night nor go to the window) (ll. 127-8), citing the silence her husband has enforced on her through the violent act of killing the nightingale. She devises a plan, stating 'De ceo m'estuet que conseil preigne' (Because of this I must find a solution) (l. 132), and saying:

'l'aüstic or li trametrai,
l'aventure li manderai!
En une piece de samit,
a or brusdé e tut escrit,
a l'oiselet envelopé. (l. 133-7, my emphasis)

('I will send him the nightingale to tell him of the event.' In a piece of silk, *all embroidered and written in gold*, she enveloped the little bird.)

This particular excerpt is important for several reasons and highlights the lady's creative and communicative abilities. Firstly, the verb usage in her own spoken words, *trametre* and *mander*, equivalent to modern French *transmettre* and *envoyer*, are near equals in meaning, thus mixing the interpretation of what is being sent, the bird or the news, and in this way the bird comes to stand in for her communicative voice, which would deliver a message if she were able to go to the window as she had always done before. The bird is presented as the physical embodiment of the *aventure*, and becomes a signifying sign that represents both the lady and her voice. The body of the bird and the fabric of the cloth come together, compounding the

message of the lady, and, in a sense, becoming interchangeable. The cloth defines the bird's body, and the bird's body defines the cloth. Additionally, the body of the dead nightingale itself paradoxically reignites the lady's oppressed voice, just as Philomena's audible voice returns to her in her metamorphosis into a nightingale at the end of the tale.

Secondly, the emphasised portion of the text above ('a or brusdé et tut escrit') has caused debate amongst Marie de France scholars, with some, such as E. Jane Burns, stating that it most likely denotes that the fabric itself was previously embroidered with text and was imported from the East, but that the lady herself did not embroider the words²³, while others such as R. Howard Bloch insist that the woman embroiders her story herself onto the cloth in the form of a message.²⁴ The verb *escrire*, used both here and in the *Philomena* ('Tot ot escrit an la cortine'; my emphasis) literally translates as 'written', and in the context of what the woman is wishing to impart to her lover, namely the *aventure*, it is clear that she is writing to him about what has happened in the form of embroidery. Philomena's pictorially woven message described as *escrit is regardé* (read) by her sister Procne, and in *L'Aüstic* as well, the knight, though the message is delivered to him through the proxy of a messenger, reads and understands the meaning of the nightingale and the embroidered cloth. There is a marriage of orality, symbolism, and written text in this short *lai*, and especially in this detail of her message. It is relayed to the knight through the vocal words of the messenger, through the written message in the cloth, and through the

²³ Burns, *Sea of Silk*, p. 51.

²⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) p. 73.

symbolism of the nightingale, uniting all forms of interpretation and 'reading'.

Michelle A. Freeman compares the nightingale in *L'Aüstic* with Philomena's tongue in her eponymous tale, thus linking the two acts of violence that cause the female characters' voicelessness and catalyse their subsequent voice in cloth.²⁵ Freeman also makes the assertion that, much as Tereus in the *Philomena* is admonished by Chrétien for mistakenly leaving Philomena in the care of a seamstress, so too does the husband of the lady in *L'Aüstic* make a fatal error. Freeman states: 'Perhaps this last violent act is his ultimate mistake, for by casting the bird back at her, mingling its lifeblood with her clothing, he associates the two again, even physically, and thereby prompts the birth of a new symbol, a new language.'²⁶ This is an important detail in that in both of these tales, along with the original Ovidian version, women's greatest power in signmaking comes from cloth. This detail especially shows violence towards the woman in that the white cloth drenched in red blood reminds the reader tellingly of bruises on white skin. Burns, in her discussion of abused women in the *chansons de toile*, makes the connection between bruised bodies and fabric, stating 'we are reminded tellingly of the red, blue, and violet hues often associated with the luxurious silks that women in romance narrative are said typically to wear.'²⁷ The white of the lady's tunic is essentially dyed with the blood of the nightingale, as are, presumably, the words that she embroiders onto the silk fabric that is wrapped around the bird. This recalls Ovid's words in his description of Philomena's tapestry: 'She wove a clever fabric, working words \In red on a

²⁵ Michelle A. Freeman, 'Marie de France's Poetics of Silence: The Implications for a Feminine Translatio', in *PMLA* 99.5 (1984) pp. 860-83 (p. 869).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, p. 114.

white ground to tell the tale 'Of wickedness' (VI ll. 581-3; my emphasis). The violence enacted upon these women is embedded in their clothwork, which then acts a substitute voice and expression that subverts patriarchal oppression.

Space and movement figure significantly in this *lai*, as the woman is never physically outside of the home, and her domestic relegation enhances the silence imposed upon her by her husband. Her limited foray into the public sphere is constituted by her gaze out of the window. Windows were considered to belong to the public sphere in the Middle Ages, and Caroline Dinshaw and David Wallace illustrate the medieval symbolism of this: 'Regulation of orifices, particularly eyes and windows, consumes much imaginative energy both in anchoritic text and in accounts of feminine occupation of domestic spaces.'²⁸ The fact that the woman is consistently described as being indoors throughout the *lai* embodies her domestic nature, and her undermining use of the window alerts the medieval reader to the fact that the window itself is not being properly regulated. Furthermore, when questioned about her nightly visits to the window, the woman states that it is to hear, and not to see, disassociating her gaze from the window in order to remain chaste in the eyes of her husband. This is the way in which she exists outside of the domestic sphere throughout the *lai*, but even this is taken away from her after the violent death of the nightingale. In terms of movement from one sphere to another, in Ovid's and in Chrétien's versions Philomena entrusts her tapestry to a woman who carries it to her sister, acting as an intermediary in the liminal space between the domestic and public spheres, and the lady in *L'Aüstic* entrusts her embroidered message to

²⁸ Caroline Dinshaw & David Wallace, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Caroline Dinshaw & David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 1-10 (p. 6).

un vaslet (valet), who carries it to her lover in the same way. This servant then moves in her place, bridging the gap between where she 'belongs' and where she cannot go. Yet her words and communication permeate that barrier, and her voicelessness is rectified through her embroidery.

As is the case with Philomena and Lienors, the lady in this *lai* chooses to communicate through a feminine medium in order to speak once more with her lover. The lady rejects the silence imposed upon her by her husband and finds a way to subvert his control of her voice in clothwork. Her message is catalysed by the violence inflicted upon the bird, symbolic of her love, and upon her body, intimated in her husband's throwing of the bird at her chest, and therefore she chooses to circumnavigate the patriarchal oppression that she suffers in the domestic sphere and, in a way, free herself through her medium of female expression.

Lienors

The example of Lienors differs significantly from those of Philomena or the lady of *L'Aüstic*, in that Lienors is not physically muted by a character representative of patriarchal power, but she is symbolically muted throughout the first half of the romance as she does not speak unless asked to do so by the male characters.²⁹ The spaces of the text in which she speaks are significant in terms of the 'appropriate' speech of female characters, and this chapter discusses the way in which violence towards her, and her exclusion from the patriarchal sphere, catalyse her use of clothwork and allow for a

²⁹ See Chapter Four for more discussion on the portions of Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* in which Lienors' sings *chansons de toile* at the behest of her brother and in order to impress and entertain a messenger of the Emperor Conrad.

feminine voice to rupture out into the public sphere of the court. Lienors' silence is inflicted by the false speech of a male character, and her speech act through fabric is equally misrepresentational of her true self, but it allows her to free herself from the slander that has been attached to her true identity as 'la pucele a la rose' (the maiden with the rose) (l. 5040).³⁰

This romance, *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, written by Jean Renart in the early thirteenth century, tells the story of Conrad, the Emperor of Mainz, who, though constantly pressured by his advisors to marry and create heirs, does not wish to find a wife. However, Jouglet, his trusty entertainer, tells him a story about a family that he knows who live in France: a mother, a beloved son named Guillaume, and his sister, Lienors. Guillaume is a good man, a good knight, and takes care of his family, and his sister is said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Just the name, 'Lienors', causes Conrad to swoon with love for this woman of which he has only heard tell. Conrad decides to send a messenger to invite Guillaume to his court so that he can make his acquaintance and ask to marry Lienors. Nicole, another trusty servant of Conrad's, makes the journey to the home of Guillaume de Dole to see if what Jouglet has said about this family is true, and, finding all in order (the wonderful and attentive mother, the valiant and beloved Guillaume, and the most beautiful and virtuous Lienors), he invites Guillaume to accompany him back to Mainz to serve at the court of the emperor. There is, however, an advisor of Conrad's, an evil seneschal, who begrudges Guillaume the favour that the emperor bestows on him, and when he learns of the emperor's intentions to marry Lienors and give Guillaume an even higher place of honour in his court through their marriage, the

³⁰ Jean Renart, *The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole (Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole)*, ed. and trans. by Regina Psaki (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995). All English translations for this text are by Regina Psaki from this edition.

seneschal decides to rid this family of the emperor's favour himself. While Guillaume is at the court of Conrad, the seneschal travels to Guillaume's home, and through his gifts and honeyed words, he stealthily learns from the mother of Guillaume that Lienors has a birthmark in the shape of a rose on her upper thigh. He uses this information to convince Conrad that Guillaume's sister is no longer a virgin, declaring that he has lain with her himself. Guillaume, upon hearing this slander about his sister, believes it and disowns Lienors; and his nephew, hearing Guillaume's violent sobs and the disavowal of his sister, races to Dole and attempts to kill Lienors.

The violence enacted upon Lienors, both in her attempted murder and in the immediate divestment of the protection offered to her by her family, creates a situation in which the heroine is alone and voiceless, cast out of her home and unable to vocally defend herself because no one would believe her, especially against the word of the seneschal who can use her physical body as proof for his testimony. Lienors, in an act of defiance, becomes her own saviour. Through a clever trick, Lienors sends an *aumosnière*³¹, belt, and brooch to the seneschal as a gift from the Châtelaine de Dijon, of whom she knows the seneschal to be enamoured. Another one of Lienors' nephews, who gives these gifts to the seneschal, also relays a message from the 'Châtelaine' that she wishes him to wear these embroidered pieces on his body at all times, and, in a comical turn of events, he 'li a si adestroit mise \Que la char tot entor le flanc \len esta vivee de sanc' ('tied it so tightly that the flesh all around his waist was flushed with blood because of it.') (ll. 4425-7), showing just how ardently he admires the Châtelaine. Once this is done, Lienors rides to court and publicly speaks out, under the pretense that

³¹ 'Aumosnière', in *Old French-English Dictionary*, ed. by Hindley, Langley, & Levy, p. 55: A small purse or alms-pouch carried at the waist, sometimes thought to have held instruments for sewing.

she is the Châtelaine de Dijon, to prove that the seneschal possesses her small alms-purse and belt that he wears on his body. The seneschal says that he does not know her and has never seen her in his life, that she lies, and that the gifts are from someone else. When Lienors stands up in front of the emperor's court, she accuses the seneschal not only of taking her virginity, but of taking it by force. She also claims that he did this horrible deed in her sewing room and stole many things from her, including those things that she has convinced him to have on his person in the court at this moment. Lienors states:

Il fu .i. iors qui passez est
Que cil la vostres seneschaus
Lors le mostre as emperiaus
Vint en .i. lieu p[ar] aventure
Ou ge fesoie ma cousture
Si me fist mout let et outrage
Quil me toli mon pucelage
Et apres cele grant ledure
Si ma tolue ma ceinture
Et maumosniere et mon fermal
I ce demant au seneschal
Et monor et mon pucelage
Et de mes ioiaus le damage. (ll. 4778-90)

(‘It was one day some time ago that this man here, your seneschal’ — and here she pointed him out to the emperor — ‘came by chance to a place where I was doing my sewing. He did me great harm and offense, for he took my virginity. And after that great outrage, he also took my belt and my alms-purse and my brooch. Here I demand of the seneschal recompense for my honor and my virginity and my treasure.’)

In the above passage, Lienors asserts that the seneschal took her virginity by force, causing her ‘mout let et outrage’ (great harm and offense), making it clear to the court that she did not give her consent and that violence was done to her body by the seneschal. Though this speech act is a

lie, it reflects the lie that the seneschal told the emperor about Lienors, and, from the perspective of the public sphere, the seneschal has, in a sense, taken her virginity by purporting to have done so. He makes her physical, naked body public knowledge, and his lie divests her of her virginity in the eyes of her patriarch, namely her brother Guillaume. After the seneschal exposes Lienors' naked body and uses it as a verification of his copulation with her, Lienors is no longer able to marry the emperor, and, through Guillaume's disownment of Lienors, she is ruined in patriarchal society, as she cannot be married and produce legitimate heirs. She has, in a sense, been dissociated from her most basic feminine role in a similar way to Philomena.

Furthermore, the space in which Lienors claims the rape to have taken place is crucial to understanding how her speech act is meant to resonate with the court in Mainz and identify her as a victim of sexual violence. She states that it was 'en .i. lieu [...] ou ge fesoï mas cousture' (ll. 4781-2); the place where she does her sewing is meant to be understood as a strictly feminine space, and especially for an aristocratic or noble woman, a supremely enclosed space, meant to protect the virtue of the lady. This denotes an overt misuse of the feminine space, and the action of the rape is placed upon the seneschal as he performed an intrusion into a private, domestic, and virtuous space. This story told by Lienors underlines her virtue, recalling the story of Lucretia, a good and virtuous woman raped by Sextus Tarquinius in her own *gynaceum*, where she was weaving.³² Though Lienors stands in the public sphere at the moment of her speech, she cites her

³² The story of Lucretia, though originally from Classical Antiquity, existed into the Middle Ages and is included in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (c. 1374), and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (c. 1410) as well as in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (c. 1380s).

domestic virtue by identifying herself spatially by her chamber and the domestic sphere wherein she was performing domestic actions.

There is a strong link in this episode between the body of Lienors and the clothwork that she has accused the seneschal of taking. She says that, in the same moment, the seneschal *stole* her virginity and *stole* her embroidered objects, linking the objects with her body, which can be interpreted, then, as her *clothbodies*. They are physically separated from her, have, in a sense, been fetishised by the seneschal, as he tied them tightly to his own body, and come to identifiably represent her as a violated woman. Those objects, which she herself has embroidered, become symbolic of her stolen virginity and her abused body, and both actions of thievery took place in her own feminine and domestic sphere.

Therefore, as was the case with *L'Aüstic* and the *Philomena*, *Guillaume de Dole* places significant emphasis on the spatial constructs and division of the public and private spheres. As Chapter Four will demonstrate, Lienors is initially defined in the romance by the women's chambers in which she works and sews, and the messenger of the emperor marvels at the virtuosity that is embodied by the inner sanctum of Guillaume's home in Dole. Lienors' movement between the spheres, both of her physical body (as with *Philomena*) and of her message (as with the lady of *L'Aüstic*), is incited by the lie of the seneschal and her quest to regain her good name. Douglas Kelly notes that 'Lienor finds herself in the unwanted pseudo-triangle containing herself, the emperor, and the emperor's seneschal. To restore her honor and public recognition of her virginity, she carries off the spectacular visit to the emperor's court that proves her innocence and catches the seneschal in the

web of his own deceit.³³ While it is true that Lienors' movement to the court does lead to her freedom from the slander of the seneschal, it is only through the prior movement of her embroidery that this movement of her physical body is made possible. Lienors takes the embroidered objects, signifying her domestic existence, and sends them to the seneschal through the intermediary of her nephew, who bridges the domestic and public spheres. Philomena is not able to leave the domestic sphere of the seamstress' hut until her messenger brings her tapestry into the public sphere and to Procne, and in this same way Lienors cannot ride to court and be heard in the public sphere until her clothwork has made the journey, setting the course for the development of the romance. The clothwork becomes a surrogate body for these two heroines, and though it evokes or precedes their spoken voice, it also acts in the form of clothbody, representing them outside of the domestic sphere.

While the false sexual violence of the seneschal leads to Lienors' false speech act in court, the violence against her that the men in her family perform is the catalyst for her embroidery. The violence enacted by Guillaume's disownment of Lienors and her attempted murder by her nephew³⁴ incite her use of embroidery to speak the truth of the matter. The fact that what should have been her patriarchal protector turns into a male community united in her persecution reflects the way in which Tereus' men are complicit in his action, as they know the truth of the matter concerning Philomena's rape and mutilation and refuse to do anything in order to help

³³ Douglas Kelly, *The Conspiracy of Allusion: Description, Rewriting, and Authorship from Macrobius to Medieval Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) p. 254.

³⁴ The particular aspects and textual examples of this violent episode are discussed further in Chapter Four in relation to the overall trajectory of Lienors' story insofar as it is traced through the inclusion of *chansons de toile*.

her. Lienors is not only called 'la vils bordeliere' (the miserable whore) (l. 3809) by her brother, but when her nephew enters their home in Dole he shouts 'ou est la iaiaus' (where is the slut) (l. 3921). This violence in words that both her brother and her nephew make against her are based on an assumption of her guilt, which is based in rumour. Lienors' silence is enforced in this way, and she does not speak at all during this scene with her nephew; but her mother does intercede in his attempt to kill Lienors and speaks in her place, even when Lienors is physically present. It is not until her nephew leaves that Lienors speaks to her mother, forgiving her for the part she has played in her social destruction; Lienors only speaks aloud in female spaces and within the seclusion of the home. She needs to find a way to be heard in the male-dominated space of the public sphere, and she says to her mother:

Bele mere ainz la fin davril
Qui ia est mout pres de lissue
Avrai ge tote a conseue
Sa vilonie et sa menconge
Tot li ferai tenir a songe
Quan quil a fet le roi cuidier (ll. 4026-31)

(Fair mother, before the end of April, which is already very near, I will have utterly exposed his [the seneschal's] villainy and his deception. I will make him recant everything he has made the king believe.)

This is where she enacts her cunning plan to get revenge on the seneschal through her own feminine creation.

Through this feminine act of embroidery, Lienors begins her journey to court, and, after her physical movement from the domestic sphere to the public sphere, she begins her speech, and accuses the seneschal of violence done against her. Before announcing her true identity to the court, Lienors

creates an atmosphere in which the seneschal is the only one to blame for her lost virginity, as she had no part or say in the act. Though the seneschal denies the claim because, in reality, he has never lain with, let alone seen, this woman who claims that he raped her, he is shocked when he realises that he has been tricked as Lienors describes the items that he has placed on his body. She closes the case by saying:

Nest pas encore toz delivres
Li seneschaus bien les achiez
Mesor alez et si sachiez
Ses draz amont et sa chemise
Si verrez quil la ceinte et mise
Tot nuanu empres sa char

[...]

Si verrez maumosniere entors

Ce sachiez au tiessu pendue. (ll. 4832-7; 4840-1, my emphasis)

(‘The seneschal is not yet entirely free, believe me. Go now and pull up his clothing and his shirt: you will see that he has tied the belt onto *his bare skin, on his very flesh* [...] You will also see my alms-purse hanging from the belt, I assure you.)

As referenced earlier, the seneschal has tied the items so tightly to his body that his skin is flushed with blood, creating a sense of an erotic violence that he enacts upon himself through the embroidered objects of Lienors. The narrator tells us that ‘mout aime et prise les ioiaus’ (he dearly loved and valued his treasures) (l. 4418) almost as if they were the Châtelaine whom he loves. The eroticism of the way in which he does not simply wear the items but practically integrates them into his physical body shows the extent to which the embroidered objects of Lienors can inflict the same physical and violent change to the seneschal’s body that he claims to have done to hers in taking her virginity.

Furthermore, there is an interesting connection between nakedness and speechlessness at play between Lienors and the seneschal, alerting the reader to the vulnerability of both characters in the public sphere. As Kathryn Kruger states, 'cloth is language: "To be naked is to be speechless,"'³⁵ and this figures strikingly in the passage above wherein the seneschal's shirt is pulled up and his *char* (flesh) is forcibly exposed. In this moment, naked except for the belt tied tightly around his body, the seneschal is left speechless in his vulnerability in front of the court. This, in juxtaposition to the way in which Lienors' naked body is made public through the seneschal's lie, shows the power of this enforced vulnerability to silence a person. Lienors gives no consent to have her body objectified by the public, and neither does the seneschal, as his shirt is forcibly lifted and the truth is laid bare. The violence enacted upon Lienors is then turned on its head and equally enacted upon the seneschal, as her speech subsumes his own previous speech act and her voice supersedes her previous voicelessness.

Once the seneschal has been found to be wearing the exact items which she has described, Lienors is able to once more use those embroidered items and her voice to define herself as the sister of Guillaume de Dole. It is in this moment that she once more wins the love of the emperor, because now not only is she an incredibly beautiful and virtuous woman who spins and embroiders most elegantly, she is a strong and vocal woman, dedicated to the truth. Because Lienors has been divested of a vocal and public voice by the enforced ostracism from her family, she chooses to use the feminine medium of embroidery in an attempt to reorder the system that wrongly condemned her. Philomena's metamorphosis into a nightingale and the lady

³⁵ Kruger, p. 28.

of *L'Aüstic's* embroidered words that are eternally enshrined with the dead bird both exist as examples of a reclaimed voice once lost through oppression, and Lienors' embroidered objects likewise allow her to regain her public voice in order to erase the false voice of the seneschal. Once the truth is made public, Guillaume is sought out in order to tell him the good news:

Ou vergier son hoste ou il ere
Le troverent tot desconfit
Mout par li fist poi de delit
Li Rossignols qui li chantoit.
La bone novele quil oit
Li toli lues tot son anui. (ll. 5161-6)

(In his host's orchard, where he [Guillaume] was sitting, they found him all disconsolate, and very little cheered by the nightingale singing there. The good news he heard, however, banished all his sorrow at once.)

With her brother's permission, Lienors is once more deemed suitable to marry the emperor, and the romance concludes with a description of their luxurious and happy wedding. As was the case with the female characters in Chapter Two, such as Fresne and Soredamors, once Lienors is married, her voice nearly disappears from the romance altogether. She is dressed for the wedding and regarded as an object of surpassing beauty and virtue once more, and the only moment in which she audibly speaks is not to give her consent to the marriage, but to ask for the emperor's mercy with regard to the seneschal; she asks that he should not be killed, but should be sent on Crusade as penance for his crimes against the court.

Conclusion

The three female characters discussed in this chapter are all connected in their chosen medium of expression, which defies the male codification of communication. In the clothwork that they employ as a means of permeating the boundary between the domestic and the public sphere, these women are able to speak actively about the violence that is enacted upon them, though it changes drastically between romances. Philomena is solely able to speak to her sister through her pictographic message, but she does succeed in sending her tapestry into the public sphere, which leads to her liberation from Tereus' enforced entrapment. The lady of Marie de France's *lai* is able to communicate with her lover through embroidered cloth and a symbolic nightingale, telling him how her oppression, entrapment, and the violence enacted upon her by her husband disallows their continued affair. Lienors, whose story is quite different from the previous two, uses embroidered gifts symbolic of a pretended love in order to escape the oppression of a lie that divests her of her true and virtuous identity.

Lienors and Philomena's clothwork in particular lead to the reclamation of their previously silenced voices. Philomena's metamorphosis allows her to sing again, and, as her name etymologically means 'celle qui aime le chant,'³⁶ she is given a way to publically and vocally tell her story and impart a moral message to all those wicked people who would wish to do harm to a 'pucele sage et cortoise' (a wise and courtly maiden) (l. 1461). Lienors, too, reclaims a public voice for herself through her cunning embroidery, and though she does lose her autonomous voice in the end of the romance through her marriage to Conrad, her good name is restored and her enforced silence is superseded by her speech at court. Though the lady at the end of *L'Aüstic* remains silent in her marriage to her jealous husband, her

³⁶ Sergent, p. 276.

voice lives on in words on a piece of silk, written with a needle and dyed with the blood of a nightingale.

Violence breeds the initial voicelessness of these female characters, yet it also incites each of these women to find a voice in clothwork. That clothwork, unlike their lost audible voices, which, as Hélène Cixous states, do not leave a trace and evaporate, is able to be noticed and to establish a contract with time. It permeates the public sphere in a way that the women's audible voices cannot, and it illustrates a clear dichotomy between *l'orale* and *l'écrit*, which is explored further in the following chapter. The women's agency and their power manifest themselves in their needles, their hands produce a voice through their cunning creations, and they establish themselves as authors of the stories of their own lives.

Chapter Four: Songs in Silence: Remembering the Female Past through *les chansons de toile*

'I shall speak the truth: I don't much like my daughter sewing [...] Bel-Gazou is silent when she sews, silent for hours on end, with her mouth firmly closed, concealing her large, new-cut incisors that bite into the moist heart of a fruit like little saw-edged blades. She is silent, and she – why not write down the word that frightens me – she is thinking.'

- Colette
*Earthly Paradise*¹

Introduction

Throughout this study, instances of cloth and clothwork in Old French literature have been shown to represent female voice, virtue, and identity. This chapter will begin with an exploration of the portrayal of mother-daughter relationships and how the mother-daughter interplay affects the trajectory of the characters' lives in romance literature. Secondly, a close-reading of the *chansons de toile*² contained within Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* not only provides an example of the embroidery of music and lyric into popular literature, but it also offers an instance of what will be referred to from this point forward as a 'mirroring effect'. This

¹ Colette, *Earthly Paradise: An Autobiography Drawn from Her Lifetime Writings*, ed. by Robert Phelps (London: Penguin, 1974).

² *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, p. 146 defines the *chanson de toile* as 'A trouvère poem of the early thirteenth century dealing with the sufferings of a lovesick girl or an unhappy wife.' Michel Zink, in *Belle: essai sur les chansons de toile*, separates the *chansons* into three main categories: those anonymously penned *chansons de toile* found in *Le Chansonnier de Saint-Germain des Prés* (a French songbook in manuscript form from the thirteenth century. It is currently housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris), those written by Audefrois le Bâtard, a male poet and composer active around 1190-1230 who composed *chansons d'histoire*, *chansons courtoises*, and *chansons de toile*, and those *chansons de toile* inserted into narrative works. There are seven *chansons* in the third category, and of those seven songs, five are only found in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*.

term encapsulates a particular phenomenon employed by Jean Renart in which he aligns the course of his characters' stories with the stories of women contained within the *chansons de toile*. Finally, an examination of the question of archaism in clothwork will be carried out by looking at both the *chansons de toile* and the language which Renart uses in order to authorise and differentiate his work from those of his contemporaries.

