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Medieval Lexicon of Multisensory Perception: A Case Study in Middle English and Old French[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the role of phonesthemes and submorphemic units in conveying multisensory experiences in medieval literature. The synaesthetic associations triggered by phonesthetic clusters are apparent in the ambiguous use of lexemes beginning with phonesthetic consonantal sequences, whose interpretation alternates between, or even merges, two different sensory domains. The analysis of case studies in Middle English and Old French highlights the extent to which the phonestheme *gl-* evokes synaesthetic associations across different senses, thus essentially emphasizing the intimate connection between language and the cognitive functions of perception and knowledge in medieval texts.

Over the past few decades, several studies have been devoted to the representation of the senses in the Western Middle Ages, their function and their interdependence. The description of multisensory events appears to have

[1] This article stemmed from the close collaboration of its three authors; however, for the concerns of the Italian academy, we specify that Sibilla Siano is responsible for the introductory section, as well as for the section entitled «Phonesthetic *gl-* in Middle English: The Case of *Gle*»; Nicola D'Antuono is responsible for the section entitled «A Linguistic Theoretical Framework: The Concept of Phonestheme», whereas Elena Muzzolon is responsible for the section entitled «Phonesthetic *gl-* in Old French: The Case of *Glat*», as well as for the concluding section.

been pervasive in both secular and religious narratives. In romances, lavish banquets and courtly celebrations were depicted in terms of intermingling sensory perceptions touching on the brightness of the court, the merriment of the musical entertainment, the flavour of the finest delicacies, the scent of exotic spices as well as the preciousness of the fabrics decorating the hall. The Christian Liturgy too was perceived as an all-encompassing event capable of eliciting all senses: the light of candles, the sound of chants, the smell of incense, the touch of the relics and the taste in the Eucharist all participate in the Christian worshipping experience (Palazzo 2016, 25-40)[2]. In Book X of his *Confessiones*, Augustine goes so far as to describe the synaesthetic communion of all senses as the way whereby one can reach the harmony represented by the sense of the heart[3].

However, the perceived complementarity of all senses was not restricted to the description of multisensory events, but rather extended to the lexicon used to define specific sensory perceptions. If on the one hand the Latin words for the senses, VISUS (sight), AUDITUS (hearing), OLFACTUS (smell), GUSTUS (taste) and TACTUS (touch) appear to have presented little ambiguity (Woolga 2006, 5), on the other their vernacular counterparts reveal a rather nuanced scenario. For instance, the Old French word *veer* not only conveyed the action of seeing, but also meant 'observation', 'recognition', 'study' and even 'consideration', whereas the meaning of the verb *oir* ranged from the description of the auditory function to that of gaining an understanding of something (ivi, 6). Similarly, the Middle English words *seen* and *heren* retained that same polysemy. *Seen* meant not only 'to see', but also 'to observe', 'to discover' or even 'to read', whereas

[2] It might be worth emphasising that the connection between sight and light still persists in modern English, as the semantic fields of sight and light frequently overlap: the eyes are believed to glitter, gleam, shine, flash, blaze, flicker, twinkle or sparkle as much as any source of light. (This list has been compiled by selecting some of the highest-ranking verbs co-occurring with 'eyes' in the BNC Corpus).

[3] «Quid autem amo, cum te amo? Non speciem corporis nec decus temporis, non candorem lucis ecce istum amicum oculis, non dulces melodias cantilenarum omnimodarum, non florum et ungentorum et aromatum suaveolentiam, non manna et mella, non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus: non haec amo, cum amo deum meum. et tamen amo quandam lucem et quandam vocem et quendam olorem et quendam cibum et quendam amplexum, cum amo deum meum, lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat, quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet, quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit, quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret, quod non divellit satietas. hoc est quod amo, cum deum meum amo.» (Augustine 2001, 171-172, x.6.viii). [But what do I love, when I love Thee? Not beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love, when I love my God; and yet I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and embracement when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man: where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. This is it which I love when I love my God] (Augustine 1957, 208).

heren meant both 'to hear' and 'to understand' (MED). The verbs describing sensory experiences might thus show a general tendency to relate the senses with the acquisition of knowledge. However, the association between sensory perceptions and knowledge does not appear to have been unidirectional. Some verbs primarily describing the acquisition / transmission of knowledge could in fact also convey multisensory experiences. The meaning of both the Middle English verb *reden* and the Old French *lire* ranged from 'to read' – a private visual experience – to 'to read aloud' – a communal auditory experience – or even 'to learn by reading' or 'to teach'. Therefore, the action of reading was not exclusively aimed at providing private or communal entertainment, but also some kind of instruction (DMF). In the prologue to his thirteenth-century *Bestiaire d'Amour*, Richard de Fournival states that the human repository of knowledge can be reached through hearing and sight, thus essentially emphasising not only their primary role amongst the other senses, but also their cognitive function[4]. After all, knowledge could only be acquired through the senses.

Et comment on puist repairer a le maison Memoire par painture et par parole, si est aparant par chou que Memoire, qui est la garde des tresors que sens d'omme conquiert par bonté d'engien, fait che qui est trespassé aussi comme present. (Richard de Fournival 2009, 154-157).

[The way wherein it is possible to reach the house of Memory at times by images, at times by words, is apparent in the fact that Memory, the guardian of the treasures conquered by human spirit through intelligence, can transform whatever (belonged to the) past into (something relevant to the) present].

Sight became part of the Christian symbolism through its intimate connection with light. In the Christian doctrine, sound and light were perceived not only as closely interconnected, but also as part of the nature of God Himself. In the Book of Genesis, God created the world by his performative *dixit* through which everything came to existence. Although sound is somehow closer to the unspeakable nature of the Divine, light and sound were simultaneously created and both participate in the Word (Mainoldi 2001, 22).

Dixit autem Deus: Fiant luminaria in firmamento caeli, et dividant diem ac noctem, et sint in signa et tempora, et dies et annos: | ut luceant in firmamento caeli, et illuminent terram. Et factum est ita. (*Genesis*, 1.14-5)[5].

[And God said, «Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, | and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.» And it was so].

[4] In his *De Veritate* – Quaestio 2, Articolus 3 – Thomas Aquinas states that «Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu» (there can be nothing in the intellect that was not in the senses first). Throughout the article, unless otherwise specified all translations are ours. (Tommaso d'Aquino 1992-2005, 206).

[5] *Bible Gateway*, «Biblia Sacra Vulgata» and «New International Version».

However, sight and light are also practically connected, as the latter is the medium whereby visual communication can be attained (Bührer-Thierry 2016, 465-466).

