The End of Chivalric Romance: Barthélemy Aneau's *Alector* (1560)¹

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Résumé: *Lorsque l'Alector de Barthélemy Aneau est paru en 1560, le roman de chevalerie attirait de vives critiques. Il est donc surprenant qu'un humaniste sérieux, tel que l'était Aneau, ait emprunté largement aux conventions romanesques, autant nouvelles (suspens) qu'anciennes (chevalier errant, aventure chevaleresque, quête). Encore plus frappante est son intention déclarée d'imposer un dessein moral et narratif sur un genre défini par son manque de clôture. Le présent article explore le projet d'Aneau de racheter les égarements du roman au moyen de l'allégorie, comprise comme agent fragile du projet moral et de la vérité humanistes contre lesquels conspirent les errements de l'intrigue.*

Errant Romance: From Medieval Cycles to Renaissance Sequels

Romance enjoyed the dubious privilege of being among both the most widely read and the most fiercely attacked genres during the French Renaissance. Du Bellay saw in the medieval romance legacy potential material for a properly French epic,² but this initial enthusiasm soon gave way to exasperation in learned circles, as *Amadis de Gaule* and other works of its kind turned out to be at best a waste of time and at worst a school of vice.³ Once the privileged expression of a cultural elite in twelfth-century courtly society, chivalric romance was to fall to the humble status of so many little chapbooks in the *Bibliothèque Bleue* circulating during the seventeenth century. These tales of knight-errantry were to be peddled by *colporteurs* who were themselves errant, or more appropriately, vagabond.⁴

Emblematic of the decline of chivalric romance is the new meaning the verb "to err" assumed during the Renaissance, for it no longer had the same

significance for *Amadis's* generation that it had possessed for medieval readers. The medieval verb “*errer*” meant simply “to go,” but during the Renaissance it assumed all of the negative connotations that it has today: to have no purpose, to be literally and morally lost, to do wrong.⁵ The tragicomic errors and delusions of Don Quixote dramatize the new connotations of errantry, although disenchantment with chivalric romance began well before his arrival.

According to Étienne Pasquier, the *Amadis* vogue lasted some twenty years after Herberay des Essarts’s highly acclaimed adaptation of the first book of *Amadis* was published in 1540.⁶ Humanist attacks, however, began as soon as 1543.⁷ Among the charges leveled at romance was its “uselessness,”⁸ an accusation that may have had something to do with its long, cyclical (*a-telic*) form. From the thirteenth century on, most prose romance was characterized by its tendency to multiply the number of heroes, interlace their increasingly complex quests, and insert individual stories into vast cycles.⁹ With the printing press came a virtual explosion of *remaniements* (“remakes”), continuations, and sequels stemming from the already intricate narratives of medieval prose romance. The epitome of this tendency was the *Amadis* cycle, which had some twenty volumes. As Renaissance printers realized that the success of a current best-seller could be exploited by printing a “sequel,” romance proved to be a lucrative business. Printers thereby blurred the line between the medieval ideal of cyclicity and simple serialization. If, as early as 1555, humanists were complaining that turning out an *Amadis* was far too easy, one may conclude that serialization was already prompting dismay.¹⁰

Given the climate around 1560, it is rather surprising that a serious humanist like Barthélemy Aneau should attempt to rehabilitate romance. Yet Aneau borrows romance conventions (including the knight-errant), while insisting on the eminent “usefulness” of his *Alector*. As we shall see, Aneau’s attempt to redeem romance hinges on aligning open-ended romance with moral purpose, on crafting a narrative that is *telic*, both formally and morally. He thus proclaims, in effect, that teleology is inherent in the vocation of knight-errantry, as though to counter the *Amadis* paradigm, defined by its numerous knights-errant, who never really seem to reach the “end” (moral or narrative) of their journeys. Indeed, Aneau declares his knight-errant to be no less than the agent of truth and moral purpose, this in the wake of the cyclicity, not to mention serialization, of chivalric romance. By following allegory through the vagaries of plot, I hope to determine to what extent

Aneau's recourse to allegory succeeds in imposing narrative and moral finality on errant romance.

***Alector*: Chivalric Romance Redeemed?**

Alector, Aneau's only *histoire fabuleuse*,¹¹ includes a number of romance conventions, such as masquerading as a translation; using numerous prophecies; and structuring the chronology around the hero's *enfances*, adventures, deeds, and quest. The "Propos Rompus" allude to a number of the traditional figures of the *matière de Bretagne*, including Lancelot du Lac, King Arthur, and Galehaut, as though to follow in the tradition of prose romance and to inscribe *Alector* within an existing *matière*. However, in comparison to prose romance such as the *Lancelot*, *Guiron le Courtois*, the *Perceforest*, and *Amadis de Gaule*, *Alector* is remarkably short: in surprisingly few pages, Aneau tells the story of Franc-Gal's long journey, which began well before the flood, taking him from his marriage with a Melusine-like woman, the birth of their son Alector, and the establishment of chivalric civilization among barbarians, to his arrival at the city of Orbe, where his son Alector is on trial for murder.

