

Courting Controversy?

Poetic Manipulations of Politics in the Mid-Fifteenth Century

‘It may be concluded that the tenor of Machaut’s own words can be taken at their face value here’.¹ Referring to Guillaume’s evocation of his experience of the plague in winter 1349 at the start of the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre (JRN)*, Roger Bowers’ injection of a note of caution (‘it may be...’) would be welcomed by literary scholars, bristle as we do at any easy identification of extratextual Machaut with his textual persona, and at acceptance of face-value interpretation in the complex and multivalent world of his *dits*. It may well, in fact, be us as medieval critics who need cautioning *against* our resistance to take anything as it appears on the surface, so conditioned are we by sophisticated post-*Rose* poetics in which the clothes do not make the man, suspecting False Seeming at every turn or at least creative playing off of authorial against narratorial identity. Our resistance stems from the highly worked literariness of fourteenth and fifteenth-century *dits* and *debats*: multilayered in their narrative schemas, colouring their personae and tale-telling with humour, and absorbing historical referentiality into an intratextual, representational, often specifically allegorical, world. As Rosemary Morris remarks of Machaut’s incorporation of a ‘named contemporary’ ruler into his *jugement* poems: ‘the effect is not to politicize the story or make it more real, but to make the two kings less so’.² However, whilst there is a tendency for an awareness of literary subtlety to lead us to push away from

¹ Roger Bowers, ‘Guillaume de Machaut and His Canonry of Reims, 1338-1377’, *Early Music History* 23 (2004), 1-48 (p. 13).

² ‘Machaut, Froissart, and the Fictionalization of the Self’, *Modern Language Review* 83.3 (1988), 545-55 (p. 550).

historical contingency, political reality is ever-present in our considerations of courtly literary activity through practices of patronage, themselves so playfully though nonetheless seriously thematised in Machaut's *dits*, entailing an inextricability between poetry and politics.³

Subtlety, as Sylvia Huot established, is our watchword for the workings of late-medieval literature,⁴ especially the post-*Rose* intellectualization of vernacular love poetry exemplified by Machaut and Froissart.⁵ 'The medieval French concept of "subtlety" [*soutil* and its congeners] encompasses artistic and intellectual ingenuity; craftiness and deception; and the delicious pains of amorous desire'.⁶ Its range of uses is diverse, but it includes the 'full range of powers' of a literary text;⁷ it is artfulness in all its forms. A particular concentration of, and, to my mind, conscious play on this keyword, occurs in a mid-fifteenth-century debate poem couched in the defence-of-women tradition, Martin Le Franc's *Le Champion des dames* (c. 1442; *CD*), dedicated to Philip the Good. Its 24,000 lines are divided into five books, in the course of which, debate between the pro-feminine eponymous Champion, Free Will, and various

³ See Deborah McGrady (ed.), *Rethinking the Boundaries of Patronage* (forthcoming).

⁴ 'Sentences and Subtle Fictions: Reading Literature in the Later Middle Ages', in *What is Literature? 1100-1600*, ed. François Cornilliat, Ullrich Langer and Douglas Kelly (Lexington: French Forum, 1993), pp. 197-209.

⁵ Sylvia Huot, 'The Daisy and the laurel: Myths of Desire and Creativity in the Poetry of Jean Froissart', *Yale French Studies* (1991), 240-51 (p. 241).

⁶ Huot, 'Sentences', p. 197.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

delegates of his arch-misogynist adversary Foulmouth serves as a frame for reflection on literary, cultural and political history.⁸ When addressing how properly to set about a love relationship, Free Will treats the familiar courtly threat of *losengiers*; to illustrate his point about the perils of concealment, he enlists the well-known thirteenth-century tale *La Chastelaine de Vergi*. In the *Chastelaine*, a knight and his lady arrange to meet covertly by using her dog to signal the all clear, a contrivance whose precarity the Champion underlines:

Seulement par le chiennet duit,
Le temps et l'eure congnoissoit,
Et n'avoit aultre sauf conduit
Quant il y entroit ou yssoit.⁹

(‘Only by the trained little dog did they know the moment and the hour, and [the knight] had no other safe-conduct when he went in and out’)

He extends this anecdote into a general curial caution against ‘False Envy’ (v. 11589):

Ne se fye en chien affaitié
Qui en court demourer desire.
Ung chascun y est enhettié
A espier, veoir et dire (*CD*, vv. 11601-4)

⁸ See, for instance, Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France (1440-1538)* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

⁹ *Le Champion des dames*, ed. Robert Deschaux (Paris: Champion, 1999), vv. 11593-96. Translations of Le Franc’s works are my own.