Sight and hearing were assigned a primary role as they were believed to be intimately connected to the intellect, whereas touch, smell and taste were somehow relegated to the bodily nature of human beings[6]. Nevertheless, in spite of their inherent corporal nature, they were also considered in synaesthetic terms. For instance, the Middle English word *tasten* could be used both to express the exercise of the sense of taste and for the examination of someone or something by touching. Sounds were conversely frequently described with adjectives recalling the semantic fields of taste, such as SUAVITAS, DULCIS, FLORATA, thus essentially constructing some sort of «polyphonic communion of sensory values» (Laugerud / Skinneback / Jørgensen 2015, 14).

This phenomenon was not exclusively confined to the lexicon directly associated with the sensorium, but rather involved a number of polysemic words whose meanings extended over the semantic fields of different sensorial perceptions. This paper thus aims at analysing the multisensory polysemy of specific words from a linguistic and semantic perspective. Firth's theory on phonesthemes will provide the linguistic theoretical framework on which the subsequent case studies will be based. In particular, the synaesthetic quality of the phonestheme *gl-* will be considered in the context of the Middle English word *gle* and the Old French *glat*.

1. *A Linguistic Theoretical Framework: The Concept of Phonestheme*

The pairing of sound and meaning is a core research topic for both semiology and linguistics. In Saussurean terms, the indivisible relation between these two components constitutes the essence of the linguistic sign. Contemporary linguistic research, especially in the tradition of generative grammar, has disrupted the one-to-one correspondence between these two components, allowing for the existence in syntax of empty categories (meaning without sound) (Chomsky 1981, 33-34). However, even before the birth of generative linguistics the assumption that there exists a necessarily bijective relation between sound and meaning had already proven problematic, not so much because of a complete lack of correspondence between these components, but rather because some of the outcomes of this pairing appeared to be, so to speak, subatomic: not only less than a word (itself a notoriously elusive concept), but also less than a root,

[6] In the Chapter x of his *Confessiones*, Augustine insists on a possible hierarchical order of the senses in which sight and hearing are the most important. (Palazzo 2016, 27; Newhauser 2014, 5). Both texts provide an in-depth analysis of the perception of the senses in the Middle Ages.

and less than a morpheme. The existence of null morphemes is also problematic in this respect since null morphemes appear to convey meaning without a corresponding phonological realisation. One of these cases is the realisation of the genitive plural case in Russian, which presents the bare nominal root instead of the expected sequence 'root+case marker', e.g. *knig-Ø*, 'of the books' (cfr. Bailyn / Nevins 2008). Another is that of disfixes, in which meaning appears to be conveyed by the subtraction, rather than addition, of linguistic material (e.g., the plural form of French *bœufs* [bø], 'oxen', which seems to be derived from subtraction of a segment from the singular *bœuf* [bœf])[7] (Bloomfield 1933, 217). The case that is investigated in this paper is that of a submorphemic unit, a phonestheme.

The concept of phonestheme was famously introduced by Firth in his seminal work, *Speech* (Firth [1930] 1964, 180-188). It identifies a pattern of sounds which is systematically associated with a certain meaning, and which crucially occurs inside independent lexical items. For instance, the sequence of sounds [gl] is associated with light or shining in several English words that begin with that pattern (*gleam*, *glitter*, *glow*, etc.). Several other phonesthemes have been proposed for English, both prefixal and suffixal, all of them associated with a loose semantics[8]. In our view, the interest of phonesthemes lies in their submorphemic quality (cfr. Dressler 1990, 33-41): like morphemes, phonesthemes are in fact associated with a certain meaning, if a vaguely identified one (e.g., 'brightness' or 'light' in the examples above). Nonetheless, and unlike morphemes, they are not lexically independent. Importantly, what is meant by this is not that phonesthemes are not structurally independent (bound morphemes are not, either), but rather that they seem to exist only as subminimal parts of morphemes: the *gl-* words listed above are all monomorphemic (subtracting *gl-* from them, for instance, does not leave us with an -**eam*, -**itter*, or -**ow* morpheme), and yet do share an association with light or brightness that appears to be conveyed by the initial pattern of sounds.

This fact has two ramifications that are problematic for the traditional understanding of morpheme. First, a morpheme, even if bound, constitutes the smallest meaningful component of meaning, and any subtraction from this atomic component should result in the complete dissolution of meaning. This follows from a Saussurean understanding of sign: if a sign comes into existence as the result of the pairing of sound and meaning, then the consequence of disrupting this pairing should be the loss of any denotational capability or semantic stability. Secondly, a submorpheme, if it in fact constitutes an association of sound and meaning, should itself be a morpheme: the fact that it is not lexically independent is thus unexpected. These facts, along with the

[7] For a more updated treatment of subtractive morphology, cfr. Broadwell (1993).

[8] For a thorough semantic analysis of a body of several English phonesthemes, cfr. Hutchins' (1998) dissertation.

existence of null morphemes and of empty categories in formal syntax, point to a less rigid association of sound and meaning, one that does not require, but rather merely favours, a one-to-one correspondence.

That of phonestheme is a concept that can be easily abused, and if one is to make good use of this category, some caveats are in order. First of all, a phonestheme should strictly adhere to the definition provided above, and not just any phenomenon that presents some degree of iconicity, or falls short of full arbitrariness, should be automatically labelled as a phonestheme. For example, onomatopoeia is not phonesthetic, given that an onomatopoeic word is, in fact, a unitary, self-contained linguistic expression (though it may in turn contain phonesthemes).

Secondly, and quite importantly for the present discussion, such phenomena as the *bouba-kiki* (Ramchandaran / Hubbard 2001) or *takete-maluma* effect[9] (Köhler 1929, 242), which demonstrates that speakers tend to associate the words *bouba-maulma* with the perception of 'roundedness' and *kiki-takete* with that of 'spikiness', are also not relevant to the topic at hand. In fact, such synaesthetic effects, though they may have a role in tarnishing the arbitrariness of language and introduce some degree of motivation in the lexicon, are not directly connected to the problem of meaning and reference in the way phonesthemes are. Of course, synaesthesia may have a role in the realisation of phonesthemes (for example, voiceless stops are more likely to participate in phonesthemes that are related to, say, the semantics of 'explosion' or 'sudden noise' than liquids or other sonorants). But what is crucial to phonesthemes, and not to synaesthesia in general, is that they present a degree of conventionalised semantic and referential stability which, albeit not lexically independent, is normally associated with morphemes or words.