Beginning and end are firmly bridged by three narrative devices: biography (the literal and allegorical journey of Franc-Gal is also the course of his life); quest (Alector is looking for his father and vice-versa);¹² and trial, from Alector's accusation to his acquittal. Aneau skillfully brings all three strands together at the end of the narrative, as Franc-Gal is reunited with his son and able to witness his heroic combat, acquittal, and civic crowning, only to die from the excessive emotions caused by these events. Chronology and plot are rigorously submitted to the "end," giving *Alector* a structure clearly distinct from the open-ended romance paradigm.

Aneau uses the path motif to orchestrate the chronology and interlace the narrative threads. This motif also serves to situate the entire narrative on a spiritual plane. Franc-Gal explains the moral significance of the path:

Il est par le monde une certaine voie longue, mais estroite et peu frequentée, pour estre aspre, scabreuse et trop difficile à tenir, laquelle voie non obstant conduit au tresantique temple du souverain. (p. 55)

The long and narrow path in question has a variety of sources, both biblical and classical,¹³ while its destination (the "tresantique temple du souverain") comes from the *Perceforest*. Aneau then has Franc-Gal's companion, the *Archier*, object that this allegory is excessive: "ne suys point pelerin" (p. 86).

But Franc-Gal eventually persuades the old priest that we are all pilgrims, on our way to our true home with the Creator:¹⁴

nous sommes tous pelerins dès nostre jeunesse, et par diverses voies, adventures et dangiers, tendons au temple Souverain, où nous est promis repos, comme en retour, à notre propre maison paternelle. (p. 87)

Aneau has thus invested knight-errantry with a clear moral *telos* (God), as if to insist that his *Alector* had nothing in common with *a-telic* romance.

True to the pilgrimage allegory, Aneau's knight-errant cannot rest until he reaches the end of his journey. Franc-Gal lingers only once when he meets and falls in love with Priscaraxe. During this very brief sojourn, Alector is conceived and Franc-Gal establishes aristocratic civilization among barbarians. However, instead of living happily ever after with his new wife, *Alector's* pilgrim/knight-errant sets out again immediately. At the moment of his departure, Franc-Gal must justify errantry to his amorous wife, as well as to the reader. The pretext for leaving, what Propp termed the "disjunctor,"¹⁵ is, again, the "pilgrimage":

Venu le temps que Priscaraxe se sentit avoir prins germe de moy et estre enceinte, je prins deliberation de la laisser, combien que departir de plaisance, trop greve, et nonobstant que sa conversation et compaignie me fust fort agreable et delectable, neantmoins encore plus *me esmouvoit le desir d'une peregrination universelle que de long temps j'avoie entreprise*. (p. 94; my italics)

Several pages later, he again makes reference to the vow he took "de peregrination au temple souverain" (p. 96). The end of *Alector* does in fact correspond to Franc-Gal's death — his arrival at "the sovereign temple." On the last day of his pilgrimage ("au dernier jour de sa peregrination" [p. 196]), Franc-Gal returns to his "origin," what he calls the "lieu d'ond j'estoie parti" (p. 119): this reference stands as a reminder that God lies both at the beginning and at the end of the journey, for pilgrimage is as much an archeology as a teleology.

As for the young Alector, a perpetual mover like his father, Aneau is equally careful to provide a moral gloss for his reasons for leaving home. These include some of the knight-errant's standard motivations, such as honor, adventure, and a specific goal (here, finding his father).¹⁶ The narrator explains that Alector's departure was also necessary in order to avoid the temptation of incest. Apparently, Priscaraxe was afraid that

... de la trop effrenée salacité de la jeunesse d'Alector et de la trop familiere conversation de grand filz avec jeune mere sans mary ne s'ensuyvit ou crimineux inceste, ou diffamatoire suspicion. . . . (p. 125)

Aneau has thus equated not only errantry with pilgrimage, but also stasis with incest, implying that an idle knight is guilty of preferring the earthly mother over the heavenly father. The reasons given for his errantry thoroughly saturate Alector's departure with moral and social necessity.

Like their medieval predecessors, Alector and Franc-Gal understand that before all else the knight-errant must *go*. In medieval romance, a knight who ignores this imperative is guilty of *recréantise*, a serious infraction against the chivalric code that usually denotes laziness or a general failure to perform the acts required of knights. Originally, however, *recréantise* referred to apostasy: a knight's inaction was thus somehow akin to a renunciation of religious faith. This etymology is a reminder that underlying the knight's errantry in romance lies the archetypal path of *homo viator*.¹⁷ The knight-errant personifies the transience of the human condition: life is but a journey, man a restless traveller, and only at the journey's end will he find true rest. From its very beginning, romance has played off the allegorical resonances of the knight's path, which promises — and reconciles — profane and sacred truths.¹⁸

In *Alector*, the sole alternative to *homo viator*'s steady progression is ecstasy. Franc-Gal's pilgrimage is occasionally interrupted by intense moments of revelation during which his familiar demon transports (*ravir*) his spirit (*esprit*) in order that it may contemplate marvelous things. He explains:

... m'advint un jour que estant au pied de celle tour, contemplant en admiration la merveilleuse fabricque d'icelle . . . donc estant quasi assommé en telle consyderation, voici que de la partie du ciel descendit volant vers moy un oyseau de blanc plumage . . . qui par maniere de me baiser, me vint mettre le bec en bouche, et ainsi me becquetant, par une certaine vertu occulte tira mon esprit à soy, le corps ce pendant laissé vivant, spirant et animant comme en ectase. (p. 57)

Rabelais, too, describes ecstasy as a rupture in pilgrimage. In the poem addressed to Marguerite de Navarre at the beginning of *Le Tiers Livre*, he writes:

Esprit abstraict, ravy, et ecstatic,
Qui frequentant les cieulx, ton origine,
As delaissé ton hoste et domestic,

Ton corps concords, qui tant se morigine,
 A tes edictz, *en vie peregrine*,
 Sans sentiment, et comme en Apathie:
 Vouldrois tu pointc faire quelque sortie
 De ton manoir divin, perpetuel? (emphasis added)¹⁹

The pilgrim reaches the divine by passing through the terrestrial; in contrast, the mystic simply transcends the terrestrial. Aside from rare moments of ecstatic rapture, Franc-Gal's condition is that of the pilgrim who has embarked upon a gradual moral and physical peregrination.

To this remoralization of errantry, Aneau adds a third dimension, this time properly philosophical. Knight-errant, pilgrim, Franc-Gal is also a wandering wise man, a cosmopolitan sage. This figure testifies to Aneau's debt to the *prisca theologia* — a synthesis of writings on Moses, pagan mythology, Greek philosophy (Plato and Pythagoras), and theology. Traveling the world over, he transmits wisdom wherever he goes.²⁰ Beyond its explicitly moral function, Franc-Gal's path thus assumes an epistemological value. The desire for knowledge of himself and of the world defines the figure of the medieval knight-errant, who is partly motivated by his curiosity, his desire to confront the unknown and to have marvelous adventures. However, in *Alector*, the philosophical resonances are so consistent that the text could be read as an enigma, with chivalric adventures masking the *prisca theologia* subtext.²¹ This tendency in romance will reach its apogee with Béroalde de Verville's philosophical romances of the late Renaissance.²²

In true Renaissance fashion, Aneau also gives his knight-errant a companion — and *devisant* — in the form of the elderly priest or *Archier*, named Croniel, with whom Franc-Gal makes the final stages of his journey. It is also to the *Archier* that Franc-Gal narrates his past adventures. Their conversation is a clever framing device, which allows Franc-Gal to tell his own story and the *Archier* to interlace the history of Orbe. But it is more than this. In fact, the two wise men are engaged in a properly philosophical dialogue, partly thanks to their common interest in *prisca theologia*. It becomes increasingly apparent that, in narrating the story of his own *peregrinations*, Franc-Gal is also telling the story of humanity. However, this story can only be fully understood with the help of the *Archier*, who contributes some of the missing pieces and confirms the truth of those affirmations that lack verisimilitude. Thus, when Franc-Gal tells the *Archier* about the visions he had during moments of ecstasy, the latter proceeds to tell a story of Orbe that

serves to confirm and complete Franc-Gal's revelations. He begins his own story by stating:

Ce que tu as compté . . . est admirable, mais neantmoins assez vraysemblable et croyable, quant à mon opinion. Car le mesme ou semblable a esté depuys n'aguères entendu en ceste region par une merveilleuse & supernaturelle adventure. (pp. 58–59)

The addition of dialogue to the theme of *homo viator* suggests that allegory alone fails to satisfy the humanist's desire for truth, as though merely traveling towards the Creator were insufficient without *discours*. Humanist colloquy is thus called upon to fill in the epistemological gaps of the pilgrimage allegory.

In short, Aneau has remotivated the medieval *homo viator*, against his own century's critiques of pilgrimage, while giving the figure a properly humanist bent. Like Rabelais, Aneau uses romance conventions in order to fashion a work of high erudition: Aneau-romancer borrows the figure of the knight-errant from discredited romance and reaffirms his higher moral meaning, while his humanist preoccupations lead him to add an epistemological value to his protagonist's errantry. In *Alector*, the idealized path obeys a triple imperative: narrative structure, knowledge, and salvation.²³

Yet Aneau also introduces deferment and narrative fragmentation into pilgrimage allegory. He prefaces *Alector* with the deliberately enigmatic "Propos Rompus." These are presented as "damaged, incomplete, and non-consecutive pages" (p. 13) of the "manuscript" that Aneau pretends to have found, translated, and published. In the guise of a translator and editor, Aneau claims to have included these fragments because they "semblent bien estre parties appartenantes à la precedence de l'histoire" (*ibid.*). He then announces the narrative proper with the heading, "*Fragment de L'Histoire Fabuleuse du Preux Chevalier Alector . . .*" (p. 17), begins the narrative *in medias res*, proceeds to defer the outcome of Alector's trial to the very end, and finally resolves the narrative tension only to announce a forthcoming sequel, as the reader is reminded that *Alector* has been only the first part.²⁴ All of these instances are variations on the theme of suspense, insofar as they are designed to toy with the reader's expectations through a manipulation of *dispositio*. Terence Cave has traced the origin of the modern notion of suspense to Marco Vida's *De arte poetica* (1527).²⁵ First Vida, then Amyot and others, articulated a model and terminology for understanding the psychological force of suspense, its capacity to hold the reader captive until the plot's resolution.²⁶ Cave describes Vida's conception of the effect of suspense on the reader as a mixture of pleasure and anguish:

Le poète s'ingénie donc à stimuler ce désir, à tourner l'esprit du lecteur ça et là, à le "suspendre" et ainsi à le tourmenter ("suspenditque diu miseros torquetque legentes"). . . . L'effet de lecture décrit ici est très proche de la conception moderne du suspens dans la mesure où l'accent est mis sur la relation de pouvoir entre auteur et lecteur et sur l'angoisse qu'éprouve celui-ci: la lecture est représentée comme un plaisir masochiste.²⁷

Centuries of novelists were to exploit and elaborate upon the findings of these Renaissance theorists, and suspense remains the defining trait of the best-seller today. A closer look at *Alector's dispositio* will allow us to determine the effect of suspense on moral and philosophical allegory.

Alector's opening *in medias res* stages the young Alector engaged in hand-to-hand combat against overwhelming odds. But the reader has to wait before the circumstances which led up to this point are uncovered: these are provided in the form of analepsis only after the young hero is captured, imprisoned, and finally unjustly accused of the murder of his beloved Noemi. By the time the reader's desire to know how Alector ended up in such a plight has been satisfied, a new source of curiosity and anxiety has been set in place: will he be found innocent or guilty? This structure is in fact a perfect realization of the kind of suspense described by Jacques Amyot in the preface to the *Histoire aethiopique de Héliodorus* (1547). Amyot praises the beginning *in medias res* because it immediately throws the reader into a state of restless desire, which an ingenious *dispositio* will prolong until the very end of the narrative. The first pages immediately create

un passionné desir d'entendre le commencement: et toutesfois il [Heliodorus] les tire si bien par l'ingenieuse liaison de son conte, que l'on n'est point resolu de ce que l'on trouve tout au commencement du premier livre jusques à ce que l'on ayt leu la fin du cinqiesme. Et quand on est là venu, encore a l'on plus grande envie de voir la fin, que l'on n'avoit au paravant d'en voir le commencement: De sorte que tousjours l'entendement demeure suspendu, jusques à ce que l'on vienne à la conclusion, laquelle laisse le lecteur satisfait.²⁸

Accordingly, *Alector's* beginning *in medias res* creates the reader's desire ("passioné desir") to know how the young hero came to be standing in the middle of a courtyard in the city of Orbe (to remain a mystery until Chapter Twenty-One), surrounded by armed men determined either to kill the young *preux* or to take him prisoner. And by the time the reader's curiosity is satisfied ("resolu") during the opening statements of Alector's criminal trial, a new desire ("grande envie") has already been set in place: "what will the final verdict be?" This question will not be answered until the conclusion ("jusques a ce que l'on vienne à la conclusion").

Not only does Aneau use suspense to string his reader along from one desire (“*désir*,” “*envie*”) to the next, but he also goes so far as to use philosophical inquiry to increase the effect of suspense. After beginning the story *in medias res* and then deferring the outcome of Alector’s trial to the end, Aneau proceeds to insert what is, in effect, a long discussion of the nature of human existence. This discussion thus takes place in the narrative space between the young hero’s accusation and his acquittal following his heroic judicial combat against a dragon. Aneau leaves the reader wondering, “will Alector be able to defeat the monstrous serpent, thereby proving his innocence?”, and then later, “will father and son be reunited?”; and in the meantime, Franc-Gal and the *Archier* engage in an ongoing dialogue, which offers the most extended moral and philosophical reflections in *Alector*. Their dialogue is used not only as part of a humanist quest for truth, which should be an end unto itself, but also to keep the reader hanging in anticipation of the plot’s resolution — a very perverse state of affairs.

This same mechanism is at work in the description of the utopian city of Orbe. Aneau places his exploration of utopia, a creation dear to the hearts of humanists, right before the judicial trial and long-suspended father-son reunion. Why here? Aneau could very well have begun *Alector* with a description of the city of Orbe, all the more naturally because this is where the action begins. Instead, its position in the *dispositio* effectively increases the reader’s anticipation. Placing this description right before the resolution of the narrative tension amounts to using it as a period of narrative *stasis* (simply by virtue of its descriptive nature) in order to defer the resolution of the narrative *action*. Indeed, Aneau goes on to admit to having used this description as a digression or narrative “extravagance”:

Velà la description de la renommée ville de Orbe, qui a esté icy mise par forme de digression, après laquelle extravagance se fault retourner à notre propos, qui estoit du combat d’Alector contre le serpent des Arenes. (p. 182)²⁹

