Translating the Self in Medieval European Romance: Narration and Emotion in *Partonopeu de Blois*, *Partonopier und Meliur* and *Partonope of Blois*

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Abstract

This article approaches the question of selfhood by reading the opening passage of the Old French romance *Partonopeu de Blois* alongside its translations in different Northern European languages: the thirteenth-century Middle High German *Partonopier und Meliur* by Konrad von Würzburg and the fifteenth-century Middle English *Partonope of Blois*. Both translations bring interiority and subjectivity to the passage by adding direct speech and access to the character's thoughts and motivations. In allowing the protagonist to respond to and rationalise his own emotions, the translators add a layer of self-awareness to their characterisation, thus producing a narrated self that was lacking in the original. This article demonstrates the great potential of comparative analysis in the study of medieval emotion and self. The different linguistic versions of the same passage here illuminate one another, highlighting different narrative techniques in the construction of literary selfhood. While the objective, exterior style of narration in the Old French passage constructs a helpless character, lacking in self-possession, the later German and English translations display a different narrative strategy that reveals their character's decision-making process, and thus make him into a self-reflecting agent.

Keywords

Medieval romance – translation – narration – emotion – self – Middle High German romance – Middle English romance

The existence of a literary self in medieval romance – that is, the narrative representation of a character with agency, psychological depth and an individual identity – has been the subject of debate. The conventionality of the genre, with its repeated tropes and

exemplary, archetypical heroes, has hampered the recognition of romance characters as individual selves. Like the editors of this special issue, I believe that literary selfhood is constituted through the audience's or reader's projection of a presumed interiority onto a textual object. What creates the audience's perception of interiority – that is, an 'imagined interior selfhood' – lies in the specific narrative choices that give access to a character's emotions and conscious motivations.[1] In this essay, I propose a methodology to study literary selfhood through the close, comparative analysis of narrative techniques in the representation of emotions and interiority. The rich European literary tradition of medieval romance, where we have access to several versions of the same story in different languages, offers a unique corpus of material for the comparative study of different narrative strategies and their effect. My case study for this article will be a passage from the twelfth-century Old French romance *Partonopeu de Blois*, characterised by an external and visual narrative style. By exploring this passage alongside two of its medieval translations, in Middle High German and Middle English, it is possible to spot variations in narration that illuminate some perceived deficiencies in the original in terms of its evocation of interiority.[2] I show how both translations independently add layers of self-awareness to their characterisation. This comparative method thus allows for the identification of the subtle narrative choices that produce literary selfhood in medieval romance.

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[1] Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 'Introduction' to this special issue.

[2] I use the term 'translation' throughout for clarity's sake, even though these are not always strictly faithful translations. This is in line with current studies in medieval translation which acknowledge the fact that translation always carries a form of commentary and forms part of broader patterns of cultural transmission and adaptation. See for example Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch, 'Introduction: Insular Romance in Translation: New Approaches,' in *Cultural Translation in Medieval Romance*, ed. Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), 1–20.

The tale of *Partonopeu* was extremely popular throughout medieval Europe. It circulated widely and was translated into most Western European languages.[3] The Old French romance, composed in the latter half of the twelfth century, is extant in seven manuscripts and exists with two different endings and a continuation; clearly, a process of adaptation was already at play within the Old French tradition.[4] Konrad von Würzburg translated the romance into Middle High German in 1277 for an 'urban elite', dedicating it to his patron in Basel.[5] The Middle English version dates from the fifteenth century, although the romance must have circulated in England much earlier than that.[6] The romance plot, which fuses the fairy-mistress motif with an exotic depiction of a Christian Orient and epic battle scenes in war and tournaments, has proved highly popular and adaptable to different literary tastes and cultural milieus. If it is a typical romance in many ways, depicting the quest of a young hero in love and knighthood, its protagonist stands out through his extreme youth and beauty, and through his unusual passivity and lack of active identity affirmation.

The romance tells how the thirteen-year-old Partonopeu, nephew of the king of France, is brought to the marvellous city of Chef d'Oire by the fairy-like Melior, who has chosen the young man as her future husband and emperor of Byzance. In a gender reversal

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[3] For a summary of the complex transmission patterns of the romance, see Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 116–20.

[4] Penny Eley and Penny Simons have suggested 1170 as date of composition, arguing that the *Partonopeu*-poet is a precursor of Chrétien de Troyes. See Penny Simons and Penny Eley, 'The Prologue to *Partonopeus de Blois*: Text, Context and Subtext,' *French Studies* 49 (1995): 1–16; Penny Eley and Penny Simons, '*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes: A Re-assessment,' *Romania* 117 (1999): 316–41. MS A (Paris, Arsenal 2986) is usually considered the oldest and is the one used in Collet and Joris's edition of the romance, which also uses MS B (Berne, Burgerbibliothek, 113) to fill in lacunae or highlight important differences. Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Joris, ed. and trans., *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2005).