The nature of this conventionality is also important. Kwon (2016) investigates in an experimental setting the cross-linguistic universality of English phonesthemes, which he partially derives from the aforementioned work by Hutchins (1998). The author departs from Peirce's definition of icon as a sign that displays a close resemblance to its referent (Buchler 1955, 105) and further assumes Sonesson's (1997) distinction between primary and secondary iconicity. In primary iconicity, a sign is associated with (some features of) a referent by virtue of its similarity to the referent. This similarity is the primary condition for the understanding of the semiotic relation between the sign and the referent: a portrait of a horse is an icon for its referent in that it is similar to it. In secondary iconicity, on the other hand, the existence of a conventional sign-relation is a precondition for noticing the similarity of the sign to its referent. Many iconic signs rely upon some degree of conventionalisation to convey their meaning among a community of users; for instance, George Stubbs' 1762 painting of the horse *Whistlejacket* has a higher similarity to its referent than

[9] Cfr. also Usnadze (1924) for an earlier observation of the phenomenon.

an item of signage (e.g., the meaning of the sign that indicates the presence of speed humps is only recoverable as part of a vocabulary of street signs, which must be mastered by users so that they may link the crude representation of the speed hump to its referent).

Kwon's experiment consisted in asking two groups of native speakers of English and Korean respectively to associate some non-words, which crucially started with ten different phonesthetic patterns, to a given semantic field. The performance of English speakers was variable: the non-words starting with *gl-* in particular were identified as associated with light or vision by a considerable 61% of participants, while 43% associated *sq-* non-words with softness and contraction, and just 33% of speakers associated *cl-* non-words with the noise produced by two objects coming together. On the other hand, none of the Korean performed above the chance probability of being correct for any of the ten phonesthemes involved. From this, Kwon concludes that phonesthemes are associated to a semantic field not through primary, but through secondary iconicity: the non-existent English words were identified as referring to light or vision because they shared a phonestheme (i.e., a submorphemic unit) with other English vocabulary items that started with the same sound pattern, not because of an intrinsic 'synaesthetic' quality of the [gl] pattern. Moreover, the variable performance of English speakers also shows that certain phonesthemes are semantically stronger than others, as some sound patterns were more easily linked to their purported meaning than others.

This datum is crucial to the present case study because it shows that a phonetic similarity between words may be enough to pull them towards a certain semantic field, provided the linguistic community shares the lexical awareness that a certain sound pattern, despite being submorphemic, is associated with a certain meaning. Phonesthemes are thus not to be understood as a mystical synaesthetic connection between language and the world, but as a lexically relevant phenomenon that can function as a trailblazer for conceptual and semantic associations between words.

The *gl-* phonestheme is associated with light, vision, or brightness, a broad semantic field which is known from the research tradition of cognitive linguistics to constitute a fertile source of conceptual metaphors (cfr. Lakoff 1980; Croft / Cruse 2004). Of course, not all the words that begin with that sound pattern have an etymological association with light or vision: *gland*, *glove*, *glue* and *glutamate* do not. But the very presence of that sound pattern at the beginning of a word makes it in principle possible for that word to be associated with the semantic field of brightness or vision. In the wake of cognitive linguistic and anthropological research, this association is especially expected for those words whose meaning, related to noise or hearing for instance, lends itself to synaesthetic processes that are commonly employed in conceptual metaphors. To make a very few examples of this well-known phenomenon, 'brightness' is a property of both light and sound in English, while in Italian *argentino*,'silvery', is

an adjective reserved for the characterisation of (bright) sounds, and the colour green may be described as *squillante*, 'ringing'. Such conceptual metaphors that are grounded in vision are so widespread that they have themselves become a metaphor for the cognitive linguistic program. In light of these observations, it is not unreasonable to expect that the general cognitive-linguistic tendency to link vision to other perceptive experiences (hearing, understanding, etc.) and the language-specific factor represented by the presence of a phonestheme *gl-* that carries a broad semantic characterisation of light or brightness will potentially reinforce each other. This reinforcement will be expected in particular for those words which, although not etymologically or semantically related to vision, begin with the same sound pattern [gl], and are related to some other kind of perception, especially hearing. The case studies that will follow are based upon the idea that this hypothesis is worth testing, and that the liaison, collocation, or formulaic recurrence of synaesthetic interrelation between words that belong to the field of vision and hearing can be motivated or consolidated by phonesthetic considerations, which can in turn determine ideal connections, stylistic habits, and literary commonplaces.

It is opportune to spend a final word of caution. The Proto-Indo-European roots from which the words that are involved in the following case studies derive have different origins and have gone down different development paths in Indo-European languages. The expressions associated with light and brightness on the one hand, and the other words dealt with in this study mainly belonging to the semantic field of sound, on the other, are derived from different Proto-Indo-European roots diachronically. But what is crucial is that, as demonstrated by the experiment above and as proposed in the literature mentioned in this section, the association that is relevant here is a synchronic process: quite obviously, speakers have no access to the history of the words and roots they use; their reasoning is driven by online associations between the phonetic form of the word (the presence of a phonestheme) and the other words in their mental lexicon that share that given submorphemic unit. That this process is synchronic and independent from the different origins of the words involved is demonstrated by the fact that in Kwon's experiment speakers applied that reasoning even to non-existent words, of which they could have no previous knowledge, and which obviously had no history in the language. The languages that are dealt with in these case studies are historical to us, but not to their speakers, who, as members of the same species, shared with us the same cognition and the same faculty of language, beyond considerations of cultural and anthropological differences[10].

[10] For these reasons, we do not believe that our study runs the risk of neglecting the importance of synchronic factors in language development. This development is indeed independent, at least in its causes and origins, from literary usage, but this usage may nonetheless, as an expression of human language on a par with any other, be influenced by such cross-linguistically valid mechanisms. On

2. *Phonesthetic gl- in Middle English: The Case of Gle*

The synaesthetic quality of the phonestheme *gl-* is apparent in the Middle English word *gle*, which represents an instance of multisensory perception, by conveying a sense of blissfulness and delight stimulating both hearing and sight. Etymologically speaking, *gle* derives from the Old English *gliw*, meaning 'glee', 'joy', 'minstrelsy', 'mirth', 'jesting' and 'drollery' (*Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*). No reference to the visual sphere can be detected either in the Old English word or in its Old Norse etymology. The Old Norse *glý*, retained in fact merely the emotional dimension, meaning exclusively 'joy' and 'merriment'[11]. Yet, in the *Middle English Dictionary*, *gle* appears to be associated with 'shining brightness', 'brilliance', 'splendour' and 'fairness' at least from the fifteenth century. As far as can be reconstructed from the corpus of extant Middle English texts, the word *gle* appears to have undergone a process of semantic widening gradually incorporating different sensory perceptions.