Is humanist utopia, then, merely a “digression” from heroic adventure — the true matter at hand? By submitting humanist moral and philosophical reflection to *dispositio*, Aneau heightens the enjoyment of romance. To reformulate a metaphor from the time, Aneau has used philosophical doctrine, which was considered to have a bitter taste for the uninitiated, as a means of making philistine romance seem even sweeter.³⁰

There is thus a fundamental incompatibility between what the explanatory moral discourse promises (teleology) and Aneau’s actual narrative practice (suspense). Characters and narrator alike never cease to gloss the

heroic adventures in *Alector*, resituating them on a higher moral or philosophical plane. They promise a firm *telos* (God, Truth), a vertical allegorizing that transcends the literal. Yet the *dispositio* itself belies these claims, since Aneau disrupts the moral, epistemological, and narrative unity of the path allegory by introducing deferment and narrative fragmentation — in short, suspense, a strictly profane mechanism tending to a desacralization of life's paths. The pleasure of suspense derives from the horizontality of *dispositio*, which leads from one adventure to the next, sometimes back again, but always on the same narrative plane. Instead of transcending the literal by means of allegory, the reader is ultimately carried away by plot, a movement that is potentially endless.

The Myth of Sisyphus: Romance and the Eternal Return

Endlessness and uselessness are precisely the specters that haunt Aneau's generation of *romancers*. For these writers interested in long narrative (*grand oeuvre*) and in using at least some of the conventions of chivalric romance, there was what one might term a crisis of finality. Rabelais structures the *Quart Livre* on an unfulfilled quest — a radical suspension of the end. He also invokes the image of a Sisyphus-inspired Diogenes to characterize his writing *persona* in the prologue to the *Tiers Livre* in 1546: he first describes all the ways in which Diogenes rolls his tub, then compares this tub-rolling to the myth of Sisyphus, recalling how the latter was condemned to roll a rock to the top of a mountain and watch it slide back down, only to roll it back up again in an eternal cycle of futility. He concludes by stating that Sisyphus embodies his own condition as a writer.³¹ At the time of the *Tiers Livre*, Rabelais found himself writing in the shadow of the *Amadis* paradigm, a fact that may help us to understand why teleology seems to preoccupy him more in the third and fourth books than it had in the first two.

In his eleventh *Amadis* (*privilège* 1552), Jacques Gohory also uses the Diogenes-Sisyphus figure, which he may very well have borrowed from Rabelais. This time the image is invoked in order to represent what learned people think of the readers of chivalric or sentimental romance. In the opinion of “les gens de meilleur estomac” — that is, those who can digest philosophy and history (“la vraie histoire”) — reading strictly for the pleasure of romance's “joyeux devis” is a “besongne autant oysive, que de rouller le tonneau de Diogenes pour faire plus que rien.”³²

In both cases, the choice of Diogenes-Sisyphus for an image of the writer or reader points to the same problem of finality at stake in *Alector*.

What most characterizes the condemnation imposed on Sisyphus is the endless frustration of his activity, for he will never accomplish his sole purpose yet can only persist. Rabelais and Gohory are in a sense troubled by the problem of purposelessness — of circularity — especially since Gohory and, to a lesser extent, Rabelais, are both writing within the larger framework of a cycle. The circle was traditionally an important pattern, especially in medieval romance cycles.³³ However, the cycle's *reprise* is unlike Sisyphus's eternal return, since the former suggests harmony, while the latter is the epitome of frustration.

Several years before *Alector*, Aneau treated the myth of Sisyphus in his *Picta Poesis*, a book of emblems first written in Latin in 1552 and then, during the same year, translated by Aneau himself into French under the title of *L'Imagination poétique*. One of the emblems, entitled "Labeur de la vie interminable," depicts Sisyphus.³⁴ Aneau first describes Sisyphus as never resting ("sans repos"), condemned eternally to

. . . roller une pierre
 Au faist d'un Roc. Qui posée n'est pas:
 Qu'incontinent elle retombe à bas.
 Puits est contrainct derechief devaller.
 Ainsi sans cesse allant, & revenant,
 Est sans repos celle pierre tournant. (lines 4–9)³⁵

Like the pilgrim or *viator*, Sisyphus embodies the human condition:

Celuy sisyphes, est tout homme mortel.
 Et la pierre, est Labeur perpetuel.
 Dur, à durer iusqu'à mort ordonné. (10–12)

Of course, unlike Sisyphus, the *viator* is moving ever nearer to "home," increasingly closer to God. There is a comfortable teleology to the pilgrim's labors that clearly distinguishes his "restlessness" from Sisyphus's ceaseless, but unproductive, activity:

Puits quand le soir à sa peine journalle
 Il pense avoir mise une fin finale:
 Au lendemain vient à recommencer
 Nouvel labeur, & travail sans cesser. (17–20)

Eternally *in transit*, Sisyphus goes nowhere.