[5] Rüdiger Brandt calls Konrad's Partonopier 'the earliest example of a courtly epic composed for an urban audience' ('Konrad von Würzburg,' in *German Literature of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Will Hasty (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 243–54 (247)).

[6] Another version of the romance also exists in Middle English. It follows a different narrative tradition and is only extant in fragmentary form. Both versions are found in Trampe A. Bödtker, ed., *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, Early English Text Society e.s. 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912).

of the Cupid and Psyche myth, Melior forbids the young man to see her until he is of age.

The romance charts Partonopeu's movements between Chef d'Oire and his home in Blois,

where he proves himself as a worthy knight in the French army, followed by his inevitable

breaking of the sight-taboo and his efforts to regain Melior's love. Scholarship has often

noted the important role played by the female characters – Melior, but also her sister

Uraque and Partonopeu's mother – in shaping Partonopeu's identity.[7] Melanie McBride

shows how the three women are the ones who make plans and achieve their own goals –

Partonopeu being one of their 'projects'.[8] The protagonist is therefore not represented as

being in charge of his own destiny, but instead passively acquiesces to the plans and

identities the women of the romance construct for him. In line with this characterisation,

his main defining feature is his beauty. As Matilda Bruckner has argued, beauty and

appearance are equated with truth in the romance and are the embodiment of Partonopeu's

worth and identity.[9] Because his beauty provides the visual manifestation of his noble

identity and of his worth, he does not need actively to construct or know himself.

Crucially, both the German and English translations qualify the importance of this

visual element in the hero's characterisation. The original romance introduces its

protagonist through a thirty-line description of his physical beauty, zooming in on such

features as his blond hair, low hips, small feet or kissable lips (lines 551–78). While

beauty portraits are conventional in medieval literature, Penny Eley and Penny Simons

have pointed out several overtly feminine elements in it, which, they argue, feminise and

sexualise the young hero.[10] The French Partonopeu is thus first characterised as a visual

[7] See for instance Brenda Hosington, 'Voices of Protest and Submission: Portraits of Women in *Partonopeu de Blois* and its Middle English Translation,' *Reading Medieval Studies* 17 (1991): 51–75 (65).
[8] Melanie McBride, 'Covert Ops: Female Empowerment in the Twelfth-Century French *Partonopeu de Blois*,' *Pacific Coast Philology* 53, no. 1 (2018): 5–22 (18–19).
[9] Matilda Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 109–56.
[10] Penny Eley and Penny Simons, 'Male Beauty and Sexual Orientation in *Partonopeus de Blois*,' *Romance Studies* 17, no. 1 (1999): 41–56 (45).

object to be seen and desired. The French narrator justifies this long portrait when he mentions that his beauty will be of importance in the rest of the book (lines 579–80) – Partonopeu will win Melior's hand thanks to a beauty contest. While his beauty remains an important plot-feature in the later translations, they both remove this long and detailed physical description. The narrator in Konrad's version mentions his loyalty and manhood before affirming that he is 'der schoenste knabe, / von dem ich noch gelesen habe / in tiutsche und in latine' (lines 289–91; 'the most beautiful young man, of whom I have ever read, either in German or in Latin'), thus distancing himself from the lavish, physical description found in the French romance.[11] The young man's extreme beauty is seen as part of a literary identity which is explicitly foreign, since no equivalent can be found in German or Latin. Partonopier's beauty is then described as the visual expression of his worth, which gloriously illuminates all of France: 'von sîner forme schîne / Kärlingen was erliuhtet' (lines 292–93; 'France was illuminated by his beautiful appearance'). Konrad thus disembodies the hero's beauty, which becomes the shining manifestation of his fame and noble character.[12] The Middle English version does not even mention his beauty at this point: Partonope is described as a noble young man whose worship may be heard all throughout France (lines 516–18). Here too, the hero's description is disembodied, expressed through the oral dissemination of his fame rather than the physical details of his body. This omission, as striking as it is, has not received much commentary, as it is usually explained away as part of the common trend in Middle English romance adaptations to reduce visual descriptions in favour of action, dialogue and concrete sensory details.[13] This is part of a general tendency to simplify plot and reduce

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[11] Quotes are from Konrad von Würzburg, *Partonopier und Meliur*, ed. Karl Bartsch and Rainer Gruenter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970). Translations are mine, with the invaluable help of Dr Christine Putzo.

[12] On the disembodied nature of beauty in *Partonopier*, expressed with terms of brightness, see Gisela Werner, *Studien zu Konrads 'Partonopier und Meliur'* (Bern: Haupt, 1977), 135.

[13] On Middle English romances being more action- and speech-driven than their Continental sources, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the*

psychological exploration. I argue instead that this omission signals a deeper change in characterisation in the Middle English translation. Through the close, comparative reading of a short key passage and triangulation with the German translation, my case study shows that the reducing of visual description in fact participates – in both translations – in a shift in narration towards a focus on more interiority and more psychological depth.