The Middle English authors of both secular and religious texts might have been fully aware of the semantic potential of the multisensorial polysemy of *gle*. In the mid fifteenth-century *Towneley Mystery Plays*, *gle* appears in fact to elude any straightforward interpretation entailing a specific sensory dimension. At the moment in which Lucifer manifests his *hybris* by declaring that nothing shall stand his might, he describes himself as pure emanation of light, *game* and *gle*.

I am so fare and bright:
Of me commys all this light,
This gam and all this gle;
Agans my grete myght
May nothyng stand then be.
(Fitzgerald / Sebastian 2013, 142, ll. 82-86).

[I am so handsome and bright: | I emanates all this light, | this joy and this *gle*; | May nothing stand my great might].

In this context, *gle* cannot be merely interpreted as light, since this feature has already been mentioned in the previous line, not even with 'pleasure' and 'delight', which appear somehow too simplistic to describe the whole extent of his rebellion. It seems rather to be interpreted as something that belonged to his previous angelic nature. *Gle* might thus describe the result of the appeasement of auditory and visual sensory perceptions. Yet, according to the fourteenth-century philosopher Jacobus, since angels have no material bodies, their songs could not but be silent (Bude 2022, 14-28). In Bude's words, «Jacobus

the linguistic side, literary sources are thus a precious attestation of the phenomenon under exam, which cannot be disregarded in the analysis of older stages of languages or of extinct languages.

[11] *Ordbøkene*, «Bokmålsordboka og Nynorskordboka».

is allowing that metaphysical bodies – the bodies of angels – could also be entwined with song, even though those bodies did not attach themselves to matter and their songs were phenomenally silent.» (ivi, 14) In Jacobus' views, although silent, angelic music could be considered a type of real music (*ibid.*). The music produced by the angels might reflect their intimate relationship with God. Therefore, the inherent quality of angelic music might allow the drawing of a parallel between multisensory perceptions and an all-encompassing sense of appeasing, being it generated by their contemplation of God Himself. The association between angels, music and beatitude is further enriched by their being pure emanation of light, thus essentially condensing all the outlined meanings of the word *gle*.

The complex polysemy of *gle* does not appear to be restricted to religious contexts, but rather extends to secular romances. Its meaning ranges from general merriment to brightness and music, thus essentially condensing all characteristics of courtly celebrations (MED). The early fourteenth-century version of *Guy of Warwick* included in the Auchinleck Manuscript (Edinburgh, NLS Adv. 19.2.1) might provide further evidence as of a possible synaesthetic use of the word *gle*. After much wandering on the continent in search of honour and fame, Guy of Warwick eventually returns to his homeland. His renown has grown to such an extent that his beloved Felice, daughter to the earl of Warwick, finally agrees to marry him. The marriage is followed by fourteen-day celebrations characterised by music and merriment[12]. The customary description of the lavishness of courtly banquets is supplemented by a lengthy list of musical instruments followed by an instance *gle* that might encompass all sensory perceptions.

For þer was al maner of gle
Þat hert miȝt þinke oþer eyȝe se
As ȝe may list & liþe.
(ll. 7125-7127)[13].

[Since there was all manner of *gle* | that heart could think of or eye see,| or one might listen to].

The kind of entertainment characterising the courtly celebrations appears to entail not only sight and hearing, but also anything the heart could think of. Although only these two senses are openly mentioned, one might argue that the description of courtly celebrations might be considered synaesthetic in nature, as the other senses as well are directly involved. Taste is elicited by the delicacies served during the banquet, touch by the exotic precious fabrics and smell by the

12 Significantly, the same number of days is also reported in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for the Christmas celebrations.

13 All quotations from the Auchinleck Manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. 19.2.1) are taken from Burnley / Wiggins 2003.

fragrances emanated by spices[14]. The context of *Guy of Warwick* is admittedly a purely secular one; nevertheless, the *gle* envisaged by this redactor appears not far from the contemplative experience depicted in the previous instance, a state of blissfulness appeasing all senses. Significantly, the reference to this all-encompassing «maner of gle» is unique to the Auchinleck Manuscript, as no other Middle English version nor even the Anglo-Norman source text contains it[15]. The Middle English redactor thus seems to have been willing not only to expand his source text, but also to clarify the inner quality of the entertainment.

The polysemy of *gle* is further explored a few lines later. The *glewemen* rewarded for their *gle* might well be interpreted as musicians, but also as professional entertainers in general, thus essentially maintaining both visual and auditory dimensions.

Þai ȝouen glewemen for her gle
Robes riche, gold & fe,
Her ȝiftes were nouȝt gnede.
(ll. 7131-7133).

[They gave the professional entertainers for their *gle* | rich clothes, gold and money, | they did not hold back in giving gifts].

An additional instance of *gle* can be detected in the words of Felice's father announcing the upcoming celebrations.

«Now for fourteniȝt it schal be
Þe bridal hold wiþ gamen & gle
At Warwike in þat tyde.»
(ll. 7083-7085).

[«Nor for two weeks the celebrations will be | hold with entertainments and *gle* | at Warwick [castle] in that time.»].

The meaning of the word *gle* is reinforced by its co-occurrence with the word *game* in some sort of alliterating hendiadys evoking the utmost expression of courtly entertainment.

Even when the word *gle* undoubtedly relates to the auditory dimension, it frequently appears to refer to a music of an almost supernatural quality. In

14 The description of King Arthur's Christmas banquet in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* might provide an example (ll. 37-84) (Andrew / Waldron 2007, 208-209).

15 After the description of the musical entertainment, the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic* immediately shifts the attention to the gifts given to poor knights and prisoners. «The maiden was splendidly prepared and was married to Guy with great honour. Then they held the wedding-feast and celebrated for four days. There were plenty of minstrels, the best of the kingdom – good harpers, players on viols and rotes, fiddlers and tambourine-players. There were all kinds of jugglers, and monkeys and bears frolicked there. Poor knights and prisoners were given rich gifts; they were splendidly paid with plenty of gold and silver, robes and precious cloth, white and grey furs, and good horses. On the fifth day they left and went back to their own lands.» (Weiss 2008, 179).

another poem from the Auchinleck Manuscript, *St Patrick's Purgatory*, the description of the harmony created in the Earthly Paradise is conveyed through the description of the music produced by the «foules of heuen».