In this chapter's exploration of female relationships, the focus will be on the exchange between mothers and daughters, most especially in terms of courtly education. Fresne's story, examined in Chapter Two of this study, is written from the medieval perspective of both a female and a male author, and underlines a tenuous thread between a mother and her abandoned daughter, who are ultimately brought together by an opulent cloth. Lienors from the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, whose embroidery allows her to be freed from slander, reappears in this present chapter as she sings songs which echo her own fated story. She is portrayed sewing in the women's chambers with her mother, and, urged on by her mother to entertain her brother and a man from the court of the emperor of Germany, she sings *chansons de toile*. As previously referenced in Chapter Three, it is Lienors' mother who inadvertently betrays her daughter's secret birthmark in the shape of a rose upon her thigh, which leads to Lienors' public shaming and the 'loss' of her virginity. In the first of the three *chansons de toile* that are sung by Lienors and her mother in a scene in which they work cloth together, a mirroring effect is created by the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in the song that they choose to sing, and the following *chansons de toile* that are sung by the young maiden also create a mirror to the rest of the narrative throughout *Guillaume de Dole*.

Renart's *Guillaume de Dole* is not the only instance of a literary romance that includes *chansons de toile*; however, it is the aforementioned mirroring effect, particularly in the case of the mother-daughter relationship, that sets it apart from other romances of its kind, such as the *Lai d'Aristote*. The mother-daughter sewing scene wherein Lienors and her mother sing *chansons de toile* provides an illustrative example of a domestic female relationship. Every *chanson de toile* included in *Guillaume de Dole* tells an important story in relation to the trajectory of the character of Lienors throughout the romance; for example, the first *chanson de toile* mirrors the situation of the mother and daughter as they are concurrently working cloth and singing the *chanson*. Whereas this first *chanson* seems to mirror the current situation, the other four *chansons de toile* found in the tale foreshadow the impending action of the romance, especially in how it treats the character of Lienors in particular. This inclusion of lyric underlines the important themes that will be found further on in the story of Lienors, such as the breaking of familial ties and secrets marked by the female bodies in the text. These themes will become clear through a detailed analysis of each *chanson de toile* included in the text and how it is woven into the parts of the text to which it pertains.

Jean Renart introduces his text as something innovative, something that consciously seeks to commit the lyrics included in his literature to memory. This idea of memory and remembrance is carried throughout the entirety of the romance, and Renart highlights the ways in which he brings the past into the thirteenth century, in an attempt, perhaps, to preserve it in the present. He goes so far as to underline the archaism of the *chansons de toile* themselves by having Lienors' mother initially reject her son's pleas for her to sing while she works cloth because it is perceived as an archaic

practice. The physical cloth that Renart includes in his romance, predominantly the marriage robe of Lienors, is also presented as an archaic artefact, and the story that is embroidered upon the cloth itself, a story within the story of the romance, calls up a tale from the past, the story of Helen of Troy and the Trojan War, into the minds of the present audience. The reason that Renart employs this practice of pretended archaism is much disputed; but from his prologue to the concluding line of the romance, Renart urges his audience to understand the importance of the past.

Many scholars, such as Michel Zink, E. Jane Burns, Edmond Faral, and Pierre Jonin have extensively written about the *chansons de toile*, including addressing the specific purpose of their inclusion in romance literature. Regina Psaki, Nancy A. Jones, and Maureen Barry McCann Boulton all discuss the importance, not only of the *chansons de toile*, but of all of the lyrical compositions included in Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, and how they affect the reading and reception of the romance itself.³ This present study analyses the ways in which this hybrid form of romance (both lyrics and narrative) highlights a dichotomous relationship between oral and written cultures through the lens of feminine voice. While previous scholars have analysed the *chansons de toile* with the overarching goal of understanding the romantic relationships, instances of female agency, and lyrical value contained therein, this chapter looks at those *chansons de toile* that are included in popular literature, and particularly the trajectory of Lienors, to bring to light the ways in which ideas about women's voice and authorship were changing towards the end of the High Middle Ages.

³ These studies, among others concerning Renart, are included in Nancy Vine Durling's edition of *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

Prior to the introduction of the *chansons de toile* in *Guillaume de Dole*, which occurs nearly halfway through the lengthy romance, Jean Renart introduces his romance using a particularly feminine vocabulary, and the first thirty lines of the narrative have incited much critical scholarship.⁴ Renart compares the creation of his romance with the dyeing of cloth and claims that both of these acts are used ‘por avoir los et pris’ (‘to earn praise and fame’) (l. 9).⁵ He comments that he has embroidered verses into his literary romance, making it beautifully designed and particularly spectacular, so that a man who was not learned would not be able to fully grasp the cleverness of what he has done. In this way, he allies learning and skill in writing with skill in embroidery and cloth production.

car aussi com len met la graine
 Es dras por avoir los et pris
 Einsi a il chans et sons mis
 En cestui romans de la rose
 Que est une novele chose
 et sest des autres si divers
 et brodez par lieus de biaux vers
 Que vilains nel porroit savoir (ll. 8-15, my emphasis)

(For just as people put scarlet dye into cloth to earn praise and fame, so has this author put lyrics and music into this *Romance of the Rose*, which is something quite new and altogether different from the others, *embroidered* in places with fair verses that an uncultivated man would not recognize.)

Renart’s word choice here is of particular interest, especially when considering the inclusion of sewing songs as part of his ‘chans et sons’.

Renart presents embroidery as a cultivated art by calling to attention the fact

⁴ See Michel Zink’s *Roman Rose et Rose Rouge*, Nancy A. Jones, and Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, for further reading on this issue.

⁵ Jean Renart, *The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole (Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole)*, ed. and trans. by Regina Psaki (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995). All English translations for this text are by Regina Psaki from this edition.

that the music ‘embroidered’ into the romance would not be understood or recognised by an uncultivated man. By using words that allude not only to clothwork, but also to intricate design (which will become a clear and recurrent theme throughout the romance), Renart makes his romance stand out from other literature and places it in the realm of the ‘performed’ arts.

In addition, Renart introduces himself as:

Cil qui mist cest conte en romans
ou il a fet noter biaux chans
por *ramembrance* des chancons
veut que ses pris et ses renons
voist en rainciens en champaigne
et que li biaux miles la pregne (ll. 1-7, my emphasis)

(The one who put this tale into Romance and had beautiful lyrics written in it for *remembrance* of those songs wants his praise and renown to go to Reims in Champagne, and for the fair Milon de Nanteuil, one of the nobles of the realm, to learn of it.)⁶

Michel Zink states that this introduction ‘c’est [de] fonder le roman sur la mémoire, et sur une mutation de la mémoire’ and that this idea of remembrance is foundationally flawed as ‘ce n’est plus celle du chant et de l’oral, mais celle des mots écrits’⁷, which is to say that in making what is oral into what is written for the sake of remembrance, one must realise that it fundamentally changes the way in which those songs, or that orality, is remembered and repeated. For example, in the prologue to the *lais* of Marie de France, Marie states that:

⁶ Psaki’s translation here includes an extension of the original text with regard to its patron, citing ‘Milon de Nanteuil, one of the nobles of the realm’ an affiliation that has been discovered through historical and literary research.

⁷ Michel Zink, *Roman Rose et Rose Rouge: Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole de Jean Renart*, 2nd ed. (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2014) p. 21.

Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie.
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
que pur *remembrance* les firent
des aventures qu'il oïrent
cil ki primes les comencierent
e ki avant les enveierent.
Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
nes vueil laissier ne obliër. (*Prologue*, ll. 33-40, my emphasis)⁸

(So I thought of lays that I had heard. I did not doubt, indeed, knew well, that those who first wrote and circulated them had wanted to perpetuate the *memory* of adventures of which they had heard tell. I have heard many of them told, and I do not want to leave them in the darkness only to be forgotten.)

Both Renart and Marie de France are basing the importance of their texts' existence on the very fact that they preserve an oral culture that would be otherwise lost. Thus, there is a dichotomy at play between *la mémoire* and *l'oublie*, and *l'écrit* and *l'orale*. In the Middle Ages, often what was written was assumed to be the truth, as shown in Brian Stock's *The Implications of Literacy*.⁹ This period of literature is caught not only in a transition from oral to written culture, but also in a transition from writing in Latin to writing in the vernacular, and this changed the definition of literacy and the reception of literature. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a time of innovation and re-creation in France, and the importance of texts should not be underestimated. Stock references Orderic Vitalis (twelfth century) who was visited by a monk of Winchester named Anthony. The monk states that: 'With the loss of books, the deeds of old men pass into oblivion, and can in no wise be recovered by those of our generation, for the admonitions of the ancients pass away from the memory of modern men with the changing

⁸ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke and trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990). All English translations are my own.

⁹ Stock, p. 76.

world, as hail or snow melt in the waters of a swift river, swept away by the current never to return.¹⁰ Thus, written culture in these centuries was clearly very important, from both a secular and an ecclesiastical perspective.

From the prologue of both the *lais* of Marie de France and of *Guillaume de Dole*, the audience is alerted to a romanticised idea of the past. Marie simply states that she does not want the tales to fall into oblivion, whereas Renart states that he wishes to include the *chansons* for the same reason. However there is a clear distinction, Renart does not state that he seeks to preserve the entirety of the romance, as narrative such as this is already within the tradition of *l'écrit*. The *lais* and the *chansons* both come from an oral culture, and their entry into a written culture reshapes and redefines them during the High Middle Ages in France. Especially in the case of the *chansons de toile*, songs *about* women said to be sung *by* women, are included in literature and remembered in this way at a time when women were excluded from the realm of writing. How could they have then preserved their songs? Ideas of remembrance, memory, and the past all come together in this chapter to highlight the significance of 'behind-the-scenes' types of interactions: those between mothers and daughters, those hidden stories within other stories, and those tales of old that have seemingly been forgotten, yet which are threaded through the text.

Like Mother, Like Daughter

In regards to cloth and clothwork during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, no relationship could be considered more significant than that of a

¹⁰ Ibid.

mother and a daughter. Especially in terms of companionship and education, this type of female community, created within a household, is vital to understanding the creative and communicative effect that clothwork can have. The divide between male and female education in the High Middle Ages led to variant ways in which men and women communicated, and, as seen in Chapter Three, a female character's choice to write in a *feminine* language of cloth can be used to subvert patriarchal oppression through a new medium and an *écriture féminine*. The importance of female relationships within the domestic sphere hinges on that relationship's non-masculinity; the very fact that only women worked in the women's quarters creates a world of femininity, and moreover, a feminine excellence and skill in tasks such as embroidery, weaving, and spinning.

In Old French literature from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mother-daughter relationships do not seem to be a common trope or theme, and the lack of these mother-daughter relationships in the literature of the time brings their significance to the forefront of this argument. Father-son, mother-son, and even father-daughter relationships are much more frequent, and the mother-daughter relationships are seemingly a 'behind-the-scenes' type of occurrence, a relationship that normally happens outside of the scope of the literary audience and contained within the enclosed, domestic sphere. Thus, when these types of relationships are included in a romance, they carry a great impact. For example, in the mother-daughter relationship in the *Roman de Tristan et Iseut*, it is Iseut's mother who makes the *philtre* that allows her daughter to fall in love with the man she is intended to marry, which, in the end, does not happen because Tristan accidentally drinks it, instead of King Mark. Iseut's mother, as a woman of magic, has also passed down her healing abilities to Iseut, highlighting her educative role. This mother-

daughter relationship is underlined by the fact that the mother of Iseut drives the destiny of her daughter, as is very often the case with these types of relationships in medieval literature.

In the two versions of the story of Fresne, discussed previously in Chapter Two, *Le Fraisne* of Marie de France and *Galeran de Bretagne* by a certain Renaut, the mother-daughter relationship drives the story from beginning to end. Fresne's mother, making a decision to abandon one of her twin daughters for fear of slander, defines the destiny not only of the daughter who is abandoned, but also that of the daughter who is kept at home. Fresne, as the abandoned twin, lives her life without a mother as her role model, and is constantly defined by her inability to be identified by her family, who have forsaken her. While the authors present the happy ending wherein Fresne is able to marry the love of her life, Goron (or Galeran), the other twin sister, the one who has her fiancé taken away from her and given to her long-lost sister, is marginalised; Marie de France names this woman Coldre. While the audience of Marie de France's *lai* is told that Coldre makes a very profitable marriage back in her own country, most of her life as a child growing up with her mother is hidden. Renaut, on the other hand, extrapolates the story of Coldre, whose name is Flourie in *Galeran de Bretagne*.

The names of the two daughters are significant, though disputed amongst scholars as to their true meanings. Most scholars prefer to regard their classification as trees, and in the following excerpt from *Le Fraisne* by Marie de France, this opinion is clearly fruitful. Goron has left Fresne, and his men are urging him to take a wife even though he still longs to be with Fresne. One of his men tells him about a beautiful woman who would suit him well:

La Coldre a nun la dameisele;
en tut cest païs n'a si bele.
Pur le Fraisne que vus larrez
en eschange la Coldre avrez.
En la coldre a noiz e deduiz,
li fraisnes ne porte unkes fruiz. (*Fraisne*, ll. 345-350)

(The maiden is named Coldre, and in all of the country there is no woman more beautiful. Leave the Fraisne in exchange for the Coldre, for the nut tree produces delicious nuts, and the ash tree never produces any fruit.)

Fresne is named after the tree near the convent in which she was found, an ash tree ('Pur ceo qu'el fraisne fu trovee, \Le Fraisne li mistrent a nun' (Because she was found in an ash tree, she was given the name Fraisne) (*Fraisne*, ll. 228-9), and Coldre, without any explanation by Marie, is named after a *coudrier*, or a nut-bearing tree. In this particular scene, when the vassals of Goron are urging him to forget the love he feels for Fresne, who he cannot marry because of her low station, and to instead turn his gaze towards Coldre, they make their argument based on the reproductive qualities of the women. While the *coudrier* bears delicious nuts, the ash tree never bears any fruit, and in this way the women are defined by the (re)productive quality that their names suggest. The mother of the twin girls has given the ability to produce legitimate heirs to one of her daughters, while the other, having been abandoned with no name, dowry, or land, can produce nothing legitimate should she become the wife of Goron.

In Renaut's version, Coldre's name is changed to Flourie, a name which still highlights her reproductive value and which was given to her at baptism because she was born on Easter Day.¹¹ The destiny of each child is

¹¹ Renaut, *Galeran de Bretagne*, ed. and trans. Jean Dufournet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009) ll. 692-694: 'Et la contesse li fist joindre \Son non, si l'apella Flourie: \Le jour de la Pasque fleurie \Ot esté la contesse nee, \Et pour ce fu ainsi nommee' (And the countess gave her [the

clearly decided by the mother, and this is reflected in the name that she gives her daughter, signalling Flourie's reproductive value. Flourie, as the child that was 'bien nourrie' (brought up well) (*Galeran*, l. 684) by her mother, becomes the woman that can 'bear fruit' (or in *Le Fraisne*, 'produce nuts'). In a similar exchange to that above between Goron and his vassal, Galeran is urged to choose the sister who can give him noble and legitimate heirs (and *assez terre*):

Et sa fille est de haulte marge,
S'est belle et plaisant a devise ;
Ses taions fu li roys de Frise,
Et s'i pouez prendre assez terre. (*Galeran*, ll. 6434-7)

(And [Brundoré's] daughter is from a noble line, she is as beautiful and gracious as they come. Her ancestors were the kings of Frise, and she can give you plenty of land.)

While this reproductive quality can be seen in their names quite clearly, R. Howard Bloch makes an interesting (dis)connection between the names of the two twin girls in *Le Fraisne*:

Codre, the sister who stays home and is raised under the parental roof, embodies the principle of union or 'remembrement' in that her name is a homonym for *coudre*, 'to sew.' 'Fresne' (alternatively spelled 'Freisne' or 'Fraisne'), on the other hand, and this irrespective of the meanings that may in medieval folklore have been attached to the hazelnut and the ash tree, resonates with the Old French *fraindre* from the Latin *frango, frangere, fractum*, 'to break, break in pieces, dash, break in two.' Nor is it any accident that the sister who is cast out is accompanied by a signifying cloth [...] In the names of the sisters inheres the meaning of 'Le Fresne,' which is about breaking apart and coming together, about a speech act that rebounds and comes to haunt, about a child who is cast out and

child] her name, and called her Flourie. The countess was born on the flowering day of Easter, and for that reason she was so named.) All English translations are my own.

returns, about a sister who is retained and later displaced.¹²

This observation made by Bloch is only compounded by the true importance of the 'signifying cloth', in that it defines Fresne's lost nobility, and not only that, it opens the understanding of the importance of this *feminine* object, passed from a mother's hands to a daughter's hands and back again, much like a shuttle flies back and forth on a loom or a thread passes back and forth through a piece of embroidery. In the High Middle Ages, it was mothers who taught their daughters the art and skill of working cloth, and it was done together in the women's quarters. This is a tradition from which Fresne was excluded, though she was said to have excellent skill in clothwork, and thus she presumably learned this from the nuns at the convent where she was raised. Though she did not learn the skill at the lap of her mother as Coldre did, she, as a woman, would not have been prevented from practising this feminine activity. Coldre learned to *coudre* from her mother, taking part in the female courtly education, and though she is the sister who is knitted into the noble family of Dol with her parents, and arranged into a marriage with a nobleman, she is the one who, as R. Howard Bloch states, is 'later displaced.'

At the end of Marie de France's *lai*, the audience is told of Fresne and Goron's beautiful and happy wedding after her reconnection with her mother and, as an aside, the end to Coldre's story is told as such:

Quant en lur país s'en alerent,
la Coldre, lur fille, en menerent.
Mult richement en lur cuntree
fu puis la meschine donee. (*Fraisne*, ll. 529-32)

(Then they [the parents] went back to their country taking with them Coldre, their daughter, for whom they then made a profitable marriage in their own

¹² Bloch, pp. 78-79.

land.)

Renaut, however, chooses to paint the end of the sisters' story in a very different way. Once Fresne has been reunited with both of her parents, they immediately throw themselves into annulling the marriage of Flourie and preparing for the marriage of Fresne to Galeran:

Sans esloignier et sans sejour
S'aparaillent des noces faire.
Flourie font arriere traire,
Qui pres va de duel ne se tue. (*Galeran*, ll. 7684-7)

(Without delay and with haste, they prepared for the nuptials. They placed Flourie in the background, who nearly killed herself from grief.)

Fresne's story begins with ostracism and abandonment, and Flourie's ends the same way. Fresne's happy ending causes Flourie's tragic ending, and because of the initial lie of the mother, the twins are exchangeable and cannot exist in the same space. Where Flourie triumphs initially, Fresne struggles, and in Fresne's banishment, their mirrored existence is described as such:

A grant deduit et a haultesse,
A grant joie et a grant richesse
Ot Fleurie sa nourreture,
Mais sa seur fu en aventure,
Que Galet le preuz emporta. (*Galeran*, ll. 695-9)

(Flourie was raised with great rank, honour, joy, and riches, but her sister would know great adventure as Galet the Valiant carried her away.)

The mother of the twin girls decided at their birth which daughter would live a life of grandeur and nobility and which would grow up without a defined lineage, but even to the end of the tale, she sees and speaks of her daughters as though they are interchangeable. Once she realises that Fresne

is the daughter she abandoned long ago, and that Fresne is in love with Galeran as well, she says to her long-lost daughter: 'Car pleüst a Dieu que Flourie\Fust en ton lieu et tu ou sien!\Or vouldroie assez plus ton bien\Que le sien, si Dieux bien me face' (I pray to God that Flourie were in your place and you in hers! I care more for your happiness than for hers, God willing) (*Galeran*, ll. 7310-3). Even though she has dedicated her entire maternal life to Flourie's happiness and success in love, she makes no secret of her desire for Fresne's happiness in exchange for Flourie's. The twin girls seem to be, in the opinion of their mother, two halves of one whole, and one must succeed while the other fails, one must be happy while the other grieves. Essentially, the twins' diverging narratives can be understood as two separate destinies of the main female protagonist.

Therefore, throughout the entirety of *Galeran de Bretagne*, a mirror is placed between the two sisters who have never met, particularly in regards to Galeran himself. He sees the beauty of Fresne in Flourie and tells himself that this is enough for him to marry her if he cannot have the one he truly loves. Galeran, in the episode in which he is urged by his men to choose Flourie over Fresne, even states that: 'Je ne l'aim mie\Ainz porte le semblant m'amie;\Si la desire plus a avoir\Que fame de greigneur pouoir' (I do not love her, except in that she resembles my love. I desire to have her [Fresne] more than a woman of great power) (*Galeran*, ll. 6419-23). This duplicative existence of two female lovers is strikingly similar to that of the Iseuts in the *Roman de Tristan et Iseut*. Tristan, though unfailingly in love with Iseut la Blonde (a woman married to his uncle), decides to marry another woman, Iseut aux Blanchés Mains, with the reasoning that if he cannot have the Iseut he truly loves, at least he can have someone who shares her name, and can imagine her to be the one true Iseut. In this way as well, Galeran agrees to

marry the twin sister that he can have, because he can imagine that it is the twin that he cannot have when he looks at her image. In fact, Renaut depicts Galeran as 'Aussi com Narcisus de s'ombre \ Fu en la fontaine soupris, \ Galeren est de l'ombre pris \ Fresnain, ce est de son semblant' (Just as Narcissus was captivated by his own reflection in the fountain, so too is Galeran unable to look away from the reflection of Frene, that is to say, from that which is her likeness) (*Galeran*, ll. 5528-31). Galeran's decision to marry Flourie, though Flourie does truly love him, is based entirely on his ability to see Fresne in Flourie. In this way, Fresne is mirrored in Flourie, and their juxtaposition is highlighted throughout the romance.

With regard to the love and devotion that Gente has shown Flourie, a point which is omitted in Marie de France's version, Gente is shown as a good mother, educating her daughter on how to be a virtuous and courtly lady. When Galeran comes to Dol in order to meet Flourie, Gente invites him into the women's chambers:

Galeran par la main en maine
 En chambres, quant salué l'a
 Longuement l'a festoié la,
 Et Fleurie qui lez li siet.
 Or li prie que ne li griet
 Gente, qui va a son seigneur:
 'Belle fille, faictes hounour,
 Fait elle, a mon seigneur le conte.'
 Celle n'a mie trop grant honte,
 Ainz est courtoise et bien aprise
 N'est vers le conte de riens prise. (*Galeran*, ll. 5206-16)

(After he had greeted her, [Gente] took Galeran by the hand and led him into the chambers, and she long entertained him, and Flourie was seated at her side. Gente, as she went to her husband, asked Galeran to excuse her, and she said: 'My dear daughter, please entertain the count.' She, who was not timid, but rather courteous and well brought up, she was lacking in nothing

towards the Count.)

In this scene, the mother leaves Galeran and Flourie alone so that Galeran might be charmed by her daughter, and a critical inclusion in this excerpt is that Gente instructs her daughter to entertain Galeran; that is, she instructs her to follow the example she has just set before her departure. This educative scene highlights the mother-daughter relationship between Gente and Flourie, and allows the audience to witness a particularly intimate moment in the courtly education of a young woman.

In an interesting parallel between the twin girls, it is a piece of cloth that reunites Fresne with her mother *and* it is also a piece of cloth that allows Galeran to see Flourie for the first time and thus create the mirrored reflection of the woman that he loves. Once Galeran has been invited into the women's chambers by Gente and left alone with Flourie, he says to her: 'Belle, ne vous soit grief, \Ostés la guimple de vo chief, \Qu'apertement vous vueil veoir' (Beautiful lady, do not take this badly, but please lift your veil so that I might see you clearly) (*Galeran*, ll. 5227-9). Renaut has already stated that Galeran 'la voit simple et belle et sage \Et ausques bien parlant pucelle' (saw her as modest, beautiful, and wise, and a rather well-spoken maiden) (*Galeran*, ll. 5218-9), and yet he wishes to gaze more fully upon her face because she has reminded him of Fresne. She, as a good hostess, agrees to his request saying 'ce me doit bien seoir, \Puis que vous siet, et bien le vueil' (That should be agreeable to me, because you wish it, and so I do it willingly) (*Galeran*, ll. 5230-1). Once she has lifted the piece of cloth that stands significantly between her definition as Flourie and her definition as the mirror of Fresne, Galeran immediately starts to kiss her over and over, and Renaut remarks that she is unable to physically fight him off because he

embraces her with such force and ardour. This scene is a moment of transformation for Flourie; she becomes a stand-in for her long-lost twin sister and is diminished to a mere reflection. She rebukes Galeran for his advances upon her and he realises that in embracing Flourie he has betrayed Fresne. He leaves the chambers and goes to an orchard, where he reflects on his actions, saying:

Si je bays le semblant m'amie,
Ay je dont fait si grant outrage ?
Enne bays je souvant s'ymage
Qu'elle a en sa manche pourtraicte ?
Quelle raison ay avant traite ?
Fresne l'a tyssue a ses mains,
S'en y a fait ne plus ne mains
Qu'il a en li, si la ressemble.
Par foy, greindre resons me semble
A la pucelle de ceens
Qu'a l'ymage, qui est niens
Envers li, qu'elle me presente
Fresnain, tant est et belle et gente,
Et pour Fresnain amer la vueil. (*Galeran*, ll. 5292-305)

(If I kiss the reflection of my lover, have I committed a great crime? Have I not often kissed her image which she portrayed on her sleeve? For what reason did I treat her so before? Fresne embroidered it with her hands, and she put into it neither more nor less than she is herself, and it resembles her. By faith, it seems to me more reasonable to embrace the young girl of this house than the portrait which cannot compare to her, because she shows me Fresne, as she is beautiful and gracious, and it is for Fresne that I want to love her.)

The *manche* of which Galeran speaks here is the sleeve upon which Fresne embroidered her own portrait so that she might be with Galeran while they are separated.¹³ Once Flourie removes her veil, the piece of cloth that has kept her from being defined as the mirrored reflection of Fresne, she is then

¹³ See Chapter Two of this study, pp. 102-8.

associated with another piece of cloth made *by* Fresne, though Galeran does place kissing her a fraction above kissing an inanimate sleeve. In this way, Flourie's relationship with Galeran, which has been established by her mother, is defined by her ability to reflect Fresne; she becomes the replacement for the cloth that represented Fresne's image, and her relationship with Galeran is then ultimately fractured by the cloth that represents Fresne's noble status: the piece of samite that her mother recognises.¹⁴

In both Marie de France's *Le Fraisne* and Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*, the relationship between the mother and her two daughters is defined through cloth and courtly education. Another such mother-daughter relationship is found in Jean Renart's aforementioned *Guillaume de Dole*. In Chapter Three of the present study, the character of Lienors from this romance was explored as a character who uses objects that she has personally embroidered to gain a voice for herself in the public sphere, which, in turn, allows her to clear her name of slander. This present chapter, bearing in mind the excellent skill with which Lienors is said to embroider, will focus on a different scene from Renart's romance in an attempt to understand more fully Renart's employment of the *chanson de toile* and the development of the relationship between Lienors and her mother.