Scholarship on Konrad von Würzburg's translation of the Old French *Partonopeu* has long argued for a 'psychologisation' tendency, observed through a greater interest in mental states and an attempt to construct characters that appear more psychologically coherent.[14] Walter Haug thus investigates *Partonopier* as part of his study of the development of the *roman* after Chrétien de Troyes, one characteristic of which is the construction of narrative from the 'subjectivity of the characters'. He sees *Partonopier* as 'the prime example' of a literary trajectory towards 'affective inwardness'.[15] *Partonopier* forms an important piece in his attempt to locate the birth of the modern literary subject – or self. Armin Schulz rejects Haupt's teleological perspective but explains Konrad's 'psychologisation' as a shift in narrative technique from the perspective of the narrator to that of the protagonist – a technique which helps simulate interiority.[16] Others have commented on Konrad's use of a 'double form of focalisation', where Partonopier's point of view, what he sees and thinks, can become, in certain scenes, the reader's sole source of

Death of Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30. Gretchen Mieszkowski talks about the importance of beauty in the Middle English romance, and while she mentions the omission, she does not comment on it at all ('Urake and the Gender Roles of *Partonope of Blois*,' *Mediaevalia* 25, no. 2 (2004): 181–95). In his study of the Middle English *Partonope*, A. C. Spearing mentions its preference for 'sensory effects'; however, he only discusses the sex scene and does not comment on the lack of visual descriptions of the protagonist (*The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 145).

[14] For a summary of the scholarship around the German romance and the concept of 'Psychologisierung' see Jutta Eming, *Emotion und Expression. Untersuchungen zu deutschen und französischen Liebes- und Abenteuerromanen des 12. bis 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 170–76.

[15] Walter Haug, 'Über die Schwierigkeiten des Erzählens in "nachklassischer" Zeit,' in *Positionen des Romans im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 342, 350 (My translation).

[16] Armin Schulz, *Poetik des Hybriden. Schema Variation und intertextuelle Kombinatorik in der Minne- und Aventiureepik* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2000), 93.

knowledge.[17] This shift of perspective, from an exterior narrator to the subjective

character, will be an important key for the interpretation of our passage. Konrad's

Partonopier has also been the object of several studies interested in medieval emotion, and

is commonly accepted as a text in which the representation of emotions is highly complex

and advanced. Anja Kühne offers a reading of the representation of affect in the romance

in comparison with medieval theoretical writings on emotions, while Susanne Rikl studies

the relationship between interiority and exteriority in the representation of characters and

their emotions.[18] Finally, emotion scholar Jutta Eming has produced the only comparative

study of emotion of the German romance. While she rejects the term 'Psychologisierung',

she argues that the German version 'seizes opportunities where the French original is

insufficiently motivated, … [or] leaves emotions out …, to elaborate on emotional

processes and conflicts'.[19] As this comment suggests, the identification of moments where

the translation adds motivation and emotional depth highlights the translator's perception

of lack or insufficiency in the source's narration of interiority.

Much less attention has been paid to the Middle English version's narrative

techniques or its representation of emotion and interiority. Comparative scholarship on

Partonope and its Old French source has mainly focused on the role and representation of

the female characters, Chaucerian influence on the translator and the figure of the

narrator.[20] Karen Grossweiner has looked at the representation of subjectivity through the

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[17] See Seraina Plotke, 'Konrad als Erzähler: Aspekte zu "Partonopier und Meliur",' *Beiträge zur Mediävistischen Erzählforschung*, Themenhefte 10 (2021): 275–92 (285–86).

[18] Anja Kühne, *Vom Affekt zum Gefühl. Konvergenzen von Theorie und Literatur im Mittelalter am Beispiel von Konrads von Würzburg 'Partonopier und Meliur'* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2004); Susanne Rikl, *Erzählen im Kontext von Affekt und Ratio. Studien zu Konrads von Würzburg 'Partonopier und Meliur'* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996).

[19] Eming, *Emotion und Expression*, 239 (My translation).

[20] See, among others, Ronald M. Spensley, 'The Courtly Lady in Partonope of Blois,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973): 288–91; Hosington, 'Voices of Protest'; Barry Windeatt, 'Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Romance: Partonope of Blois,' in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 62–80; B. J. Whiting, 'A Fifteenth-Century English Chaucerian: The Translator of *Partonope of Blois*,' *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945):

figure of the narrator in both versions. She shows how the Middle English narrator's subjectivity is often emphasised through an enhanced use of the I-voice, which establishes a self-conscious relationship both with the audience and its Old French source.[21] This increased narratorial subjectivity is important for my own case study, as the heightened presence of the narrator's I-voice often correlates with greater interest in the characters' subjective states and intentions. Changes made to the characterisation of the protagonist have not, however, been treated in English scholarship, which has not been in conversation with the German scholarship. I argue that the emphasis on narrative motivation and the representation of more complex mental and emotional processes – observed in Konrad's translation – also characterises the Middle English translation. By broadening the comparative scope to three versions of the romance, this study opens up new theoretical perspectives and sheds light on common threads in independent translations that offer insights on the reception of the source's characterisation.