Oþer ioies he seiȝe anouȝ:
Heiȝe tres wiþ mani a bouȝ,
Þeron sat foules of heuen,
& breke her notes wiþ miri gle,
Burdoun & mene gret plente,
& hautain wiþ heiȝe steuen.
(*St Patrick's Purgatory*, ll. 863-868).

[He saw enough of other joys: | tall trees with many branches, | where the fowls of heaven sat | and started singing with merry *gle*, | many of them sang the accompaniment in a law voice, | whereas others the higher notes in high voices].

Significantly, the two archbishops that Sir Owain meets in this heavenly setting explain that the Earthly Paradise is the place in which all senses are appeased, «into this Paradis, | Ther joie and blis ever is» (Foster 2004, ll. 982-983). In *Sir Orfeo*, the eponymous character's ability to perform wonderful *gle* allows him to have his beloved Heurodis freed from the Fairy King's imprisonment, thus essentially implying that his music somehow possesses some superhuman, enchanting powers.

Þe king herkneþ & sitt ful stille,
To here his gle he haþ gode wille;
Gode bourde he hadde of his gle,
Þe riche quen also hadde he.
When he hadde stint his harping,
Þan seyd to him þe king
«Menstrel, me likeþ wele þi gle.
Now aske of me what it be,
Largelich ichil þe pay.
Now speke & tow miȝt asay.»
(Laskaya / Salisbury 1995, ll. 4448-4502).

[The king listened and sat quiet, | he really wanted to hear his music | great pleasure he had of his song. | The rich queen as well was delighted. | When he has stopped his harping, | the king told him | «minstrel, I liked very much your music. | Now ask me what you wish, | I will pay you generously. | Now speak up if you wish to find out.»].

The late fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* might offer further evidence as to the complex network of associations raised by the word *gle*[16]. After a thirty-five-line prologue describing the mythical foundation of England by Brutus, the scene is immediately moved to King Arthur's court.

[16] In his 2014 article, Graham Williams analysed possible sound-salient collocations of the phonestheme *gl-* in *Pearl*. (Williams 2014, 596-618).

It is Christmas time and the court is celebrating with the conventional *largesse*, appropriate to the most legendary of English kings. Music certainly holds centre stage, for musical interludes and merry carols are repeatedly described.

Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,
Dere dyn vpon day, daunsyng on ny3tes,
(Andrew / Waldron 2007, 209, ll. 46-47).

[Such noise and music glorious to hear, a pleasant sound in the day, dancing at night].

The choice of the cluster «glaum ande gle» might well have been driven by metrical and stylistic constraints; however, it might also reveal a deliberate use on the poet's part. The *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* reveals that by the end of the fourteenth century, a cluster very close to that mentioned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, «game and gle», might have been widely used in both secular and religious contexts[17]. Therefore, its popularity could be exploited in order to achieve specific effects in the narrative. For instance, in *The Tale of Sir Thopas* from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the comic effect is ensured by the introduction of the cluster "game and glee" at what should have been a crucial point in the narrative.

His myrie men comanded he
To make hym bothe game and glee,
For nedes moste he fighte
With a geaunt with hevedes three,
For paramour and jolitee
Of oon that shoon ful brighte.
(Chaucer 1992, 215, ll. 839-844).

[He ordered to his companions in arms to make both entertainment and music for him since he needed to fight with a three-headed giant for the love and pleasure of the one that shine full bright].

Since 'Sir Thopas' appears to collect an entire set of romance *topoi* and formulaic expressions in order to ridicule the conventions of this literary genre, the presence of the cluster "game and gle" might support the hypothesis that, at that point, it was perceived almost as a cliché. The Gawain-poet's modification of this well-known cluster might well have been driven by metrical constraints, namely the preservation of the alliteration in gl-, but it might also have been prompted by the desire to exploit the repertoire of romance linguistic

17 For instance, in the Auchinleck Manuscript, the word *gle* co-occurs 13 times out of 39 with the word «game», thus possibly implying that at the beginning of the fourteenth century this cluster already belonged to the repertoire of formulaic expressions [*Amis and Amiloun* (l. 488), *The Life of St Mary Magdalene* (l. 466), *Guy of Warwick* (couplets) (ll. 4550, 6363, 7084), *Beues of Hamtoun* (l. 3274), *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (ll. 6532, 8210), *Lay le Freine* (l. 17), *Horn Childe & Maiden Rimnild* (l. 935), *Seynt Katerine* (l. 75), *St Patrick's Purgatory* (ll. 123, 1003)].

conventions to produce sophisticated effects. Although the Middle English word *game* also appears to be associated with music and festivity, it also retains the abstract meaning of *pleasure* and *delight*. Conversely, the word *gla(u)m* solely means 'loud noise' or 'loud talking'. If on the one hand this would imply a narrowing of the polysemy of *game*, on the other it would convey an increase in terms of auditory intensity. The *grandeur* of court festivities customarily characterised by abundance of food, music and gifts is thus supplemented with a new dimension: sound intensity.

The banquets staged at Arthur's and Sir Bertilak's courts not only certainly follow the courtly conventions, but also seem to share an identical lexical repertoire in terms of visual and auditory suggestions.

Much glam and gle glent vp þerinne
Aboute þe fyre vpon flet, and on fele wyse
At þe soper and after, mony aþel songez,
As coundutes of Krystmasse and carolez newe
With al þe manerly merþe þat mon may of telle.
(Andrew / Waldron 2007, 268, ll. 1652-1656).

[Great noise and music sprang up there around the fire in the hall, and in many ways at the supper and afterwards, many noble songs such as Christmas part-songs and new ring-dances, with all the dignified amusement that one may tell of].

In the eyes of the Gawain-poet, visual and auditory perceptions might somehow be inextricably intermingled. In this context, the word *gle* might well refer to musical entertainment, thus essentially creating a hendiadys emphasising the loudness of the hall; however, it might also convey an idea of shining brightness. In the corpus of the Pearl Manuscript, ten out of sixteen instances of the word *glent* are in fact connected to the semantic field of light and additional four to that of sight[18]. This might give way to the possibility that the Gawain-poet wanted to create some sort of synaesthesia in which both senses were contemporarily engaged. The author uses the word *gle* only thrice in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and it is always related to the courtly environment. The author's willingness to exploit the polysemy of the word *gle* might find support in the words co-occurring with it. In Arthur's court the *gle* is «glorious to here», certainly referring to the music invading the hall, whereas in the description of Sir Bertilak's court, the «gle lent up therinne», thus possibly referring to the brightness shining around. However, although the *gle* invading

[18] Instances belonging to the semantic field of light: *Pearl* (ll. 70, 114, 1001, 1026, 1106), *Cleannes* (l. 218), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ll. 171, 570, 604, 2039); instances belonging to the semantic field of sight: *Pearl* (ll. 671, 1144), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ll. 82, 476); instances belonging to the semantic field of movement: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (l. 2292); instances belonging to the semantic field of sound: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (l. 1290); instances possibly belonging to the semantic field of both light and sound: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (l. 1652).