In the scene in which the character of Lienors is introduced, Nicole, the faithful messenger of the Emperor Conrad, has travelled to Dole (an area in Franche-Comté) in order to confirm what Jouglet, the emperor's entertainer, has told Conrad: that Guillaume de Dole is the finest knight and that his sister, Lienors, is the fairest and most virtuous maiden that man has

¹⁴ See Chapter Two, pp. 97-102.

ever seen. Upon meeting Guillaume, it is clear to Nicole that Jouglet has spoken the truth about the knight, for he is very handsome and gracious. Guillaume invites Nicole into his home and takes her to the women's quarters so that Nicole might meet his mother and his sister, much in the same way that Gente invites Galeran into their chambers to meet Flourie. Renart remarks that 'il en a mout fet por lui \ Que iames nentrera puis hui \ En chambre a dame na pucele \ ou il voie nule si bele' ('Now you may be very sure that Guillaume did him a great favor, for Nicholas would never again enter the chamber of a lady or a maiden where he would see any so beautiful.') (ll.1119-22). Thus, Renart defines Lienors through the gaze of Nicole as the most beautiful woman man has ever seen, again verifying the words of Jouglet, just as the gaze of Galeran defined Flourie as the mirror of Fresne. In this scene, Lienors is seated next to the two men, and she greets them. Guillaume's mother is seated 'desor une grant coute pointe' ('On a great embroidered cushion') (l. 1128) and is presented in this way:

ouvroit sa mere en une estole
 vez fet il biaux amis nicole
 Quel ovriere il a en madame
 cest une mervellouse fame
 et set assez de cest mestier
 Fanons garnemenz de moustier
 chasubles beles aubes parees
 ont amdeus maintes foiz ouvrees (ll.1129-36)

(His mother was working on a vestment: 'See,' said Guillaume, 'fair friend Nicole, what a needlewoman my mother is. She is an extraordinary woman, and knows a lot about this work. The two of them have often made hangings, church ornaments, chasubles, fair ornate albs.)¹⁵

¹⁵ The virtuosity of the women is shown clearly by the fact that everything that Guillaume's mother creates is a work for the church, which highlights the ideas about virtuosity in clothwork (especially in relation to the Virgin Mary) present in Chapter One of this study.

Guillaume invites Nicole into these private quarters so that Nicole is able see his mother and sister's worth and virtue. He does not fail to tell the emperor's messenger that, in fact, 'cest aumosne et deduis \ Ses met as povres moustiers vuis \ degarnemenz et derichece' (it's both charity for them and a pleasure; they give them to the poor churches¹⁶ where there are no ornaments or riches) (ll. 1137-9), alerting him to the fact that his mother and sister are truly the perfect examples of women. His mother even introduces herself by saying: 'Que dex me doint ioie et leece \ et de moi et de mes enfanz \ ce li sui ge toz iors proianz' (I pray to God daily for joy and happiness for my children and for me) (ll. 1140-2), and Nicole here remarks on what a good prayer that is for a mother to have.

Having succeeded in presenting his mother and sister as virtuous and pious women, Guillaume entreats his mother to sing a song for them, asking, 'dame fet il une chancon \ car nos dites si ferez bien' (Lady, do sing us a song; that would be kind) (ll. 1144-5). The mother sings the following *chanson de toile*:

Lors conmenca seri et cler.

Fille et la mere se sieent a lorfrois a un fil
dor i font orieuls croiz. parla la mere qui
le cuer ot cortois. tant bele amor fist aude
en doon. Aprenez fille a coudre et a filer. et en
lorfrois les oriex crois lever. lamor doon vos
convient oublier. tant bon amor fist
bele aude en doon. (ll.1158-66)

(Then she began pure and clear:

Daughter and mother are sitting at the orphrey,
with a thread of gold they make golden crosses on it.
The mother spoke, whose heart was courtly.
So much good love did fair Aude have for Doon!

¹⁶ A more accurate translation for *moustiers* would be 'monasteries' or 'convents'.

'Daughter learn to sew and spin, and raise gold crosses
on the orphrey. You must forget the love of Doon.'
So much good love did fair Aude have for Doon!)

This *chanson*, as the first instance of these sewing songs within the romance, is significant in its placement and mirroring effect. The *chanson de toile* tells the tale of a mother attempting to teach her daughter a proper and virtuous activity. The mother tells her daughter to pay attention to the activity at hand and to forget her musings on the love of a man. In the *chanson*, the mother and daughter are stitching gold crosses, most likely in a charity for the local church, and in this act, the audience can make the connection between the virtue of the mother and daughter within the song and what Guillaume has told Nicole about the works of his mother and sister: that they do them out of charity for the church. The mother, 'qui le cuer ot cortois', tells her daughter how to live a good and courtly life. Guillaume's mother, much like the mother in the *chanson*, has been established as a very courtly woman and a good mother.¹⁷

The way in which the mother and daughter work together, both in the main narrative and in the *chanson de toile*, alerts the reader to an important portrait of a domestic female community. Here the men are not singing along, nor are they working, but they are simply there to gaze upon the women in their chamber and to be entertained by their beauty and their song, as if the women are objects for enjoyment. The women are both beautiful and courtly, both virtuous and wise. The mother in the *chanson* is seen as the teacher of her daughter, much as Gente is presented in *Galeran de Bretagne*. In addition, the mother of Guillaume, still teaching her daughter the arts of womanhood, goes on to ask her daughter to sing a song for Nicole as

¹⁷ Renart, ll. 1236-7: 'et se pense cainc mes ne vit \ si bons enfanz ne tele mere' (privately [Nicole] thought that he had never seen such good children or such a mother.)

well: 'Ma bele fille fet la mere\Il vos estuet feste et honor\Fere au vallet lempereor' (My beautiful daughter,' said the mother, 'you must honor and entertain the emperor's messenger) (ll. 1178-80). This mirroring of mother and daughter enhances the mirroring of song and story, and the mother's insistence on her daughter exhibiting courtly behaviour by attending to the entertainment of Nicole is much like the scene in *Galeran de Bretagne* in which Gente leaves her daughter Flourie to attend to Galeran. This is all part of the education of the young women by their mothers, during which they are taught to be virtuous and courteous, particularly through examples set by their mothers. The inclusion of domestic female communities that consist of a mother and a daughter in *Le Fraisne*, *Galeran de Bretagne*, and *Guillaume de Dole* highlights the significant manner in which the mother and daughter relationship is related to cloth and clothwork, a decidedly feminine activity performed in the gendered space of the women's quarters.

While it is perhaps too presumptuous to say that these types of female communities and these relationships between mothers and daughters must have existed simply because they are recounted in the literature of the time, historical accounts of mothers and daughters, even those relationships fraught with dissention, such as that of Christine de Pizan and her mother,¹⁸ alert modern scholars to an underlying truth in these literary creations. While there has not been much historical unearthing of the *chansons de toile*, other than the fact that they exist in various forms and works, there are enough instances of similar lyrical creation throughout contemporary Europe to draw conclusions about these simple songs. Typical *spinnlieder* from such places as Baden in modern-day southern Germany, or the waulking songs of the Western Isles of Scotland, paint an historical picture of a domestic

¹⁸ See Chapter 5 of the present study, p. 218-9.

community of women, not well-documented archivally, but perhaps, at the time, also not seen to be worthy of documentation. The *chansons de toile* are, however, documented in the popular literature of the High Middle Ages. This music, entrenched in the process of working cloth, has the ability to transcend the domestic sphere. It lives outside of a simple definition of 'women's work', and these *chansons de toile*, and the female communities that are formed within them, are no exception. In the following exploration of the *chansons de toile* included in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, they serve as a mirror to the trajectory of the romance itself and indicate a distinct shift from domestic activity to public performance.

Mirror, Mirror

Galeran de Bretagne contains both the aforementioned mirror of mother and daughter, as Gente sets an example of courtly behaviour for Flourie, and the mirror of the twin sisters. This dichotomy and parallel between two female characters provides a discourse about the domestic education of young women by their mothers, and equally their objectification in relation to male characters. Though the mother-daughter reflection and educative imagery is also contained in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, here it serves a different purpose than solely the mirroring of mother and daughter in terms of courtly education.

Michel Zink, among other Renart scholars, references the importance of the *chanson de toile* of *Fille et la mere se sieent a lorfois*, as 'Lienor et sa mère apparaissent comme les doubles des femmes que mettent en scène leurs

chansons.¹⁹ Zink here notes the doubling or ‘mirroring’ effect in this first *chanson de toile* that is sung by the mother of Guillaume and Lienors, aptly identifying all the ways in which Renart has hinted at a link between the songs and the narrative. While scholars such as Zink, Boulton, and Psaki have stated that all of the songs (not solely the *chansons de toile*) serve a certain purpose in the development of the narrative, this chapter presents a close-reading of the four subsequent *chansons de toile*, and how they fit into the overall trajectory of Lienors’ story in particular. After Lienors’ mother has sung the first *chanson de toile*, which sets up this mirroring theme, she tells her daughter to follow her example by singing for the emperor’s messenger, and Lienors, following her mother’s suit and request, sings the following *chanson de toile*, entitled *Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*:

Siet soi bele aye as piez sa male maistre.
 sor ses genouls un paile d'engle
 terre. a un fil i fet coustures beles. he!
 he! amors d'autre pais. mon cuer avez
 et lie et souspris. –Aval la face li
 courent chaudes lermes. Qel est batue
 et au main et au vespre. por ce quel aime
 souldoier d'autre terre. he! amor
 d'autre pais. mon cuer avez et lie et
 souspris (ll. 1183-92)

(‘Fair Aye sits at the feet of her cruel governess,²⁰
 an English silk brocade on her knees,
 and with a thread she makes fair stiches therein.
 Oh! Oh! love from another country, you have both bound
 and captured my heart. Down her face run hot tears,
 for she is beaten morning and night
 for loving a paid soldier from another land.
 Oh! Oh! love from another country,

¹⁹ Zink, *Roman Rose et Rose Rouge*, p. 24.

²⁰ A more accurate translation of the word *maistre* would be ‘mistress’.

you have both bound and captured my heart.’)

This song mirrors the overall romance narrative of *Guillaume de Dole*, and it also provides an example of the underlying importance of the domestic female relationship between Lienors and her mother. In this particular *chanson de toile*, much as in the first, there is mirroring imagery of a domestic relationship between a young woman and her female teacher (mother/governess). Renart uses the *chanson* to underline the relationship between these two women who work together, which leads the audience to understand the importance of this female relationship. While it is not yet known that the seneschal will trick Lienors’ mother into revealing privileged information about her daughter, which leads to her social destruction,²¹ this *chanson* does foreshadow the impending ostracism of Lienors by her family. Bele Aye’s governess is defined as ‘male’ which Regina Psaki has translated as ‘cruel’, and Lienors’ mother is defined by Renart as a ‘chetive vielle hors dou sens’ (wretched old woman, foolish and mad) (l. 3378) once she makes the mistake of being so flattered by the seneschal that she divulges privileged information about her daughter. The nephew of Lienors and Guillaume likewise chastises the mother for having guarded Lienors ‘si mal’ (so poorly) (l. 3940). Unlike the working mother-daughter relationship in the first *chanson de toile*, the mirrored relationship of Bele Aye and her ‘mal maistre’ and Lienors and her mother at this point in the ‘mirroring’ is one of two women working together who are symbiotically coexisting, albeit not in a beneficial relationship. The female relationship in this *chanson* underlines the tear in the fabric of the bond between Lienors and her mother upon her betrayal.

²¹ See the discussion of Lienors in Chapter Three of the present study, pp. 142-52.

The subject matter of Bele Aye's lament is that she loves a man from a foreign land, and because of this she is beaten day and night; while it may not be immediately clear how this relates to the character or story of Lienors, there is a mirroring effect with this aspect of the *chanson* as well. Bele Aye, the audience is told, is beaten because she loves a mercenary soldier from another land, and the rumour of Lienors' lost virginity is tied to the fact that she supposedly gave her virtue away to a seneschal from the court of the Emperor Conrad. This theme of women who are locked away or beaten is not particular to this *chanson de toile*, and the violence inflicted upon Bele Aye is seen almost as if it were a normal occurrence.²² In the same way, the moment that Guillaume is told that Lienors has lost her virginity to a seneschal, he throws himself into a violent tirade against her very character and person, and worse yet, the nephew of Guillaume and Lienors rides off to Dole in a blind rage to kill Lienors for what she has done. Guillaume, miserable with grief at the news of his sister's treachery, says 'en tel doel ma mis. \La vieus la jaianz jaielus' (the wretch, the slut, the whore has caused me this grief) (ll. 3806-7). He then tells his nephew what Lienors has done to deserve this aggression, and the nephew responds immediately with:

oncles ci a grant ochoison
 par qoi len la doit bien destruire
 Sel ne se haste quele muire
 Ie lo cirrai a mes .ii. mains
 Femes getent ades dou mains
 por fere honte a lor amis (ll. 3832-7)

(Uncle, this is a serious matter, for which she must be killed. If she herself does not hasten to die, I'll kill her with my own two hands. Women always manage to make a bad move to bring shame on their friends.)

²² Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, pp. 111-116.

After Guillaume and his nephew discuss her treachery, the nephew rides off to Dole in haste, and once he reaches the home he ‘a trete lespee nue\et sen vet grant pas vers la sale’ (drew his naked sword and strode away to the hall) (ll. 3916-7). He is ready to punish Lienors for the love he assumes she bears for the seneschal, and he even refers to Lienors as ‘Ce li voir que io cirrai hui!\A mes .ii. mains se ge la truis’ (The one I shall kill today with my own two hands, if I find her!) (ll. 3942-3). In the end, Lienors’ mother, who has been mixed up in the commotion, realises what part she has played in her daughter’s ruin. She faints, and is attended to by Lienors, at which point the enraged nephew takes his leave. Lienors, because she has allegedly lost her virginity to the seneschal and is no longer suitable to marry the emperor, is disowned by her family and treated with contempt and violence. The *chanson de toile* of Bele Aye, unlike that of *Fille et la mere se sieent a l’orfois*, is not a mirror to the scene of Lienors spinning and singing with her mother, but rather could be seen to mirror what will happen further on in the story, when she is subjected to violence. The story of a young woman with a love from another country, beaten for loving a foreign soldier, rings similar to the story of Lienors. In E. Jane Burns’ essay ‘Sewing like a Girl: Working Women in the *chansons de toile*,’ she references the tenuous line between a woman empowered and a woman mistreated, epitomised in the *chanson de toile* of Bele Aye:

Indeed, this brief song cogently encodes the complex doubled position occupied by a number of singing women throughout the *chansons de toile*, courtly heroines balanced precariously between the poles of working subject and object of desire, often located in an enclosed chamber that might either facilitate women’s work and lead to fulfillment in love or entrap and restrain the beautiful lady against her will. At times the fragile line between male desire for and denigration of women snaps and the beloved object of affection and

adoration become the object of abuse.²³

This portraiture is exemplified by Lienors as well as Bele Aye, a beautiful and desired object thrown into a life of abuse that she did not choose or make for herself. Furthermore, it calls to mind the other tales of romantic heroines explored throughout this study, continuously walking a line between subjectivity and objectivity, entrapment and empowerment. Tisbé actively leaves her home, but her physical body is replaced by her clothbody through the gaze of Piramus, which undermines her agency. Fresne shows her agency in embroidering her image onto her *manche*, but, once it is physically separated from her, she has no control over its treatment. Philomena, too, refuses love from Tereus, and is raped, muted, and imprisoned to work, though she does use her imprisonment to her advantage. She exemplifies the constant struggle of the medieval heroine. Lienors, in this moment of objectification, where she sits working cloth and entertaining men, and subsequently in her unjust treatment and ostracism by those same men, embodies both 'a working subject and [an] object of desire.'

In this *chanson de toile*, Bele Aye is working on an English brocade, and this, in conjunction with her lament over her lover from another land, alerts the reader to how the woman's desire is mirrored in her clothwork, as both her lover and her brocade are from another land, a feature which Burns explores further in 'Sewing Like a Girl'.²⁴ Lienors' clothworking is certainly mirrored in the *chanson* of *Fille et la mere se sieent a l'orfois*, but this clothwork defines her courtly education, piety, and virtue, rather than her love or

²³ E. Jane Burns, 'Sewing Like a Girl: Working Women in the *chansons de toile*', in *Medieval Women's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck & Ann Marie Rasmussen (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) pp. 99-126 (pp. 123-4).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

desire. However, in the mirroring of her clothwork with that of *Bele Aye*, the desire of Lienors becomes clear. The embroidered gifts that Lienors sends to the seneschal signify her imagined or pretended identity as the Chatelaine de Dijon, which, when compounded by her cunning plot against the seneschal, leads to her freedom from the slanderous lie attributed to her. While *Bele Aye's* desire to be with her foreign lover is reflected in her sewing an English brocade, Lienors' desire to be proven innocent of her crime is manifested in the embroidered gifts possessed by the seneschal. Through this cunning plot, she 'regains' her virginity, and, in so doing, she regains the admiration and love of the Emperor Conrad once again. She thus acquires that which she desires through her own embroidery of objects. While *Bele Aye's* desire is mirrored in the foreignness of her love and the foreignness of her brocade, so too is Lienors' desire for truth mirrored in her embroidery and in her plot against the seneschal, her own foreign 'lover'.

In Renart's inclusion of *Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*, which he places in the mouth of his female protagonist, he embroiders his romance with the themes underpinned in the lyrical *chanson*. The importance (and perhaps destructive potential) of the female communities in the domestic sphere, the social and familial destruction that can occur when a woman loses her virtue or loves someone she should not, and the violent acts committed against these female characters enhance the interplay between female desire and clothwork. Though this particular song has a foreshadowing effect, it is also critical to understand the context of the romance into which it is placed. Lienors is singing this song at the behest of her mother and in order to entertain Nicole and her brother. The *chansons de toile* are then being sung for the pleasure and at the behest of the patriarchy, as a male guest is led into the inner space of the household where women are

at work, and the men hear and are entertained by the female voices as they sing songs about women, which highlight, as E. Jane Burns so aptly reports, women's foray into the courtly love lyric as desiring subjects, rather than remaining simply desired objects.²⁵ In *Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*, the woman sings about her desire for the man that she loves while she works, and Lienors, too, can be seen as a woman desiring love as she sings these songs in order to charm the emperor through his messenger.

The second song that Lienors sings in this same scene, *La bele Doe siet au vent*, is at the behest of her brother, Guillaume, and she commences her song:

La bele doe siet au vent.
Souz laubespine guion atent
plaint et regrete tant forment
por son ami qui si vient lent
Diex quel vassal a en doon
Diex quel vassal dex quel baron
Ia namerai se doon non
Com ez chargiez com ez floriz
a toi me mist plet mes amis
mes il ne veut a moi venir
Dex quel vassal a en doon
Dex quel vassal dex quel baron
Ia namerai se doon non (ll. 1203-16)

(‘Fair Doe sits in the wind,
waiting for Guion beneath the hawthorn.
She complains and laments so,
on account of her love who is so slow in coming:
‘God, what a knight Doon is!
God, what a knight! God, what a lord!
I shall never love anyone but Doon.’
‘How laden you are, how full of flowers!’

²⁵ Ibid., p. 110: ‘The courtly beauty has moved over the course of this woman’s song (and indeed at times from one line to the next) from being the adored object of desire to adopting a less familiar pose as a desiring subject.’

My love told me to meet him beside you,
but he does not want to come to me.
God, what a knight Doon is!
God, what a knight! God, what a lord!
I shall never love anyone but Doon.')

In this *chanson de toile*, Lienors sings of a woman waiting alone under a hawthorn tree for a lover who is not coming for her. Bele Doe sings to the tree as a marker that her lover does not want her as he may once have done, as time passes and seasons change. After the lie is spread about the loss of her virginity, Lienors, like Bele Doe, is alone. Her brother and nephew have disowned her, and even attempted to kill her; her betrothed, the Emperor Conrad, has forsaken her, and no one comes to her aid, no one fights for her. *La bele Doe siet au vent*, like *Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*, does not reflect the current events of the romance at this point; however, a mirroring of Lienors' future is reflected in the theme of the *chanson*. The *chanson de toile* of *La bele Doe siet au vent* differs from the two previously included *chansons de toile* in the female protagonist's solitude (as opposed to the inclusion of a symbiotic female relationship) and the lack of clothwork (whereas the female protagonists in the other *chansons de toile* were working with *fil d'or* or *une paile*). This discord between the two previous songs and this last song of Lienors alerts the audience to a new romantic conception in the romance itself. *Guillaume de Dole* diverts from the typical trope of romance in which a courtly knight ultimately saves a woman from some form of imprisonment or entrapment; rather, in Renart's romance, Lienors saves herself through a cunning plot against the seneschal. The final *chanson* that is sung by the female characters in the women's quarters (the other two being sung later by men in public) portrays a woman who is alone and outside of the domestic sphere, much as Lienors is left alone after her family has disowned her and

she no longer belongs to any house of Dole. In this romance, it is the female protagonist who saves herself, and it is at the critical moment when her mother has fainted, her brother is in painful misery and has disowned her, her nephew has tried to kill her, and she is completely alone in the world that she decides to take up her needle and save herself. Bele Doe, sitting out beneath the hawthorn tree, waits for Guion, who is never coming, and there is no man, including Guillaume, coming for Lienors; thus, she takes matters into her own skilled hands.

After she sings this song, Lienors refuses to sing anymore, telling her brother that 'seroit ce sanz cortoisie' ('it would be discourteous') (l. 1218) to insist that she sing another song for them. Nicole, agreeing with her, lets her know that she has won his thanks and favour, 'et la querele et voz amis' ('the argument and your family's praise') (l. 1223). Thus ends this scene of female community, mother and daughter united in work and song. Nicole rides back to Mainz with Guillaume, and the mother and Lienors vanish from the story until the fateful moment when the jealous seneschal comes to visit their home while Guillaume is still away and hatches his plan to bring their family to ruin. This scene, in which Lienors and her mother are working, however, stands out in this romance as the only instance of a domestic space occupied by female characters, particularly in terms of its juxtaposition with Lienors' impending and enforced solitude.

The fourth *chanson de toile* included in *Guillaume de Dole* also acts as a mirror to the story of the romance. However, it is not sung in this scene of mother-daughter clothwork, and in fact, it is not sung by a female character at all. This particular *chanson*, the only *chanson de toile* that is included nearly

in its full length in the romance,²⁶ is sung after the scene in which the three previously discussed *chansons de toile* have been recited, and, interestingly, it is sung by a young knight from Normandy on his way to a tournament. He sings the story of *Bele Aiglentine en roial chamberine*:

La bele aiglentine en roial chamberine
devant sa dame cousoit une chemise. ainc
nen sot mot quant bone amor la tise. or
orrez ja comment la bele Aiglentine exploita
Devant sa dame cousoit et si tailloit. Mes
ne coust mie si com coudre soloit. ele sen
tre oublie si se point en son doit. la soe mere
mout tost sen apercoit. or orrez ia comment.
Bele aiglentine deffublez vo sorcot. Ie voil
veoir desoz vostre gent cors. Non ferai dame
La froidure est la morz. Or orrez ia.
bele aiglentine qavez a empirier. Que sivos
voi palir et engroissier. Ma douce
dame ne le vos pui noier. Je ai aimi .i.
cortois soudoier. le preu henri que tant fet
a aproisier. Sonqes ma mastes aiez de moi
pitie. Or orrez i coment.
Bele aiglentine vos prendra il henris. Ne
sai voir dame car onqes ne li quis. bele
aiglentine or vos tornez de ci. tot ce
li dites que ge li mant henri. Sil vos prendrai
ou vos lera einsi. Volontiers dame la
bele respondi. Or orrez ia.
bele aiglentine sest tornee de ci. et est venue droit
a lostel henri. li quens henris se gisoit en son
lit. or orrez ja que la bele li dit. Or orrez ia
Sire henri velliez vos ou dormez. Ia vos
requiert aiglentine au vis cler. Se la prendrez a
moullier et a per. o il dit henris. onc ioie noi
mes tel. Or orrez ia
Oit le henris mout ioianz en devint. il fet
monter chevalier trusqa .xx. Si enporta la bele en

²⁶ Regina Psaki, 'Jean Renart's Expanded Text: Lienor and the Lyrics of *Guillaume de Dole*', in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance*, ed. by Durling, pp. 122-41 (p. 129).

son pais et espousa riche contesse en fist. grant
ioie en a li quens henris quant la bele
aiglentine a. (ll. 2235-95)

(Fair Aiglentine in her royal chamber
was sewing a shirt before her lady;
she didn't say a word, true love so silenced her.

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
Before her lady she sewed and cut;
but she does not sew at all as she usually did;
her mind wanders, and she pricks her finger.
Her mother quickly notices this.

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
'Fair Aiglentine, unfasten your surcoat;
I want to see your fair body.'
'I will not, my lady, for the cold is deathly.'

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
'Fair Aiglentine, what's making you suffer,
that I see you grown so pale and swollen?'
'My sweet lady, I cannot deny it to you:
I have loved a courteous hired soldier,
the valiant Henri, who is so much to be praised.
If ever you loved me, have pity on me.'

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
'Fair Aiglentine, will Henri marry you?'
'Truly, I do not know, lady, for I never asked him.'
'Fair Aiglentine, go now from this place:
you may tell Henri that I send to know
if he will take you, or leave you like this.'
'Gladly, lady,' the fair one replied.

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
Fair Aiglentine set out from that place,
and went straight to Henri's lodging.
Count Henri was lying in his bed.
Now you will hear what the fair one told him.

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.
'Lord Henri, are you awake or asleep?
Aiglentine of the bright face asks if you
will take her as your wife and companion.'
'Oh yes,' he said, 'I never heard such joyful news.'

Now you'll soon hear how fair Aiglentine managed.

Henri heard her, and rejoiced at it.
He had as many as twenty knights mounted,
and took away the fair one to his country
and married her, and made a rich countess of her.

And great joy he had of it,
count Henri, once he had Fair Aiglentine.)

In this *chanson de toile*, Bele Aiglentine has taken a lover, and her mother has discovered her secret through Bele Aiglentine's growing, pregnant belly. Instead of waiting for the Count Henri to come to her and ask for her hand in marriage, Bele Aiglentine rides to him and asks him to marry her. He does so, and makes her a rich countess. The knight from Normandy sings this song on his way to a tournament where both Guillaume and Conrad will be present, before the action of the seneschal's terrible lie, before Guillaume's disavowal of his sister, and before the rescinding of the emperor's previous intent to marry Lienors. In the public sphere, and in front of those people of the court who will judge and reject Lienors because of a rumour, the knight sings a *chanson de toile* about a woman who could have been beaten and disowned by her family for becoming pregnant by a man who is not (yet) her husband. However, Bele Aiglentine is the picture of a brave woman; she confesses her condition to her mother and goes in search of Count Henri, who is doing nothing but lying on a bed in his lodging (a particularly passive portraiture of a gallant male character), and asks him to marry her. At the behest and instigation of her mother, not unlike the relationship between Gente and Flourie or Lienors and her mother, Bele Aiglentine actively presents herself as a marriageable woman to her lover. She is the one who decides her own fate, just as Lienors, in a position of being seen by the public as an immoral woman, rides to the court of the emperor and clears her name, in order that he will decide to marry her again,

and moreover in order that her family will once more be free from slander and disrepute.