In spite of the emblem's title, "Labeur de la Vie Interminable," the end of Sisyphus's labors will eventually arrive. Unlike his classical counterpart, who is of course already dead and so condemned to eternal frustration,

Aneau's Sisyphus will endure his labors only until death: "à durer iusqu'à mort ordonné." This detail reinforces the allegorical meaning Aneau gives his Sisyphus, who is the personification of the human — mortal — condition. However, while Aneau's Sisyphus will perish, nothing apparently leads up to this moment. All Sisyphus can do is continue to roll his stone until death surprises him.

In other words, Sisyphus is condemned to a form of serialization. Instead of realizing the purpose of his endeavor once and for all, he is obliged to begin anew each day — "au lendemain vient à recommencer" — in an eternal cycle of sterile repetition based on the suspension of the end. If Rabelais and Gohory chose this figure to express their anxiety regarding long prose narrative, it is because in the wake of the best-selling *Amadis* cycle, circularity lost the fragile connection to harmony that it had possessed in medieval cycles. It is Sisyphus, and not the pilgrim, who speaks most eloquently of the true relationship of Renaissance romance to teleology.

Barthélemy Aneau tries to resist the pull of the *Amadis* paradigm by stating over and over again that the readers and characters of his *histoire fabuleuse* are not like Sisyphus. They are not wasting their time like Gohory's readers of "joyeux devis," themselves errant, lost in the circularity of so many exercises in futility. Characters and narrator alike promise that secular romance can still be consonant with sacred truths, that the path of romance, like the paths of life, remains sacred: a privileged way to knowledge and even salvation.

In effect, though, *Alector* succumbs to the eternal return, the potentially endless movement from text to sequel, from the beginning to the end to the beginning, and so on. The end of *Alector* testifies to Aneau's failure to resist this movement. Here one discovers that the pilgrim's return to the Creator on "the last day of his pilgrimage" is not, strictly speaking, the end of the story. Apparently, this moment of high allegory, when the creature returns to the Creator, is not sufficient to provide a narrative climax or definitive closure. With the narrator's announcement that *Alector* is "to be continued," the reader's desire is once again set into motion. Many "beaux faictz" (p. 200) await the reader in the next book, including Alector's "faictz et gestes heroiques," his trip to Gaule, and the arrival of the so-called "Peregrin Pensif." "Tout cecy," states the narrator with the last words of *Alector*, "sera narré en la seconde partie, car icy prent fin la premiere" (*ibid.*). Like Sisyphus, *Alector*'s reader must prepare to begin his labors all over again and to follow the journey of a second hero, Alector himself, whose own

adventures are only just beginning. Driven by desire and not moral purpose, *Alector's* mode of reading forfeits the divine *telos* which it still claims to seek. Pilgrimage allegory is the remnant of a promise that can no longer be kept, for suspense thwarts any attempt to transcend the horizontal tug of plot.

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Notes

1. My thanks to Ullrich Langer, Marian Rothstein, and the anonymous readers for *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* for their comments and suggestions regarding this essay.
2. "... choysi moy quelque un de ces beaux vieulx romans Francoys, comme un *Lancelot*, un *Tristan*, ou autres: & en fay renaitre au monde un admirable *Iliade* & laborieuse *Eneïde*" (*Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse*, ed. Henri Chamard [Paris: Didier, 1948], 2. 5. 20–23 [pp. 128–29]). For a discussion of Renaissance classifications of the novel as a form of epic, see Marian Rothstein, *Reading in the Renaissance: Amadis de Gaule and the Lessons of Memory* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), pp. 17–31.
3. For an account of the reception of *Amadis de Gaule*, France's first best-seller, see Michel Simonin, "La Disgrâce d'Amadis," *Studi Francesi* 28 (1984): 1–35, and Rothstein. Jodelle enumerates the charges against romance in his preface to the *Histoire palladienne*, Claude Colet's translation of a Spanish imitation of the *Amadis* cycle (Étienne Jodelle, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Enea Balmas, vol. 1 [Paris: Gallimard, 1965], pp. 92–97).
4. Jean-Pierre Gutton, in *La Société et les pauvres: L'Exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534–1789* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1970), discusses the proximity of certain trades such as *colportage* to vagabondage in early modern France. Vagabonds attempted to hide their true condition under the guise of these trades and sometimes drifted back and forth between vagabondage and peddling various wares.
5. The changing meaning of *errer* is discussed by Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 206. Patricia Parker studies the multiple connotations and functions of errantry in the context of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* in *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 16–53.
6. "Jamais Livre ne fut embrassé avec tant de faveur que cettuy, l'espace de vingt ans ou environ" (Étienne Pasquier, *Les Recherches de la France*, ed. Marie-Luce Demonet et al., gen. eds. Marie-Madeleine Fragonard and François Roudaut, 3 vols. [Paris: Champion, 1996], 2: 1410).
7. See Simonin.
8. Jodelle refers to the opinion of "plusieurs espritz" who held romance to be "choses inutiles." He himself confesses to having called romance a "perte de temps" (p. 93).
9. For discussions of the complicated narrative structure of late medieval romance, see Douglas Kelly, "Multiple Quests in French Verse Romance: *Merveilles de Rigomer* and *Claris et Laris*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 9 (1969): 257–66; Jane H. M. Taylor, "The Fourteenth Century: Context, Text and Intertext," in *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J.