(‘Whoever wants to remain at court should not place his trust in a fitted-up dog.
Everyone there is encouraged to spy, witness and speak out’)

So far, so *Policraticus* in its insistence on envy as scourge of the court,¹⁰ but he adds a further twist, relating the perils of trying to outwit the court to the art of writing:

Car si soubtillement escrire

Ne porras qu’ung plus soubtil oeul

En blanc papier ne sache lire

Ce que tu cuides sçavoir seul (*CD*, vv. 11605-8)

(‘For you can’t write so subtly that a more subtle eye isn’t able to read in a blank sheet of paper that which you think you alone know’)

Savoir is the skill behind *soubtilité*: the skill of the writer as well as that of the reader; the Champion laments as inevitable that the former’s artfulness can always be outplayed by the latter. This example of subtlety is of note for how its very literariness: its metafictional intertextuality, is tied into, rather than distanced from, political concerns.

We ascribe a requirement for readerly subtlety to ourselves as critics: our instinct being to interrogate our materials, we expect to *need* to ask questions to prompt them

¹⁰ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* 7:24. For this as a standard topos in medieval narrative and didactic writing, see Aldo Scaglione, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 154-55, 202-3.

to tell their story: for instance, querying why Machaut decided to respond to one of his most popular works, *Le Jugement dou roy de Behaingne (JRB)*, with *JRN*, alleging deficiencies in the original?¹¹ It comes, then, as a shock to us when a text volunteers an answer unprompted, as occurs in Le Franc's poetic response to his *Champion*, *La Complainte du livre du Champion des dames a maistre Martin le Franc son acteur*.¹² Staging a debate between Book and Author, it discloses the *Champion's* unsuccessful reception at the Burgundian court and tells us precisely why it met with failure: the Book identifies explicitly 'the principal cause', accusing Martin: 'you have been at Basel'.¹³ He blames the writer's allegiance to the Council of Basel, from which Philip had withdrawn his prelates in 1438. But does this straightforward revelation necessary satisfy the questions to which we want answers? The *Complainte* features in the second presentation copy of the *Champion* (Paris, BnF, fr. 12476 (P1)) in which the latter text is complete and unedited, with none of the passages expressing Basilien support excised: why flag up problems, therefore? Why seem to make its second attempt at court entrée more difficult than the first? Not to mention that there is no external evidence to corroborate the rejection of the first presentation copy (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 9466 (B1)).¹⁴ In fact, could this reported failure, as our

¹¹ See, for example, R. Barton Palmer, 'Transtextuality and the Producing-I in Guillaume de Machaut's Judgment Series', *Exemplaria* 5.2 (1993), 283-304 (pp. 294-96).

¹² in Gaston Paris, 'Un poème inédit de Martin Le Franc', *Romania* 16 (1887), 383-437

¹³ C, vv. 226, 229.

¹⁴ The tale of rejection is usually accepted as fact: Pascale Charron, 'Les Réceptions du *Champion des dames* de Martin Le Franc à la cour de Bourgogne: "Tres puissant

critically suspicious mind may suggest, be a fictional ruse, itself a subtle sleight of hand in a complex negotiation of patronage relations?

The present paper uses Machaut's *JRB* and *JRN* as a launch-pad for reading the relationship of response between Le Franc's *Complainte (C)* and *Champion*, with the aim of understanding better the stakes at play in this fifteenth-century false retraction.¹⁵ Machaut's first debate (*JRB*), as to whether a lady whose lover has died or a knight whose lady has jilted him suffers the greater grief, concludes in favour of the knight. In *JRN*, dissatisfaction is reported with this verdict as an antifeminist position, and the writer himself is put on trial, defending *JRB*'s arguments and outcome; however, he eventually agrees to make amends... by writing further poems as penance, starting with the *Lay de plour*. As Calin and Palmer affirm, *JRN* does not constitute a full reversal or proper retraction of *JRB*'s conclusion.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is no supporting evidence of actual discontent.¹⁷ Palmer rightly views the status

et tres humain prince [...] veuillez cest livre humainement recevoir", *Bulletin du bibliophile* 1 (2000), 9-31 (p. 13).