This *chanson de toile*, again, like two of the three previous *chansons de toile* sung by Lienors and her mother, is of a mother and daughter working cloth. This instance of a working, female community is significant in that it serves to once more underline the power possessed by the mother-daughter relationship in this romance. Both Bele Aiglentine and her mother are intimately involved with Aiglentine's physical body, just as Lienors and her mother are both privy to information about Lienors' body that is inadvertently divulged to the seneschal. The mother in the *chanson* asks to see the swollen belly of Bele Aiglentine, an intimate act, just as the mother of Lienors intimately describes the physical body of her daughter and the rose birthmark to the seneschal:

Ia mes nul hom qui parler puisse
Ne verra si fete merveille
come de la rose vermelle
desor *la cuisse blanche et tendre*
Il nest merveille ne soit mendre
Aoir ce nest nule doute
la grant beaute li descrit tote
et la maniere de son grant (ll. 3362-9, my emphasis)

(‘No man capable of speech will ever see such a wonder as the crimson rose on her *tender white thigh*. There is no wonder so extraordinary to hear, of this there is no doubt.’ She described its great beauty to him, and its shape and size.)

These physical markers of shame, the pregnancy of Bele Aiglentine and the rose birthmark upon Lienors' thigh, which will come to represent her loss of virginity, are intimate and private affairs, yet they are both made public, by the way in which Bele Aiglentine has started to show, and the way

in which the seneschal spreads the word of Lienors' birthmark as proof of her loss of virtue. Here especially, as with *Fille et la mere se sieent a l'orfois*, the mother-daughter relationship is of paramount importance to the mirroring effect contained in the romance. In *Bele Aiglentine en roial chamberine*, the mother takes notice of her daughter's physical condition, and, in speaking about it, allows it to be brought into the public sphere by encouraging her daughter to ride to Count Henri and ask him if he will marry her. In *Guillaume de Dole*, Lienors' mother, in this scene of misspoken words, brings the private details of her daughter's body into the public sphere by describing them to the seneschal, who then, as a man who is able to speak out publicly, spreads the word of her body in order to desecrate her family's good name.

There is an interesting paradox between the proof that the seneschal requires for his story to be believed and the proof that Lienors' requires. Whereas the seneschal needs only to speak about the naked body of Lienors, his gaze upon her (real or imagined) constitutes proof of his having taken her virginity. Lienors' accusation of rape, however, requires her to have physical objects attached to the senschal's body; they are so critical in fact, that the emperor does not initially believe her when she vocally accuses the seneschal without the proof of her embroidered objects. Once Lienors' says, 'il me toli mon pucelage' (he took my virginity) (l. 4784), the emperor responds to the seneschal, 'onques mes voir noi reclaim \ Que vos feissiez tel outrage' (ll. 4802-3) (I have never heard it said of you that you committed such an outrage), and once the seneschal denies the claim, the emperor turns to Lienors and says, 'Oez que dit li seneschaus \ [...] il levos nie' (You hear what the seneschal says [...] he denies your claim) (l. 4812-3). This is when Lienors asks that the seneschal be disrobed in order to reveal her stolen treasures; she

must publicly expose the secret aspects of the seneschal's naked body in order to prove her case, whereas the seneschal only needs to vocally claim that he has gazed upon her inner thigh. Michel Zink presents the secretive aspect of the birthmark as: 'la rose rouge sur la cuisse de Lienor [qui] est caché sous les vêtements',²⁷ which presents a compelling mirror, not only in terms of the growing belly of Bele Aiglentine, which is also hidden underneath her 'sorcot', but also in the way in which the gifts of Lienors are hidden underneath the clothes of the seneschal, tied tightly against his skin, making them seemingly a part of his body. Lienors makes her statement at the court of the emperor: 'mesor alez et si sachiez \ ses draz amont et sa chemise \ si verrez quil la ceinte et mise \ tot nuanu empres sa char' (Go now and pull up his clothing and his shirt: you will see that he has tied the belt onto his bare skin, on his very flesh.) (ll. 4834-7), and once his clothes are lifted up the truth comes to light. The embroidered objects found on his body are symbolic of Lienors' true virtue.

The idea that clothing reflects the inner being of a person, particularly of a woman, is evident through explorations of opulent fabric or modest cuts and mode; however, there were also anxieties about the ability a woman has to disguise herself in the Middle Ages. The current misogynistic climate, present in today's media, surrounding the assertion that wearing make-up is a means for women to 'lie' about their natural beauty is similar to medieval misogynistic ideas, especially in relation to clothing. In Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, a text argued to have been inspired by Jean Renart's own *Roman de la Rose*,²⁸ a jealous husband berates his wife for dressing opulently, stating that:

²⁷ Zink, *Roman Rose et Rose Rouge*, p. 45.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-92.

Car savoir doivent toutes fames
 Que ja fame, pour qu'ele vive,
 N'aura fors sa biauté naïve,
 Et tout autant di de bonté
 Com de biauté vous ai conté.
 Si di, pour ma parole ouvrir,
 Qui voudroit un fumier couvrir
 De dras de soie et de floretes
 Bien colorées et bien netes,
 Si seroit certes li fumiers,
 Qui de puir est coustumiers,
 Tels com avant estre souloit.
 Et se nus hons dire vouloit :
 'Se li fumiers est laiz par enz,
 Dehors en est plus biaux parenz,
 Tout ausi les dames se perent
 Pour ce que plus beles apperent
 Ou pour leur laidure repondre.' (ll. 8906-24)

(All women should know that as long as they live they will never have anything but their natural beauty, and I say the same about goodness as I have about beauty. I will begin my remarks by saying that if anyone wanted to cover a dung-heap with silken cloths or brightly coloured and neatly arranged little flowers, it would undoubtedly be the same, habitually foul-smelling dung-heap that it had been before. And if any man said: 'If the dung-heap is ugly within, it appears fairer on the outside; in the same way ladies adorn themselves in order to appear more beautiful or to hide their ugliness.')

These ideas of deception in clothing could have been in the minds of the medieval audience, and examples of disguise and misinterpretation abound in medieval romance. Clearly, the role of clothing and cloth is particularly illustrative in *Guillaume de Dole* in terms of definition and truth, just as identifying cloth appears in *Le Fraisne* and *Galeran de Bretagne*. Fresne

²⁹ Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose* ed. Armand Strubel (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992). English translation by Frances Horgan from *The Romance of the Rose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

is revealed to be the abandoned daughter of Gente through the opulent cloth in which she was wrapped as an infant,³⁰ and Flourie's secret identity as the identical twin sister of Fresne is revealed to Galeran by the lifting of her veil; thus, there is a theme of cloth as a barrier between what is perceived and what is seen. What is hidden by clothing cannot remain a secret forever. In the case of Lienors, she dresses herself as the Chatelaine de Dijon in order to enter the court of Conrad, and her clothing hides her true identity, which is now signified by the rose birthmark upon her thigh. Just as Bele Aiglentine lifts her shirt to reveal her pregnancy, so too does Lienors create a ruse in which the shirt of the seneschal is lifted to reveal the truth. Identity in relation to cloth, being the prime focus of Chapter Two, is very important to this study of femininity and feminine voice in Old French romance, and the way in which it figures in this chapter, particularly alongside the text of Jean de Meun, highlights a tension between revelation and secrecy. While the way in which Jean de Meun made his claim that clothing serves only to hide the truth is highly misogynistic, there is an element of this idea in Renart's *Roman de la Rose* as well. Lienors is able to conceal her birthmark through clothing, the seneschal does the same with the embroidered gifts, and both of these things are true and used as evidence in public claims. Equally, and as referenced in Chapter Two, E. Jane Burns' exploration of sartorial bodies that allow men and women to move between social classes based on the clothes that they wear provides even more examples of this type of anxiety embedded in medieval narrative. However, though some heroines (and heroes) use cloth in a dubious manner, not all revelations of identity through cloth are portrayed as wrong, and the case of Lienors' birthmark is a perfect

³⁰ Laid upon the marriage bed of Coldre and Goron in *Le Fraisne* and alternatively worn by Fresne in *Galeran de Bretagne* to allow her entry into the kingdom as a woman of higher station that she is thought to be.

example of this. Additionally, Fresne's identity is revealed by her *paile*, and neither the clothing that Lienors wears to hide her birthmark, nor the cloth of Fresne, present a heroine who misuses fabric in order to pretend to be something she is not, though both do conceal secrets.

The importance of the mother-daughter relationships in these *chansons de toile* cannot be underestimated in regards to the themes of the romance as a whole. Just as Gente decided the fate of Fresne and Coldre/Flourie, the mothers (or mother figures) in these *chansons de toile*, as well as the mother of Lienors possess an enormous amount of power to influence the events of their daughters' lives, and this derives from the intimate connection that they have as they share the women's quarters and as the mothers continuously set examples for their daughters. This juxtaposition between *Bele Aiglentine en roial chamberine* and the story of Lienors' great shame allows the audience to understand that a mother's words do not always have a positive influence on the lives of their daughters. Lienors' mother is established as a good and courtly mother, educating her daughter in the art of courtly love, embroidery, and song, and yet she is the one that causes the downfall of her daughter through her truthful speech act. It is up to Lienors to use a false speech act in order to free herself from the slander. In the mirroring *chanson de toile*, the mother of Bele Aiglentine instructs her daughter to tell the truth to the man that she loves, and this ends up winning the favour of Count Henri.

The final *chanson de toile* included in this romance is sung by 'uns nies lenvesque dou liege' (a nephew of the bishop of Liege) (l. 5185) directly after Guillaume is told of his sister's innocence. This particular *chanson de toile* is different from all the others in that there is no clothwork being done, nor is there any great subjectivity of the female character, whose name is Bele

Aigline. This *chanson* tells the story of a traditional dance that is arranged in April, around the time of Easter, and at a castle called Beauclair. Everyone comes from far and wide, and knights, maidens, squires, and ladies all enjoy themselves, and Bele Aigline is only mentioned towards the end of the *chanson*:

[...] la bele Aigline
si est fete mener. Si ot vestu un bliaut
de cendel qui granz .ii. aunes trainoit par
les prez. Guis aime Aigline. Aigline
aime guion. (ll. 5203-7)

(Fair Aigline is escorted there,
and she is wearing a tunic of fine silk
which trails two ells behind her on the meadow.
Gui loves Aigline, Aigline loves Gui.)

As this *chanson* is sung at the end of the tale, when all has been resolved and Conrad has 'enporta la bele \en son pais et espousa riche contesse enfist' ([taken] away the fair one to his country \and married her, and made a rich countess of her') (ll. 2292-3), just as Henri has done with Aiglentine, it is clear that Aigline being draped in a silk tunic represents and mirrors the happy ending of *Lienors*, in which she too is draped in an opulent robe. This robe depicts the Trojan War, and it factors importantly into Renart's presentation of archaism, which pervades his romance from the prologue to the conclusion.

The Good Old Days

In the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, Renart includes many references to an archaism palpable to the audience, from the dialogue to the

dress of the female characters in the romance. In the mother-daughter sewing scene, Renart hints at an archaism by ventriloquising one of his female characters as the mother defines the activity of working and singing *chansons* to be an outmoded fashion. When Guillaume asks his mother to sing a song for him and Nicole, she initially refuses to sing, stating that:

biaus filz ce fu *ca en arriers*
Que les dames et les roines
Soloient fere lor cortines
et chanter les chancons distoire (ll. 1148-51, my emphasis)

(Fair son, it was *long ago* that ladies and queens used to make their hangings and sing *chansons d'histoire!*)

Though she initially objects to singing, Renart does write, 'ele chantoit sor tote rien\et si le fesoit volentiers' ('She dearly loved to sing, and usually did it gladly) (ll. 1146-7), telling his audience that she does not object to singing because she cannot or does not enjoy it, but rather because she finds what her son has asked to her to do to be out of fashion. In fact, her reference to the *chancons distoire* only furthers Renart's aim to highlight the archaism and romance of this act of singing and working. By stating that it is an archaic practice, but still participating in that activity, the mother (and, moreover, Renart) give the audience (both the literary audience and the fictional audience of Guillaume and Nicole) the feeling that they are about to witness a special reenactment of the past. Renart does not claim to have written the *chansons de toile*,³¹ and, by including this underlying archaism, he leads the reader to believe that these songs are inherently part of the past, as they predate the narrative. Zink comments on the ways in which this leads to the

³¹ Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, 'Lyric Insertions and the Reversal of Romance Conventions in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose* or *Guillaume de Dole*', in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance*, ed. by Durling, pp. 85-104 (p. 88).

character portrayal of the two women in this scene: 'De même, il déclare qu'elles étaient chantées autrefois parce que leur facture lui donnait une impression d'archaïsme. C'est pour cet archaïsme qu'il les fait changer à Liënor et à sa mère, c'est cet archaïsme qui donne son sens à la scène de son roman qu'il tire de ces chansons.'³² The inclusion of the *chansons de toile*, particularly in this scene of mother and daughter working together, does not only colour the romance with an archaism, as Zink notes, but it also colours the female characters and defines them in their present state. They exist in the domestic sphere, though they are likewise seen by representatives of the public sphere (exemplified by Nicole, and, by extension, the emperor). As the *chanson de toile* of *Belle Aiglentine en roial chamberine* is sung by a knight at a tournament, a decidedly masculine space, and is the penultimate *chanson de toile* to be included in *Guillaume de Dole*, there is a clear progression from domestic to public sphere. Renart, by making these *chansons de toile* accessible to the masses and attempting to embed them in their memory, shows the power that speech has to transcend gendered or physical boundaries, which is the major focus of Chapter Three.

As previously mentioned, the mother of Guillaume and Liënors does sing the first song in this particular scene, that of *Fille et la mere se sieent a l'orfois*, and so begins this critical episode in the romance. Liënors' mother, because she initially refuses to sing as she works due to the archaic connotations of such an act, gives the *chansons de toile* an intangible venerableness when she does eventually perform a *chanson*. Michel Zink states that Renart includes this line, as well as his overall lack of discourse on the *chansons de toile* themselves 'pour créer une fausse perspective temporelle en ménageant, entre la présentation et l'interprétation des chansons, entre

³² Michel Zink, *Belle: essai sur les chansons de toile*, (Paris: Champion, 1978), p. 12.

leur contenu et le contenu presque identique du passage romanesque qu'elles suscitent et où elles s'insèrent, l'espace illusoire d'un *ça en arrière*.³³ Zink's reference here to the *fausse perspective temporelle* that Renart creates underlines this critical device; by creating a barrier of time between the characters of the romance and the characters of the *chansons*, Renart allows his audience to disengage from a normative recitation of romance. They are invited to participate in a recreation of the past; just as Nicole and Guillaume hear the women sing these *chansons de toile* while they work, so too does the audience play an equal part in the reception of the romance. Furthermore, Nancy A. Jones notes that 'By the end of the twelfth-century, aristocratic workshops, and the literary representation of embroidery takes on a self-consciously archaic aura.'³⁴ Where Lienors and her mother could have been performing any virtuous act, it is then important to the reading of Renart's archaism that he portrays them making embroidered works for the church, and, moreover, singing about women making embroidered works for the church, as they do this; Renart's archaism is unequivocally intended.

The romantic power of the past in relation to domestic female relationships is not lost on Renart, and he uses it to establish his story as something more profound than a normative chivalric tale. He gives Lienors and her mother authority and eloquence over what they do in working cloth and singing together simultaneously, and the importance of Guillaume and Nicole's presence should not be underestimated. Since it was not something that is typically done at the time in which the romance takes place, one can deduce that Lienors and her mother were most likely not singing *chansons de toile* as they worked together before Guillaume entered with the emperor's

³³ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁴ Jones, p. 22.

messenger. The audience, then, is, to an extent, excluded from the private lives of these women, though it seems they are getting a glimpse of them, as the women are seated in private quarters doing a private activity. However, the gaze of the brother and Nicole, the fact that they are there to watch the mother and Lienors simply in order to determine their worth, and the fact that the women must entertain the men with archaic songs not necessarily meant for the pleasure of an audience but more meant to pass the time for women working together, come together to create an atmosphere of performance. Thus, the past is re-enacted in the present. This portraiture of women working cloth together in the women's quarters is not an invention of the genre of the time period, as one can see by Lienors' mother's reference to the queens of the past; this activity of women together in an enclosed space is one of creative significance, though it is referenced through the lens of the past. Due to the fact that in the second *chanson de toile* that is sung by Lienors, *Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*, the young woman in the song is singing of her love from another country and working on an English brocade, the work that she does and the love that she has are united in their foreignness. The aforementioned mirroring effect can be attributed to this song in terms of its connection with the life of Lienors, but it also serves to create a mirroring effect between women's work, desire, and storytelling. When past queens would work on their hangings while singing *chancons distoire*, they would continue an oral tradition of storytelling and participate in an oral 'literature' within their domestic sphere. Likewise, in this particular scene from *Guillaume de Dole*, the mother and daughter are working together, seemingly even before Guillaume and Nicole enter the women's chambers, and a tradition of female communal working continues

in this genre, regardless of whether the singing of *chansons de toile* is organic or pretended.

While each *chanson de toile* included in *Guillaume de Dole* serves as a mirror to the story, and the mother of Lienors highlights the archaic nature of the *chansons* themselves, Renart also employs fabric in his romance in order to further both the mirroring effect and to highlight the romance of Antiquity. Once Lienors has spoken out at the court of the emperor, accused the seneschal of wrongdoing, and freed herself and her family from the slander that he inflicted upon them, she is once again betrothed to Conrad. The marriage happens straight away, and the description of her marriage robe is given a significant role in the romance. This robe was embroidered by a queen of Puglia and is said to be made of material spun by a fairy, lending this romance an altogether mythical aspect. It tells the story of Helen of Troy, a woman taken away from her home and slandered (for centuries to come), after having forsaken her marriage for the love of a man who is not her husband:

dun drap que une fee ouvra
Fu vestue lempereriz
Il niert ne tiessuz ne tresliz
Aincois lot tot fet o agulle
Ia dis une roine en puille
En ses chambres por son deduit
El i mist bien .vii. anz ou .viii.
Ainz que loevre fust a finee
Einsi com helaine fu nee
I estoit listoire portrete
Ele meisme i fu retrete
et paris et ses frere hectors
et prians li rois et mennors
Li bons roi qui toz les biens fist
et si com paris la ravist
I sont dor fetes les ymages

et si come li granz barnages
 des grieus la vint requerre apres
 Si i fu aussi achilles
 Qo cist hector dont granz diels fu
 et si com cil mistrent le fu
 En la cite et el donion
 Qen avoit repost a larron
 es chevax de fust et tapis
 En ce quil iut sor les tapis
 Des roubee fu la navie
 Des grieus [...] (ll. 5324-50)

(In a cloth worked by a fairy was the empress dressed. Its design was neither woven nor damasked; instead a queen of Puglia in times gone by had embroidered it with her needle, in her chambers, for amusement. She had spent a good seven or eight years at it before the work was completed. The story of how Helen was born was portrayed on the robe; she herself was pictured there, and Paris and his brother Hector and Priam the king, and Memnon, the good king who did good deeds; the images of how Paris abducted her were all done in gold, as were those of the great army of the Greeks that came to win her back. Achilles was also there, who slew Hector, which caused great sorrow; and it showed how those who had secretly been placed inside the wooden horse set fire to the city and the towers of Troy. And while he lay upon the rugs, the ships of the Greeks were taken [...])

Firstly, in terms of the aforementioned mirroring effect, the way in which the story is described creates an interesting mirror to the story of Lienors, the main difference between the female protagonist of *Guillaume de Dole* and Helen of Troy seemingly being that Helen had a fleet of strong warriors and men willing to risk their lives in order to bring her back to Greece, whereas the patriarchal family of Lienors is quick to disown and disavow her, calling her 'la vieus la jaianz jaiens' (the wretch, the slut, the whore) (l. 3807). She is left to clear her own name, which she does, and then she is blessed by wearing this beautiful marriage robe, about which Renart states '[...] or nest vie\hom qui si biau drap seust faire' (No man now lives who would know

how to make so beautiful a cloth) (ll. 5350-1), giving the robe an even more significant archaic aspect.

This robe is a thing of the past, a thing that tells a story in embroidery, a thing made by a queen (and it was queens of the past who used to sing while they made their hangings, or so says the mother of Guillaume and Lienors), a thing beyond recreation. The queen of Puglia, who embroidered this marriage robe, is said to have spent seven to eight years embroidering it from start to finish, and this type of intricate and dedicated embroidery is a thing of imagination. In terms of language, the fact is that, though this is a work created by a woman, Renart uses the word 'hom' when stating that no one could recreate such an extraordinary piece of clothwork. While it could be argued that *hom* could be seen as the gender neutral term for anyone, there may be more at play in his employment of this particular word. The queen of Puglia would have carried an archaic sense, much in the same way that Lienors' mother talks of queens of the past singing as they worked cloth, and the nostalgia that is built into this item of clothing pervades the entire romance, in the same way that a mother and daughter working cloth together and singing simple songs brings the reader into the nostalgic idea of the past. While it may be too presumptuous to say that Renart is commenting here on the fact that perhaps a *femme* could make a cloth as elegant as the marriage robe of Lienors where an *hom* could not, in terms of the productive value of women in the thirteenth century, it is more likely that he is making a comment on the dwindling creative value of domestic, female clothwork.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Jean Renart likens his innovation to 'met la graine es dras' (put[ting] scarlet dye into cloth) (ll. 8-9), and he references his inclusion of *chansons* as an embroidery upon his romance; thus, Renart himself allies cloth production with writing and

excellence. While the dying of cloth in France, particularly in mass production, was probably done by men, as male cloth production was on the rise in terms of marketed value, embroidery and silk production at this time remained a decidedly feminine activity. This only furthers the significance of the passing on of female values and activities from mother to daughter, as embroidery remains a domestic activity of the women's quarters. This appropriation of a female activity in no way diminishes its impact on the idea of a domestic female community of the thirteenth century; however, it is critical to understand the ramifications that this has on the medieval mind-set, particularly in relation to future female authors such as Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé, who reject the social role and perceived patriarchal entrapment that embroidery plays in their world. A nostalgia for the past on the part of Renart may be a direct response to the changing world around him in terms of male-female dichotomies.

Scholars such as Regina Psaki and Nancy A. Jones have researched the implications of this opulent robe, but from different viewpoints. Where Jones asserts that 'while the robe empowers Lienor's image, the embroidered story it conveys [...] also signals Lienor's potentially destructive power as a woman,'³⁵ Psaki speaks to the narrative value of such a cloth stating: 'The joint (female) makers of the robe [...] selected and transposed the story again.' She asserts that 'when the historical antecedents [of a story such as the Trojan War] in all their richness and complexity are irrevocably lost, signs and echoes of them subsist in their literary representations.'³⁶

Therefore, though the robe can serve multiple functions, in regard to Renart's archaism, it invariably embeds an ancient story into the framework of his

³⁵ Jones, p. 28.

³⁶ Psaki, pp. 136-7.

own narrative. He tells of the Trojan War, of the creation of the robe itself, and he does all of this while telling his own story of Lienors' marriage. While it is important that Lienors is the one to wear the robe, from the viewpoint of *memory*, this robe preserves multiple stories of the past, which Renart has then succeeded in solidifying, not only in his own present times, but into the future.

Much in the same way in which Procne (and the audience of Chrétien de Troyes' *Philomena*) read the tapestry that Philomena weaves, the audience and the general public at the wedding of Lienors and Conrad *read* the marriage robe and its archaic story. This woven story of Helen provides a temporal break from the rest of the story, and its seemingly anachronistic inclusion presents the audience with an indication of its significance. In comparison with Chapter Three, an exploration of the female voice in cloth, the marriage robe of Lienors stands alone as a different type of woven object to that of Philomena or the *dame* from *L'Aüstic*. Both the tapestry of Philomena and the embroidered cloth of the *dame* were inspired by and communicate a present state of affairs and are understood as attempts at communication with the world outside of the domestic sphere. In contrast, the marriage robe of Lienors not only tells a story of old, it, and the women who created it, belong to the past, and moreover, to the world of the *merveilleux*, an intangible space and place. Thus, this particular story within a story does not serve to represent the female voice, as the others do, but rather speaks to the qualities of the woman who wears it. Lienors, who throughout the entirety of the romance has proven herself to be a good and virtuous woman, only has these qualities emphasised through the robe upon her body. The robe, as seen earlier in its mirroring effect, highlights her struggles and accomplishments while underscoring the entirety of the romance with a

nostalgia enacted by female characters and clothwork.³⁷ Though the robe acts in this way, it equally signals the authority of Lienors in her possession of this mythic, archaic object, into which a woman has worked a narrative of the past.

Renart has chosen to include a story from the classical world, employing a trope which will become much more pervasive in the Renaissance, in order to further his own authority and appeal to the nostalgia of his audience. This story of Helen of Troy would have been well-known among the aristocracy of the thirteenth century, particularly due to the 'medieval renaissance' that was happening at the time, in which many Classical tales were being rewritten and disseminated in Old French.³⁸ In this way, knowledge of these tales was being spread to a wider public than when they were only written and read in Latin, and the inclusion of what Psaki terms as 'signs and echoes' of ancient stories in vernacular literature recasts and renews the historical narrative. However, Renart's *Guillaume de Dole* is conflicting in its desire to implement the past in the present; for example, Renart states that this ancient marriage robe's elegance is something that could never be recreated in the present, and yet his romance stands as an innovation, incomparable to anything in the past. His assertion that he has created something altogether new and different exists dichotomously with the past that he invokes, and the marriage of these two ideals validates his authority as an author of a tale in which a woman, enclosed with her mother, meant to have her virginity protected, stands in a public crowd and decries a man for violence done to her and her family, and wins her case. By including songs and stories of the past, Renart appeals to a certain romanticism, but he

³⁷ Jones, pp. 28-9 and Psaki, p. 137-8.

³⁸ Such as *Le Roman de Troie*, written in Old French c. 1155-1160 by Benoît de Sainte-Maure.

changes these stories through their inclusion within the context of his present narrative.