- Lacy, Douglas Kelly and Keith Busby, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 267–332; and François Suard, *Guillaume d'Orange: Étude du roman en prose* (Paris: Champion, 1979).
10. Jodelle refers to this opinion: “Voire et se trouvoient quelques uns entre nous, tant ennemys de ceste façon d'historier, qu'ilz disoient n'estre point difficile à un homme, bien né, apres avoir un peu fantastiqué, de faire filler en parlant, un Amadis tout entier, ou quelque autre mache-enclume, sans se troubler ny en son discours ny en sa parolle” (p. 93).
 11. See the discussion by Marie-Madeleine Fontaine (“Introduction,” *Alector ou Le Coq: Histoire fabuleuse*, by Barthélemy Aneau, ed. Marie-Madeleine Fontaine [Geneva: Droz, 1996], pp. xl–lxviii) of the *histoire fabuleuse*, a term also used by other humanists such as Gohory and Jodelle (in reference to Colet's *Histoire palladienne*) to distinguish their creations from chivalric romance. The term resonates with Macrobius's *narratio fabulosa*, suggesting a fiction or falsehood (*fabula*) that is nevertheless useful. It suggests a “lie” (such as a myth or an allegory) that also speaks “the truth.” All citations of *Alector* will be from Fontaine's edition; page numbers will be given in the body of the text.
 12. Late medieval romance sometimes exploited the drama of the separation and reunion of father and son. One example of this is the fifteenth-century prose romance entitled *Histoire des seigneurs de Gavre* (ed. René Stuip [Paris: Champion; Geneva: Slatkine, 1993]). Like *Alector*, the *Seigneurs de Gavre* tells of the separation of father and son, who are reunited at the end of the romance. Both texts also pretend to tell of the ancestors of a noble family. A number of romances from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries fall under the rubric of what Georges Duby has termed “genealogical literature.” See the latter's *Le Chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: Le Mariage dans la France féodale* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).
 13. Fontaine suggests that Aneau took this Hesiodic motif from Pedro Mexia's *Silva de varia lecion* (1540), translated into French in 1554 by Claude Gruget under the title of *Les Diverses Leçons de Pierre Messie*.
 14. The allegory of the pilgrimage of life had deep roots; from Scripture itself to Guillaume de Deguileville's popular *Pèlerinage de vie humaine*, written during the fourteenth century and printed four times between 1485 and 1499. The prologue explains the significance of the extended allegory: “Tous princes princesses et aultres gens habitans sur la terre en laquellé comme dit monseigneur saint pol l'apostre ils nont point de demeure permanent, mais ils sont tous et toutes pelerins et pelerines” (ed. J. J. Stürzinger, Roxburghe Club, No. 124 [London: J.B. Nichols, 1893]).
 15. Following Taylor, I borrow this term from V. I. A. Propp, *Morphologie du conte*, trans. Claude Ligny (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 114–15. See Taylor's discussion of the importance of this principle for quest and adventure in fourteenth-century romance (pp. 292–97).
 16. “. . . hors la premiere enfance et la puerilité,” states Priscaraxe, “et à l'entrée de l'adolescence, à un jeune filz, mesmement extraict de bonne race, n'est honneste ny expedient de demourer inglorieusement soubz l'aile de la mere, ains plustost suyvre les vertueuses traces du pere . . . chercher l'immortel honneur par heureuses poursuyctes de grandes fortunes et adventures, où les puissances superieures l'appellent et conduisent” (p. 126).
 17. See Gerhart Ladner, “Homo Viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order,” *Speculum* 42 (1967): 233–59.

18. The motif of the "path of virtue" also appears in more explicitly didactic literature such as the so-called *Bibles Historiées* printed during the first part of the century. The prologue explicitly defines the function of the *Bible Historiée* to be helping us to find "le vray chemin de la gloire eternelle" (*Bible Historiée* [Lyons: Pierre Bailly, 1521]).
19. François Rabelais, *Le Tiers Livre*, ed. Jean Céard (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1995), p. 5.
20. See Marie-Madeleine Fontaine, "Alector de Barthélemy Aneau, ou les Aventures du Roman après Rabelais," in *Mélanges sur la littérature de la Renaissance à la mémoire de V.-L. Saulnier*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 202 (Geneva: Droz, 1984), pp. 556–67.
21. Fontaine, in the notes to her edition, has documented the hermetic intertext underlying Alector's elaborate system of allegorical correspondences.
22. On the interplay between fictional and philosophical elements in Béroalde's romances (*Les Aventures de Floride* [1592–96], *Voyage des princes fortunez* [1610], *Le Restablisement de Troye* [1597], *La Pucelle d'Orleans* [1599], and *L'Histoire d'Herodias* [1600]), see Neil Kenny, *The Palace of Secrets: Béroalde de Verville and Renaissance Conceptions of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). There is, however, an important difference: unlike Aneau, Béroalde does not try to couple teleology with romance. Instead, in his *Voyage des princes fortunez*, he privileges romance as quest rather than goal, and as unsystematic and fluctuating rather than as an ordered progression.
23. For a discussion of another humanist recuperation of the romance paradigm, see Ullrich Langer, "Humanism's Antidote to Romance: *L'amant resuscité de la mort d'amour* (1555)," in *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 281–92. Langer argues that Nicolas Denisot reforms the sentimental romance in vogue at the time in order to conform to humanist moral standards — here, perfect friendship based on virtue. He concludes that Denisot's

