Shaping idealisms : studies in Middle English romances and the literature of the Medieval Revival

Veldhoen, N.H.G.E.

‘*Floris and Blauncheflour*: To Indulge the Fancy and to Hear of Love’, in: N.H.G.E. Veldhoen & H. Aertsen (eds.), *Companion to Early Middle English Literature*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1988, pp. 53-67.

FLORIS AND BLAUNCHEFLOUR
TO INDULGE THE FANCY AND TO HEAR OF LOVE

N.H.G.E. VELDHOEN
(University of Leiden)

J.W.H. Atkins (1907:301) prefaces his discussion of the Middle English metrical romances by pointing out that

> the *raison d' être* of the romances is of a secular kind. It was felt to be good to indulge the fancy and to hear of love, and so legendary and historical narratives and cheerful love-stories were, from time to time, related with no other motive than the telling of a good tale.

Although *Floris and Blauncheflour* (henceforth *Fl & Bl*) is perhaps not, in the strictest sense, a romance—it is not a story of knight-errantry—yet the story of the two young lovers is told in the conventional narrative technique of the genre of the romance of chivalry. And Atkins' well-considered words will appear to apply particularly to this tale.

The point about the genre of *Fl & Bl* needs to be made because for the modern reader, conditioned by the modern novel or short story with their realistic verisimilitude, the kind of narrative to which *Fl & Bl* belongs is not immediately accessible. The story may be compelling enough, but the full impact of the medieval English rendering of this story will not be grasped unless one is ready and willing to accept a high degree of formality in it, which constitutes its own peculiar logic and significance.

Romances are stories of public life: they portray the age's ideals of life, of men and women, of what makes life significant. Underlying the romances is the assumption that rituals, when performed in the proper manner, add significance to life, or rather bring out the significance that life had in the theological culture of those days. And this is not only true for religious or courtly rituals, nor only for public or special rituals, but as much for what we would consider private or common rituals. For

them such distinctions are immaterial. Swooning in public or in private, eating, asking the way, playing chess, as rituals properly performed, add as much significance to the life portrayed as the selection of a queen or the Christian marriage-ceremony.

This medieval sense of ceremony, i.e. formality as a way of celebrating significance in life, is reflected in the formality of construction of these tales. In *Fl & Bl* the formality is immediately apparent in the ritualistic repetitions: there are several innkeepers, several guides, several obstacles to be overcome, several disguises, even the game of chess is to be played three times. Also words and lines are repeated in the same ritualistic way: from the characteristic *vnnepes* ('reluctantly', ll.63 and 153) to describe Floris' father, to Floris' equally characteristic reaction when he is offered food:

> Mi þouȝt is, on alle wise,
> Mochel on mi marchaundise,
> And ȝit þat is mi meste wo
> ȝif ich hit finde and schal forgo.
> (ll.503-06)

(My thinking is in every way much engaged upon my merchandise, and yet that is my greatest anxiety, if I should find it and be obliged to do without it.)

These lines are repeated almost verbatim in ll.589-94.[1]

But the formality, the sense of ceremony in this kind of narrative, also accounts for such details as seem necessary for the plot: the second ring, the details of food eaten (ll.569-76), the blankets only pulled down a little to ascertain the sexes of the lovers in bed (ll.1059-62), the Emir marrying Clarice in the end.

Where we finally need this notion of formality most, where we need to see and accept the absolute dominance of the medieval sense of ceremony, is in our reading of those details which, in a modern narrative, should be noted as inconsistent in the story: the Oriental and pagan Emir is given West European chivalric paraphernalia. This unnatural despot has his city guarded by knights; he allows himself to be guided by a council of barons, placing chivalric honour over despotic judgment; he dubs Floris a knight and even administers a Christian marriage.

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[1] All quotations from *Fl & Bl* have been taken from the edition by Taylor (1927).

In other words, the spirit or mood in which we are required to enjoy and interpret such stories is that with which we also approach fairy tales and folktales. They have the "feel" of the dream world: in a dream one can fly, and that causes no surprise, yet the feeling is memorable. And they have the logic of ritual games: the logic that makes us avoid the black lines with our feet when stepping across a zebra crossing. It is the symbolic logic of life experienced as basic desires and fears, and the ritual patterns ensuing from that.