Arthur's court seems to be related to the music resounding in the hall, it is also described as *glorious*, both magnificent and shining, thus possibly reinforcing the idea that the auditory dimension cannot be separated from the visual one.

By a process of semantic widening, all meanings of the word *gle* are explored in the poem, so much so that in its last occurrence it comes to symbolise a complete synthesis of all senses. The third instance of the word *gle* is in fact related to Gawain's astonished reaction at Lady Bertilak's visitation.

«In goud fayþe,» quoþ Gawayn, «God yow forȝelde!
Gret is þe gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
Þat so worþy as ȝe wolde wynne hidere,
And pyne yow with so pouer a mon, as play wyth your knyȝt
With anyskynnez countenaunce, hit keuerez me ese».
(Andrew / Waldron 2007, 264, ll. 1535-1539).

[«In good faith,» said Gawain, «may God reward you! It is great good pleasure and a huge delight to me that one as noble as you should wish to come here and take pains with so worthless a man, as to amuse yourself with your knight and show any kind of favour; it gives me pleasure.»].

In this context *gle* means not only entertainment, but also joy, delight, and pleasure encompassing all sensory perceptions.

The analysis of the instances of the word *gle* in both religious and secular contexts might support the assumption that it was perceived by medieval English speakers as related to different sensory dimensions. Its polysemy could thus be exploited by contemporary authors to condense in a single word the complexity of synaesthetic perceptions.

3. *Phonesthetic gl- in Old French: The Case of Glat*

In the Old French context, the semantic polyvalence of the phonesteme *gl-* finds an emblematic case study in the elusive figure known as *beste glatissant*. The oldest text in which the *beste* appears is probably *Perlesvaus*[19]. The episode appears in the 9th *branche*. Taking leave of his mother and sister, Perlesvaus enters the Lonely Forest and rides until, around noon, he comes to a clearing, where he sees a vermilion cross. At the far end of the clearing stands a knight dressed in white carrying a golden cup; on the opposite side a maiden, clothed in white silk, carries a second golden cup. Suddenly out of the forest comes

[19] Such is the opinion of William A. Nitze (1936) and Edina Bozóky (1974, 136) according to whom Gerbert de Montreuil's *Quatrième continuation de Perceval* is later than Perlesvaus. However, Nitze considers 1212 as the *terminus ante quem* for *Perlesvaus*, while others (Bogdanow 1984, 181) postdate it to 1225-1240.

a snow-white, emerald-eyed beast, little bigger than a hare. The little animal looks terrified; a terrible noise comes from its belly:

Ele avoit .xii. chaiaus dedenz sun ventre, qui glatissoient autresi dedenz li comme chenerie de bois. (Nitze / Jenkins 1932-1937, 239-240).

[She had twelve puppies inside her belly, barking inside her like a whole pack of dogs][20].

The beast, terrified, seeks protection in Perlesvaus, who feels pity for her, so sweet and beautiful; but the white knight orders him to leave her to her fate. So the beast rides towards the cross, and the puppies emerge from its belly, tearing it apart. Perlesvaus kneels before the vermilion cross, kisses the ground where the beast was killed, while a suave perfume rises from the ground; the rest of the scene takes place in an allegorical-liturgical atmosphere[21]. We meet here for the first time in the poem the verb *glatir* in association with the strange creature. The *beste* of *Perlesvaus* is not yet colourful – as its later hypostases will be – but it is in every respect a creature of light. Indeed, the splendour is already present in the emerald eyes of the little beast and in the blinding candour of its coat, as white as freshly fallen snow, which reverberates by multiplying in the whiteness of the two onlookers: the knight completely dressed in white («vestuz de blans dras») and the maiden in a white silk dress adorned with gold drops («vestue d'un blanc samit goté d'or»); the colour scenery is completed by the vermilion of the crosses.

The episode featured in Gerbert de Montreuil's *Quatrième continuation de Perceval* (Gerbert de Montreuil 2014, 504-507, ll. 8319-8406) is very similar to the one in the *Haut Livre du Graal*. We shall refer to William A. Nitze's in-depth analysis for a comparison of the two sequences (Nitze 1936, 409-418). We will merely point out here that in these early attestations the creature is simply called *beste*, while the verb *glatir* is used to indicate the howling of the dogs it carries in its belly, akin to a tremendous gestation.

In the thirteenth-century *Suite du Roman de Merlin*, the noise precedes the sight in the appearance of the *beste*. The episode is located at the beginning of the text (Roussineau 1996, 3-5). After conceiving Mordret by incest with his sister, Arthur has a disturbing dream, following which he decides to go hunting. All intent on chasing a deer, he does not realise that he has strayed far from his companions; what is more, his horse dies exhausted from the race. Having reached a spring, the king hears a roar:

Aussi tost comme il s'est assis, il commencha a penser a chou qu'il ot veut la nuit en son dormant. Et en che qu'il pensoit, il escoute et ot uns grans glas de chiens qui faisoient aussi grant noise que se il fuissent .xxx. ou .xl., et venoient viers lui, che li samble. (Roussineau 1996, 3).

[As soon as he had sat down, he began to think about what he had seen at night in his sleep.

[20] All English translations from Old French are my own unless stated otherwise.

[21] According to Bozóky (1974, 135), the sacrifice of the beast is a vision intended to initiate the hero into the mysteries of the Grail, a (luminous) spectacle reserved for the elect.

As he was thinking, he strained his ear and heard an intense howl of dogs, causing such a din that it sounded like thirty or forty, and they were coming towards him, so it seemed to him].

Arthur looks in the direction from which the din is coming, which seems to have been caused by a large pack, but instead of the dogs he sees a huge beast appear. Even more than the marvellous features of the beast, it is the tremendous noise coming from its belly that causes astonishment. The text insists on this aspect:

Par foi, ore voi jou les gringnors merveilles que jou onques mais veisse, car de si divierse beste coume ceste est n'oï jou onques mais parler. Et se elle est miervilleuse par defors, encore est elle plus miervilleuse par dedens, car je puis oïr et connoistre tout apertement que elle a dedens son cors brakés tout vis qui glatissent. (ivi, 4).