The passage that will form my case study is found at the very beginning of the story: it is the start of Partonopeu's quest, when he finds himself separated from his family and the courtly setting of Blois for the first time. The first scene of the romance depicts the young protagonist going hunting in the Ardennes with his uncle, the king of France, a rite of passage for the thirteen-year-old. While he is first successful in killing a boar, he then quickly gets lost in the forest. The description that follows depicts him as a scared and lost child. He wanders for two days in the forest before stumbling upon the seashore, where he finds a magnificent boat which, although seemingly without a crew, sails away with him on board and brings him to a foreign and mysterious city. Throughout the passage, events seem to happen to Partonopeu without much action on his part. We – both the reader and

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40–54; and Karen Grossweiner, 'A Tripartite Model for Determining Narratorial Subjectivity in Medieval Romance: The Composite Subject in Partonope of Blois,' *Studies in Philology* 109, no. 4 (2012): 381–408.
[21] Grossweiner, 'Tripartite Model,' 407.

Partonopeu himself – will in fact learn later that everything in the scene was planned and managed by Melior in order to bring the young man to her. The scene is also key in establishing the hero's identity as in transition between childhood and manhood. The liminal and transformative spaces of the forest and the sea mark the move from the known world of the court to a magical and exotic world of alterity, but they also reflect the interior oscillation of Partonopeu from boy to man. This transitional journey culminates with his meeting with the invisible Melior and a disturbingly violent scene of sexual conquest, an 'over-corrective action', according to Jane Bonsall, which 'initiate[s] him into (hetero)sexual maturity'.[22] This over-correction follows a scene where the protagonist is highly passive and which is characterised by a 'highly unusual climate of fear and anxiety'.[23] Scholarship on the different versions of the romance agrees on the existential role that fear plays in the protagonist's journey. Albrecht Classen argues that fear forms part of a 'struggle for the self' in the German romance and makes Partonopier an original 'heroic protagonist' whose openly revealed anxieties 'reflect his youth and lack of personal maturity'.[24] The passage under analysis here is centred on the hero's fear and his attempts at overcoming it. While it forms part of the romance's interest in the shaping of Partonopeu's masculine, heroic self, it is striking in its emphasis on his complete helplessness and passivity – at least in its original version.

The passage starts with the young Partonopeu riding after the dogs who are chasing a boar. As he wishes to bring the dogs back under control, he forgets his uncle and gets

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[22] Jane Bonsall, 'Disorienting Masculinity: Movement, Emotion and Chivalric Identity in *Partonope of Blois*,' in *Medieval Mobilities: Gendered Bodies, Spaces, and Movements*, ed. Basil Arnould Price, Jane Elizabeth Bonsall, and Meagan Khoury (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 139–64 (151). See also Amy Vines on this scene and its role in the formation of masculine identity: 'A Woman's "Crafte": Melior as Lover, Teacher, and Patron in the Middle English *Partonope of Blois*,' *Modern Philology* 105, no. 2 (2007): 245–70 (254–55).

[23] Bonsall, 'Disorienting Masculinity,' 143.

[24] Albrecht Classen, 'The Struggle Against Fear as a Struggle for the Self in Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur*,' *Mediaevalia* 25, no. 2 (2004): 225–52 (232).

lost. The rest of the scene follows his aimless wandering in the forest and onto the boat. The narration is purely descriptive; there is no direct speech. The omniscient narrator tells us what Partonopeu sees and does and feels, but we have no direct access to his own internal thoughts, nor does he ever speak:

> Il s'est desos un caisne assis,
>
> Plore des beaus iols de son vis.
>
> A grant mesaise vit li las,
>
> Car grant froit fait, si a poi dras;
>
> Grant faim a, si n'a que mangier,
>
> Ainc n'en avoit eü dangier
>
> Si a de soi grant peor,
>
> Ja ne cuide veïr le jor.
>
> Il a peor et faim et soi,
>
> Si a dur lit sains nul agroi.
>
> Pleure des iols, ne set que faire,
>
> Car n'ert apris de nul mal traire. (lines 649–60)[25]

> (He sits under an oak tree, weeping from his face's beautiful eyes. The unfortunate one is very uncomfortable: it is very cold and he has few clothes; he is very hungry and has nothing to eat. He has never been in such danger. He is so scared for himself that he believes he will not see dawn. He is scared, and hungry and thirsty; his bed is hard without any comfort. He cries his eyes out and does not know what to do because he is not used to suffering.)