ethical-rational world seems far removed from the fictional world governed by the movement of desire, by the sense of frustration and errancy of the chivalric romance. . . . It also purports to convey knowledge, practical insights and definitions. In this sense *l'amant resuscité de la mort d'amour* is a work of humanist prudence, and the very fact that it is laboriously written, didactic, and static, makes it into the perfect antidote to that entertaining but what many "doctes" perceived as entirely useless romance. (pp. 291–92)
24. Aneau never wrote this second part because he was killed in 1560 during one of the riots in Lyons.
25. See Terence Cave, "'Suspendere animos': pour une histoire de la notion de suspens," in *Les Commentaires et la naissance de la critique littéraire*, ed. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani and Michel Plaisance (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990), pp. 211–18, and *Pré-histoires: Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), pp. 129–41.
26. The ability to turn the audience's emotions in any direction is also an effect of oratory, beginning with Aristotelian *pathos*. Du Bellay refers to *movere* in the following terms in his *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse*: ". . . celui sera veritablement le poëte que je cherche en nostre Langue, qui me fera indigner, apayser, ejouyr, douloir, aymer, hayr, admirer, etonner, bref, qui tiendra la bride de mes affections, me tournant ça & la à son plaisir" (2. 11. 112–16 [p. 179]).
27. Cave, p. 213.

28. Quoted by Cave, p. 215. Vida makes a similar observation, which Cave paraphrases as follows: "...le poète, après une entrée en matière abrupte, doit fournir une exposition minutieuse des incidents précédents pour que le lecteur ne reste pas dans l'ignorance" (p. 212).
29. In order better to keep the reader in suspense, Vida recommends developing the plot by digressions or *ambages* — sinuous detours and circumlocutions (Cave, p. 212).
30. In the prologue to the eleventh *Amadis*, published a few years before *Alector*, Gohory complained that his conflicting readership put him in a double bind: some readers resented him for spoiling the pleasant stories with austere "doctrine," while others criticized him for spoiling the philosophical meaning with so many bagatelles. He first notes that "le populace grossier qui ne presteroit l'oreille à Platon & Aristote, a besoin qu'on luy deguise l'austerité de sapience souz quelque miel & douceur de volupté," adding that if the reader in search of simple entertainment does not wish to be enlightened, he may simply take the stories and leave the philosophy: "Au fort s'ilz ne reçoivent ces raisons en payement, n'ont qu'à prendre icy ce que trouveront plus au gré de leur palais delicat, reservans la viande plus forte à gens de meilleur estomac. Lesquelz, au contraire, approuveront tant ceste semence de literature, qu'ilz blasmeront le reste du ioyeux devis que les premiers louent" (sig. aiiij^r). Like Aneau, Gohory uses both conventions of chivalric romance and a "higher" meaning — here, alchemy (*L'Onzième Livre d'Amadis de Gaule, Traduit d'Espagnol en Francoys, Continuant les Entreprises Chevaleureuses et Aventures estranges, tant de lui que des Princes de son Sang* . . . [Paris: Estienne Groulleau, 1559]).
31. Diogenes "le [le tonneau] devalloit de mont à val et proecipitoit par le Cranie, puy de val en mont le rapportoit comme Sisyphe faict sa pierre"; Rabelais then compares himself to Diogenes-Sisyphe, stating, "je pareillement" (p. 19). On the Diogenic structure of the *Tiers Livre*, see Edwin M. Duval, *Design of Rabelais' Tiers Livre de Pantagruel* (Geneva: Droz, 1997). Duval argues that the *Tiers Livre* is only ostensibly a-teleological. In reality it possesses a very clear *telos*, which does not lie in the circuitous errance of Panurge's quest, but rather in Pantagruel's evangelical lesson on *caritas* working through beneficence.
32. Gohory, sig. aiiij^r.
33. It could, however, take the more threatening form of the Wheel of Fortune, the symbol of anguish and contingency with which the thirteenth-century *Mort Artus* concludes. For a discussion of medieval conceptions of cyclicity, see *Transtextualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicity in Medieval French Literature*, ed. Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), particularly Michel-André Bossy's "Afterword" (pp. 195–203).
34. Brigitte Biot characterizes Aneau's book of emblems as having an explicitly moral content adapted to a relatively broad public. "Labeur de la vie interminable" sounds a common theme in the collection: namely, the necessity of work. See her discussion of Aneau's poetry in *Barthélemy Aneau, régent de la Renaissance lyonnaise* (Paris: Champion, 1996).
35. *L'Imagination poétique* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme, 1552), pp. 104–5.