[My word, I am seeing the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen, for I had never heard of a beast as strange as this. And if it is extraordinary on the outside, it is even more so on the inside, for I can hear and clearly distinguish that she has in her body live hunting dogs that howl].

The noise visualises the invisible, announcing a mysterious and tremendous presence before it even comes into view. The *Perlesvaus* beast appears as a sacrificial animal; its belly contains twelve dogs that, after letting out their howls, materialise before the audience's eyes, tearing the candid creature apart. In the *Suite du Roman de Merlin*, we do not see dogs made of flesh and blood, but their acoustic essence remains, their barks are no less lacerating than those of the *Perlesvaus* beast and still coming from an inscrutable depth.

The beast moves away from the spring «a grant noise et a grant glatissement» (ivi, 4) [with great noise and a great howl], while the dogs in its belly start barking again, making «si recommencierent a glatir autressi comme il faisoient devant et fisent autretel noise comme fesissent .xx. braket apriés une beste sauvage» (*ibid.*) [they started barking again as before and made as much noise as twenty hounds after a wild beast]. In the *Suite du Roman de Merlin*, the sonorous substance of the *beste* thus undergoes a transformation: the infernal howl is subjected to an acoustic hypostatisation, and only the din of the puppies remains.

It is only from *Tristan en prose* (ca. 1235-1240) that the *beste* is systematically named in the romances as *beste glatissant*. Again, it is from this text that the beast takes on a different, decidedly composite, and varied appearance. The white coat of the small animal that ran fearfully towards Perlesvaus is now a distant memory. The composite aspect is found in *Perceforest*'s late romance, where the beast is portrayed as one of the most marvellous and terrible: its neck possesses all the colours of the world, and their reverberation mixes with the rays of the sun, in such a dazzling spectacle that it draws all beholders into ecstatic rapture. The beast then takes advantage of the state of hypnosis induced in the victim to kill her. The creature's sudden manifestation results in a seduction

that is both thunderous and glaring. In the *Perlesvaus*, the brutal laceration of the beast's snow-white body is above all sonorous violence, a supernatural din. In later declinations of the extraordinary animal, the bestial cry intervenes to break a silent spell of light: the beast of the *Perceforest* conceals a diabolical nature behind its deceptive glowing appearance.

The substantial angelic-demonic ambiguity of the nature of the *beste* is also detectable at a lexical level: *glatissant* is a term that can refer as much to the aural-sonic semantic sphere as to the visual-luminous one[22]. In the late *Geste de Liège* (dating to the second half of the 14th century) by Jean d'Outremeuse, the verb *glatir* is employed several times, solely in the sense of 'to shine', to describe special effects of light in a hagiographic context: in l. 10320 the verb denotes the light of an angel (*angle glatissans*)[23] (Jean d'Outremeuse 1869, 627). In *Perceforest*, the verb *glatir* and the substantive *glat* recur several times, almost always referring to the howling of dogs or the terrible cry of the *beste*[24].

Also in *Perceforest*, and precisely in reference to our beast, there is an occurrence of the noun *glat* that would seem to stand for the luminous effect:

> La beste n'avoit couleur au col qui ne jectast son glat, et pour ce les habitans de celle forest qui oÿe et veue l'avoient la nommoient la Beste Glatissant, et pour ce fut la forest surnommee du Glat. (Roussineau 1991, 216).
>
> [The beast had no colour on its neck that did not screech, and for this reason the people of that forest, who had heard and seen it, called it the Beste Glatissant, and the forest was surnamed the Forest of the Glat].

In the passage mentioned above, *glat* unquestionably refers to a chromatic glow. But there is more: the author explaining the epithet of the beast (*Glatissant*) and that of the forest (*Forest du Glat*) relates the acoustic valence to the luminous valence. The inhabitants of the *Forest du Glat* define the beast as *glatissant* after hearing and seeing it.

22 *glatir*[1] DEAF G*5* 823, 1; *glatir*[2] DEAF G*5* 827, 21.

23 See also Scheler 1882, 168.

24 «Sy se mist en fuite comme espouentee, glatissant et menant tel bruit qu'il sambloit qu'elle eust cent bracqués dedens le corps.» (Roussineau 1993, 167) [She fled as if terrified, barking and making such a noise that it seemed as if she had a hundred hunting dogs in her body] «Si se fery en la forest, glatissant en telle maniere comme se douze chiens lui fussent en la panche» (Roussineau 2014, 801) [She fled into the forest, barking as if there were twelve dogs in her belly]; «Les chiennets […] lors encommencierent a glatir d'une maniere qui donnoit a congnoistre aux veneurs qu'ilz avoient trouvé le cherf.» (Roussineau 2014, 674) [The puppies started barking so that the hunters knew they had found the deer]. Auguste Vincent believes that toponyms such as *Glatigny*, *Glatigné*, *Glatigni*, widely attested in Belgium, France and Switzerland derive from the French word *glattir*, which in turn derives from the Latin GLATTIRE, 'to bark', from which *glatissement* 'noise, cry' would derive. The verb *glattir* would be replaced from the 13th century by *glapir* (already attested in the 12th century), which would be an alteration of the former, due to the influence of *japper*. To prove the thesis, there are three toponyms in the form of Glapigny (Vincent 1942, 232-235).

Auguste Scheler argued that the two semantic and sensory fields of the verb *glatir* could be ascribed to the same term: he hypothesised a transfer from the acoustic to the visual field[25]. Albert Gier categorically dismisses Scheler's hypothesis[26], ascribing *glatir* (to bark) to Latin GLATTIRE, and *glatir* (to shine) to Old High German *glat*, *clat* or Middle Dutch *glat* 'bright (of eyes)'[27]. It is not difficult to suppose an interference between two homographs with different etymologies. Given the relative geographical proximity to Jean d'Outremeuse's *liégeoise* area of origin, it is not surprising that the anonymous author of *Perceforest* employs the noun *glat* in a luminous sense. Moreover, both texts are late: they date from the 14th century[28]. In any case, whatever the origin of the two terms, it is evident that the two meanings overlap and merge in the figure of the *beste*, in the same way as its caleidoscopic reflections. The acoustic-visual interference reaches its maximum intensity in the description of the strange animal, generating a sensory ambiguity that is the signature feature of its late appearances. The figure and textual history of the *beste glatissant*, therefore, seem emblematic of the semantic shift and sensory ambiguity associated with the *gl-* phonestheme.