His emotional state is expressed through simple narratorial report: the narrator names his fear, which is repeatedly listed alongside his hunger and thirst as a similar, objective

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[25] Quotes are from *Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. and trans. Collet and Joris. English translations are mine, with help from Collet and Joris's Modern French translation.

affliction. His emotion is also externalised through physical reaction: he weeps. The description is very visual: the narrator draws attention to Partonopeu's beautiful eyes and the tears streaming down his face. The embodiment of emotion is exterior and visible and participates in a narratorial strategy that constructs the hero as a visual object to be pitied.

After staying up all night, dawn gives him hope to find his way back, but he goes the wrong way:

> Il entre en un molt let sentier,
>
> Batu le voit molt et plenier.
>
> Traces i voit de tels manieres –
>
> Onques n'avoit veü tant fieres –
>
> De serpens et de wivres grans
>
> Et de venimos vers volans.
>
> Li enfes a molt grant peor (lines 671–77)

> (He walks down a sinister-looking path, which he sees is large and well-trodden. There he sees tracks – he had never seen such fierce-looking ones – of snakes, great vipers and flying, venomous dragons. The child has great fear.)

We then follow him as he goes up a hill from which he can see the sea and starts to head towards it. His movements are recorded externally so that they do not appear to stem from conscious decision. The rest of the passage, as he spots a boat, climbs into it and falls asleep only to wake up to it sailing away at full speed without any crew on board, is narrated through the repetition of verbs of vision as Partonopeu observes the wonderful boat and weeps some more from fear. The narration describes what Partonopeu sees and feels, and yet it remains mostly exterior. Although we have an omniscient narrator, the 'focalisation' feels 'external', to borrow Gérard Genette's terminology. In this narrative

style, 'the hero performs in front of us', much like a camera which follows the hero moving around in this fearful environment, without access to his interior motivations.[26] We see him act without any apparent self-awareness, as he does not do much more than react emotionally and physically to what is happening to him.

At the start of the passage the narrator repeats the word 'folie', meaning 'folly', 'foolishness', or '(temporary) madness', three times: 'Et il enprent molt grant folie, / Qui por les chiens le roi olblie.' (lines 619–20; 'He undertakes a great folly, and for the dogs forgets the king'); 'Partonopels del roi s'esloingne; / De grant folie s'enbesoigne' (lines 625–26; 'Partonopeu goes away from the king, busy with this great foolishness'); 'Il pert ses chiens et d'als l'oïe: / Dont s'aperçut de sa folie' (lines 645–46; 'He hears that he has lost the dogs and realises his folly'). Instead of conscious intention, his actions stem from a lack of reason, a loss of self-possession. The exterior and objective narrative technique contributes to the representation of Partonopeu's 'folie' and helplessness, so much so that it is debatable whether this passage does give us access to a form of selfhood. The changes made in the two later translations of the romance in fact seem to point to a deficiency of interiority.

One first notable change that occurs in both versions is the removal of the emphasis on folly as the cause for the hero's actions: the character thus becomes more self-possessed. In both translations, this change is embedded in a characterisation where the protagonist's in-between, adolescent status is made more explicit. Susanne Rikl even argues for the 'polarisation' of Konrad's Partonopier in this first scene, where he appears alternately as a strong, manly hunter and a scared, lost boy in rapid succession.[27] By

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[26] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 190. While I cite Genette here, I will not be using strict narratological terminology as a methodological tool. Indeed, I believe that in this case, narratology can only bring us so far: all three versions have an extradiegetic, omniscient narrator, or 'zero focalisation' in Genette's terminology, and yet, as I will show, some very important differences occur within this same narrative focalisation.

[27] Rikl, *Erzählen im Kontext*, 37.

making a much stronger contrast between the two facets of the hero's identity, the

translations highlight a gap between social identity and interior self.[28] During the hunt,

both translations have the French king express his admiration of his nephew in direct

speech, something that does not appear in the source. In the German translation, the king

exclaims his pride and awe that a thirteen-year-old boy should have slain such a terrifying

boar ('daz ein drîzehenjaeric knabe / sô griulich swîn gevellet habe', lines 397–98), while

the English one says: 'Thys was welle don, as of a chylde, / … He ys ryghte lyke to ben a

man' (lines 556–59).[29] The protagonist is praised as a good hunter and a child who is on

his way to becoming a man. In this context, his pursuit of the dogs is not described as a

folly but as a confirmation of his status as successful hunter.

    In the Middle English version, Partonope is described as chasing the boar, rather

than the dogs he was asked to bring back, in an act of bravery and determination:

'thoroughe thyke and thynne toke he no kepe / The boore to folowe' (lines 579–80). His

getting lost is then characterised as an act of Fortune:

> He wyste neuer where that he was,
>
> Thys was to hym a sory case.
>
> The kynge a-nonne loste had he.
>
> Thynge þat ys ordeyned nedes moste be
>
> By ffortune vn-to euery manne. (lines 587–91)

From personal determination to fortune, the role of folly is ruled out as the motivation for

Partonope's actions. In Konrad's version, 'folie' also disappears and Partonopier's

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[28] On the Middle English version's emphasis on the transition from child to man, see Lucie Kaempfer, 'Pleasure in Knighthood: The Private Construction of a Social Identity in *Partonopeu de Blois* and its Middle English Adaptation,' *Reading Medieval Studies* 47 (2021): 173–92 (177).