To conclude his romance after the marriage of Lienors and Conrad, Renart again employs the idea of *mémoire*, an echo of the preface to the romance. He states that:

larcevesques par reverence
En fist metre en escrit lestoire
bien le devoient en *memoire*
avoir et li roi et li conte
Cel prodome dont on lor conte
por avoir de bien fere envie
ausi com cil fist en sa vie
por cui len chante et chantera
tant com li siecles durera
Qui ne finera mie encore (ll. 5643-52, my emphasis)

(The archbishop, out of reverence, had the story put in writing. Well should he be kept in *memory* by all kings and counts alike, this nobleman we've told them of, so that they will desire to do good just as he did in his life; on his account people sing it, and will sing it, as long as the world endures – which will certainly not end just yet.)

From the opening lines to the closing verses, Renart highlights the importance of the written word as a means of preserving the past, even while oral tradition still endures and the story will be sung for generations to come. In the prologue, Renart states that he has preserved the memory of these songs through their inclusion in popular literature, so that they should not be forgotten. As this is the only medium in which these particular songs are known to modern audiences, it is safe to say that he succeeded in preserving them in this way. Yet, it is cited as important by the author that the story of the romance itself as well as the goodness of the Emperor Conrad be remembered, and so he seems to have ventriloquised the hand of an

archbishop in order to root his story in glorified archaism. He says that this story has already been written down, that it has already been preserved, and presumably it is through the diligence of the archbishop that Renart is able to retell this story in such a way that it continues to remain concrete for generations to come.

While Renart often creates a temporal shift throughout *Guillaume de Dole*, he also highlights the continued use of archaic practices, and in the final lines of the romance, when he states 'len chante et chantera \ tant com li siecles durera' (ll. 5650-1), he underlines the idea that the past and the present are forever contemporary, existing in the same time and space. The past, emphasised through the implications of the *chansons de toile*, the clothwork of the female characters, and the marriage robe which envelops Lienors, cogently implies an archaic environment which allows the 'present' state of the romance to flourish in its innovation. Renart, who from the beginning states his desire to appear different and more cultivated than his contemporaries and predecessors, employs the past in order to comment on the future.

Conclusion

In classical history and literature, the *gynaeceum*, or women's quarters, plays a significant part in the description of life from the female perspective. However, in terms of the study of the High Middle Ages, working female communities, particularly those exemplified by a mother-daughter dynamic, have not been thoroughly researched in a literary context, as they are strangely not a common trope, particularly in romance. In the popular literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a history of women united

in clothwork can be unearthed and recognised, whether these are mother-daughter relationships or otherwise. In Marie de France's *Le Fraisne*, as well as in Renaut's *Galeran de Bretagne*, the significance of the mother-daughter relationship manifests itself in the influence of the mother's teachings (or lack thereof) imparted to her daughters and the clothwork embedded in the core of the romance. In *Le Fraisne*, though the daughter who is raised at home is not nearly as thoroughly explored as the reflected character in *Galeran de Bretagne*, she remains an important (if imagined) juxtaposition to her twin sister. Renaut, when retelling this story, extrapolates upon the character of Flourie, allowing her to appear in scenes in which she interacts with her mother in a courtly manner. She is defined by the male character as an exact mirror of the woman he loves, and ultimately is physically replaced by a sister who lacked a maternal love and influence her entire life. This trope highlights the objectification of women that is repeated throughout courtly literature, and the character of Flourie, for example, comes to represent another narrative of Fresne wherein she is not abandoned. As much as it reflects the life and story of Fresne, it also reflects the two roles of motherhood that Gente performs: the destructive and absent mother and the devoted and educative mother.

The characterisation of mother-daughter relationships in these two versions of the same story of Fresne, as well as in that of Lienors and her mother in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, opens a dialogue about the influence mothers have on their daughters, whether beneficial or destructive. In both the central narrative of *Guillaume de Dole*, and in the peripheral narratives told through the *chansons de toile*, the mothers are presented in a variety of ways, with the character of Lienors' mother even changing in the course of the romance from educator of her

daughter in courtly behaviour to imprudent woman who has ruined her family's good name through gossip and bribery. Of the five *chansons de toile* inserted into Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, three of them contain a portraiture of domestic female communities, and these lyrical women juxtapose each other in an oscillation from the mother as instructor of her daughter in clothwork and courtliness (*Fille et la mere se sieent a l'orfois*), to a wicked governess capable of violent destruction of her charge (*Siet soi bele Aye as piez sa male maistre*), to an absence (*La bele Doe siet au vent*), and back again to helpful educator in her daughter's affairs (*Bele Aiglentine en roial chamberine*). These *chansons de toile*, while they mirror the life of Lienors as the heroine of the story, also track the trajectory of the mother's influence on her daughter's life.

In the depiction of the relationships between mothers and daughters in all three of the texts treated in this chapter, clothwork is central to the development of the bond between the feminine characters, especially in the creation of dichotomous views of femininity and motherhood. The clothwork that binds these women together also encourages their enclosure and silence, but it is equally seen to lead to liberation and to the discovery of the truth, which highlights both the identification and expression of women in their association with cloth and clothwork. The underrepresented relationship of mothers and daughters in romance narrative seemingly reflects an aspect of domestic life in the time of Renart, and he casts it concurrently in the past, the present, and the future. The way in which the mother-daughter relationship is woven into the lyrics, the overarching narrative, and the objectification of the male characters' gaze allows it to transcend beyond the present. The way in which Renart highlights the archaism of clothwork and the importance of *la mémoire*, alongside his assertion that his technique of

including songs and lyrics in his narrative is innovative and unlike anything from past traditions, provides the audience with an opportunity for a rich interaction with the text and with the characters. *Guillaume de Dole* presents dichotomies of past and present, purity and impurity in feminine constructs, and oral and written culture, while the orality of this romance evokes the archaic past, Renart's written technique solidifies it inexorably in the present.

Chapter Five: A Helping Hand: Rewriting Feminine Clothwork and Excellence in the Works of Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé

'You can desire. You can read, adore, be invaded. But writing is not granted to you. Writing is reserved for the chosen. It surely took place in a realm inaccessible to the small, to the humble, to women.'

- Hélène Cixous
*Coming to Writing*¹

Introduction

Throughout this study, the portraiture of women as workers of cloth has been examined in terms of identity, expression, and agency. Chapter One outlined a basis of moral and inspirational clothwork in the religious and exemplary development of the Virgin Mary and Minerva, whereas Chapter Two focused on romance literature's treatment of women who are identified by cloth, simultaneously giving and taking away the agency of female characters still limited by their patriarchal boundaries. In Chapter Three, the female characters in three romances are shown to thwart those patriarchal boundaries through the use of clothwork as voice in a form of cunning manipulation and expression in order to escape entrapment from within the patriarchal system. Chapter Four examined how clothwork is presented as an archaic activity and how Jean Renart in particular develops his romance by equating his masculine technique of writing romance with the more feminine task of clothwork. In the final chapter of this study, two women writers are shown to use masculine authorial codes in their own works, while simultaneously including examples of feminine clothwork, excellence, and intelligence in order to invite women to move beyond domestic

¹ Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', p. 13.

regulations and participate in the male-dominated field of education and writing.

This chapter will focus on two major female authors of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé. The discussion of these two female authors leads to an examination of feminist development that reaches beyond the Old French romance of the Middle Ages in terms of female voice and expression, particularly in how they are born of the themes explored thus far. Both Christine and Louise were actively engaged in producing poetry, and both exemplify a crucial instance of feminine authority that can be found at the end of the period in which the previously examined romances were being produced in France. Christine de Pizan is representative of a woman who reacted to her surroundings by dialoguing with contemporaneous or previous literature, whereas Louise Labé can be seen as a woman born of her surroundings, as economical and authorial attitudes were changing and developing.² In other words, Christine's work is in keeping with the popular literary traditions of the fourteenth century, and she uses those traditions and tropes to send a message about the education of women. However, Louise Labé and her works seem to be formed in response to a particularly exclusive tradition, wherein female authors cannot even attempt to play a part because their feminine perspective inherently challenges and disassembles the codified poetic tradition of the sixteenth century. Christine is the perfect example of a woman who adapts to the world in which she is placed, and Louise is the embodiment of challenging social structures. Both women attempted to turn the literary traditions surrounding them on their heads, particularly by

² Cécile Alduy, 'Lyric Economies: Manufacturing Values in French Petrarchan Collections (1549-60)' in *Renaissance Quarterly* 63 (2010), pp. 721-53.

setting an example, which entailed refuting the existing codes of literature through the imitation of well-respected and near contemporaneous male authors. Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames* has often been compared to Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*, which assuredly presented itself as a source of inspiration for Christine's work. However, as Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. state, 'Whereas Boccaccio portrays female virtue as exceptional, [Christine] depicts it as universal'³, showing a clear and decisive progression from a male to a female author. Louise Labé also uses a male-codified form of writing, the typical Petrarchan style of poetry, in order to present herself (or another female narrator) as a feminine and desiring subject, irrevocably turning the tide of masculine dominance in the realm of intellect and education. These two women worked to counteract the intertextuality of misogynistic texts that pervaded the sphere of literature and education up to this point. This chapter will focus on the ways in which clothwork is included in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and will equally draw on various aspects of *Les Œuvres Complètes* by Louise Labé, that show a strong progression from the themes outlined in the romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with a particular focus on how these women rewrite the female sex from a feminine point of view that is not diminished in the masculine space of public authorship.

From cloth-related examples of paragons, to those of identity, to those of voice and expression, this study has focused on the physical manipulation of cloth that is reproduced in Old French romance in order to understand the ways in which noble, working women are portrayed, represented, and

³ Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., 'The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series' in *Louise Labé: Complete Poetry and Prose, (A Bilingual Edition)*, ed. and trans. by Deborah Lesko Baker and Annie Finch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. xi-xxxi (p. xxi).

understood in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Agency and activity have often come to the forefront of discussion, and this chapter will show the ways in which female hands, once relegated to participation in feminine activities, take up the pen and the lute in order to participate in the masculine activity of writing and composing. The two female authors discussed here do not only subvert their feminine relegation as desired objects and become writing and authorial subjects, but the way in which they represent themselves and the women that they write about also allows them to incite their readers to follow their example. Christine de Pizan became economically self-sufficient as a writer after the death of her husband, and her succession to the role of author came directly from her desire and dedication to being financially independent in order to support her family. As Kathryn Reyerson notes, 'Widows might be poor, but widowhood could free women of means from the control of husbands and male relatives.'⁴ Through her lived experience, Christine is able to give her female readership first-hand knowledge of what it means to be an educated and successful woman in the masculine-dominated public sphere. Louise Labé's *Œuvres Complètes* were published some 150 years after Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and Mireille Huchon very convincingly argues the *œuvres* may not have legitimately been written by the ropemaker's daughter, but rather were the result of a collaborative effort by such poets as Maurice Scève and Claude de Taillemont amongst others who were published by Jean de Tournes.⁵ Regardless of whether men wrote the poems of Louise Labé, the voice projected from the *Œuvres Complètes* is intentionally feminine, and the

⁴ Kathryn Reyerson, 'Urban Economies', in *Women in Gender in Medieval Europe* ed. Bennett & Karras, pp. 295-310 (p. 296).

⁵ Mireille Huchon, *Louise Labé: un créateur de papier* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2006) p. 272: 'Les *Œuvres de Louise Labé Lionnoize* sont une opération collective élaborée dans l'atelier Jean de Tournes, par des auteurs pour la plupart très liés aux réalisations de cet imprimeur.'

significance of that fact is what will serve the discussion in this chapter. Mireille Huchon's research, published within the last ten years, was a new and groundbreaking development into the reception and historical understanding of Louise Labé, and, according to this research, the purpose of the creation of the poet 'Louise Labé' was not to show a masculine-voiced female puppet, rather it was to show the barriers that female poets were coming up against in their plight for success in authorship. Because the research into Labé's verifiable authorship is so recent, it can be assumed that she would have been viewed as a true female author in the Renaissance. For the purposes of this study, then, as laywomen of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance provide the basis of medieval reception of both Louise Labé and Christine de Pizan, Labé will be treated as a female author, rather than a male-constructed poet.

The fashion in which these feminine authors present themselves and their background, regardless of whether or not it is historically factual, lays the foundation for the way in which they intend the significance of their works to be received by their respective audiences. For example, while it is widely accepted by medieval and feminist scholars that Christine de Pizan rejected the teachings of her mother (namely household tasks such as embroidery and spinning) for the teachings offered to her by her father (that of a full range of study on the arts and sciences), the instances in which Christine presents women working cloth remain crucial to the understanding of how her own upbringing (her familial duties and her education) influenced her defense of women in her *Cité des Dames*. This presentation of women's work is a tenuous thread, causing ruptures in the comprehension of what Christine's overarching argument seems to be throughout the work.

For example, Christine, through the ventriloquised words of Droiture, brings forth her own take on her upbringing:

Ton pere, qui fu grant naturien et phillosophe, n'oppinoit pas que femmes vaulsissent pis par science apprendre, ains de ce qu'encline te veoit aux lettres, si que tu sces, grant plaisir y prenoit. Mais l'oppinion femenine de ta mere, qui te vouloit occuper en fillasses selonc l'usage commun des femmes, fu cause de l'empeschement que ne fus en ton enfance plus avant boutee es sciences et plus en parfont. [...] ne te pot ta mere si empeschier le sentir des sciences que tu, par inclinacion naturelle.

(Your own father, who was a great astrologer and philosopher, did not believe that knowledge of the sciences reduced a woman's worth. Indeed, as you know, it gave him great pleasure to see you take so readily to studying the arts. Rather, it was because your mother, as a woman, held the view that you should spend your time spinning like the other girls, that you did not receive a more advanced or detailed initiation into the sciences. [...] Despite your mother's opposition, you did manage to glean some grains of knowledge from your studies, thanks to your own natural inclination for learning.)⁶

If one were to simply read this passage from the *Cité des Dames* in isolation, it would be difficult to see how domesticity and clothwork could possibly be considered to be aspects of a woman's life lauded by Christine. In this excerpt, Christine seemingly presents the idea that her mother hindered her learning and development in the masculine realm of the arts and sciences, namely because her mother was a woman who had a typical woman's outlook on life and attempted to relegate Christine to the feminine

⁶ Christine de Pizan, *The Livre de la Cité des Dames of Christine de Pisan*, ed. Maureen Cheney Curnow, (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1979) pp. 875-6. All English translations are by Rosalind Brown-Grant taken from *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. and trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1999) and are referenced as: Brown-Grant, p. 141.

and domestic sphere. Roberta L. Kreuger comments on Christine's presentation of her own upbringing as a case for inciting dialogue with her female readership: 'Deploying the traditional opposition between textile work, often represented as a spindle and gendered as female and learning, which may be represented by the pen or the book and gendered as male, Christine demonstrates that apparently "natural" categories of difference are in fact cultural norms that can be overturned by a woman's innate intellectual inclinations.'⁷ This chapter will look at this opposition highlighted by Kreuger in order to show more clearly the ways in which Christine attempts to justify the domestic arts, though she herself felt a sense of suffocation and entrapment within them, due to the ways in which they were presented to her. Moreover, Christine attempts to show that *l'opinion féminine* that her mother and so many other women had can be changed by Christine's own interpretation and presentation of the countless women that she describes in her text as the feminine ideal. Rosalind Brown-Grant states that Christine's 'view of history and set of *exempla* [in her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*] seeks to empower her female reader by valorising key areas of women's experience,⁸ and this is crucial to understanding the ways in which domestic life and women's work are presented by the author and would have been received by the audience. Though the examples of women's work throughout the *Cité des Dames* are not many, the places and spaces of the book in which they reside make them critical to our understanding of

⁷ Roberta L. Kreuger, 'Towards Feminism: Christine de Pizan, Female Advocacy, and Women's Textual Communities in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Bennett & Karras, pp. 590-606 (p. 599).

⁸ Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 132.

Christine's domestic, and moreover, feminine ideal.

Christine's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* begins with an image of Christine in which she reads the *Lamentations* of Matheolus, and, believing that the misogyny found within must be the truth because it is written down by so many different (male) authors, she falls into a fitful sleep, cursing herself for being born a woman. She even goes so far as to say: 'Helas! Dieux, pourquoy ne me faiz tu naistre au monde en masculin sexe, a celle fin que mes inclinacions fussent toutes a te mieulx servir et que je ne errasse en riens et fusse de si grant perfeccion comme homme masle ce dit estre?' (Oh God, why wasn't I born a male so that my every desire would be to serve you, to do right in all things, and to be as perfect a creature as man claims to be?)⁹ This seemingly refers to the idea that women are inherently less perfect than men, who are naturally closer to God because of their sex; however, the ways in which men pay homage to God are those activities from which women are typically excluded. For example (and as discussed in Chapter One), the study of the Bible and meditation on the Word of God was seen as a pious activity, and while women were forbidden to learn to read (particularly in Latin), so too were they excluded from this type of devotion. It is interesting here that Christine, a learned woman with all the tools to serve God in this way, still presumes to believe that she is more imperfect than a male counterpart. She takes to heart what Matheolus has said and allows it to pervade her own opinion of the truth, and in doing so, she believes that she is unfit for Christian devotion because of her naturally determined sex.

⁹ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 621; Brown-Grant, p. 7.

Using the common trope of dream visions,¹⁰ Christine describes her uneasy sleep. She dreams that she is visited by three Ladies: Raison (Reason), Droiture (Rectitude), and Justice. Through the use of these allegorical characters, Christine places her words into the mouths of women sent by God, which in turn gives her the authority to speak on the subject matter at hand. What ensues in Christine's vision is a debate between the misguided character of Christine and the Three Ladies, who attempt to lure Christine out of the dangerous and misogynistic mindset in which she is entrenched. They metaphorically build a city together, a *Cité des Dames* (City of Ladies), digging the trenches, raising the walls, and erecting beautiful palaces and towers. These palaces, they tell Christine, will be filled with the most virtuous and deserving women, and they proceed to introduce Christine to these women, both Christian and pagan, who exemplify the goodness and virtue that naturally lie within women's hearts, despite what Matheolus and his fellow writers may say.

In comparison to the context surrounding Christine and her *Cité des Dames*, at the end of the Late Middle Ages, the Renaissance brought forth the works of Louise Labé. Her *Œuvres Complètes* include three elegies, twenty-four sonnets, and a debate entitled *Le Debat de la Folie et de l'Amour*. These works are prefaced by an *épître dédicatoire*, addressed to Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges, which provides a rich understanding of how Labé's voice and views are projected and to whom they are directed. Both Christine and Louise are usurping masculine forms of writing in order to write them as

¹⁰ Dream visions are a common allegorical trope of literature in the Middle Ages in both France and England from mainly the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some medieval authors who invoke dream visions within their literature are Geoffrey Chaucer, Jean de Meun, the *Pearl* poet, Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and William Langland.

an *écriture féminine*, and François Rigolot, in his preface to the *Œuvres Complètes* of Labé, makes this point clear in his definition of the premise of Labé's writing of the dedicatory letter: 'Mettant à profit la liberté nouvelle de leur sexe, elles entreprendront des activités intellectuelles honorables et obtiendront la gloire qui, jusque-là, était abusivement réservée au sexe masculin.'¹¹ Seemingly a precursor to Virginia Woolf, a feminine voice for the female population attempting to find a way for women to be integrated intellectually into society, Labé's dedicatory letter provides an important lens for the growing ideas of early feminism in the Renaissance in France. Throughout her works, including the *épître dédicatoire*, she rejects the typically feminine attributes of identity, preferring 'de participer à égalité à cette culture nouvelle, ou renouvelée, qui lui donnera sa véritable identité [...] qui ne dépende pas du désir objectivant du sexe dominant.'¹² Christine and Louise both use these well-regarded and accepted forms of literary style and voice put in place by male authors, in order to redefine their feminine voice and subvert the masculine system of authorship.

All the women discussed in this chapter whose description comes from the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* are in some way connected to clothwork, and that connection, and the way in which they are presented by Christine, illustrate how their femininity and their manipulation of cloth provide illustrative examples of the themes discussed throughout this study. In the themes' connection to certain works included in Louise Labé's *Œuvres Complètes*, a linear progression from Old French romance, to late medieval female authorship, to advanced ideas about female education in the Renaissance will be highlighted. The descriptions of Minerva and Dido as

¹¹ Louise Labé, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. François Rigolot (Paris: Flammarion, 2004) p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

female paragons of clothwork and cleverness will be outlined in the *Cité des Dames*, in contrast to their depiction in Louise Labé's *Elégie III*, which presents the struggle of a woman to excel while she is under the influence of Love, in order to showcase feminine excellence and success in activities that most especially pertain to the arts and sciences. Furthermore, Pamphile's invention of silk production and silkwork will highlight themes of identity found in the romances discussed in Chapter Two, particularly *Galeran de Bretagne*, as well as in Louise Labé's self-portraiture as a love poet found in *Sonnet XII*. Christine's presentation of Arachne and Labé's *Sonnet XXI* provide an example of how the codified system can be undermined by feminine talent and ingenuity. The overall focus of this chapter, then, will be on the ways in which Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé discuss (and refute) patriarchal ideas about women and women's education, and their attempt to found their revolutionary ideas in a feminine language, aimed at a female audience, in order to incite change within the feminine community. This then becomes a foundation for the approach of such revolutionary feminist authors as Hélène Cixous and Virginia Woolf. Writing as women *to* other women sets both Christine and Louise apart from their male contemporaries or predecessors. This chapter will show how the presentation of aspects of clothwork in Old French romance acts as a foundation for the promulgation of a new way of thinking and a call for a change in the patriarchal system.

Dame Raison's Defense of Spinning and Labé's Plea

Before examining the specific examples of women working cloth that Christine provides in her defense of women, it is crucial to see the ways in which clothwork is woven into the overarching defense throughout the *Livre*

de la Cité des Dames, especially in its contrast to its inclusion in *l'épître dédicatoire* of Louise Labé. Though Christine does not specifically ask the Three Ladies to tell her stories of great mothers, great weavers, or great domestic workers, the characteristics and virtues embodied in these types of women are highlighted through the lens of Christine de Pizan's own education. For example, Christine's discussion of Blanche de Castile, queen regent of France from 1223 to 1226, is focused on Blanche's ability to govern and to be a great mother and influence her son, Saint Louis. Raison describes her as such:

Et [...] se peut dire de la tres *saige*, et en tous cas bonne, la noble royne Blanche, mere de saint Loys, qui tant noblement et prudentment gouverna le royaume de France tant que son filz fu mendre d'aage, que oncques mieulx par homme ne fu gouverné. Et meesmement quant il fu grant, par l'espreuve du saige gouvernement d'elle fu tousjours chief du conseil, ne riens n'estoit fait sans elle.

(I could tell you a [...] story about the *wise* and noble Queen Blanche, the mother of Saint Louis, whose goodness was infinite. She ruled the kingdom of France with such skill and care until her son was old enough to accede the throne, that no man could have done better. Even when he was grown up, she proved herself so worthy that she remained at the head of his advisors and nothing was decided without her consent.)¹³

Blanche de Castile was also instrumental in the continued veneration of the Virgin Mary during the High Middle Ages at Chartres. The pilgrimage to Chartres hinged on the locative power embedded in the Virgin's *chemise*. Thus, Blanche de Castile embodies all the qualities of a good and noble woman in the eyes of Christine. She provides an example of a woman who

¹³ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 669; Brown-Grant, p. 31. My emphasis.

uses her role (both domestically and politically) to the greatest advantage, using good judgment and her own wisdom (emphasised in the passage above) to raise her son well, affecting all the subjects of the kingdom through her good mothering and influence. Though she is not mentioned with any direct connection to clothwork, her wisdom and motherhood set the groundwork for further discussion of excellence in feminine domesticity.

This can be seen in the further example of Gaia Cirilla, a noblewoman who used her resources for the betterment of others. As the (supposed) wife of Tarquinius Priscus, the king of the Romans from 616-578 BCE, Gaia Cirilla was in a position of great influence, and though Raison does not describe the ways in which she encouraged the men in her life (husband or sons), she describes the ways in which her own virtuous activities inspired the other women in her presence to be likewise virtuous and productive:

[...] de femme prudent, bien puet estre ramenteue la noble royne Gaye Cirile. [...] Elle fu de moult grant prudence en fait de gouvernement et moult vertueuse avec *le grant scens naturel*, leauté et bonté qu'elle avoit. Sur toutes femmes fu renommee d'estre tres grant mainagiere et de nottable pourvenance. Et tout fust elle royne, et bien se peust passer de ouvrer de ses mains, tant avoit celle dame le cuer a tousjours prouffiter en aucune chose et n'estre nul temps oyseuse que tousjours labouroit en aucune œuvre, et semblablement faisoit labourer les dames et pucelles d'environ elle et qui la servoyent. Elle trouva la maniere de sortir laines et faire fins draps et de plusieurs sortes; et en ce se occuppoit, qui estoit *pour le temps* tres honnourable chose.

([...] about women of good judgement, we should not forget the noble queen, Gaia Cirilla. [...] She was both very prudent in her behaviour and extremely virtuous, being endowed with *great good sense*, loyalty and kindness. Gaia was esteemed above all women for managing her household well and seeing attentively to everything. Even though she was a queen and thus had no need to

work with her hands, she delighted in always using her time profitably on some task or other. She hated being idle and thus would keep herself constantly occupied, making the ladies and the girls who served at her court do likewise. She knew how to distinguish between the different qualities of wool and how to make both fine and coarse cloth, spending her days at what was regarded as a most honourable occupation *at that time*.)¹⁴

The clear underlying activity of Gaia Cirilla and the women in her company is that of domestic work, mainly clothwork, and (as seen emphasised) it was a particularly honorable and virtuous activity *pour le temps*. This caveat is not unique to Christine's work, as this particular example seems to be one taken quite directly from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*; he too writes that woolworking was 'quod credam *eo tempore* apud Latinos honorabile' (that which I believe to have been honorable in the view of the Latins *at that time*) (XLVI, my emphasis).¹⁵ Where Christine could have taken this opportunity to rewrite woolworking from a contemporary and feminine perspective, she copies Boccaccio's statement, and with regard to the way she presents her own upbringing, Christine is giving her clear opinion to her female readers: domestic work is all well and good, but times are changing, and we can do more. She shows Gaia Cirilla as a woman to be admired and emulated for her good virtues, and she does not denigrate the activities that she performs, aside from her inclusion of *pour le temps*. Christine presents her as having *grant scens naturel*, among her other good qualities, showing that she ran her household well and was well versed in important aspects of clothwork within her domestic sphere of influence, not out of boredom or simplicity, but out of a sense of honor and virtue.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 767; Brown-Grant, p. 81. My emphasis.

¹⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women* ed. and trans. by Virginia Brown, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) pp. 190-191. All English translations by Virginia Brown.