In such narratives we are not shocked by what in modern stories should be considered as cruelty. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the beheading game does not unduly worry us. Neither need we be surprised in *Fl & Bl* to find Floris' father so murderously inclined. When on two occasions he proposes to have Blaunchefloure killed (ll.45-51 and 141), he is speaking as the King who must insist on a fitting marriage-partner for his successor. And apart from this ritual aspect of his conduct, he is at the same time acting out the part of the father as rival or restrainer of his son's maturing sensuality. It is interesting to notice that by the side of the father's cruel effectiveness it is Floris' mother, or rather the King's wife, whose role it is to introduce more civilized alternatives. She proposes to send Floris away for some time *þat he lese not his honour / For þe mayden Blaunchefloure* ('in order that he will not lose his honour because of the young girl Blaunchefloure', ll.57-58) and later proposes the ruse of selling the girl away and pretending that she is dead (ll.144-52). It is characteristic that in both cases the King submits *vnneþes* ('reluctantly', ll.63 and 153), just as in similar instances later on he submits reluctantly to his wife and son: *Sen it may noon other be* ('since it may not be otherwise', l.322) and *Seth it is soo,/ Seþ þou wylt noon other doo* ('since that is how it is, since you will not do otherwise', ll.351-52). So love as a civilizing influence on the harsh man's world of public interest is shown to gain a hard-won victory. Similarly in the end the emir appears easily moved by the young lovers and ready to have a civilized trial rather than summary justice (ll.1109-30).

The Queen's loving influence does not stop at civilizing her husband's attitude and thereby granting full development to their son. She is also shown literally to give life to her son when she prevents his suicide at Blaunchefloure's alleged grave. And symbolically she also gives life to Blaunchefloure by opening the grave and showing that the girl is still alive (ll.308-40). This ultimate act of love wins the field for the lovers.

Fl & Bl is undeniably a story of love, although John Stevens rightly remarks (1973:44) that in contrast to other romances love here is not "all dark passion" or "merely businesslike":

> Amongst the English romances which seem to concede most to amorous ideals is *Fl & Bl*. But the concessions are more to sentiment than to *amour*. (...) Floris and Blancheflur are counters in a game of sentiments.

Every reader knows the sentiments of Ideal Love. We all know what to expect and wish for. And that is dramatized in the romances. But first and foremost we are aware of the obstacles, of our fears and misgivings. And those are dramatized primarily in the romances, and give them their shape of a series of conflicts. Our hopes are reflected in the fact that the hero invariably wins through. But the interest lies in the fears portrayed in action. These are the real points of recognition and of identification. Floris' parents and the gatekeeper and the Emir are in a way more real to our experience than Floris himself can ever be.

The love-interest in the Middle English romances operates on various levels. One level is that of strongly felt human relationships. On another, love is an ennobling and civilizing force. On again another love is the inspiration to transcend one's present self by means of action on behalf of a lady. This is love as part of the process of growing up, of growing away from self-centredness and mere self-assertion towards a civilized social identity. *Fl & Bl* shows that achieved love leads to social integrity: Floris and Blauncheflour's first free acts are acts of loyalty to the other characters involved. Floris loyally protects his 'man', the gatekeeper, from the Emir's wrath (ll.1245-50)—appropriately before he himself becomes the Emir's 'man', thus avoiding a clash of loyalties—and Blauncheflour intercedes for her trusted friend Clarice, achieving final harmony in the form of a marriage between Clarice and the Emir (ll.1277-79).

In the romance-manner of story-telling all the action and all the other characters are to be seen as reflecting the development of the protagonist. Therefore it is in Floris that we see the "education" that leads to the perfect love achieved in the end. And typically, his love-education follows the pattern of what from classical antiquity had been recognized as man's fundamental desires: his *libido*. That *libido* had been split into

