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### “A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes...”: The Commanding Love in *La Dame à la licorne* of the Musée de Cluny

A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes  
Upon a ryver, in a grene mede,  
There as swetnesse evermore inow is,  
With floures white, blewe, yelwe and rede...

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*

When in 1841 Prosper Mérimée visited the Limousin region in his capacity as the general inspector of historical monuments, he was attracted to the imposing and picturesquely located fortress of Boussac, rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by one of Jeanne d’Arc companions, and sold only four years before Merimee’s sojourn to the local prefecture. It was there that he encountered and discovered one of the wonders of the late Middle Ages, a group of six tapestries that for over a hundred and twenty years have been the highlight of the French National Museum of the Middle Ages, the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Since the day they were hung in the museum’s dark, first-floor room, they have become one of the must-sees for anyone visiting the French capital, and a never-ending source of income to all those spawning their better or worse reproductions and copies. Incidentally, the famous, so-called, “Five Senses” tapestries seem to be mirroring the history

of the Hôtel de Cluny – like the present museum, erected as a Parisian residence for the Cluny abbots towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the sizeable tapestries are also thought to have been woven around that time. Furthermore, the museum was founded only a year after the tapestries were found, even though they were not installed there until 1882.

Volumes have been written about the six tapestries<sup>1</sup>, which themselves appear to be speaking volumes, yet we have no truly verifiable information about them. They must have been left in total obscurity for some three centuries in Boussac castle's recesses. And although we know that the recurrent image of the three half-moons is featured on the coat of arms of an influential 15<sup>th</sup> century Burgundian family of Le Viste, we do not know when and for whom these fabrics were woven, we do not know what the occasion was, nor do we know what they were actually meant to represent. In 1921 the curator of Victoria and Albert Museum, Albert Frank Kendrick, suggested a reading which until today serves as a universally accepted method of naming and organizing the tapestries.<sup>2</sup> What Kendrick saw in them was an allegorical representation of the five senses and a following dedicational scene with the words *À mon seul désir* "to my only desire" visible on the lavish tent. The whole sequence apparently develops from the darkest and most uninspiring sense of touch (*Le Toucher*), through the sense of smell (*L'Odorat*), taste (*Le Goût*), hearing (*L'Ouïe*), proceeding to the sense of sight (*La Vue*), and to the largest of the tapestries, which Kendrick called a dedicational

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<sup>1</sup> Among the chief editions in English see: Pierre Verlet and Francis Salet, *The Lady and the Unicorn* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961); Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *The Lady and the Unicorn* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992); Gottfried Büttner, *The Lady and the Unicorn*, trans. Roland Everett (Stroud: Hawthorne House, 1995). A cultural history of the unicorn is presented by Lise Gotfredson, *The Unicorn*, trans. Anne Born (London: Vintage, 1999). The tapestries have also stimulated fiction writers: the most recent novel, whose plot is inspired by a fictionalized history of the tapestries, is Tracy Chevalier's *The Lady and the Unicorn* (London: HarperCollins, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> G. Büttner, *The Lady and the Unicorn...*, p. 6.

scene of "To my only desire" (*À mon seul désir*). All the tapestries represent a sumptuously dressed lady, prominently flanked by two myth-laden animals, a lion and a unicorn. On four of the scenes, the woman is accompanied by another female figure, the lady's maid, judging from the aura of servitude emanating from her gestures. Last, but not least, all the six scenes are breathtakingly full of vegetation, following the *millefleurs* style of decoration – so characteristic of the 15<sup>th</sup> century French art of tapestry-weaving – including various trees, shrubs and a number of plants in blossom, as well as representatives of aerial and terrestrial fauna.

Although Kendrick's proposition of seeing the tapestries as a late-medieval representation of human senses is generally agreed upon, for want of a more comprehensive explanation, it is quite clear that the elements he found as betokening the particular senses are not always convincing and they do not always feature as the most conspicuous components of the Lady and the Unicorn cycle. Climbing up the stairs of the Hôtel de Cluny, we reach the Museum's highlight hanging in accordance with Kendrick's reading. On closer inspection, however, one cannot refrain from questioning his interpretation as possibly not necessarily wrong in its core assumption – the symbols of the senses can indeed be spotted on five of the scenes – but as quite limiting, if treated as the sole theme of the scenes. The intention of this short enquiry, therefore, is to present the tapestries as reaching beyond the pure illustrations of the human senses. Rather than concentrating on the details depicting them, this essay shall consider the sequence as one of the late-medieval visual representations of the theme of conquering love. It shall be proved that the depiction of the senses in the tapestries could be treated not as their central subject, but merely as their component, a motif affirming a popular vision of all-commanding love, to whose power man is subjugated through his sensual perception.