Throughout the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine presents many arguments that men have made against women, and Raison, Droiture, and Justice continually help her to refute them all. One argument that is repeated twice in the *Cité des Dames* is Christine's misunderstanding of why God made women. She says to Raison: 'Dame, hommes me font un grant harnois d'un prouerbe en latin que ilz tant reprochent aux femmes, qui dit, "Plourer, parler, filler mist Dieus en femme"' (My lady, men have made a great deal of mileage out of mocking women because of a Latin proverb which says that 'God made women to weep, talk, and spin').¹⁶ After Christine's presentation of this proverb, Raison provides a refutation of the negative reading or interpretation of it stating that: 'Et de bonne heure pour celles qui par parler, plourer, filler ont esté sauvees mist Dieux ycelles condicions en elles (It's a fine thing that God endowed women with such qualities because many have been saved thanks to their tears, words, and distaffs).¹⁷ All throughout the *Cité des Dames*, Christine presents an interpretation of misogynistic texts, such as Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, and Matheolus' *Lamentations*, and the Three Ladies guide her in understanding why these misogynistic interpretations are false.

In this particular example, Raison refutes the ways in which weeping, talking, and spinning are construed as negative traits, and states especially on the topic of spinning:

Quant est du filler, voirement a Dieux voulu que ce leur soit naturel, car c'est office necessaire au service divin et a l'ayde de toute creature raisonnable, sans lequel ouvraige les offices

¹⁶ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 657; Brown-Grant, p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

du monde seroyent maintenus en grant ordure. Si est grant mauvaistié de rendre en reprouche aux femmes ce que leur doit tourner a tres grant gré, honneur et loz.

(As for spinning, God made this into women's natural domain, and it is an activity which is essential for serving Him and for the good of all rational beings. Without it, the world would be in a vile state. So it's the height of wickedness to reproach women for something for which they should be thanked, honoured and praised.)¹⁸

Raison maintains that the world would be 'maintenues en grant ordure' without the use of spinning, seemingly suggesting that women's work is what ties the world together and prevents chaos. Spinning is 'a l'ayde de toute creature raisonnable' and would not belong to a chaotic world or being, and thus it is a sophisticated, useful, and cultured form of work.

On the subject of this proverb, Raison equally refutes the ways in which weeping and talking are likewise construed as negative traits of women by citing Martha and Mary Magdalene to refute the claims against weeping, and again Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman for those against talking. However, what is striking in the above excerpt is that there are no examples of any spinning paragon used to refute this part of the argument. Where she could have brought in examples of famous religious or even pagan women who stand for the ingenuity or virtuosity in spinning, as she did with the women previously mentioned, Raison rather presents spinning as an everyday activity that mutually benefits both men and women, though it belongs in the woman's domain. She does not spend a great deal of time describing the ways in which spinning benefits the world, especially not in relation to the time she devotes to defending weeping and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 663; Brown-Grant, p. 28.

talking; however, the underlying message is this: 'c'est office necessaire au service divin'. This is the way in which women can interact with and serve God. Especially in consideration of the ways in which women are excluded from the study of the Bible and other religious texts, Raison argues that women can access their virtue and devotion through spinning. This is a significant plea to her female readers, as Christine, a learned and educated woman who can access the more masculine aspect of liturgical devotion, tells them that the ways in which they carry out their daily lives and how the daily activities that they perform can aid in their understanding and devotion to their faith. Thus, rather than stating simply that these tasks admonished by men are indeed trivial and trite, Christine shows how women can transcend their commonality and simplicity by using them as a form of devotional practice.

Christine is seemingly consoled by the defense that Raison provides for her against this old adage; however, after Raison has provided her with ample examples of female paragons in intellect, the arts, and sciences, Christine brings up the argument made by men once more, only phrased differently. After hearing of various intelligent women, Christine says, 'Et, a brief dire, l'oppinion et dit des hommes communement est que elles n'ont servy au monde, ne servent, fors de porter enffans et de filler.' (On the whole, men seem to hold the view that women have never done anything for humankind but bear children and spin wool.)¹⁹ To this Raison responds:

Or puez tu congnoistre la grant ingratitude de ceulx qui ce dient;
et ilz sont comme ceulx qui vivent des biens et ne scevent dont ilz
viennent, ne graces n'en rendent a nulluy [...] quant il luy a pleu
conceder qu'en cervelle de femme ait si grant entendement que
non mie seulement soyent habilles a apprendre et retenir les

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 746; Brown-Grant, p. 70.

sciences, mais trouver d'elles mesmes toutes nouvelles, voire sciences de si grant utilité et prouffit au monde que riens n'est plus neccessaire.

(Now can you understand the terrible ingratitude of those men who say such things? It's as if they're enjoying all the benefits without having any idea of where they come from or whom they should thank for them [...] He chose to endow women's minds with the capacity not simply to learn and grasp all kinds of knowledge but also to invent new ones by themselves, discovering sciences which have done more good and have been more useful to humanity than any others.)²⁰

Raison has already defended spinning wool once in the text, and the second time she gives no specific examples of this activity, but rather, by stating that women have been endowed with the ability to learn and even invent new forms of knowledge, the act of spinning is raised to a higher level of intelligence. Additionally, by having spinning linked with motherhood, Raison (and Christine by extension) defend the art of domestic womanhood. Through the examples that she has given before Christine's question, and those that she uses afterwards as examples of ingenuity, Raison shows Christine how intelligence is not diminished by one's context, but rather how ingenuity can be found even in restricted or relegated activities.

Additionally, Dame Raison's two speeches in defense of spinning (and childbearing) call to mind those mythological women who keep the world in order through their own clothwork: the Fates. In Raison's first speech of defense, she states that the world would be 'maintenues en grant ordure' without the use of spinning, and that statement, in conjunction with the relation to childbirth made by Christine in her second defense of spinning,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 747; Brown-Grant, p. 70.

underlines a crucial aspect of women's work: without weaving, spinning, and childbearing, the world would cease to exist and would be plunged into chaos. This portraiture of women as the masters of maintaining order in the world calls to mind the mythic influence of the Fates, who come from the mythology of classical antiquity and are said to be the weavers of the lives of men. Kathryn Kruger identifies these three women as such: 'Klotho, the youngest, spins the thread of a person's life; Lachesis: a middle-aged woman, measures the thread. Finally Atropos, a crone, cuts the thread with her shears.'²¹ Hesiod, in his *Theogony*, describes them as daughters of Night: 'Night bore hateful Doom and dark Fate and Death, she bore Sleep, she bore the tribe of Dreams.'²² Fate is linked with Death from the beginning, giving women the power to decide when death befalls a man or a god. As reproductive beings physically bringing life into the world, women are capable of influencing the lives of their children and family. They are essential in the creation of the world that surrounds their children; they make their clothes and other fabrics, they provide them with food, and they therefore play an influential role in determining how their lives will or will not continue on earth, from the moment they are born to the moment that they die. In fact, from Kruger's description of the three Fates, one sees indeed the three stages of a woman's life: as a youthful and virtuous maid spinning thread, as a middle-aged woman who has lived and contributed to society, measuring the thread of life, and as an old woman, wizened by her years, knowing when the time has come to allow destiny to take a life from the world.

This imagery of three women who drive the fate and destiny of men is not solely that of classical antiquity, but is repeated throughout various

²¹ Kruger, p. 137.

²² Hesiod, p. 9.

cultures, including Celtic and Norse mythology. H. R. Ellis Davidson describes this triad of women in Scandinavian mythology: 'The names of the wise maidens or Norns are *Urðr*, *Verðandi* and *Skuld*, and it has been suggested that this is an imitation of the three Fates of classical mythology. However, *Urðr* is the word used elsewhere for Fate; *Verðandi* is the present participle of the verb *verða* (be, become) and could refer to the goddess governing the present moment; *Skuld* has the meaning of something owed, a debt, and could therefore refer to the time appointed for death.'²³ Davidson shows their links with weaving and spinning, women who work and who decide the fates of heroes in popular sagas. He likens them not only to the Greek Moirai (or Fates), but also to the Weird Sisters included in Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historia*, which would later influence their inclusion in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.²⁴ These working Norns seem likewise to embody the three stages of life, *Urðr* as Fate from birth, *Verðandi* as growth and development, and *Skuld* as the unavoidable aging and death. Though Christine is surely not writing that the world would be *maintenues en grant ordure* without spinning in order to allude to the Classical Fates, there is a crucial understanding of the importance of motherly and domestic duties in Raison's defense of the activity. The symbolic nature and the imagery surrounding such activities as spinning and weaving, even in mythological contexts, present a crucial connection to the way in which the household was regarded in the Middle Ages, being externally possessed by the man, but internally managed by the woman. Across periods and cultures, there has been a significant focus on and praise for women's influence as mothers, and

²³ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) p. 164.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

the connection to the household and to clothwork within that household must not be ignored.

As seen by Christine's description of both Blanche de Castile and Gaia Cirilla, not to mention those mother-daughter relationships described in Chapter Four, a woman's influence over her domestic domain remains a powerful tool. Rosalind Brown-Grant, in her introduction to the English translation of the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, mentions the vast array of characters presented in the work, stating that: 'These wives, mothers and daughters of past and present themselves perform deeds which "translate" into their own domestic sphere of influence the qualities shown by warriors and saints in the public and spiritual domains.'²⁵ Thus, regardless of a woman's place in the social hierarchy, the 'base' activities that they perform in the domestic sphere mirror the valiant deeds that both women and men perform in the public sphere. Moreover, both childbirth and spinning for the household reflect Raison's initial defense of spinning in that it is indeed what makes the world spin and what makes life continue on: it is what makes order and prevents chaos. In her initial defense and 'by praising women for spinning, Raison anticipates the discussion of the inventions and discoveries of the pagan women in Book I of the *Cité*'²⁶ which will be discussed further in this chapter.

In relation to the presentation of a domestic skill as a universal marker of femininity, Louise Labé's *épître dédicatoire*, which prefaces the *Œuvres Complètes*, offers a lens through which one can understand the Renaissance's view of women's work insofar as it acts as a standard by which the abilities and activities of women can be understood and classified. Clothwork is an

²⁵ Brown-Grant, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, p. xxxiii.

²⁶ Brown-Grant, *Moral Defence of Women*, p. 150.

ever-oscillating activity in the literature of the High Middle Ages, moving between being seen as simple utility to artistry and back again, even in its characterisation in the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*. Moving into the Renaissance, the way in which Louise Labé presents clothwork in this letter to Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges casts it as something slightly different.

She states:

je ne puis faire autre chose que prier les vertueuses Dames
d'eslever un peu leurs esprits par-dessus leurs quenoilles et fuseaus, et
s'employer à faire entendre au monde que si nous ne sommes
faites pour commander, si ne devons nous estre desdaignees
pour compagnes tant es affaires domestiques que publiques, de
ceus qui gouvernent et se font obeïr.²⁷

(I can do nothing else than implore virtuous ladies *to raise their minds a little above their spindles and distaffs*, and strive to make it known to the world that even if we were not made to be in command, we ought not be disdained as companions as much in domestic affairs as in public ones by those who govern and are obeyed.)

Spinning is used here as a universally understood activity of domesticity and is regulated by gender, allying it with the female sex. Moreover, Labé presents it as a hindrance to women's ability to participate in the world around them, and as a marker of their being governed rather than of governing themselves. Just as Christine de Pizan tells of her mother's negative influence on her learning of the arts and sciences, so too does Louise Labé here call for a change in the power dynamic, which she recognises can only be incited by women who reject their classification as domestic and lesser beings.

²⁷ Labé, p. 41-2. My emphasis and translation.

This is a direct call for change. Louise Labé seems to be telling her fellow woman that she has the creativity and the power to change the system, but not if her hands are occupied with the instruments placed in them by the patriarchy. She does not necessarily denigrate *les quenoilles et fuseaus*, she only says that there is more that women are capable of handling. She writes that women should raise their minds *un peu* above this domestic ability, making it clear that it would not be stretch for them to take up the pen and create their own voice. There is a tension in this emphasised phrase; a balance between understanding spinning as a relegating activity and as a point from which women can succeed further. Though it is hard to imagine that Louise Labé is stating that spinning is an activity that could be understood as a basis for the ability to write, it is equally hard to imagine that she would entirely denigrate it when she is writing to women who are wont to perform this activity. It could then be understood that her word choice here is of the utmost importance. She chooses *quenoilles et fuseaus* in an attempt to broadly talk about domestic activities that keep women busy and out of the public sphere, and she asks that women simply look up from these activities in order to engage more fully with the public sphere and take what they deserve: an education and a voice.

This *un peu* calls to mind Christine's inclusion of *pour le temps* in her description of Gaia Cirilla's unmatched domesticity, as it was a *tres honnourable chose* (a most honourable occupation) at the time. Times are changing; there is more to do. Domestic clothwork is an activity of the past and an activity that limits women from making the changes that need to happen now in order to have a brighter future. 'Nous ne sommes faites pour commander', Labé writes, and their excellence in domestic affairs can reach beyond and into public affairs. They are seen as companions within the

house, now they must mindfully choose to be seen as companions without. She states as well that this is a plea to *les vertueuses Dames* who spend their time spinning in the home, good and virtuous women who have the capacity to achieve more. This is equally reminiscent of Christine's intention as well, in that Christine is addressing virtuous women, and she desires to fill her City with 'fors toutes dames de renommee et femmes dignes de loz' (only ladies who are of good reputation and worthy of praise) as 'a celles ou vertu ne sera trouvee, les murs de nostre cite seront forclos' (to those lacking in virtue, its gates will remain forever closed.)²⁸ There is a certain expectation, then, in Louise Labé's *épître dédicatoire* that she is addressing women who do not *need* to spin as work, but rather who spin because that is what is expected by the patriarchal system of good and virtuous ladies. Thus, she knows them to be capable of much more than this because they are of a certain social standing wherein an education could be procured.

The tone of both of these two works, Christine's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* and Labé's *Œuvres Complètes*, is set by the way in which their arguments surrounding the education of women and the rejection of their respective systems are framed by a presentation of the current, domestic situation of women. The way in which clothwork is displayed in literature throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, particularly in its depiction in terms of the lives of noblewomen, underlines a tension between utilitarianism, creativity, and relegation. In the High Middle Ages, at the time of the production of much of the Old French romance treated in this study, guilds operated by male masters were taking over the production of cloth, and this is a crucial turning point for understanding clothwork in the

²⁸ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 630; Brown-Grant, p. 11.

Middle Ages from a feminist standpoint.²⁹ What was in Roman times a means of defining a good and virtuous woman, *lanam fecit* (she made wool) being carved into women's epitaphs, became a tool of relegating the female sex to the domestic sphere and defining their virtuous characteristics by the level of their lack of engagement with the public sphere. Christine de Pizan herself rejects the activity of making cloth and defines it as a deterrent to her studies. Louise Labé sees it as a means to keep women out of the public sphere and implores her friends to put down the spindle and pick up the pen. Domestic clothwork in the noble home has ceased to be utilitarian as cloth and dress can be purchased from merchants, and its creative power is not on par with more masculine forms of expression such as writing or composing. This type of clothwork has come to be seen as a means of restriction, relegation, and entrapment by the Late Middle Ages. It is crucial then to look to the ways in which Christine de Pizan presents clothwork in her *Cité des Dames* as a means of redefining the values of intelligence and virtuosity that are associated with the activity. Furthermore, Louise Labé, throughout her *Œuvres Complètes*, may not necessarily reshape feminine activities in order to show them as intelligent, but she redefines male activities of loving, writing, and composing in order to show how they can be recast as belonging equally to the feminine domain.

Minerva's Moral Influence and Dido's Victorious 'Vellum'

Christine de Pizan's lens is of particular importance in the reconstruction of the depiction of women who are associated with clothwork

²⁹ Whittle, p. 219: 'The growth of weaving as a specialist occupation correlated with the gradual decline in women's involvement.'

in the *Cité des Dames*. In lieu of presenting the women's artistry and creativity, Christine chooses to focus on the educational or intellectual aspects of the women, allying their inventions and skills with the brilliance of their minds, in order to make her point that women are equal to men in intelligence. The word *cautelle* (translated as 'clever' or 'cunning' by Rosalind Brown-Grant throughout her English translation of *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*) and other words, such as *sçavoir*, *soubtiueté*, and *engin*, that highlight intelligence or wisdom are employed by Christine de Pizan in her descriptions of women who excelled in or used clothwork to their advantage. It is ingenuity, not idleness, that drives the inventions and excellence of the women Raison defends in Book I of *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and, moreover, their inventions are not only born of intelligence, but they are beneficial to humanity. This, in relation to the ways in which Raison has defended the activity of spinning, allows the reader to understand the multiple levels of benefit that these women have brought to the world.

In Book I of the *Cité des Dames*, Christine asks Raison if women ever invented a new form of knowledge, and Raison launches into a litany of women who contributed to the arts and sciences, such as Carmentis, who invented the Latin alphabet. She then turns to the example of Minerva, who, it is written, 'trouva maintes sciences et la maniere de faire armeures de fer et d'acier' (invented countless sciences, including the art of making arms from iron and steel.)³⁰ Minerva's many beneficial gifts to humanity are described at length, and the following excerpt is the way in which Raison describes her invention of the skills of writing and of weaving:

Ceste fu soubtille et de grant *entendement*, nom mie seulement

³⁰ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 739; Brown-Grant, p. 66.

en une chose, mais generaument en toutes. Elle trouva par sa soultiveté aucunes lettres grecques que on appelle caracteres, par lesquelles on puet mettre une grant narracion de choses en escript en l'espace de bien pou de lettres et de briesve escripture, desquelles aujourd'uy encores usent les Griex : qui fu moult belle invencion et *soubtive* a trouver. Elle trouva nombre et manière de compter et d'assembler sommes soubz briesveté. Et a tout dire, tant avoit *l'esperit enluminé de savoir* qu'elle trouva plusieurs ars et ouvrages a faire qui oncques n'avoyent esté trouvez : l'art de la laine et de faire draps trouva toute, et fu la premiere qui oncques s'avisast de berbis tondre de laine, charpir, pigner, carder a divers outliz, nettoyer, amolir a broches de fer, filler a la quenouille, puis les outliz a faire le drap, et comment il seroit affin tissu.

(She employed her skilfulness and her immense *ingenuity* not just in one domain but in many. First of all, she used her brilliance to invent various Greek letters called characters which can be used to write down a maximum number of ideas in a minimum number of words. This wonderfully *clever* invention is still used by the Greeks today. She also invented numbers and developed ways of using them to count and perform quick calculations. In short, she was so *ingenious* that she created many arts and techniques that had not previously been discovered, including the art of making wool and cloth. It was she who first had the idea of shearing sheep and developing the whole process of untangling, combing and carding the wool with various instruments, cleaning it, breaking down the fibres on metal spikes and spinning it on the distaff, whilst also inventing the tools needed for weaving it into cloth and making it into fine fabric.)³¹

While Christine's description of Minerva is very similar to the way in which Boccaccio presents her in his *De Mulieribus Claris*,³² the order in which the skills of Minerva are listed is significantly different. Boccaccio first tells of

³¹ Ibid., pp. 739-40; Brown-Grant, p. 66. My emphasis.

³² Boccaccio, VI, pp. 34-9.

Minerva's perpetual virginity, then of her weaving, then of her invention of oil and armor, and lastly of her invention of numbers and her associations with wisdom. As seen in the passage above, Christine chooses to immediately highlight Minerva's association with wisdom and the invention of the alphabet before anything else, which instantly places Minerva in the reader's mind as someone of great intellect. In conjunction with this initial portraiture of Minerva, Christine's presentation of her art and skill in weaving is not one of a simple domestic craft, rather she spends a great deal of time explaining the complicated process that Minerva instituted, showing it as a clever and useful act, rather than one of simple domesticity. The fact that she includes it within a great list of skills used in writing and mathematics only furthers Raison's underlying argument, that in this collection of women who have invented new forms of knowledge, Minerva's invention of the making of wool and cloth is something to be esteemed and admired, on par with more classical forms of education and learning. The emphasis placed in the excerpt above shows clearly the equality of the variant forms of knowledge that Minerva has invented. Her invention of the Greek letters and the numbers are classified as something of *grant entendement* just as the art of weaving is due to Minerva's *esperit enluminé de savoir*.

Though Minerva is not discussed as a goddess, but rather as a woman of such extraordinary skill that she was thought to be divine in pre-Christian times, Christine's readership would most likely have been familiar with Minerva's classical characterisation as the goddess of weaving, wisdom, and warfare, which are all topics of discussion in the *Cité des Dames*. Minerva's invention and her skill are what define her as a woman of excellence. She, as

the goddess of wisdom, uses her knowledge and intelligence to further her contributions to humanity, and her identity stems from those classifying attributes. She has invented chainmail and other such implements used for warfare, and likewise she has invented the art and skill of weaving, and so becomes imbued with the identifying description as the goddess of weaving. Aside from that classification, the human impact of Minerva's invention is also presented to Christine by Raison as she states: 'Minerve aussi, qui pourvey de son sçavoir nature humaine de maintes choses tant necessaires comme de vestemens de laine, qui avant ne se vestoyent fors de piaux de bestes, osta de la paine que ilz avoyent de porter.' (Minerva too used her wisdom to endow human beings with many vital things such as woollen clothing, instead of the animal pelts which were all there was previously to wear).³³ Christine presents Minerva's invention as a scientific art, requiring a great deal of ingenuity and cleverness, and yet, it is also utilitarian. Equally, as the goddess of wisdom, Minerva seemingly removes the use of animal pelts as dress in order to reassign them as a means of transcribing wisdom: from vests to vellum.

The ways in which humans use animal skin is an increasingly rich topic of ecocritical discussion, and there are innumerable ways in which one could consider the transition from wearing animal skins to wearing cloth, especially in that wool still comes from sheep. The manipulation of the wool is what makes the utility of the fabric overpower the unyielding and unmalleable nature of pelts. However, their manageability and malleability changes drastically when they are used to create vellum, which in turn becomes a vehicle for the transmission of the written word. Christine

³³ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 750; Brown-Grant, p. 72.

specifically lauds Minerva for *son sçavoir nature humaine* that caused her to create the art of woolworking and take people out of animal pelts, and she writes this upon vellum, imparting this wisdom on the skin of an animal.

This connection calls to mind the way in which Dido is presented by Christine, not long after Minerva has been exemplified as an intelligent and resourceful woman.

Dido, known most especially from Virgil's *Aeneid* as the lover of Aeneas and the Queen of Carthage, is presented by Christine de Pizan as a woman of vast intellect. It is the clever way in which she acquires the land for her kingdom of Carthage that is presented above her attributes of steadfastness in love (later recounted by Droiture in Book II of the *Cité des Dames*). Raison presents Dido's plight and the cunning trick that she plays in order to gain power to Christine. Dido is the sister of the cruel King Pygmalion, who had her husband killed in order to steal his wealth, and Dido, realising that what he has already stolen will not be enough for him, and that her life is in danger, gathers together loyal subjects and sails away from her home in Phoenicia, eventually landing in Africa, where she is greeted by the local people. She makes a deal with the local people, and Raison describes it in this way:

Et la dame, qui fist semblant que moult grant habitte ne vouloit faire sur estrange terre, leur request a vendre sur la marine tant de terre seullement comme un cuir de buef pourroit enclosre, pour y faire ediffier aucun herberge pour elle et pour sa gent. Laquel chose luy fu ottroyee ; et les couvenences et marchié fait et juré entre eulx, la dame, qui adont demonstra son *sçavoir* et *grant prudence*, fist prendre un cuir de buef et le fist trenchier par les plus deliees courroyes que faire se povoit et lier ensemble tout en une ceinture, puis les fist estandre sur la terre environ la marine, qui contenoit a merveilles grant paÿs. De laquel chose les vendeurs furent moult esbahis et esmerveillez a *cautelle et*

scens de ceste femme, et nonpourtant couvint que luy tenissent son marchié.

(Insisting that she didn't want to establish a large colony on this foreign soil, the lady asked them to sell her a piece of land by the coast which was no bigger than what could be covered³⁴ by the hide of a cow. Here she would build some dwellings for herself and her people. They granted her wishes and, as soon as the terms of the deal had been agreed upon, her *cleverness* and *good sense* came to the fore. Taking the cowhide, the lady had it cut into the tiniest strips possible which were then tied together to form a rope. This rope was laid out on the ground by the seashore where it enclosed a huge plot of land. Those who had sold her the land were amazed and stunned by her *cunning ruse*, yet they had to abide by the deal they had struck with her.)³⁵

Using the same terminology with which Raison describes Minerva (as well as Arachne and Pamphile, to be discussed shortly), Dido is portrayed as having *sçavoir* and *grant prudence* in order to complete such a *cunning ruse*, translated as such by Rosalind Brown-Grant from the *cautelle* and *scens* that Dido possesses. What is particularly interesting about this translation of *cautelle* is that it is consistently translated by Brown-Grant throughout the *Livre de la Cité des Dames* as 'cunning'. However, in all the cases, excepting this one, where *cunning* has been translated from *cautelle* (or some derivation of that word), it is always referring to a man or masculine example of great intelligence or cunning.³⁶ Only in the case of Dido is the word *cautelle* used to describe a female character's intelligence, which could be due to a myriad of reasons, one perhaps being that she is in a significant place of power being

³⁴ A more accurate translation for *enclosre* would be 'encompassed'.

³⁵ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 773; Brown-Grant, p. 84.

³⁶ In Christine de Pizan's description of the Sabine women, Romulus, as king, is likewise referred to as *cautilleux* due to his ruse of stealing the Sabine women in order to populate his newly founded city sorely lacking in the female sex. Ibid., p. 864; Brown-Grant, p. 134: 'Et pour ce Romulus, advisé de grant *cautelle*' (For this reason, Romulus had to devise a *cunning* plan.)

the Queen of Carthage. Another, perhaps, is that here she is active in both her ruse and the execution of it; she takes on a masculine role. Christine does not admonish her for this, as she herself is doing quite the same. Christine is using the masculine implements of writing, which have been used against her and her sex, in order to fight against the societal repression of women and the misogynistic writings that surround her. Likewise, Dido, as a queen in her own right, without a male counterpart, establishes her own presence and power in society. She uses what some men believe to be her ignorance and weakness to her advantage. She manipulates a cowhide, just as Philomena manipulates cloth in order to escape her entrapment, and just as Christine manipulates vellum in order to gain a place of respect and power in society.