three kinds or levels: the *libido sciendi* ('the desire to know'), the *libido dominandi* ('the desire to dominate'), and the *libido sentiendi* ('the desire to feel, to be emotionally involved'). We can recognise the *libido sciendi* in the emphasis on Floris' going to school and on his being so dependent on instructions from others to achieve his ends. Floris receives directions and is taught the tricks—here in the form of plots and ruses—how to cope with "life". The *libido dominandi* is brought out in his many struggles against repression, in which he successively overcomes his parents, the gatekeeper, and finally, in a sense, the Emir. And in a love-story such as *Fl & Bl* the *libido sentiendi* is dominantly present. Floris' quest for his chosen love-partner is a quest for integrity, for a place and an identity in the grown-up world. The *libido sentiendi* is brought out by Floris' trying to achieve a pattern of relatedness and mutual loyalties. The enforcing of the truth at Blauncheflour's tomb and the struggle over who shall have the protective ring are the dramatic highlights of this narrative vein.

Having established the basic pattern of the ideal experience, there now remains to be seen of what nature the characters are in this formal world, and what the nature is of the "adventures" to which they are submitted.

We see Floris growing from child to independent man and master of men. That this is a difficult and painful process is illustrated by the fact that on seven different occasions on the way Floris does the unmanly thing: he weeps, either for frustration or fear or joy (ll.15-17; 83; 270; 847; 932; 947; 1134). This pattern of growth might have made for dramatic variety and tragic depth, as it had done in the epic narratives that preceded romances in time. But neither is to be found. The hero is a stereotype 'flat' protagonist, for the interest lies in the action, not in the character of the hero. He is an embodiment of virtue or of growth towards virtue. His story cannot be tragic, because if he dies, the virtue he embodies perishes with him, whereas romance sets out to show the virtue literally for what it is worth. This does not mean that there is nothing explorative to romances. Yet the character of the hero is 'flat'. The tensions and conflicting motives underlying the ideals are brought out by the action, not by dramatic conflicts within the character. The action is the full drama of the portrayed ideal, and the various characters , including the hero, personify various facets of the complex experience of trying to attain that ideal. The hero enacts the striving towards the pure ideal,

while the other characters are representatives of the checks imposed by 'reality' and by the co-existence of other fundamental passions. Because the protagonist is the example or 'type' aimed at, all characters other than the protagonist are only important in relation to the protagonist, not in relation to each other. They 'are' the action.

The character of Floris is a *persona*, a 'mask'. We do not see an individual character experiencing 'reality' in his own particular way. The fact that he has a name does not make him an individual. In Floris we see an ignorant and dependent young boy winning through to a socially acceptable position. And we see him also developing. While he has to be shown his way most of the time, we see him taking the initiative twice, at crucial points: after the ruse of Blauncheflour's faked tomb has been exploded, Floris himself decides that he shall set out to find the girl, and he states his own terms of how he proposes to travel and what he will take with him; and ultimately it is the spontaneous act of endlessly exchanging the protective ring that overcomes the Emir. And yet Floris remains more or less the ignorant helpless child he was from the start.

This apparent inconsistency of a character showing development and yet remaining largely what he was from the beginning is typical of all romance heroes. They "go through the motions", but only to show that, and how, the ideal they represent overcomes all tests. The tests are not really moments of doubt, but elements that serve to define the nature of the ideal portrayed in action.

The term 'flat' suits the other characters in this narrative better. They are static: they cannot be 'educated'. They are representations of the perennial fears attendant upon Floris' ideal social personality. Floris' father and the gatekeeper and the Emir introduce into the action all these uncivilized desires that are incompatible with what Floris stands for. They constitute the primitive, uncontrolled and animal parts of the human being against which the protagonist is tested. They are the antagonists proper to Floris: they define him.

On his way to find himself, the ideal lover Floris overcomes three antagonists to that ideal: his father, the gatekeeper, and the Emir. His father represses his striving for integrity in the form of union with his appropriate partner Blauncheflour on the grounds of social conventions. These conventions of the impropriety of marriage between people of unequal birth—here pushed to the absolute of murder to prevent that—are represented as unfitting for the type of love that *Fl & Bl* idealizes.

