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**REPRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION: UNDERSTANDING TEXT THROUGH
IMAGES IN THE *ROMANCE OF THE ROSE***

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This interdisciplinary thesis examines the relationship between the text and images of illuminated manuscripts of the *Romance of the Rose*. One of the most beloved and widely-disseminated works of the Middle Ages, approximately 250 extant manuscripts of the *Romance* are illuminated, a tradition that established several iconic scenes which are present in nearly every manuscript. Of these, images depicting the Fountain of Narcissus are among the most frequent, and demonstrate the shifts in iconography between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Issues of representation and interpretation of the Old French text come to light through the motifs in the images, creating a conversation that emphasizes the ways in which the illuminations inform the understanding of the text. Examining the influence of the presence and content of the manuscript imagery on the text indicates a change in the mid-fourteenth century leading to a newfound amount of interpretation on the part of the artists of the manuscripts. This inclusion of interpretation as opposed to the strictly-regulated tradition of the iconography implies a growing sense of identity and of the individual within a pre-Renaissance society. The changing imagery of the fountain itself reveals a parallel linguistic shift, as embodied by the nuanced connotations of the word “fontaine.” Analysis of the decorative initials found throughout the manuscripts exposes two distinct traditions for initials, marking those of earlier manuscripts as extensions of the illumination frames, and those of later works as isolated imagery unto themselves. Examination of distinct elements found within the manuscript Douce 195 demonstrates a synthesis of the textual and visual elements, uniting the two aspects in an unprecedented manner.