Though Dido does not weave or sew, her knotwork is of significance in that she creates a means of maintaining the security and power for herself and her people. She speaks to the people of Africa, and, staying true to her word, uses only the space covered by a cowhide as her future kingdom. Her physical manipulation of the hide, however, shows great intelligence and determination. Much as the way in which thread passes through hands, or the way in which the warp is moved up and down on a loom, much as people pray the Rosary, passing bead after bead through meditative fingers, Dido cuts strip after strip of the cowhide, and ties knot upon knot in a concerted effort to establish her voice and authority in this new place. Dido utilises the material of parchment and manipulates it in a domestic practice, in order to participate fully in the more masculine-dominated arena of public authority. In doing so she establishes herself as a great queen of *grant prudence*, and both Christine and Boccaccio state clearly that at this moment her name changes from Elissa to Dido 'qui vault autant a dire comme *virago*

en latin, qui est a dire celle qui a vertu et force de homme' (which means 'virago' in Latin: in other words, a woman who has the virtue and valour of a man.)³⁷ Dido's cunning and feminine work causes her name change and places her virtually on the same level as masculine rulers, and thus her status as a ruler is redefined due to her intelligence and her actions.

Both Minerva and Dido's skills make them women of supreme excellence and intelligence, and both of these women are connected in their autonomy: Minerva as a perpetual virgin, and Dido as a queen in her own right, founding a city on her own. In fact, it is only in Book II that Christine de Pizan mentions Dido's relationship with Aeneas, who eventually leaves her and causes her to commit suicide: 'Laquelle departie fu si grant douleur a la lasse Dido, qui trop amoit, qu'elle voulst renoncier a joye et vie' (The wretched Dido was so devastated by his departure that she lost all interest in life and joy, consumed as she was by her passion for Aeneas).³⁸ The later work of Louise Labé equally presents a capable woman who can excel at any skill or feat, yet who is held back by the curse of love upon her. In her *Élégie III*, Labé addresses the 'Dames Lionnoises', the ladies of Lyon, and this, in conjunction with the content of her *épître dédicatoire*, underlines a literary-based female community meant to engage in a discussion with women. Labé begins this *Élégie* by stating that she has been blessed with many talents, but that one thing has held her back:

Mais si en moy rien y ha d'imparfait,
Qu'on blame Amour : c'est lui seul qui l'a fait.
Sur mon verd aage en ses laqs il me prit,
Lors qu'exerçoi mon corps et mon esprit

³⁷ Ibid., p. 775; Brown-Grant, p. 85.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 931; Brown-Grant, p. 174.

En mille et mille euvres ingenieuses,
Qu'en peu de tems me rendit ennuieuses. (*Elégie III*, ll. 27-32)³⁹

(So if there is anything imperfect in my life,
blame Love. He is the cause of all my strife.
In my green youth he got a hold of me,
while I was exercising both my soul and body
in a hundred thousand ingenious feats of skill
which, in no time at all, he rendered dull.)

Once Love aimed an arrow at her heart, it was all consuming, and any great feat that she could have accomplished becomes lesser. She shows which skills she could have excelled at by referencing Classical examples of excellence and showing her capacity to equal or better produce the actions of classical women, including the ability to weave better than Arachne:

Pour bien savoir avec l'esguille peindre
J'eusse entrepris la renommee esteindre
De celle là, qui plus docte que sage,
Avec Pallas comparoit son ouvrage. (*Elégie III*, ll. 33-6)

(Wanting to paint fine scenes in my sewing frame,
I had challenged myself to extinguish the great fame
of her who – surely more studious than wise –
set her work against what Pallas had devised.)

Louise here references Arachne's challenge of Minerva (discussed in Chapter One and later in this chapter) in order to show the kind of glory that she could have achieved were she not hindered by love. Arachne, said to have been renowned for her weaving so much so that it caused Minerva to challenge her to a duel, is shown as a paragon for excellence in this art, one

³⁹ All poetry translations of Louise Labé are by Annie Finch from Louise Labé: *Complete Poetry and Prose (A Bilingual Edition)*, ed. and trans. by Deborah Lesko Baker and Annie Finch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and will be subsequently referred to as Finch, pp. 167-71.

that Labé claims she could have surpassed. Subsequently, Labé also claims that she herself could fight better than Brandamant or Marfisa, two female knights from Ludovico Ariosto's 1532 recreation of the *Chanson de Roland*, entitled *Orlando furioso*. Labé writes directly after her evocation of Arachne:

Qui m'ust vù lors en armes fiere aller,
Porter la lance et bois faire voler,
Le devoir faire en l'estour furieus,
Piquer, volter le cheval glorieus,
Pour Brandamante, ou la haute Marphise,
Seur de Roger, il m'ust, possible, prise. (*Elégie III*, ll. 37-42)

(And you should have seen me in armour, riding high,
gripping my lance, letting my arrows fly!
I kept my head in the fury of the fight,
spurring my glorious wheeling horse, you might
have compared me to the great Brandamante with ease,
or to Roger's sister, the renowned Marphise.)

Deborah Lesko Baker's reference to the inclusion of Brandamante is that she, 'known as the Virgin Knight and wielder of a magic spear that caused the downfall of any knight it touched, fell in love with Marfisa's brother, the Moor Ruggiero, and following his conversion became his wife.'⁴⁰ This imagery of a strong and capable woman who subsequently falls silent after marriage is not an uncommon one throughout this study. Especially seen in the stories of Fresne from *Galeran de Bretagne* and Lienors from *Guillaume de Dole*, these women are presented as both independent and publicly vocal, yet upon their respective marriages they fall silent, and both of their romances are named for a masculine character: Fresne's lover in the case of *Galeran de Bretagne* and Lienors' brother in *Guillaume de Dole*. Louise Labé, throughout this *Elégie*, references the fickle nature of love, citing

⁴⁰ From Deborah Lesko Baker's notes to the bilingual edition of Louise Labé, note 32, p. 239.

examples of men who leave their wives to ruin, such as Paris and Jason, and the destruction of Time, taking away the glory of once great accomplishments. At the end of her *Elégie*, all she asks of Love is for an equal in all respects, not for unending glory or fame, because she knows that it does not truly exist.

The understanding of the fleetingness of glory is seen when, after citing the previous examples of feminine excellence, Labé asks her fellow ladies of Lyon: 'Mais quoy? Amour ne put longuement voir, \ Mon cœur n'aymant que Mars et le savoir' (But what of it? Love couldn't lend my heart \ to Mars and study for long) (*Elégie III*, ll. 43-4). As this question is raised directly after she describes how she could have excelled, citing Mars as the image of warfare and *le savoir* as the image of Arachne's study of weaving, it portrays a tension between excellence and happiness that Labé blames on Love. Labé is not saying that women should give up excellence for love by any means, but that while Time causes one's excellence to fade away, Time will only augment the torment associated with love's inconstancy. Labé, in this particular *Elégie*, outlines the difficulties of being a woman for her *Dames Lionnoises*: a woman is capable of excellence, but Love will always mar the ability to truly succeed in the same way that men do. Aeneas could leave Carthage and go on to gain his great renown, whereas Dido, a strong and clever queen in her own right, is so tormented that she throws herself on a pyre out of grief at being left alone. Because of Love, Labé says, she does not have the resilience within her heart to commit herself to glory, either in warfare or *le savoir*.

Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé both underline themes of feminine excellence and the limitations that are placed upon them due to their very nature as women. Christine presents Minerva as a paragon of intellect even in her creation of a domestic skill, yet she is defined by her virginal nature, whereas Dido is included in two different books within the *Cité des Dames*, one in which Christine focuses on Dido's great *sçavoir* and the other on her *amour ferme*. The readers are then led to question what boundaries women come up against in their quest for excellence. Labé addresses this clearly in her *Elégie III*, which stresses the capacity for women to excel by showing herself as a woman capable of excellence, intelligence, and skilfulness. Yet, she outlines the parameters of women's hearts by alluding to classical women of surpassing excellence and fickle men who cause heartache and distress in women. Both Christine and Louise have recast classical depictions of women in order to speak to their feats and faults from a feminine perspective and to a predominantly (or even invoked, in the case of Labé) feminine audience. The identities that are assigned to them through their accomplishments, Minerva as the goddess of weaving and *le savoir*, Dido as a queen and *virago*, become increasingly important when they are regarded from the feminine perspectives of these two female authors.

Pamphile's Silken Identity

Similar to the way in which Minerva's skill identifies her qualities as a goddess (eg. weaving, wisdom, and warfare), identity comes to the forefront of discussion in the way that Christine presents Pamphile, especially in opposition to the description of her in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*. Boccaccio defines her as a woman who invented weaving as it is today, and describes how she was the

first to pick cotton wool off plants, and spin and weave it into material.⁴¹

Christine, on the other hand, presents Pamphile in a more scientific light, and defines her as the inventor of silkwork:

De sciences trouves par femmes, bonnes et couvenables et prouffitables, entre les autres ne fait mie a oublier celle que trouva la noble Pamphille, qui fu du païs de Grece. Ceste dame fu de tres *soubtil engin* en divers ouvraiges, et tant se delitta a *investiguer* et *encercier* choses estranges qu'elle fu la premiere qui trouva l'art de la soye : car si comme elle fust moult *speculative* et *ymaginative*, elle avisa les vers qui font la soye naturellement sus les branches des arbres ou païs ou elle estoit, si prist des bocettes que ces vers avoyent faittes qu'elle vit moult belles, et prist les filles de plusieurs ensemble a assembler. Puis esprouva se belle tainture en diverses couleurs prendroit celluy fil; et quant elle ot tout ce essayé, veu que belle chose estoit, elle se prist a fayre et a tyssir les draps de soye. Pour laquel chose, de la science de ceste femme, est venu grant biauté et prouffit au monde, monteplié en toutes terres: car Dieux en est honnouré et serviz en plusieurs paremens, et en sont faiz les nobles robes et paremens des prelas au divin office et aussi des empereurs et des roys et princes, et meesmement au peupple d'aucune terre qui n'use d'autres vestemens parce qu'ils n'ont nulles laines et ont foyson vers.

(On the subject of great sciences invented by women which are extremely beneficial to humanity, we should not forget the one invented by the noble Pamphile, who came from Greece. This lady was *highly skilled* in various arts and took such delight in *experimenting* and *discovering* new things that it was she who first invented the art of creating silk. Using her great *ingenuity* and *perceptiveness*, she noticed that the worms which lived on the branches of the local trees naturally produced silk. Picking the lovely cocoons that she had watched the worms making and pulling the threads together, she tried dyeing them various different colours to see if they would take. After she had thoroughly tested this process and seen how good the results were, she took the dyed thread and wove it into silken cloth.

⁴¹ Boccaccio, p. 185.

The science brought into the world by this lady has proved to be a most wonderful and useful invention, one which has spread to all countries. In order to serve and glorify God, silk is used to make all manner of robes and vestments worn by prelates during divine service. It is also used by emperors, kings and princes, and even by the whole population of certain countries where they have no wool but an abundance of silkworms.)⁴²

Pamphile is lauded by Raison as *speculative* and *ymaginative*, both adjectives of a mindfulness and intelligence that led her to create an activity and a product that is both delicate and beautiful, and that not only benefits humanity, but also helps to establish hierarchical structure through cloth and clothing, as silk was an important addition to the segregation of social classes. As E. Jane Burns suggests in her *Sea of Silk*, 'At times, Old French heroines accrue more specific authority and influence by donning silk raiment',⁴³ tying their identity and power directly to the fabric that they wear. This trope of the luxury of cloth is repeated throughout Old French romance literature, as well as being a means of defining the excellence of the character wearing or employing the cloth and showing the social boundaries of the characters. For example, in *La Mort le Roi Artu* (as previously discussed in Chapter Two), the *demoisele d'Escalot* attempts to reach beyond her status and show herself to be a noblewoman and the keeper of Lancelot's heart when she asks him to ride in the tournament with her silk sleeve atop his helmet. Through this significant act, the crowd at the tournament believes this unknown knight to be in love with a very noble woman, although the only indicator of this supposed status is the silk material of this sleeve. This classification in cloth can be found across medieval literature, with women of

⁴² Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, pp. 755-6; Brown-Grant, pp. 74-5. My emphasis.

⁴³ Burns, *Sea of Silk*, p. 10.

high status being draped in silks and samite even when their birth status is not known, such as is the case with Fresne. Her signifying cloth, given to her by her mother before she was abandoned, is described as 'ung drap de samit' (a cloth of samite) (*Galeran*, l. 533) and 'un paile roë' (a silk cloth adorned with rosettes) (*Fraisne*, l. 123) imported from Constantinople, hence from the East where silk production was common. This cloth is the only clue to Fresne's noble birth, and to the eventual reconnection with her noble family.

As in Christine's description of Minerva's clothwork, she defines the invention of silkwork as *la science de ceste femme*, assigning it to a position of learning and education rather than one of simple domesticity. The way in which Pamphile's inventiveness is presented is much like a scientific process: she takes notice of the world around her, comes to a conclusion about a naturally produced product, and through trial and error finds a way to make that product useful. Additionally, Raison presents Pamphile's invention as something that greatly honors and serves God, in the same way that she presented her defense of spinning: 'c'est office necessaire au service divin.' The invention of silkwork has helped clothe people in countries where wool is scarce, yet silk is abundant, and in cultures with variant materials, it helps to distinguish social hierarchies. Furthermore, in all areas of the world where God is glorified, those who work in his divine service are clothed in silk in order to honour him. This is not an aspect of clothwork that is common to all the women in this series of clothwork inventions, but rather it shows Christine's readership how working on raiment and other such works for the church is an activity that they can perform in order to model themselves after the behaviour of women like Pamphile, and devote themselves more fully to God. This call to perform virtuous work is very much like Raison's initial

defense of spinning, and it allows women to see how their everyday lives can contribute to the glorification of God. In fact, in medieval romance literature, this trope of women working virtuously on silk cloth bound for the church is not altogether absent. In Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* (discussed in Chapter Four), the first glimpse that the audience has of the virtuous Lienors is when she is presented working on hangings bound for the church and singing *chansons de toile* with her mother in the women's chambers. As this is the first impression the audience receives of Lienors, she is automatically cast in a virtuous light, defined by the activity that she performs.

Pamphile is defined in the *Cité des Dames* as a woman of science, who, through observation and experimentation, invented silk and silkwork. She presents an interesting case in that, though the work she has done and the way in which she is presented by Christine define her as an intelligent and creative woman, she has offered the world a means of identification through cloth and clothing. The social hierarchy, as well as the religious hierarchy, depends greatly on Pamphile's invention. It is presented as something not only beautiful and delicate, but something that represents alterity for the Western world. Coming from the East, silk provides an image of luxury and elitism. Where *la demoisele d'Escalot's* sleeve is an attempt to raise her own social status, another silk sleeve deployed as a marker of feminine identity is found in the story of Fresne from *Galeran de Bretagne*. Once Fresne is made to leave the convent in which she was raised, she independently makes her way in the world by working as both a seamstress and a troubadour, manipulating *fil d'or et de soie*, words, and lyre strings. When she sends her indicative clothbody to Galeran, a portrait of herself as a love poet with a lyre

around her neck embroidered upon a silk sleeve, she is identifying herself as noble in the luxurious nature of the sleeve's fabric, while simultaneously identifying her voice as belonging to a singing and composing subject, though she makes her image the object of Galeran's desire. The tasks that she performs as an independent woman and the sewn portraiture of a lyre-playing love poet, supply a prime example of an alliance of fingers that stitch thread with fingers that strum strings, bringing manual manipulation to the forefront of the discussion of identity.

Not entirely dissimilar to Fresne, Louise Labé portrays herself as a love poet throughout her sonnets, identifying herself through her physical manipulation of, and inherent intimacy with, the lute. This is seen especially in the language she uses in *Sonnet XII*, which outlines the suffering she endures in love and its direct relation to the work that she produces with her lute:

Lut, compagnon de ma calamité,
De mes soupirs témoin irréprochable,
De mes ennuis contrôleur véritable,
Tu as souvent avec moy lamenté:

Et tant le pleur piteus t'a molesté,
Que commençant quelque son delectable,
Tu le rendois tout soudain lamentable,
Feignant le ton que plein avoit chanté.

Et si te veus efforcer au contraire,
Tu te destens et si me contreins taire:
Mais me voyant tendrement soupirer,

Donnant faveur à ma tant triste plainte:
En mes ennuis me plaie suis contrainte,
Et d'un dous mal douce fin esperer. (*Sonnet XII*, ll. 1-14)

(Lute, my companion in calamity,
irreproachable witness of my sighs,
faithful secretary of all my cries,
you have lamented so often with me

that my tears have driven you deep into pity.
Now, if a delicious sound starts to arise,
you turn it back to a sad lament, disguise
it with tones you've sung so much more frequently.

No matter how I try to force you the other way,
you struggle, and loosen your strings, and steal away
my song. Still when you watch my tender sighing,

indulging me, listening again while I complain,
I know pleasure, I find an opposite in my pain,
and hope sweet suffering will lead me to sweet dying.)⁴⁴

This sonnet shows the narrator's intense connection with the musical instrument as it becomes the marker of her identity, both physically and emotionally. Pamphile's discoveries and manipulation of nature leads Christine de Pizan to identify her as a scientist of sorts who gave the world a means by which they can produce further classification and identification in social and religious representations. Louise Labé, presenting herself as a love poet who manipulates an instrument, shows how a manually manipulated object can become imbued with identity. She states that because she has previously been so tortured in her writing of lyrics, the lute itself becomes an embodiment of that torture. When she is 'commençant quelque son delectable', the lute, sitting physically just above her heart, refuses to change the tormented identity that she has gained through her frequent composing of previous sad love lyrics. Just as silk and silkwork have become imbued with a connotation of luxury and opulence, the lyre itself has become a

⁴⁴ Finch, p. 195.

vehicle for Labé's identification as a tortured love poet, and the connection between what is represented and what is manually manipulated connects relatively seamlessly with the identifying agency of other inanimate objects, such as cloth and clothing.

The lute, like fabric, is invariably connected with the body that it touches. The eroticism associated with women's clothing and clothbodies in Old French romance creates a clear understanding of how fabric can come to identify, if only temporarily, a female-sexed body, disrupting the physical body's identification. The lute, held closely against the poet's body, likewise seems to here disrupt Labé's true identity as it takes away her ability to play anything other than these Petrarchan sonnets, a form which Labé follows and challenges throughout her twenty-four sonnets. Though she desires to break the mold of what she has been consistently pressured to compose, her lute, the object that she wields in order to fit into the definition as a love poet, refuses to bend to her desires. There is a tension at play between the companionable nature of the lute, as it is directly addressed by Labé and her desire to identify herself as an innovative poet in comparison to her male contemporaries. The final lines of *Sonnet XII* show how Labé's manipulation of the lute will bring her fame as she suffers and dies as a great love poet.

Though there is no mention of clothwork in Louise Labé's *Sonnet XII*, manipulation and handiwork are important in terms of self-representation and identification, recasting her femininity as the speaking and composing love-poet. In much the same way that Fresne in *Galeran de Bretagne* casts herself as the love poet by embroidering her image with a lyre around her neck onto a silk sleeve, Labé portrays her intimate relationship with the lute as it bears witness to her torture and eventual success as a brilliant poet. In the vein of brilliance, Christine de Pizan outlines Pamphile's identity as a

model of scientific success by her observation and physical manipulation of the natural world in the production of silk. The way in which Christine outlines her scientific method, using verbs such as *investiguer* and *encercier*, underlines her *soubtil engin* as a feminine inventor of a very identifying fabric. Silk, itself a material of opulence and alterity providing hierarchical classification throughout Old French romance, religion, and aristocracy, becomes a crucial marker of identity, one invented by a woman of great scientific skill. As Pamphile, Christine, and Louise Labé observe the world around them, their female gaze overrides the previously predominant male gaze and allows them to excel at science, writing, and love poetry, making their impact upon the present and future generations to come. In the Old French romances discussed in the study, the male gaze upon female objects is a repeated image; both Christine's depiction of Pamphile and Labé's portraiture of herself as a love poet identified by her lute redefine feminine agency in observation and creation. Labé's voice and music, though dominated by the lute's set and rigorous structure in this sonnet, is shown in her *Sonnet XXI* to be much more akin to the rebellious voice of Arachne as she is depicted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Christine's *Cité des Dames*.

Arachne's Inescapable Entrapment

Throughout the entirety of her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine gleans inspiration from such authors as Boccaccio and Ovid, introducing women both hailed and chastised by these male authors. However, Christine only rewrites the good and glorious parts of each woman's story, even those women known for destruction, such as in the case of Medea, a woman who is known for having committed infanticide. Another woman to whom history

has not been kind is Arachne, known best from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where she is presented as a mortal girl who had enough gumption to lie about the fact that it was the goddess of weaving herself who taught her how to produce such beautiful works in cloth. As discussed in Chapter One, in this story, Arachne is the student of Minerva, or Athena, who teaches her everything she knows about woolworking, and once she is praised for her immense talent, she states that she is simply gifted and has learned to do it all on her own. Minerva then challenges Arachne to a duel of sorts; both of them must weave a story into a tapestry in order to see who is truly the better weaver. As told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Minerva weaves four scenes into a tapestry, all of them depicting mortals who have challenged the gods and been punished, seemingly attempting to send a message to mortals such as Arachne who would dare challenge her. Arachne, however, insolent still, chooses to weave the ways in which mortals have been tricked and cheated by the gods, and the end result is described as such:

In all that work of hers Pallas could find,
Envy could find, no fault. Incensed at such
Success the warrior goddess, golden-haired,
Tore up the tapestry, those crimes of heaven,
And with the boxwood shuttle in her hand
(Box of Cytorus) three times, four times, struck
Arachne on her forehead. The poor wretch,
Unable to endure it, bravely placed
A noose around her neck; but, as she hung,
Pallas in pity raised her. 'Live!' she said,
'Yes, live but hang, you wicked girl, and know
You'll rue the future too: that penalty
Your kin shall pay to all posterity!'
And as she turned to go, she sprinkled her
With drugs of Hecate, and in a trice,
Touched by the bitter lotion, all her hair
Falls off and with it go her nose and ears.

Her head shrinks tiny; her whole body's small;
Instead of legs slim fingers line her sides.
The rest is belly; yet from that she sends
A fine-spun thread and, as a spider, still
Weaving her web, pursues her former skill.⁴⁵ (VI ll. 130-51)

By turning Arachne into a spider, Minerva insures that she will spin and weave all the days of her life. More importantly, however, is the way in which Ovid describes both Minerva and Arachne's woven works. Both of them weave stories, and speak through their weaving. This is similar to the way that Chrétien de Troyes describes Philomena's ability to almost create sound from cloth in her depictions of Hellequin's troops: 'Un diaspre ou un baudequin, \Nes la mesniee Hellequin \Seüst ele an un drap portreire' (Arabesques, frills, and even the Wild of Hunt of Hellequin's troop, she knew how to portray them in cloth) (ll. 193-5),⁴⁶ which E. Jane Burns explains in her *Bodytalk*: '...she has the unparalleled talents of weaving and working cloth [...] So skilled is Philomena at weaving [...] she can depict Hellequin's troop. That is to say that she can make cloth talk [...] To portray them fully would require images and sounds, to relay voice through weaving or to make cloth speak much in the way Philomena uses the famed tapestry later in the tale to convey her own speech.'⁴⁷ Likewise, Minerva shows Cinyras 'bereaved, \Embrac[ing] the temple steps, his daughters' limbs, \And lying on the marble seem[ing] to weep' and Arachne weaves Europa 'calling to her friends, \Seeming to dread the leaping billows' touch' (Ovid, VI. ll. 99-101; 108-9), emitting powerful and emotional voices from the threads of the tapestry. Both are able to speak through their works, Minerva transmitting a

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). All subsequent references to this text are from this edition.

⁴⁶ Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans : suivis des chansons avec, en appendice, Philomena*, dir. by Michel Zink (Paris: Livre De Poche, 1994). My translation.

⁴⁷ Burns, *Bodytalk*, p. 122.

message of caution to mortals about the power the gods have to punish humans, and Arachne telling of the ways in which the gods have mistreated humans, sending a message to Minerva. Through this act, Arachne challenges the system to which she belongs and in which she is characterised as the lesser.

Boccaccio, like Ovid, presents Arachne as a silly girl, the embodiment of conceitedness, vanity, and egotism; he states that: 'an celum vertere et in se dignitates omnes trahere potuisse arbitretur' (she thought it possible to alter the heavens and usurp every honor for herself) (XVIII).⁴⁸ He then ends his inclusion of Arachne in *De Mulieribus Claris* with a general comment on people's desire to take more than they deserve by writing:

Optarem quippe ut Aragnes unica in hoc nobis esset ridiculum, cum sint innumeri tanta laqueati dementia qui, dum se in precipitium stolide presumptionis efferunt, Aragnem minus ridendam faciunt.

(I wish, indeed, that Arachne had been the only one to make herself ludicrous in this way, but the number of those in the noose of her madness is endless; as they throw themselves off the cliff of foolish presumption, they make Arachne less an object of ridicule.)⁴⁹

Both Ovid and Boccaccio present Arachne quite simply as a silly girl who was tempted by praise and fame, and, especially in *De Mulieribus Claris*, she stands as much more of a cautionary tale than of a woman of great intellect or skill. However, Christine de Pizan presents the feats of Arachne in a similar fashion to the way in which she presents those of Minerva. Once the science of wool-making was complete, Arachne excelled in the art of it:

⁴⁸ Boccaccio, pp. 80-1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 82-3.

Non mie, voirement, sans plus par ycelles dames a Dieus voulu pourveoir au monde de plusieurs choses couvenables et necessaires, mais semblablement par maintes autres, si comme par une pucelle de la terre d'Ayse, qui fu nommee Arenie, fille de Ydomete Tholophone, laquelle de merveilleuse *soubtiveté* et *engin* estoit. Et tant se soutilua qu'elle fu la premiere qui trouva l'art de taindre laines en diverses couleurs et a tyssir ouvraiges ou draps, si comme font paintres, en la maniere que nous dirions ces draps de haulte lice. Et en tout fait de tysserie fu de merveilleuse *soubtiveté*. Et fu celle dont la fable dit qu'elle estriva a Pallas qui la mua en yrangne.