The gatekeeper represses Floris' progress towards the achievement of his love on the grounds of a peculiar symbolic rivalry, which I will discuss later on. He has the peacock appearance of the typical rival lover: *þe porter is proud wiþalle;/ Euerich dai he goþ in palle* ('besides, the gatekeeper is proud: he is dressed in a rich robe every day', ll.679-80). Moreover, he is portrayed as jealous:

> Wel sone he wil come to þe
> And aske what mister man þou be
> And ber vpon þe felonie,
> And saie þou art comen þe tour aspie.
> (ll.753-56)
>
> (Very soon he will come up to you and ask what business you have there, and accuse you of malicious intentions, saying you have come to spy on the tower.)

To this Floris is advised to reply with the meekness befitting the true lover: *þou shalt answeren him swetelich / And speke to him wel mildelich* ('you must answer him graciously and speak to him meekly', ll.757-58).

The medieval ideal lover will especially have to overcome the Emir, because the uncivilized type of love represented by him does certainly not fit the European ideal of the day. The Emir is not chivalrous to his ladies, whom he buys in the first place. He would be well described by the modern term 'male chauvinist pig': his 'love' is all lust and, one assumes, businesslike procreation, without any sense of relationship towards his partner. And that would be unacceptable to the mainly female audiences of Eleanor of Aquitaine's generation.

Quite appropriately Floris' antagonists are all male, because the checks to the ideal he portrays are aspects of the male psyche. The female characters in *Fl & Bl*, for their part, are manifestations of various aspects of the nature of Woman, at least of the idea of Woman in a man's mind. That idea appears to be mainly a set of complements to his own nature. Such complements can, in general, as easily enhance the beneficial as the malevolent aspects of his world. But in the love-romance *Fl & Bl* the female characters typically represent the positive influence on the male world. Floris' women add a whole range of experience of feminine virtue to the ideal action.

Blaunchefloure is, throughout, a young lover's projection of an ideal love. She is from the beginning inseparably part of him, as his refusal to go to school—that is, to start on social life—without her bears out (ll.15-24). Their separation illustrates that a sense of separateness and social obstacles will have to be overcome before a full union can be achieved. The hero will have to learn, will have to gain wider experience, before the union can become socially relevant. Yet in the end Blaunchefloure is still the ideal young love who literally forgets the whole world—the necessity to keep up her duties towards the Emir—when she is with her lover (ll.979-1039). Also ideally, she had remained absolutely faithful to Floris, to the point of contemplating suicide rather than being another man's wife (ll.907-20).

Further details of his experience of woman Floris encounters in his mother. On the one hand she shares with Blaunchefloure's mother a 'malevolent' role in maintaining the falsehood of the girl's death, which provides Floris with a reason to leave her as well as his father. But on the other hand Floris' mother is a manifestation of the virtue of love. Her role is to civilize her husband and their relationship with their child, thereby setting their son free to start out on his own. Thus to the hero's experience and to the story's scope she adds the fundamental notion that love is an ennobling force and that it can overcome all obstacles in its way.

Blaunchefloure's friend and confidante Clarice adds to Floris' experience a woman's capacity for devoted loyalty, as also for clever subterfuge, when she tells the Emir that Blaunchefloure slept late because she had been praying for him all night (ll.1005-14). She parallels Floris' mother, who also risked displeasure and resorted to subterfuge—the suggestion to sell Blaunchefloure away and simulate her death was hers—to achieve what she held to be a more civilized order of affairs. There is, therefore, poetic justice in Clarice being married to the Emir, another uncouth husband whom, no doubt, she is to civilize, thus creating a neat end to this story of integrity. The formal pattern of ennobling love thus reigns supreme, against all improbabilities.

The other characters in *Fl & Bl* are devices to help enact the above pattern. The good men and women along the road serve as guides to Floris on his way to private happiness which is the social good. The gatekeeper's opposite number on the right side, Daris, is the clearest example

of the disinterested guide, who has nothing to gain but the common good, which in terms of this romance is Floris' union with Blauncheflour.