Let us open here by a brief review of the sequence. Its every scene is arranged triangularly, with the lady positioned in the centre. In supposedly the first image of the collection, "The

Touch", she is displaying as it were two types of touching – standing upright, she is firmly holding a standard with three Le Viste crescents in her right hand, and gently stroking the unicorn's horn with her left. The possible erotic connotations of her gestures cannot be ruled out – not only when we consider the shapes of the objects she's holding, but also when we notice the rabbit at her feet, symbolic of unrestrained sexual behaviour and when we notice the expression of utter devotion and obvious pleasure on the unicorn's muzzle. Curiously however, more prominent than the touching gestures, is the implication of power, enslavement and subjugation emanating from the scene: the seemingly wild animals, monkeys and predators in the background are girded and chained. Equally subjected are the two most conspicuous beasts, the lion and the unicorn, traditional enemies displaying nevertheless an identical and unanimous devotion to the woman, clearly their mistress. In "The Smell" tapestry, apart from the fact that the woman is making a wreath from the flowers handed to her by the maid, the only other element related to this sense is the monkey, now free and unchained, smelling a flower picked from a basket. Again, one cannot fail to notice the reverential poses assumed by the lion and the unicorn, squatting on their behinds and supporting two standards, bicuspid and rectangular respectively. "The Taste" is apparently represented by another scene engaging intermediaries – here we see the lady feeding a falcon and the monkey, familiar to us from the two previous scenes, is about to eat a berry. Once more, however, the composition is arranged in the way suggestive of control and servitude, although here the lady's benevolence is accentuated by her dignified smile. The lion and the unicorn of this tapestry strike one as fiercely protective, standing with their front limbs resting against the standards' poles. If, in "The Touch", it was the unicorn that seemed to bear some eroticism, here it is the lion with his phallic tail emerging from between his hind legs, with his mouth open, as for roaring, and the tongue visible between his fangs. In "The Touch" the unicorn's eyes were lovingly directed towards the woman, while the lion was half-smilingly contem-

plating us, the onlookers. In "The Taste" the situation is opposite; this time the unicorn is looking at us, if with a degree of distrust, and the lion's eyes are fixed on the lady. Nevertheless, she seems to take no notice neither of the lion nor of the unicorn, and even when she strokes the unicorn's horn in "The Touch", she seems to be doing that in an absent-minded manner, as if thinking of something or someone else. It is only on the penultimate of the scenes, in "The Sight" that she turns her eyes to the unicorn, although, as we shall later see, she might, in fact, be looking at someone else.

Following Kendrick's classification, the two scenes succeeding "The Touch" are both most idyllic and most undisputedly associated with the respective senses of hearing and sight. Like the biblical King David, in "The Hearing" the lady, playing the portable organ and assisted by her maid, is once more wielding total command over the surrounding world. The lion and the unicorn, having exchanged their standards, are resting, almost reclining on the flags' poles. Other animals, appearing here particularly profusely, are a further proof of her command. As if attracted by the sweetness of the lady's music, we see here little rabbits and a lamb accompanied by those who would normally hunt them: a lion cub, a bloodhound and foxes. Moreover, the enchantment brought by the music seems to affect even the blowing wind. It is evident when we turn our eyes to the standards - "The Hearing" is the only scene where the two are directed to the centre, the laws of physics being suspended here, thanks to the might of the playing lady. The harmony of this scene is continued in "The Sight". The rabbits are not just calm in the presence of their natural oppressors, but they appear to be playing with them. The scene is a representation of the closest physical contact between the woman and the unicorn. On no other tapestry do we see them so close, as here the unicorn rests his front limbs on her lap. And yet the contact is, beyond doubt, that of an idealized courtly love representation, resembling an exchange of dues between a sovereign and a vassal. The unicorn is kneeling before the lady, placing his front limbs on her lap, while she