[29] Quotes from the Middle English version are from *The Middle-English versions of Partonope of Blois*, ed. Bödtker.

decision to follow the dogs is justified by his understanding of the king's annoyance and

his wish to bring them back himself (lines 444–50). In both translations, instead of madly

forgetting about the king, his determined following of the dogs is in compliance with his

uncle's wishes and signals his successful participation in the adult, masculine society of

the hunt. It is not an act of folly but a well-motivated and reasoned action.

The German version then quickly moves on to the negative emotions of Partonopier

as he loses tracks of the dogs: 'Er haete si dô gar verlorn. / daz wart im leit unde zorn / daz

er vil trûric nider saz' (lines 479–81; 'He had lost them entirely. That annoyed and

angered him, so he sat down mournfully'). Instead of mere fear, Partonopier feels a blend

of emotions (anger and sadness) as a direct result of having lost the dogs. The narrative

also produces an immediate and drastic switch of mood here from the triumph of active

participation in the courtly activity of the hunt to anger and sadness resulting from failure

and isolation from the courtly realm.[30] Partonopier's fear is mentioned only much later: he

is 'erschrecket in dem muote' (line 555; 'frightened in his spirit'). This indication of

internal vulnerability is contrasted with Partonopier's external and social identity, which is

then unfolded:

> der edele und der guote,
>
> der hövesche und der klâre,
>
> was noch ein kint der jâre
>
> und was gevaren selten ê:
>
> dar umbe entsaz er deste mê
>
> den wüesten ungehiuren walt. (lines 556–61)

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[30] Werner argues that this represents a negative mirroring of the hunting scene: Partonopier goes from 'successful killer' to potential prey (*Studien zu Konrads Partonopier*, 78). See also Rikl, *Erzählen im Kontext*, 33.

(The noble and good one, the courtly and beautiful one, was still a child in years and had hardly

ever travelled anywhere. For this reason, he was the more horrified by the wild and frightening

forest.)

The conflict between his external, courtly identity as a beautiful and noble hero, and his

internal, childlike fear, is emphasised here to reveal interiority, while at the same time the

protagonist's emotions are given more explanation and justification. This added contrast in

the representation of emotions in the translations uncovers a deeper sense of self and

emphasises the complex oscillation between childhood and manhood that the hero

undergoes.

In the Middle English version, the word 'foly' eventually occurs a few lines later.

Instead of qualifying Partonope's actions externally and objectively, the word seems to

refer to Partonope's own judgement of his actions: 'Than gan he waxe of heuy chere, / For

he hadde don a foly thynge / So for to drawe hym fro hys kynge' (lines 597–99). Unlike in

the Old French version, 'foly' here forms part of the description of the character's

emotional state, which is represented as an embodied, visible process – his expression

turns heavy – that has a direct cause indicated with the conjunction *for* – for he has done a

foolish thing. It is the realisation of his own folly that causes Partonope's heaviness.

Unlike the French narrator, the English one repeatedly glosses his report of emotions with

a cause, introduced with *for*. When the French Partonopeu is said to be hungry and thirsty

and to weep and wake all night, the English one thinks to himself: 'For colde and honger I

am fulle wo' (line 658) and his sleepless night is then explained because of his sorrow:

'Alle that nyghte fulle sore he wepte, / For sorowe and drede slepe he no slepe' (lines

670–71). A. C. Spearing analyses this type of phrasing as 'explanatory glosses',

interventions to the independent narrative that act as 'subjectivizing material', which

'implies the play of a narrating consciousness upon the events of the story'.[31] While I am interested in the presence of a narrated self rather than narrating consciousness, the two, as Spearing has shown, often go hand in hand. The Old French passage is in fact characterised by a complete absence of the narrator's I-voice, which creates a 'narrative of outward actions', with very little subjectivity.[32] The Middle English narrative voice, on the other hand, makes itself heard more frequently, through direct first-person commentaries – asking God to help his own character for example (line 681) – but also through narrative glosses that offer a cause for emotions. This seemingly small change forms part of a tendency to provide more explanation and motives for the character's emotions and actions. We are given direct access to his thoughts: '"Allas," he thoghte, "what may I do?"' (line 658). The use of a rhetorical question here works to make Partonope into a thinking agent. He reflexively wonders what he will do, and then he does something: he finds shelter under a tree. The narrator tells us:

> Thys yonge man wyste not what to do,
>
> But at the laste he drewe hym to
>
> An olde tre, an holowe thynge,
>
> Ther-in to haue hys loggyng. (lines 664–67)

While the action is recounted externally in the Old French source, this more detailed description gives a motive to the action: he goes to the tree 'in order to find shelter', so that it appears as a conscious action with intention. By removing the emphasis on folly, adding cause to emotion and action, and making explicit the contrasts and transition in the character's status, the translations construct the hero as a self-aware agent.