The frequency of this guidance may be worth notice. Three times Floris receives information and guidance on the road: first from a landlady (ll.428-39), then from the men of Babylon, the 'talk of the town' (ll.465-76), and finally again from a landlord, another member of that life-sustaining and rest-providing guild (ll.527-36). Then he is three times passed on into other hands, by his last host to Daris (ll.549-58), by Daris to the gatekeeper (ll.607-818), and by the gatekeeper to Clarice (ll.850-68). In the meantime Floris has used three disguises: that of a merchant (l.370), that of an engineer or builder (ll.748-50), and that of a 'flower' in a basket of flowers (l.854). Rather than tracing 'magic' or 'fertility' or other symbolic origins for the number three, it is helpful to realize that in children's games and in play between grown-up and child such generally agreed numbers—usually three or a hundred—serve as suspense-building devices. Whether or not the number three has connotations of perfect harmony, the repetition certainly has a formal function. On the symbolic level it may point to integrity to be gained, but as a formal pattern it is also a suspense-building device, in the same way that, later on, the introduction of the Emir's chamberlain and the calling in of the barons near the end are suspense-building devices.

Because it is not the individual characters but the whole action that represents human experience in this type of story, the setting and the 'stage properties' must also be considered as part of the experience.

Fl & Bl appears to progress by means of situations and objects of an archetypal nature. The archetypal situations of a young lover's conflicts with father and rivals and his experience with women and guides have been sketched above.[2] Of archetypal 'props' the most outstanding are the tomb, the ring, the precious stones, the chalices or cups, and the flowers. In this formal type of story these 'props' are to be read as symbolic agents in the total experience.

The recurrent symbols marking the progress of *Fl & Bl* are the cup and the ring. It is typical of this story that the progress should be marked by female symbols rather than male ones such as swords and lances. There is no mention of weapons, as there is no fighting, chivalric or oth-

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[2] For a further discussion along Jungian lines, see Reiss, 1971:339-50.

erwise. The love idealism portrayed in *Fl & Bl* concentrates on the adolescent hero's quest for integration of the feminine aspects of life, excluding the simultaneous development of the masculine aspects.

The cup appears in two forms. The cup that was given in payment for Blaunchefloure (ll.161-82) is central. Instead of the girl herself, a symbol of her remains behind. Floris would not be 'alive' without her presence, even if only in a symbolic form. Therefore, when he sets out to be reunited with Blaunchefloure, that *ilke self coupe* ('very same cup', l.373) is given to him by his father because *Herewiþ þou may þat swete þing / Wynne* ('with this you can win back that sweet girl', ll.376-77). The cup points out the purpose of Floris' quest and does turn out to be the key that opens the gate to the girl. It is the right equipment to gain admittance, and therefore convinces the gatekeeper (ll.781-822).

So, by staying behind, the cup shows the hero what he must go in search of if he is to be re-integrated. As long as that has not been achieved, Floris is not really 'alive', which is illustrated by the fact that he goes without food because he misses her (ll.129-30; 417-18; 493-94; 577-83). Characteristically, when he receives information about Blaunchefloure, he rewards his guides with cups (ll.444-48; 517-22). These other cups emphasize the role of the first cup as pointer: Floris can symbolically give his cup away in exchange for directions towards Blaunchefloure. When he comes to her actual gatekeeper, he does so literally.

The ring, which in psychology as in alchemy not only symbolizes the female but also truth (since it has neither beginning nor end), operates on both these symbolic levels. When Floris has reached the point when he can set out to win his love, it is given to him—typically—by his mother.

> Haue nou, sone, here þis ring;
> While þou hit hast, doute þe no þing,
> Ne fir þe brenne, ne drenchen in se,
> Ne iren ne stel schal derie þe;
> And be hit erli and be hit late,
> To þi wille þou schalt haue whate.
> (ll.391-96)

(Now, my sone, take this ring. Be not afraid of anything as long as you possess it: no fire shall burn you, you shall not drown in the sea. Neither iron nor

> steel shall harm you. And whether early or late, you shall have the wherewithal to satisfy your wants.)

This incantation-like speech indicates that now, when he has shown himself independent enough to set out, he can wear this ring which, like the cup, adds the feminine aspect to his male personality, thus making him whole. And with that integrity he shall be safe against the elements, which are hostile to him as long as he has not achieved integration, as his mother's words imply: against the fire, the water and the iron that can kill him. And the sustaining earth shall not fail him.