is holding an ornate mirror in her right hand and touching or stroking his back with her left. Their facial expressions add much to the sense of the scene – the unicorn is smiling gently, looking into the woman's eyes with loving dedication, whereas she sends him back a look full of sadness and, it seems, denial. Thus it is not surprising that the subtle exchange of the gazes and of the senses carried by them made Kendrick think of "The Sight" as a commanding theme of this tapestry. Still, as we have seen it with the previous scenes, if indeed the sense of sight operated here as an inspiration, the arrangement of looks speaks of the arrangement of power and subjugation. Moreover, having examined five tapestries corresponding to the human senses, it would seem viable to say that their by now traditional reading is true up to the point where the representations of the senses act as an invitation to contemplate a more profound meaning. Were the tapestries to revolve around some unifying conception, it would not just be centred on the senses themselves, but rather on what is being perceived through them. And thus, as the frame of signification within which the tapestries are located is undoubtedly connected with the topics of love and power, what is being grasped by the five senses is the idea of commanding love, which, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gaston Paris dubbed *amour courtois*.<sup>3</sup>

Such a way of viewing the sequence of scenes becomes all the more evident when we direct our eyes to the sixth tapestry. Emerging from a gold and blue tent, embellished by the letters spelling *À mon seul désir* "to my only desire", the lady is stripping of her jewellery, placing it in the casket held by her maid. The woman is "the only desire", dearer than all the precious stones and costly trappings, worshipped by the natural world, but, first of all, discovered and apprehended through all the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. David F. Hult, "Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love", in: *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, eds. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 192–224.

senses of the five previous tapestries. Such is her sway that something little short of a homage is being paid to her by nearly every creature present in the scene. It is her who has been the focus of the sensual perception – the representations of the senses serve as illustrations of the bodily consciousness of love, although this love is simultaneously portrayed as unattainable. It is guarded by fearsome beasts, the lion and the unicorn, and yet, much as these creatures exist here in their symbolic dimensions, such love, captivating though it is, is symbolic and unreal. Its commanding attribute is exemplified by a peregrine falcon of the last scene. The bird is flapping its wings immediately above the tent, yet it remains chained to the *millefleurs* background. Although it would typically signify the members of the elite class, it becomes here an intriguing symbol of entrapment. Falconry was a refined medieval pastime, making use of the birds that were not much freer than the falcon of the tapestry. Does the falcon of *À mon seul désir*, fluttering above the tent, pose a question about the degrees of enslavement to the letter of both artistic and social convention? If this were to be so, in the tapestries we are confronted not just with a visual representation of commanding love, but also with the representation of its self-destructive sterility. However close to it, the falcon shall never catch the heron, depicted as taking wing on the other side of the tent.

The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries follow the horticultural visions of love present in medieval French literature from the creation of the *Le Roman de la Rose*. Firstly, the notable feature of all the tapestries follows the idea of what came to be known as *hortus conclusus* and *hortus deliciarum*, an enclosed garden, sheltered from the outside world, where *amor* would metaphorically blossom.<sup>4</sup> It is the garden of love that we know from the dream allegory of Jean de Meun, which Chaucer translated as:

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<sup>4</sup> Ehrenfried Kluckert, *European Garden Design* (Cologne: Könemann, 2000), pp. 20–31.



And whan I had a while goon,  
I saugh a gardyn right anoon,  
Ful long and brood, and everydell  
Enclosed was, and walled well  
With highe walles enbatailled  
With many riche portraitures.<sup>5</sup>

The garden of the rose is a fragrant garden scented with the smell of vibrant vegetation:

There were, and that wot I full well,  
Of pome-garnettys a full gret dell; [...]  
And trees there were, gret foisoun,  
That baren notes in her sesoun,  
Such as men notemygges calle,  
That swote of savour ben withalle.  
And alemandres gret plente,  
Fyges, and many a date-tree  
There wexen, if men hadde nede,  
Thorough the gardyn in length and brede.  
Ther was eke wexyng many a spice,  
As clowe-gelofre and lycorice,  
Gyngevre and greyn de parys,  
Canell and setewale of prys,  
And many a spice delitable  
To eten whan men rise fro table.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, the *hortus conclusus* of *Le Roman de la Rose* is a cultural reworking of the garden from the multiple visual representations of paradise, which would also be represented as a place of enclosure, or as a place of sweet captivity. The biblical *Song of Songs* speaks of such a fragrant garden of love, reminiscent of the garden of Eden and foreboding the garden of love:

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Romaunt of the Rose", in: *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 688, ll. 135-141.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 701, ll. 1355-1356, 1359-1372.

"You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.