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[31] A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42–45.
[32] Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*, 41.

The most striking change, in both translations, is the repeated addition of direct speech. In the French romance, Partonopeu's powerlessness is expressed externally and visually through his tears and his turning to God for help: 'Il plore et crie a Deu merci' (line 681; 'He weeps and cries mercy to God'). Both the German and English translators remove the description of Partonopeu's tears falling from his eyes and instead opt for the first-person voicing of prayer which allows the protagonist directly to ask God for help, addressing Him in the imperative (MHG lines 542–44; ME lines 655–56 and 661–63). Through speech, the protagonist is able to voice some resistance to what happens to him; he can express his fear and his hopelessness.

The added direct speech also plays a crucial role in offering access to thought processes. In the Old French version, emotional representation is physical and visual; it does not participate in mental processes. In the translations, on the other hand, the representation of thought becomes an important part of the construction of the protagonist's emotional state. In the Middle High German version, this change is so drastic that every single mention of the protagonist's tears in this scene is removed: the German Partonopier does not cry at all during the whole time of his wandering in the forest.[33] There is no mention of external symptoms of emotions, as first-person expression substitutes for this form of emotional narration. This narrative change is highly significant in terms of the perception of the type of subject that he is. As Jutta Eming has argued, while the Old French narration presents Partonopeu as helplessly subjected to his situation, Konrad's Partonopier instead appears to have greater awareness of his own situation, as he displays a pattern of rationalisation of his emotions and subsequent actions.[34]

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[33] The first mention of his weeping occurs in line 681, once he is already on the boat.
[34] Eming, *Emotion und Expression*, 177, 183.

The addition of direct speech indeed allows Partonopier to analyse his own situation. The young man first expresses his helplessness through a self-aware rhetorical question – a narrative tool also used in the Middle English version: 'ei waz tuon ich Partonopier?' (line 526; 'Alas, what shall I, Partonopier, do?'). He then expresses his knowledge and understanding about his own situation and its hopelessness. He knows that spending the night in the forest means certain death: 'begrîfet mich diu naht alhie, / sô bin ich tôt, daz weiz ich wol' (lines 528–29; 'If the night catches me right here, I shall die, I know it well'). And he knows that the forest is full of serpents: 'der walt ist aller würme vol, / des bin ich zwâre vil gewis' (lines 530–31; 'the forest is full of snakes, of that I am very certain'). The German author here emphasises cognition: Partonopier knows and understands his condition and expresses it consciously. But his thinking aloud also participates in the generation of his own fear. The presence of dangerous beasts in the forest is presented as objective fact in the third-person narration of the Old French version: Partonopeu sees tracks of 'venimos vers volans' (line 676; 'poisonous flying snakes'). In Konrad's version, the passage is spoken in the first person by Partonopier, who imagines a longer and more fanciful list of animals lurking in the forest: the evil snake, the crocodile, and the terrible basilisk that kills with one stare (lines 532–39). While he appears certain of his knowledge about these beasts, this knowledge is not confirmed by physical proof as it is in the Old French version. Instead, the increasingly marvellous and dangerous beasts that Partonopier describes appear to be a subjective embodiment of his fear. The first-person speech thus enables a more developed subjectivity as we are given access to the character's rationalisation of his own situation as well as a subjective expression of his fearful imagination.

Emphasis on thought processes also characterises the third-person narration of Partonopier's emotional state. After this long monologue, the narrator expresses the hero's

aimless wandering through an interior description, and he posits Partonopier's own

thoughts, his own subjective, cognitive processes as the cause for his emotion:

> er dâhte für sich unde wider,
>
> waz er solte grîfen an.
>
> Her unde hin, dar unde dan
>
> gie der getriuwe denkende,
>
> sîn herze in sorge senkende
>
> vast ûf des grüenes plâne. (lines 622–27)

> (He thought back and forth to himself what he should do. Here and there, to and fro, the faithful
>
> one went, thinking, his heart deeply submerged in worry, over the green meadow.)

Partonopier's helplessness is described through his to-ing and fro-ing as he walks here and

there while his thoughts go round and round. Instead of an externally expressed reaction to

circumstance, Partonopier's heart is described as sinking in worry as a result of this mental

and physical oscillation. The description of emotion is thus embedded in a complex

interiority where affective and cognitive patterns are intertwined. As Eming argues, in the

German version patterns of thought become more important than the representation of

emotions: through thought, Partonopier is able rationally to understand and manage his

emotions.[35] If thought generates fear, it can also regulate it. Later, when he is on the boat,

Partonopier reflects about the fact that the boat was sent to him through 'aventiûre' – that

is, chance or adventure – a thought which is explicitly described as calming his anxiety:

'durch den gedanc erwendet / wart ein teil sîn ungemach' (lines 774–75; 'through this

thought, his restlessness was calmed a little'). Partonopier displays a form of coping

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[35] Eming, *Emotion und Expression*, 177.

mechanism, entirely absent in the source. The German narration thus veers away from visibly embodied emotions and turns to Partonopier's thought processes, which produces a more self-aware character.