(Truth to tell, God chose to provide the world with endless useful and important techniques through the efforts of these women and of many others, too. One such example is an Asian maiden named Arachne, daughter of Idmonius of Colophon. Being extraordinarily *resourceful* and *clever*, this Arachne was the first person to create the arts of dyeing wool in different colours and of producing what we would call fine tapestries from weaving pictures on cloth to make them look like paintings. Indeed, she mastered every aspect of the art of weaving. There was even a fable about Arachne which tells how she was turned into a spider by the goddess Pallas whom she had dared to challenge.)⁵⁰

Arachne is here shown to have taken the utilitarian aspect of an activity created by Minerva and to have found ways in which to enhance its production in an artistic and ingenious way, which is not entirely dissimilar to how Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé are attempting to improve upon the act of writing and call for equity in education through their *écriture féminine*. Arachne is described as having invented the art of dying fabric and the creation of tapestries though *soubtiveté* and *engin*, and, in this description, Christine does not fail to alert her readers to the intelligence of this female

⁵⁰ Christine de Pizan, *Cité des Dames*, p. 753; Brown-Grant, p. 73. My emphasis.

inventor. While Christine does mention the myth associated with Arachne, her foolish and impetuous nature is not the subject of discussion, rather Arachne is portrayed as a woman who improved upon an existing skill invented by someone of a greater power and status than herself. She is attempting to rewrite the ways in which wool is used, and, in an attempt at expression rather than utilitarianism, she discovers how to 'tyssir ouvraiges ou draps, si comme font peintres'.

In relation to previous chapters, Arachne's attempt at surpassing the boundaries put in place by a higher power recalls the ways in which women use clothwork in order to free themselves from the bounds of some entrapment described in the Old French literature previously examined in Chapter Three. For example, Lienors uses her incredible talent in embroidery to free herself from a slanderous lie that has brought ruin upon herself and her family. The lady from *L'Aüstic* is able to communicate with her lover through an embroidered piece of fabric though her husband has imposed voicelessness upon her by enclosing her within the home. Most strikingly of all, however, is the case in which Philomena uses her craft and cloth to free herself from a life of imprisonment and forced work. One can create interesting parallels, therefore, between Arachne and the character of Philomena, not only in terms of clothwork, but also in terms of an attempt to challenge the system to which they belong, which in the end leads to some form of metamorphosis. Both of these tales have their roots in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and both are examples of Old French retellings that allot far more intelligence to these women than that with which they are endowed in the literature of Ovid. Philomena, for example, is cast as a woman of great intelligence who can read and write, and who excels in the art of weaving, so

much so that her tapestries seem to speak.⁵¹ After she is raped and has her tongue cut out by her brother-in-law, Tereus, she is trapped in a house with seamstresses, and by means of escape, she weaves a tapestry that 'speaks', communicating a message to her sister, in the hope that she will come and rescue her from her imprisonment. Philomena uses her system of imprisonment to her advantage in this way, and after she is rescued by her sister, Procne, they eventually kill Tereus' son and heir, taking down the patriarchal system from the inside by redefining those things which they have produced as women: a tapestry and a child. Philomena, though she is cast as the victim and the heroine in her tale, is seemingly punished as she is metamorphosed into a nightingale, forced to sing of her deed forever crying, 'Oci, oci' (Killed, killed) (l. 1467).

In a similar fashion to the way in which Philomena challenges the patriarchal system that has power over her through a feminine task, Arachne likewise attempts to take down the hierarchical system that allows the gods to mistreat humans by weaving that divine exploitation into a tapestry. However, she too is eventually punished through her metamorphosis into a spider, and is made to spin and weave for the rest of her days. Both of these original tales are focused on the limits of challenging codified systems of power and privilege, and both end in metamorphosis and a loss of voice meant to illustrate a moral punishment; however, Christine overrides this aspect of the tale of Arachne and simply presents her as a woman who reimagined the past uses of a skill in order to improve upon it. Arachne does not lose her voice in Christine's depiction of her, rather Christine gives her a

⁵¹ See Chapter Three, p. 121.

place of honour in her City as a clever woman who excels in the art of expression in cloth.

Christine thus rewrites not only the entrenched notions of Arachne put in place by Ovid, but also the more contemporary masculine perception of Boccaccio, in order to redefine her as a woman of great *soubtiueté*, who ingeniously reinvented a means of expression and voice, much in the same way that Louise Labé presents the obstacles that she faces in her desire to break the masculine codes of love poetry in order to write them from a feminine perspective. As Deborah Lesko Baker cogently illustrates: 'Labé asserts the legitimacy of a woman's claim to take on the first person role of the suffering male lover and validates her loss of voice.'⁵² In other words, Labé describes her transition from the desired object of love to the desiring *feminine* subject. Where Arachne and Philomena move between voiceless object to speaking subject and back again, Labé attempts to define the parameters in place in Petrarchan poetry that must be rewritten from a feminine perspective. This is seen especially in her questioning and frustrated *Sonnet XXI*:

Quelle grandeur rent l'homme venerable?
Quelle grosseur? quel poil? Quelle couleur?
Qui est des yeus le plus emmieleur?
Qui fait plus tot une playe incurable?

Quel chant est plus à l'homme convenable?
Qui plus penetre en chantant sa douleur?
Qui un dous lut fait encore meilleur?
Quel naturel est le plus amiable?

Je ne voudrois le dire assurément,

⁵² Deborah Lesko Baker, 'Poetry Introduction', in *Louise Labé: Complete Prose and Poetry*, ed. Baker, pp. 133-51 (p. 137).

Ayant Amour forcé mon jugement:
Mais je say bien et de tant je m'assure,

Que tout le beau que lon pourroit choisir,
Et que tout l'art qui ayde la Nature,
Ne me sauroient acroitre mon desir. (*Sonnet XXI*, ll. 1-14)

(Which height makes a man earn the most admiration?
Which weight? Which hair? What color of skin and face?
Which eyes brim the fullest with the honeyed grace
that spurs the most incurable sensation?

What song brings a man's voice the highest glorification,
its sadness penetrating the deepest place?
On whose voice does a lute leave the sweetest trace?
Which nature best feels love's warm palpitation?

I wouldn't want to claim that I know best,
since Love forces my judgement; nevertheless,
I do know one thing well – yes, I'm quite sure

that all the beauty I could choose to explore,
and all the art that might improve on Nature,
would never increase my desire one bit more.)⁵³

The questions that begin this sonnet call to mind very clearly not only the descriptions of desired feminine objects in much of the poetry of Labé's contemporaries, but also highlight the repetitive tropes of beauty used throughout much of the literature of the Middle Ages, particularly in romance. Fair-haired, fair-skinned, blue-eyed beauties show up time and again throughout romance poetry and prose, and, in this way, beauty is codified from the masculine perspective, literally legitimised by the male gaze upon a female body.⁵⁴ Thus, what Labé is attempting to illustrate in this

⁵³ Finch, p. 213.

⁵⁴ This is defined as the *blason* tradition, defined by Deborah Lesko Baker as 'verse involving the male praise of specific female body parts', usually through a cataloguing of the physical bodily features. Referenced from Baker's notes on the bilingual edition, p. 240.

sonnet is her inability to describe a male body as an object of beauty from the perspective of a female gaze, due to the fact that this type of poetic trope is not presently codified in masculine poetry as the male-object/female-subject dichotomy is non-existent. This sonnet rejects the limitations and boundaries of the Petrarchan-style sonnet and is rather a reflection on the masculine-dominated world of poetry. The inclusion of this particular sonnet is a subversion of the normal codes imposed upon the poetry of her time period in her attempt to rewrite the way in which she engages with the masculine poetic world as a feminine poet.

By presenting her struggle in the form of compounding questions, Labé challenges her reader to engage with her difficulties as a feminine poet. In a similar way to how Christine de Pizan refutes her predecessors and contemporary misogynistic texts in her *Cité des Dames*, Labé directly places the problem into her sonnets. None of the questions that Labé poses in *Sonnet XXI* are answered in the end, rather she concludes by alluding to the fact that none of these codified attributes of beauty would fit into her poetry: she would still be loving and desiring outside of the male codes of love and desire, and in this way she is breaking out of the mould of her contemporary poets. Her struggle to break free of the limitations that bind her to a certain type of poetry repeat themselves throughout her sonnets, and these questions that she presents are not dissimilar to the struggle she faces in attempting to free herself from the permanent lament of her lute in *Sonnet XII*. This is not a question of excelling; rather it is a question of changing the system in order to allow the excellence of a feminine poet. She poses these questions in an attempt to disengage from the entrenched system to which she currently belongs, not only to allow herself and her contemporary

women to succeed in the realm of performance and poetry, but also to change the system in order that women of the future may be able to succeed if they choose to follow the advice that she gives them in her *épître dédicatoire*, to rise above their domestic work and become educated and intelligent women with a voice in the public sphere.

In relation to both Arachne and Philomena, Labé presents a clear rejection of the unbending nature of the masculine created system; she rejects and challenges the rules and regulations set out in her desire to become a renowned love poet. Where Arachne challenges a system in which she is considered the lesser and Philomena challenges the treatment inflicted upon her by a dominant symbol of the patriarchal system, Labé shows the struggles that she faces as a feminine poet in this masculine-dominated sphere. Christine de Pizan likewise rewrites the women of the past from a feminine perspective in order to change the way that they are received by her audience. These four women highlight the issues that come with having a feminine voice in their respective spheres. Arachne uses Minerva's own skill set to speak out against the maltreatment of humans. Philomena's voice is literally taken away as her tongue is cut out, and she finds a new *feminine* way of communication in order to challenge the system that has defiled and dishonored her. Labé questions the limitations presented by the male-codified poetic world in order to make a voice for herself as a feminine poet, and Christine de Pizan takes inspiration for her examples of feminine excellence and virtuosity from male authors in an attempt to rewrite them and change misogynistic perceptions of women in her *Cité des Dames*.

Conclusion

Regarding texts that predate feminism, one must be careful to understand the context surrounding the writings and teachings of women who call for a change in their daily circumstances. One thing that unites both Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé, though they lived over a century apart and were from very different worlds, is that they both vie for a change in the circumstances of women's treatment and education. Both authors, in their own way, seem to understand the constraints upon certain women to achieve what they themselves have, but Christine and Louise find ways in which they can engage with their audiences. Christine de Pizan is rewriting and reframing the past in her *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and this is very clearly seen by the fact that all of the women with whom she directly associates clothwork are classical models of excellence and intelligence, including Gaia Cirilla. On the other hand, 150 years later, Louise Labé is redefining herself and her fellow female poets in order to change the system as it presently stands, so that future women can excel in the masculine-dominated world of writing and authorship. She calls for this change and action specifically in her *épître dédicatoire*. However, regardless of the way in which they address their respective audiences, both women are writing in an *écriture féminine*, and from a feminine perspective, about feminine expression and excellence.

The City of Ladies is founded and filled with many virtuous and deserving women in an allegorical attempt to show Christine de Pizan's readers that women can rule, can love, can influence, and can work just as

well as men, and that they should not be excluded from the realm of education. Louise Labé, in her *épître dédicatoire*, states the same in a much more blunt and concise manner. She very clearly states to her fellow woman: 'Nous faut il animer, l'une l'autre à si louable entreprise [...] pour aquerir cet honneur que les lettres et sciences ont acoutumé porter aus persones qui les suyvent' (We need to ignite a desire within each other for this very worthy enterprise [...] to acquire the honor that learning and the sciences are known to bring to the people who pursue them).⁵⁵ In her letter, she alludes to sumptuous fabrics, jewelry, and dress, stating that they are trappings of custom, meant to distract a woman from taking up the pen. She states that if women have the capacity to devote so much thought to these material pleasures, they surely can devote that thought to study. If woman can excel with spindles and distaffs, the pen should fit nicely in hands accustomed to expressive work.

For both authors, cloth and clothwork provide common ground in their pleas to women to disillusion themselves from the misogynistic ranting that surrounds them. Christine de Pizan, though she does not choose to make clothwork her personal main activity, does weave it throughout her *Livre de la Cité des Dames* in an attempt to engage with her desired audience. By including Dame Raison's defense of spinning (and by extension all cloth-related, domestic references), Christine attempts to connect with all women on a matter that concerns their daily lives. She speaks to her audience in terms that they will understand; she ties all of her feminine examples of fortitude and virtuosity to their daily works, to their maternity, and to their relationships. Christine finds ways to connect with women, and in doing so, she allows them to see the bigger picture and the underlying message

⁵⁵ Labé, p. 42.

throughout her work: do not believe what you have been told, women are intelligent, virtuous, inherently good human beings, and that includes you and your fellow women. Through her variant examples, Christine is able to highlight certain characteristics that all women should strive to imitate. Most strikingly, in her examples of cloth and clothwork, which admittedly are not many, she finds a way to paint them out of the simple domesticity in which they were previously presented by male authors. She admonishes men for saying that spinning is not a virtuous activity by making it clear that the world would be chaotic without it, and she further allies it with childbirth, making it clear that women keep the world and humanity from ending through their virtuous and daily activities. Furthermore, she creates a foundational understanding of clothwork as an intelligent science and art form by describing the women who invented and excelled at it with such determination and description that one would see them as great thinkers and inventors of their day. In doing so, Christine makes even simple, daily embroidery seem a gift and a derivation of a great science, requiring knowledge and craft.

Firstly, the ways in which Christine presents Minerva and Dido underline their excellence and equity with great men, Minerva as a goddess of both weaving and wisdom, and Dido as a cunning queen in her own right. While Minerva is an eternal virgin, love does not touch her or cause her to turn away from her excellence, whereas Dido's relationship with Aeneas overshadows her excellence as a queen. Christine comments on her steadfastness in love for Aeneas in Book II, in comparison to his act of leaving Dido. Thus, the effect of a romantic relationship, especially when considering the fact that Christine herself was celibate as a widow, provides an interesting lens through which to view feminine excellence and

independence. This has also been a running theme throughout the Old French romances explored in this study. Louise Labé equally addresses this question of whether a woman can truly have it all in her *Élégie III*, when she references great women of renown, stating that she could have excelled beyond them were it not for the fact that she is afflicted by Love's burden. These examples introduce an important discussion on how women are expected to act in romantic relationships throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance: can they truly and skillfully succeed if they are expected to be the object of love for men?

Secondly, another theme that has been explored throughout this study is the way in which women are identified by cloth, clothing, or clothwork that they produce or wear. Christine presents Pamphile as a scientist in the way that she has observed the world around her and found a way to manipulate nature in order to create silk. Thus, Pamphile, by inventing the production of silk, has founded the ideas of hierarchical structures in both religious and societal domains. These ideas of domestic and hierarchical identity repeat themselves throughout the Old French romance literature of the High Middle Ages, and although Christine's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* succeeds much of the literature that includes these various tropes of cloth and identity by nearly a century, the way she presents the Classical beginning of silk and silkwork, especially in her description of its uses, remains vitally important in terms of identification. It is interesting to look at this type of manipulation (of nature and of cloth) in relation to Louise Labé's manipulation of the lute. Though *Sonnet XII* is not about identification in cloth, it is about Labé's intimate relationship with the lute which ruptures her true identity. She has placed so much of herself into this instrument, which defines her as a love poet, that when she plays it, she cannot change

her persona as a poet, but rather is restricted to play the sad songs that she always has. This is very likely a comment upon her inability to free herself from the restrictions placed upon her by the masculine-coded Petrarchan poetry of the time period. Thus, both Christine and Louise introduce compelling examples of identity that are tied to a material object wielded by a woman, and of how those objects are imbued with the identity of the possessor or manipulator of them.

Finally, Christine de Pizan's presentation of Arachne deviates from Arachne's more common portrayal as a silly girl who dared challenge a god. Rather, Christine presents Arachne's ingenuity and intelligence as the woman who discovered how to dye and weave tapestries, taking the work of the gods and improving upon it. She briefly mentions Arachne's common portrayal and metamorphosis into a spider, which, in combination with her portraiture of Arachne, shows a strong, vocal, and intelligent woman who speaks out to challenge the hierarchical system as the disenfranchised and lesser being. This calls to mind the power, authority, and voice embedded in feminine clothwork in much of the romantic literature that predates Christine's *Cité des Dames*, such as *Philomena* and *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*. Arachne, in a way similar to Christine's own actions as a feminine author, is attempting to challenge the system to which she belongs by portraying the faults within it; just as Arachne weaves the injustices of the gods, Christine refutes such misogynistic authors as Matheolus, Ovid, and Jean de Meun. Louise Labé equally comments on the difficulties she faces as a feminine poet in her *Sonnet XXI*; she outlines these obstacles and how they are tied to the masculine codes of poetry, not unlike her presentation of her identity in *Sonnet XII*. Labé consistently makes it clear that she is a *feminine* poet, and that the system needs to be changed in order to better include more

feminine poets. Through her repeated questioning concerning a male object of love and desire from the perspective of a desiring female gaze, Labé brings the issue immediately into her reader's mind, just as Christine continually refutes misogynistic ideas, even in the presentation of Arachne, which is so different from the presentation written by her male predecessors and contemporaries.

Neither Christine de Pizan nor Louise Labé seems to be writing to an audience of slanderous men. They understand that this is not the way to incite change. Both women choose to write to an established female audience, highlighting the force and power that lies in female relationships. Just as in the romantic literature that precedes them, female relationships remain a united and dynamic entity capable of changing the course of a story or history. Though Lienors' mother in *Guillaume de Dole* accidentally causes her daughter's ruin, both female characters' speech acts and clothwork advance the story of the *Rose*. Though Fresne's mother gives away her daughter at birth, the cloth in which she wraps her child leads to the eventual climax of the story, in which Fresne is reunited with her true family and identity. And though Philomena and her sister are unable to vocally communicate, the tapestry that Philomena weaves in lieu of a physical voice allows the story to continue on and end in reunion, retribution, and release. The literary women in these romances rely on their own ingenuity and agency to free themselves from any patriarchal constraints that force them into an unhappy way of life, and it is through their interactions with other female characters that they employ their greatest power and authority. Christine de Pizan presents her women as warriors; though often without physical armor, they fight for their own right to be active and intelligent women, and Christine recognises them by writing them into her City. Louise

Labé highlights the world as it is in her letter to Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges in an attempt to show her, and other women readers, how the world ought to be, and, throughout her *Œuvres Complètes*, she addresses major issues that arise in the field of poetry, which is unwelcoming and unaccommodating of feminine authors. Intelligence, excellence, power, voice, and expression, are not inherent in the goodness or badness defined by the patriarchal context in which these women live, but rather by the desires and the drive of the women who employ them, by needle or by pen.

Conclusion: Evolving Expression in Feminine Fabrications

'The changes in ideas about femininity that can be seen reflected in the history of embroidery are striking confirmation that femininity is a social and psychosocial product.'

- Rozsika Parker
*The Subversive Stitch*¹

Throughout this study, medieval ideas about femininity in relation to identity, expression, and agency have been viewed through the lens of clothwork. From embroidering, to weaving, to sewing, to spinning, all forms of clothwork denote the domestic, the feminine, and even the oppressed 'bowed head of the embroiderer', as referenced by Rozsika Parker.² Through the centuries, even long after the High Middle Ages, the feminine association with cloth and clothwork has existed in a state of dichotomous definition, between that of oppression and that of empowerment. Throughout all of the literature included in this study, from Marie de France's *lais* to Louise Labé's *Œuvres Complètes*, clothwork has been shown to both embolden and entrap women in relation to their femininity. From didactic texts, to poetry, to romance, the way in which authors present feminine ideals, excellence, and activity enhances our understanding of the medieval anxieties surrounding feminine power and agency, which still exist in some form today. In order to show a progression in feminine agency, this study has moved from an analysis of orality and imagery, to identity, to voice, and finally to authorship, all while using the frame of clothwork.

¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996) p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

The introductory chapter of this study analysed the ways in which medieval views of femininity can be found to be embodied by paragons whose weaving, wisdom, and maternal qualities were used as a foundation for the values of the Middle Ages in relation to women. Though the Virgin Mary and Minerva originate in different contexts, they are both connected in their socially constructed femininity as medieval Christian ideals of women. They are accessible to women earlier in the medieval period through imagery and orality, and later in the period these paragons are included in literature, primary didactic texts, and, in the case of Mary, Books of Hours. The ways in which the Virgin Mary and Minerva are presented as mothers, as clothworkers, and as wise women showcase an essential construction of femininity, and though their virginal natures and deification divorce them from the world of mortal women, the virtues that they embody as feminine paragons set an example for medieval women who may have had access to them through imagery or vernacular literature. Therefore, especially in the interrelatedness of Mary and Minerva's motherhood, weaving, and wisdom, a foundation for the feminine ideal is constructed and built upon through the presentation of these activities in female characters of both romance narratives and didactic texts.

Feminine associations with clothwork predate written culture, as clothwork was inherently domestic before the expansion of the cloth industry at the very beginning of the High Middle Ages in Europe. The inclusion of clothwork in the romance narrative of the same time period, then, becomes an important lens for modern scholars, in terms of how women are codified by their patriarchal environments. The identities and the bodies of female characters in Old French romance are crucially connected to spatial constructs, and their inability to physically pierce the public sphere is

highlighted in such romances as *Cligès*, *Galeran de Bretagne*, the *lai* of *Le Fraisne*, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, and even in the later *Ovide Moralisé*'s rendition of *Piramus et Tisbé*. The identity of the female characters from these romances is consistently bound up with fabric and clothwork, which highlights the characters' definition as domestic constructs. Their foray into the public sphere comes in the form of clothbodies, which dichotomously give them and take away their agency, undermining the subjectivity of the female character in its separation from her physical body. There are underpinnings of patriarchal anxieties about women's ability or inability to exist autonomously in the public sphere in the presentation of these clothbodies, and, as none of the women in these romances succeed in gaining an autonomous, public definition, despite their occasional physical travel outside of the home, their agency is diminished.

The presentation of female identity in cloth leads one to question the other ways in which women interact with cloth, namely as it becomes a female character's medium of expression. The instances in medieval romance where women write in or express themselves through cloth are few, and, interestingly, they are all catalysed by a physical and violent oppression of the female character, such as in the *Philomena*, the *lai* of *L'Aüstic*, and the romance of *Guillaume de Dole*. The female characters in these romances are mistreated, oppressed, silenced, and entrapped women who use their agency in clothwork as a means of expression and escape. It is both striking and troublesome that in order for these women to find their voice, especially when they have been physically deprived of it through bodily mutilation or captivity and solitude, they need to be acted upon violently by a character who embodies patriarchal power. None of the female characters in these romances use the tools of the oppressor to get revenge or free themselves

from their misery, and it is significant to this study that they all choose to use their own feminine medium of clothwork in their attempts to cross the boundaries of the domestic sphere and make their voices public. While women's physical bodies are not able to be successfully identified in the public sphere in Chapter Two, Chapter Three presents an important distinction in that women's voices, even when embedded in or enacted by clothwork, can permeate the public sphere, allowing for communication and physical mobility. It is important, however, especially in relation to the female authors explored in Chapter Five, to note that these women use a form of writing (clothwork) unsanctioned by the patriarchy, which, from a medieval viewpoint, simultaneously encourages and chastises women's power.

The female characters explored in relation to voice in clothwork move away from their connection with orality as a feminine form of narrative, and this innovation allows them to make their voices material and lasting against patriarchal control. However, with regard to mother-daughter relationships, both historically and in literature, orality is the crux of feminine education, as teachings are passed down from mother to daughter in a matriarchal lineage. Jean Renart presents this aspect of female relationships in his romance, *Guillaume de Dole*, and he does so by integrating orality (lyrics) into his written narrative. Furthermore, the speech and silence of his female characters oscillate throughout the romance, and even, at times, in relation to his lyrical inclusions. Lienors consistently moves between the role of desired object and the role of speaking subject throughout the romance, and Lienors' mother moves from the role of educator, to that of destructor, to a penitent, to a happy mother-in-law of an emperor at the same time as the trajectory of Lienors' story moves forward, which highlights the important relationship of

mothers and daughters that is overwhelmingly underrepresented in romance narrative. This simultaneously productive and destructive relationship that mothers have with their daughters is likewise presented in the stories of Fresne from Chapter Two. In the case of both Lienors and of Fresne, the mother's educative role and her destructive role are born of orality, and, especially in the case of the romance of *Guillaume de Dole*, there is a significant presentation of the divide between and mirrored representation of oral and written culture. This idea is first introduced in Chapter Three as the feminine voice loses its orality and moves into the definition of something that is written, and both Marie de France and Jean Renart focus heavily on the importance of memory in the prologues to their works; memory seems to be only eternal through writing, which underpins an historical shift towards written culture as it superseded orality. In *Guillaume de Dole*, archaism plays an important role in relation to feminine voice and clothwork, as they are both allied in the Middle Ages with orality, which is presented as an aspect of the past. This idea, along with the presentation of clothwork throughout much of romance literature, assuredly highlights anxieties about feminine agency, but these episodes concerning feminine clothwork may also exist as a means of reacting to the industrial change in the High Middle Ages wherein guilds became incredibly important to the fabric of society and feminine voice and learning were becoming more pervasive. While women are still marginalised in authorship at the end of the High Middle Ages, ideas surrounding clothwork, and the presentation of those ideas in popular literature, provide a discourse for future female authors who wish to refute the patriarchal oppression that has been codified by medieval culture.

Christine de Pizan's and Louise Labé's texts provide important examples of the feminine view of the literary and historical content of the

Middle Ages.³ Christine's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* and Labé's *Œuvres Complètes* are both dedicated to the female reader, and because of this fact, modern scholars can view the Middle Ages not only through the lens of female authors, but also through the lens of female readers. What might medieval women have thought about these new ideas? Would they have wanted to immediately put down their spindles as women today refuse to play into a patriarchal view of what a woman should do, how she should act, or how she should be clothed? We cannot necessarily ever know the answer, but the means by which both Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé attempt to connect with their female audiences helps us to construct an understanding of what the average woman's life may have been like in the Middle Ages. Both female authors appeal to clothwork, not primarily, but crucially, in their works, and both present clothwork as something that once was good, creative, expressive, and intelligent, but now can be laid down in favour of other tasks such as reading, writing, and education. These authors present clothwork as a tool of repression, and both use their pens in an attempt to reorder the system that would have them be simple spinsters relegated to the domestic sphere. Christine de Pizan and Louise Labé, among other female authors of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, are following the example of Philomena, though they are doing so even more boldly, by using a masculine tool of expression in order to write from a feminine perspective.

Through the lens of clothwork, one is able to trace the feminine voice and the medieval identification of what it means to be a woman through the fabric of medieval French narrative, in a time of enlightenment and change, as well as in a time of pervasive misogyny and oppression. Feminine expression moves from orality to the needle to the pen, and this illustrates an

³ Or, in the case of Louise Labé, a constructed feminine view.

evolution of feminine expression. This study begins and ends with didactic texts by Christine de Pizan, who wholeheartedly rejected the life of a widowed spinster, preferring instead to excel and support herself and her family in the masculine-dominated arena of authorship. Medieval femininity is not definable, though medieval paragons of femininity are, and Christine uses definable women in order to show the spectrum of what it means to be a good woman, a virtuous woman, and an intelligent woman in the Late Middle Ages, without denigrating what it meant to be a good, virtuous, and intelligent women in times past. Christine, too, is a construct of her environment, and the feminine identity, agency, and voice that are ignited by cloth and clothwork lay the foundation for the pen in the hands of a woman.

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