You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon".

"Awake, north wind, and come south wind!

Blow onto my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its fruits".

*Song of Songs 4:12-16*

This is a *hortus* which is discernible in all the tapestries – the six scenes, aside from being scented with the smell of the *mille fleurs*, feature a notable contrast between the red background and the centrally located oval area of navy blue, as it were, an island, flanked, in "The Taste" tapestry, with a form of flowery fence. The opposition between the island, where the main figures are placed, and the background is striking not only in terms of colour, but also because the central scenes depict the peacefulness associated with that safe enclosure. It is not just the serene and confident figure of the lady, nor the symmetrical layout of the trees in the background, but also the images of small animals in happy concord that contribute to the harmonious aura. I have already pointed to the fact that in "The Sight", "The Taste" and "The Hearing" we see the cunning fox and the hunting dogs resting beside playful rabbits. The recurrent monkeys seem placid when placed within the *hortus* and are wild, in chains, or non-existent when not there.

Ultimately, however, the impression of idyll, and, simultaneously, of its unnaturalness, is brought to mind by the two beasts flanking the lady, the lion and the unicorn. The untameability of the unicorn was legendary and allegorical. Pliny the Elder's description of the beast he calls *monoceros*, in the eighth book of his *Historia Naturalis*, is shockingly brutal. It is portrayed by him as a ferocious and fearsome animal: "But the most fell and furi-

ous beast of all other, is the Licorne or Monoceros: his bodie resembleth an horse, his head a stagge, his feet an Elephant, his taile a bore; he loweth after an hideous manner; one blacke horn he hath in the midst of his forehead, bearing out two cubits in length: by report, this wild beast cannot possibly be caught alive".<sup>7</sup> Its unsubmitiveness could only be broken by a virgin, and, thus, it would become a symbol of chastity, although the phallic aspect of his horn and the attraction it would show to virgins would also endow him with strong erotic connotations. What is more, the unnatural peacefulness of the scenes from the tapestries is created by the other beast, known for its bloodthirstiness and its legendary hatred of unicorns, the lion. In the fifth *canto* of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* we come across a depiction of the conflict between the lion and the unicorn:

Like as a Lyon, whose imperiall powre  
A prowde rebellious Vnicorne defies,  
T'auoide the rash assault and wrathfull stowre  
Of his fiers foe, him to a tree applies,  
And when him running in full course he spies,  
He slips aside; the whiles that furious beast  
His precious horne, sought of his enimies  
Strikes in the stocke, ne thence can be rel[e]ast,  
But to the mighty victour yields a bounteous feast.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, in the tapestries the two animals appear to be united by their devotion to the lady. The two pieces which Kendrick saw as opening and closing the sequence, "The Touch" and "To My Only Desire", portray them as totally tamed by the woman and subservient to her, regarding her with looks of reverential love.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Historia Naturalis*, Book VIII, Chapter XXI, trans. Philemon Holland (1601), in: *Philemon Holland's Pliny*, 1 October, 2004; <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/pliny8.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto V, stanza 10, in: *Renaissance Literature. An Anthology*, eds. Michael Payne and John Hunter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 289.

The richness of allegorical meanings associated with the two animals is difficult, if not impossible to encompass, and many of them are mutually self-exclusive, such as the images of the savage force conjoined with the metaphors of Christ. It is, however, clear that the most prominent motifs of the pair are subjugated to the feminine power of the lady. It is her who seems not only to unite them in the scenes, but who also appears to unite their very features in herself. Is it a coincidence that on almost all the tapestries we see her hair falling freely in the manner of lion's mane, and on four pictures her head is crowned by an intricate head-gear, resembling a horn? In the tapestry supposedly depicting the sense of sight that horn seems to be formed from intricately plaited hair, thus combining the leonine element with that of a unicorn. As a representation of the command of love, she is as dangerous and as voracious as the lion, for such love was to be consuming and immoderate. And yet, she is as elusive as the unicorn, or even, we are tempted to say, like the unicorn, neither she, nor the emotion that she stands for, exist outside the space of the arts.