Parallel to this, another ring is given to Floris by his last host on the way, to be given to Daris (ll.555-58). This ring also protects him, here from the effects of being a stranger, and it serves to identify him to his next and most essential guide. This ring tells Daris the truth about Floris the lover. And telling the truth about Floris and Blauncheflour is also what the first ring ultimately does (ll.1149ff). Its protective power is again hinted at: *þou ne schalt nowt die whiles hit is þin* ('you shall not die as long as it is yours, l.1152). But its protective effect is shown to consist in its showing the truth of the great—because essential—love between the two. It is not its magic but its symbolism that is effective. It is the fact that both insist on the other's wearing it, sacrificing their own lives for the sake of the other, that convinces the Emir that this is a true love that he must not destroy.

The quest for Blauncheflour is a quest from death to life. Their union is life in social terms; their separation is death, as the tomb scene emphasizes. At Blauncheflour's supposed tomb Floris realizes that for him by himself there is no life. So he decides to commit suicide (ll.301-12). This scene illustrates that parental restraint, when pushed to the absolute, is death for the child. The child must be able to get out on its own, in order to achieve an identity and a place of its own in the whole. Floris' identity threatens to be killed until, as I said above, his mother gives life to him again by preventing his suicide.

Also Floris' swooning on various occasions suggests that apparently insuperable obstacles to his reunion mean for him the loss of his identity—here symbolized as consciousness. He swoons for the first time when he hears from her mother that Blauncheflour is dead (l.246), and three times, so more absolutely, when he is reading the inscription on her tomb (l.267). And he is once more to swoon three times when he has heard how absolutely inaccessible Blauncheflour is in the Emir's power.

Having progressed 'through' the tomb, Floris begins to show—temporary—signs of independence: *Now, moder, y þink þat y leve may* ('Mother, I believe that I can leave now', l.341). And he even takes command: *"Leue fader," he seide, "y telle þe / Al þat þou shalt fynde me"* ("'Dear father," he said, "I shall name you all that you must provide me with"' (ll.355-56). But his initiation to life is by no means complete. He has so far only been initiated into the quest stage. His approach to union is marked by obstacles, as if it consists of so many stages. Each of these obstacles is of a kind that could have symbolic power, but this does not appear to be worked out in this rendering of the tale. The first obstacle after the tomb is water, the *salte flod* that he must cross (l.455). It marks the beginning of the Babylon stage. The second obstacle is a bridge (ll.549-52), at the end of which he shall find his most essential guide Daris. This bridge he 'achieves' by means of the above-mentioned second ring. Between his guide and his goal is the third obstacle, the city-wall of Babylon and its defending knights (ll.608-34). And ultimately there is the tower with its eunuchs and gatekeeper (ll.635-78).

With the tower in Babylon the obstacles do acquire symbolic power: *And in þe bourh, amide þeriȝt / þer stant a riche tour, I þe aplyȝt* ('and in the city, right in the middle, there stands a rich tower, I assure you', ll.635-36). The tower in its setting of Babylon or the orchard almost suggests a *mandala*: it possesses a number of the perennial symbols of the achievement of inner wholeness. It is crowned with a sun-like jewel (ll.655-60) and it is presented as a place of bliss:

> So wel were þat ilke man
> Þat miȝte wonen in þat an,
> Nou þourt him neuere, ful iwis,
> Willen after more blisse.
> (ll.663-66)

(Any man who would be able to live in it would be fortunate to such a degree that he need not, indeed, ever wish for greater happiness.)

The description of the Emir's orchard adds to the symbolic power of the setting in which Blauncheflour is found. The description of Paradise in the *Book of Genesis*, and most especially in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, as also the description of the Garden in the *Roman de la Rose*, show that a setting of the Tree of Love and/or a Tree of Life and a

fountain and flowers, birds and precious stones is felt to be the appropriate one for love and integrity. The Emir's *locus amoenus* likewise has birds (l.691), precious stones (ll.693-96 and 701-03), a well from Paradise (ll.697-700), a Tree of Love (ll.721-23) and flowers (ll.724-26).