The emphasis on cognitive processes is a crucial change made to the Old French source, where cognitive verbs are almost entirely absent. One exception is the verb *cuider*, 'to believe', which is used three times. In the morning after his first night of terror in the forest, Partonopeu believes he is turning back but is in fact mistaken (lines 66–69); the verb is used again later as Partonopeu sees the boat and goes to it, believing he will find people there (line 706). The cognitive verb thus does not highlight Partonopeu's conscious rationalisation, but rather points out his mistake, of which he is unaware. In the same scene in the Middle English version, the phrasing suggests reasoned decision-making: Partonope 'loked a-bowte, and gan to devyse / Wyche cuntre homwarde he myghte beste' (lines 673–74). As the young man sees the boat, the English translator reports his decision in direct speech: 'Then thoghte he: "My Gode and man, / In wolle I go, what so be-tyde"' (lines 729–30). In Konrad's version, Partonopier is also described as pondering his decision to get on the boat: he thinks in his mind ('er dâhte in sînem sinne'; line 644) that he would be better off on the boat than on the shore and therefore goes on board happily ('wünnesam'; line 649).

The use of direct speech in the Middle English version further allows the transformation of objective generalisations into personal reflection. Once on the boat, the French narrator reports Partonopeu's growing fear and hopelessness through the proverbial affirmation that fear is worse at sea than on the ground: 'Peors de terre est mioldre assés / Que n'est de mer, bien le savés' (lines 745–46; 'Fear on land is lesser than fear at sea, as is well known'). We do not learn of Partonopeu's own appraisal of his situation, and whether he in fact does feel more fear now on the water than in the forest;

instead, the narrator depersonalises his experience. In the Middle English version, on the other hand, Partonope works through his personal experience, before arriving at a general truth:

> For when I was in yender fforeste,
>
> Off my lyffe I was in drad;
>
> For very fere I was ny mad.
>
> In-to þe shyppe for seker I came,
>
> And In wyth me my horse I name.
>
> I howpet to haue a better yere;
>
> And nowe for soþe better me were
>
> In yender foreste to have ben
>
> Than in thys shyppe, as I wene. (lines 791–99)

Here Partonope goes through a learning process, as he processes his fear in the forest, his reason for coming on the boat and his regret, before he deduces what 'every man know[s]' (801), namely that fear is worse at sea than on land. We follow Partonope's mental struggle as he learns to extrapolate bigger truths from experience, an insight which participates in the Middle English romance's emphasis on the character's rapid growing up. Konrad's version also adds direct speech here, as his Partonopier goes through a similar process from personal experience to general truth when he realises that instead of freeing him of his troubles, his choice to get on the boat has led him to a still bigger torment (lines 736–41). In both translations, the protagonist's thought processes are thus foregrounded, creating a much more deliberate and self-aware character. Indeed, if the protagonist's powerlessness is expressed through external, objective narration and a lack of thought and interiority in the French source, both translations take his helpless situation

as an opportunity for the exploration of affects and interiority, notably through lengthy (interior) monologues.

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In conclusion, this comparative close reading uncovers strikingly similar changes in the two independent translations of this particular passage, which indicate areas of perceived deficiency in terms of the original character's emotional and cognitive depth. It has revealed a common move towards the development of a more self-aware subject, through the narrative representation of interiority and subjectivity. If, as Sif Ríkharðsdóttir argues, changes in medieval translations can be seen as 'evidence for the cultural predilection of reading communities that created and received these translations', these changes suggest a similar cultural preference in the reading communities of both the translations for a more active and motivated character.[36] The exterior narrative technique in the Old French passage indeed constructs Partonopeu as a visual, pitiful object, rather than as an active subject. This is in line with the story's focus on the alignment of appearance and worth, external identity and inner self. Rather than a 'defect' or insufficiency in the French romance, I believe this is a purposeful narrative strategy. The objective, exterior style of narration in this passage conveys Partonopeu's passivity, helplessness and self-dispossession. The changes that both the translations make reflect a different narrative strategy, and cultural preference, one which constructs the protagonist as an agent with the ability rationally to understand what happens to him and to make conscious decisions. In lieu of the narratorial naming of emotions and report of physical emotional symptoms, the translations integrate the representation of emotion within an exploration of thought

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[36] Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, 3.

processes. My study of the reception of the Old French protagonist in this scene by two different linguistic and cultural translators thus exposes narrative elements such as conscious intentionality, self-reflection and the interaction of emotion and cognition as essential in effecting literary selfhood.

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