Whether the anonymous artisan designed some title for the whole sequence we do not know, yet, even though the lion features on every of the six scenes, the common name for these tapestries does not include it. It is obvious that the unicorn enjoys the lady's special graces: not only is her head turned towards him in four of the scenes, but also, in two of them, he is in physical contact with her. We remember that in "The Touch" the woman gently touches, or even caresses his horn, whereas in "The Sight" the union is mutual – she is touching the unicorn's back, while his front limbs rest upon her lap. We may probably treat these two representations as alluding to the popular belief that the unicorn could only be lured by a virgin. Indeed, so powerful is the woman's allure that the unicorn is oblivious to the presence of its arch-enemy, the lion. More than that, the lion appears to be on guard, while the lady and the unicorn are exchanging loving looks. A similar situation of enchantment is represented on the other famous sequence of 15<sup>th</sup> century unicorn tapestries. The

cycle held in the Metropolitan Museum in New York features a series of hunting scenes, where a unicorn, remarkably similar to that of Paris tapestries, is being chased by a princely hunting party accompanied by blood hounds. And yet, it is only after a lady, presumably a virgin, approaches him that the unicorn is caught, and later placed in the confinement of a little *hortus conclusus*, surrounded by blooming *mille fleurs* and wearing on his neck a garter symbolising his captivity.

Comparing love to the unicorn hunt and a distressed lover to the hunted unicorn was not uncommon and such comparisons appear not only in the symbolic sphere within medieval visual arts. Some two centuries before the Paris tapestries were woven, one of the foremost 13<sup>th</sup> century French troubadours, Thibaut de Champagne, later king of Navarre, spoke of the nature of courtly love as stupefying and dangerous, parallel in these respects to the trap set for unicorn:

Aussi comme unicorne sui  
Qui s'esbahist en regardant,  
Quant la pucele va mirant.  
Tant est lie de son ennui,  
Pasmee chiet en son giron;  
Lors l'ocit on en traïson.<sup>9</sup>

[Thus, I am like a unicorn,  
While he's ruled by stupefaction,  
Looking at a lady-virgin.  
Yet, in his torment he finds joy,  
Falling, as if dead, on the lady's bosom,  
And only then encountering the treason of the hunters.]

Whether the death Thibaut alludes to is the *petite mort* of sexual fulfilment, or whether it is the treason of the lady hunting for him,

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<sup>9</sup> Thibaut de Champagne, "Aussi comme unicorne sui", in: *Antologia poezji francuskiej. Anthologie de la poésie française*, ed. Jerzy Lisowski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2001), p. 132 (translation into English mine).

is for us to decide. However, when we juxtapose the poem with the visual representation of the unicorn in the tapestries, two conclusions seem certain. One is that of the phallic connotations borne by the unicorn. In Umberto Eco's most recent novel *Baudolino*, in which he endeavours at interpreting the nature of medieval story-telling, myth-making and the collective unconscious, the eponymous hero thus describes his symbolic hunt for the unicorn (I retain the original spelling of the English translation here):

[...] because the unicorn story goes like this everybody knows that to hunt a unicorn you have to put a girl whose still a virgin at the foot of a tree and the animal smells the virgin smell and comes and puts his head in her lap so I took Bergolio's Nena who had come with her father to buy my fathers cow and I said to her come into the woods with me and we'll hunt the unicorn then I put her under the Tree because I was sure she was a virgin and I said to her sit still like this and spread your legs to make room for the animal's head and she asked spread like this and I said there right there and I touched her and she began making some noises like a nanny goat dropping a kid and I lost my head and had something like a napocalis and afterwards she wasnt pure like a lily any more and she said oh my god how will we make the unicorn come and just then I heard a voice from Heaven said that the unicorn qui tollis peccata mundis was me and I started jumping around the bushes and crying hip heee fr fr because I had put my horn in the virgins lap [...].<sup>10</sup>

While *Baudolino* proves later to be a courtly lover only in one of his multiple capacities, in the context of courtly love, every male lover is clearly representable by a unicorn. The phallic horn represents the sublimation of the phallus, as much as the courtly love represents the sublimation of the common sexual drive. The horn becomes then a sort of phallus of the soul or phallus of the mind,

<sup>10</sup> Umberto Eco, *Baudolino*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), p. 4.

not concerned with reproduction, but proudly worn on one's forehead as a token of one's special status. The other conclusion stems from the above; namely, that the true nature of the courtly affection is self-centred and the lover's primary focus is his own anguish. Such love, then, becomes a narcissistic mirror reflecting the image of a lover, in the very same manner in which the mirror held by the seated lady in "The Sight" scene reflects not her but the unicorn. That very mirror deserves in fact some more attention. Firstly, it strikes one how much it resembles a monstrance, thus forming a doubtless allusion to the unicorn's ambivalent significance. On the one hand, we see him here as symbolising Christ in His purity and in the fact that only the chaste may approach Him. Additionally, the actual pose assumed by the woman and the unicorn is that of the Virgin and Christ. On the other hand, however, it is the mirror of Narcissus. It is held at such an angle that it could not possibly reflect the unicorn from the tapestry. Instead, it returns an image of the onlooker, the unicorn/lover, equally trapped by the charm of the lady, the charm of his own emotional disposition, and the charm of the artwork.