In *Fl & Bl* it is, and at the same time is not, the place of reunion of the lovers. Tower and orchard suggest that this is the final place where the quest finds its fulfilment. The object of the quest, Blaunchefloure, is there in the appropriate setting for what she is for Floris. That this 'enemy territory' presents itself primarily, in its imagery, as the place of achievement of the desired object, must be understood in the light of the fact that in this type of story every element is to be seen in relation to the protagonist. Inner wholeness is to be achieved there, so the setting suggests. But the final achievement contains in itself also the final test.The place constitutes, at the same time, a major danger from which Floris must rescue Blaunchefloure and himself: a paradise—symbol of social achievement—manipulated by the false values of the Emir, whose abominable fertility-cult of mating for the season is a perversion of the perfect love that the romance seeks: a fully integrated social ideal, based on loyalty instead of manipulation and on love instead of mere pleasure.

But Floris is not yet ready to achieve this rescue. First he must pass the Cerberus-gatekeeper into the underworld of a symbolic death, to rise to life again in his proper form in the basket of flowers. The gatekeeper first appears as another peacock-rival or obstacle to Floris' achievement of love, prefiguring one aspect of the Emir (ll.679-80), but in the detailed instructions that follow he is presented as a Cerberus controlling the entrance to the Paradise of Blaunchefloure's setting. Like the porter to the Underworld of Greek mythology he is said to rob the applicant of his possessions: *He wille him boþe bete and reue* ('he will beat as well as rob him', l.678). He is wary of people who are just curious:

> Wel sone he wil come to þe
> And aske what mister man þou be
> And ber vpon þe felonie,
> And saie þou art comen þe tour aspie.
> (ll.753-56; see above for translation)

Serious applicants for entrance he submits to the test of the game of chess, by which they must pay for his services in conducting them in.

The game of chess (ll.764-814) is traditionally an initiation through symbolic death and rebirth. Floris' boyish dependence on others will have to die, so that he shall be reborn as a man able to play his own game. The gatekeeper shall not be his guide, but his servant. How much effort this developemnt takes, what price Floris must pay, is indicated by the three stages that the game takes, with doubled and tripled stakes and finally by the sacrifice of the cup itself which symbolizes Floris' life, as I have argued above.

After this Cerberus' assistance—the first integration or loyalty—has been secured by Floris' symbolic death, the seed of the new hero is buried in the coffin of the basket, from which the flower Floris will resurrect. Dramatizing the continual risk to which the ideal is exposed, he is carried to the 'wrong' place, so that his resurrection might yet prove death, acted out as Floris' diving back into the basket again (ll.861-78). But the girl Clarice, to whose room he has been carrried, 'revives' him, thus prefiguring an aspect of Blauncheflour. She shows a further integration, now of a woman's capacity for fellow-feeling, healing and tender care:

> 'Ne doute ȝou nammore wiþalle
> Þan to miself hit hadde bifalle.
> Wite ȝe wel witerli
> Þat hele ich wille ȝoure boþer druri.'
> To on bedde ȝhe haþ hem ibrowt
> Þat was of silk and sendal wrout.
> Þai sette hem þere wel softe adoun,
> And Clarice drowȝ þe courtyn roun.
>
> (ll.953-60)

('Be no more afraid in this matter than if it had happened to me. You may rest assured that I will keep the love between the two of you a secret.' She took them to a bed that was made with silk and sendal. They lay down in it very comfortably and Clarice drew the curtain round them.)

Now Floris and Blauncheflour are finally reunited, but their quest has not yet come to an end. Their place in the whole of society they still have to win. The parental and jealous rival figure of the Emir demands final proof of their love. A last initiation awaits them. Their enclosure in a dungeon (l.1088) symbolizes that they must die again, now together.

But they only achieve their ultimate initiation by voluntarily accepting literal death, the one sacrificing himself or herself for the other. This scene of their mutually taking the blame and of the insistent exchanging of the protective ring (ll.1135-82), followed by their taking each other's place under the Emir's sword (ll.1193-1230), reveals their full beauty, the glory of their true love, for all to see.

In *Fl & Bl*, then, we have indulged the fancy and we have heard of love, in that order. How perennial this experience is, every lover of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* will recognize. The Middle English *Fl & Bl* has rendered the experiences simply and briskly. The rich archetypal suggestiveness does not clog the pure and direct manner of the narrative. What Atkins referred to as a "good tale" turns out to be a well-structured tale: without the support of any extensive discussion or moral, the carefully handled formal and symbolic patterns bring out the significance of the tale in the most immediate manner.

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