Further complicating the terminological ambiguity is another substantive, *glas*, attested with the meaning of 'bark'[29] – as previously mentioned – in the appearance of the *Perlesvaus beste*[30], where it coexists with the verb *glatir*[31], and in *La Suite du roman de Merlin*[32]. Derived from *CLASSUM, the noun *glas*, generally indicating an aerophone or metallic sound, appears to be sometimes confused with the noun *glat*. In the mentioned cases, indeed, *glas* is singular cas

25 «Même mot que *glatir*, faire du bruit; transport de l'ordre auditif à l'ordre visuel (cp. l'origine de fr. *éclater*)» (Scheler 1882, 168).

26 Cf. *glatir*[2] DEAF G5 827, 21. The Germanic origin of the luminous homograph would be confirmed by the fact that it is mainly attested in Walloon (FEW XVI 44a: *glat.*). See also *glit*, *gljá* (De Vries 1961, 174-175).

27 See also FEW IV 150a: *glattire*; FEW XVI 44a: *glat*.

28 According to Gilles Roussineau, the first draft of the *Roman de Perceforest*, the most extensive prose compilation of the French Middle Ages, is dated between 1337 and 1344; the author was probably from the region of Valenciennes, in the north of France, close to present-day Belgium. According to Roussineau's hypothesis, the version that has survived to us is a rework dating from the mid-15th century, at the court of Philippe Le Bon, whereas no trace remains of the first version. On the dating and tradition of *Perceforest*, see the editor's introduction to *Perceforest. Quatrième partie*, t. I (Roussineau 1987, ix-xxxviii); see also Roussineau 2012; Roussineau 2017, xi. As for Jean d'Outremeuse – alias Jean des Prés –, he was born and died in Liège (1338-1400), where he served as chancellor (Goosse, 1964, 425-426).

29 *glas* DEAF G5 821, 14.

30 «La beste s'en fuioiet aval la lande por la poor des chiens dont ele oet le glas dedenz li» (Nitze / Jenkins, I, 239) [The animal fled across the clearing in terror of the dogs it heard barking inside].

31 «ele avoit .xii. chaiaus dedenz sun ventre, qui glatissoient autresi dedenz li comme chenerie de bois» (*ibid.*) [she had twelve puppies in her belly that barked like a pack of dogs in a forest].

32 «il escoute et ot uns grans glas de chiens qui faisoient aussi grant noise que se il fuissent .xxx. ou .xl.» (*ibid.*) [he strained his ear and heard an intense howl of dogs, causing such a noise that it sounded like thirty or forty dogs].

régime and can hardly be related to *glat*. The ambiguity seems to already be present in the noun *glas* (<*CLASSUM)[33]. This substantive is often encountered in reference to the sound of swords and armour, in contexts where the luminous effects of sparks are also mentioned. In *Perlesvaus*, for example:

Si s'entredonent molt grans colx desus les heaumes, si que tuit li oil lor estincelent, et la forest retentist des glas de lor espees. (Nitze / Jenkins 1932-1937, I, 241).

[They strike heavy blows on their helmets, their eyes blazing, while the forest echoes with the clashing of swords].

Already in ancient times there was confusion between *CLASSUM, of Latin origin, and **gladja*, a noun derived from the adjective **glada*, attested in all Germanic languages in the sense of 'brilliant', but also 'joyful'; this confusion could explain the attestation of the variant *glai*[34] alongside *glas*, as well as providing further evidence of an interference between the spheres of hearing and sight[35]. It is therefore not surprising to encounter *glai* as meaning 'joy', 'festivity', 'exultation'. See an example from the *Miralces de Nostre Dame* (Paris / Robert 1878, 250):

Que j'ay trouvé? toute gaudie,
Touz solaz, touz esbatemens,
Tout glay, certes pas ne vous mens.
(ll. 146-148).

[What have I encountered? Every joy, every pleasure, every amusement, I certainly do not lie to you].

Glai too is employed to refer to the barking of dogs. An example can be found in this excerpt from *Cligès* by Chrétien de Troyes:

Si s'antrevienent d'un eslais
Plus tost que cers qui ot le glais
Des chiens qui après lui glatissent.
(Chrétien de Troyes 1994, ll. 4915-4917).

[They charge at each other, faster than a deer that hears the barking of the dogs behind it].

The examples cited above show how, in Old French medieval texts, there is a series of lemmas (*glat*, *glatir*, *glas*, *glai*, …) all featuring the phonesteme *gl-*, and all sharing a certain semantic promiscuity between the luminous and aural spheres, and the dimension of joy and festivity.

[33] *glas* DEAF G5 817, 6.

[34] «*glas*[2]: bruit, tumulte, en particulier bruit confus de joie» (noise, uproar, especially marry-making) (Godefroy, 1881-1902, IV, 285).

[35] *glas* DEAF G5 817, 43; 818, 51.

4. *Conclusion*

The results of the current study shed light on the extent to which in both Middle English and Old French romances the presence of the phonestheme *gl-* plays a pivotal role in the association of certain words with the semantic fields of sight, hearing and joy. This association appears to have been exploited in literary contexts to create specific synaesthetic effects of interminglement of sensory perceptions. However, in order for this complex network of multisensory allusions to be correctly understood by the audience, this knowledge needed to be shared by the entire community, thus essentially reinforcing the role of phonesthemes in the reception and interpretation of literary texts. is not difficult to suppose an interference between two homographs with different etymologies. Given the relative geographical proximity to Jean d'Outremeuse's liégeoise area of origin, it is not surprising that the anonymous author of Perceforest employs the noun glat in a luminous sense. Moreover, both texts are late: they date from the 14th century27. In any case, whatever the origin of the two terms, it is evident that the two meanings overlap and merge in the figure of the beste, in the same way as its caleidoscopic reflections. The acoustic-visual interference reaches its maximum intensity in the description of the strange animal, generating a sensory ambiguity that is the signature feature of its late appearances. The figure and textual history of the beste glatissant, therefore, seem emblematic of the semantic shift and sensory ambiguity associated with the gl- phonestheme.

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providing further evidence of an interference between the spheres of hearing and sight34. It is therefore not surprising to encounter glai as meaning 'joy', 'festivity', 'exultation'. See an example from the Miralces de Nostre Dame (Paris / Robert 1878, 250):

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Conclusion

The results of the current study shed light on the extent to which in both Middle English and Old French romances the presence of the phonestheme gl- plays a pivotal role in the association of certain words with the semantic fields of sight, hearing and joy. This association appears to have been exploited in literary contexts to create specific synaesthetic effects of interminglement of sensory perceptions. However, in order for this complex network of multisensory allusions to be correctly understood by the audience, this knowledge needed to be shared by the entire community, thus essentially reinforcing the role of phonesthemes in the reception and interpretation of literary texts.

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