Thus, the principal sense issuing from the love allegory present in the tapestries, as well as the identity of the affection present there, is that of entrapment. The *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden of the tapestries, is a prison, as much as the garden of Eden constituted one. Neither the former nor the latter were concerned with reproduction – the situation of entrapment is the situation in which nothing changes, it is the situation of sterility. Despite the blooming flowers and despite the richness of the vegetation in the tapestries, it is indeed difficult to forget the image of the chained falcon, aimlessly fluttering his wings above the tent in "To My Only Desire". Therefore, the garden of the tapestries seems to be accessible through Chaucer's gate of infecundity from his *Parliament of Fowles*, leading to disdain and danger:

"Thorgh me men gon", than spak that other side,  
"Unto the mortal strokes of the spere

Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,  
That nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere".<sup>11</sup>

And yet, if the symmetrical garden islands of the tapestries indeed represent the *hortus deliciarum*, the garden of pleasure, it is the destructive pleasure of the titillating fear of feminine control, though that very power could only be exercised in the enclosed sphere of the love garden or love metaphor. In this respect, I believe, we are entitled to speak of the multiple levels of entrapment constructed in the world of the tapestries' visual metaphors, ranging from the entrapment of our sensual perception, to the entrapment by the letter of the artistic and social convention. Indeed, it must have come as a useful coincidence to whoever was designing the scenes, that the coat of arms of the alleged tapestries' sponsors, the Le Viste family, featured three silver half-moons. Thus, the suspension of freedom, celebrated in the tapestries and in the sphere of courtly love, is allowed only under the sign of the *luna*, the sign of madness and the sign of clandestine affection.

Concluding, let us turn to one more garden and to one more instance of ensnarement, present in the rondeau written and composed by a 14<sup>th</sup> century French poet and musician, Guillaume de Machaut:

Rose, liz, printemps, verdure,  
Fleur, baume et tres douce odour,  
Belle, passés en douçour,

Et tous les biens de Nature  
Avez, dont je vous amour.

Rose, liz, printemps, verdure,  
Fleur, baume et tres douce odour.

Et quant toute creature  
Seurmounte vostre valour,  
Bien puis dire et par honnour:

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, in: *The Riverside Chaucer...*, p. 387, ll. 134-137.



Rose, liz, printemps, verdure,  
Fleur, baume et tres douce odour,  
Belle, passés en douçour.<sup>12</sup>

[Rose, lily, springtime, greenery,  
flowers, balm and most sweet perfume,  
fair one, you surpass in sweetness,  
and you have all the good gifts of Nature,  
which is why I adore you.

Rose, lily, springtime, greenery,  
flowers, balm and most sweet perfume.

And since your sweet virtue  
Surpasses every living creature,  
I may well say, and honourably:

Rose, lily, springtime, greenery,  
flowers, balm and most sweet perfume,  
fair one, you surpass in sweetness.]

Although earlier in time than the unicorn tapestries, this seems a perfect illustration and a perfect conclusion of the scenes familiar from there. Here we have the *mille fleurs* of words and musical notes, but, more importantly, we see here a woman who, like the lady accompanied by the unicorn, appears to surpass and control the fragrant nature. It is very soon, however, that we see her not only as locked among those exquisite flowers and breathtaking scents, but predominantly as enclosed in the repetitive stanzas of the *rondau*'s fixed structure. Ultimately, therefore, we are faced with a construct, under the strict conditions of which the power exercised by women in the world of courtly affection, was, in fact, controlled by those who would create and propagate the artistic code – the male poets and artisans, weaving the tapestries of subtle and intricate erotic senses.

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<sup>12</sup> Guillaume de Machaut, "Rose, liz, printemps, verdure", in: *The Mirror of the Narcissus. Songs by Guillaume de Machaut*, ed. Christopher Page (London: Hyperion Records, 1987).