¹⁵ One possible flaw in this comparison could be seen to be the different addressees of the two *jugements*, whereas Le Franc's two poems target the same patron; however, as the patron of *JRN* may have been changed to the king of Navarre only late in its composition, the impact of its dedicatee on the content of the poem is uncertain: see Lawrence Earp, *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research* (London/New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 209-10.

¹⁶ Palmer, 'Transtextuality', p. 301; William Calin, 'A Reading of Machaut's *Jugement dou Roy de Navarre*', *MLR* 66.2 (1971), 294-97.

¹⁷ Palmer, 'Transtextuality', p. 294.

of *JRN* not to be a sequel to *JRB*, as it does not continue the same level of textual reality, but a response in which ‘the fiction becomes the examination of the poet’s performance as poet’.¹⁸ He sees *JRN* as unique in medieval literature for the complexity of its exploration of the poetics of authorship;¹⁹ I propose that *C* may provide an instructive analogue.²⁰ Of great interest in considering the imbrication of poetry and politics will be the author’s demonstrated awareness of his relationship both to his work and to his audience, understanding authorship as a dialogic process. Such awareness concerns his control over the poem’s content, his management of intertextuality across his own œuvre,²¹ and the metafictionality of writing poetry about the writing – and, crucially, the reception – of poetry. These have long been appreciated as concerns of Machaut that influenced a range of later writers in the *dit* and *debat* tradition, such as Alain Chartier’s *Excusacion* – a further false palinode – in response to his *Belle Dame sans Mercy* (1424).

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 300; ‘The Metafictional Machaut: Reflexivity in the Judgment Poems’, in Palmer (ed.), *Chaucer’s French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition* (New York: AMS Press, 1999), pp. 71-92 (p. 83).

¹⁹ ‘Metafictional’, p. 89.

²⁰ Palmer considers an analogy with the continuation of *Le Roman de la rose*: ‘Transtextuality’, p. 300.

²¹ *JRN*’s extended title, as it appears in certain manuscripts, makes explicit a conflictual connection with the earlier work, in the same way as Le Franc’s *Complainte*: ‘*Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre contre le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*’: *The Judgment of the King of Navarre*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1988), p. xxviii.

The particular pertinence of the Machaldian parallel with Le Franc is three-fold:²² first, both *JRN* and *C* are slippery texts that defy easy summary of their argument's development: there is many a twist and turn leading, at times, to uncertainty as to what is of primary and what of secondary concern; for instance, with the effect that one may challenge whether Book's quasi-triumphal declaration of 'the principal cause cause' actually identifies the root of the problem.²³ Second, the reader is struck by a seemingly incongruous mix of historically engaged material and courtly personification allegory, often injected with comedy, that destabilises any secure sense of what the 'true' subject matter and tone is: in *JRN*, the much-discussed juxtaposition of the opening plague account and the debate that follows;²⁴ in *C*, the interweaving of ecclesiastical controversy – conciliarism and how Martin has disagreeably 'spoken about holy church' (v. 209) – with comical bickering about literary reception that appears otherwise disengaged from the content of the *Champion*.²⁵ Third, within the *Champion*, Le Franc engages explicitly, at some

²² There is also, of course, the intertextual coincidence that both *JRB* and *CD* draw upon the little dog motif from the *Chastelaine*.

²³ In his summary of Machaut's debate, Palmer inserts parenthetical remarks bringing out apparent incoherencies and irrelevances, reflecting this slipperiness: *JRN*, xxxi-xxxvii.

²⁴ See Calin; Earp, p. 210; Palmer, 'Metafictional', pp. 84-87.

²⁵ This is a notable difference between *JRN* and *C*: in the former, the author is engaged in debating the content of *JRB* rather than how it should be presented.

length, with Machaut's judgment poems, as his Champion takes issue with the verdict of *JRB*:²⁶

Je ne m'acorde au jugement

Machaut, car la dame pouoit

Son amy mort incessamment

Plourer et faire le deivoit (*CD*, vv. 12737-40)

('I don't agree with Machaut's judgment, for the lady could mourn her lover's death unceasingly, and indeed ought to')

I suggest that *jugement* / *Machaut* may be deliberately ambiguous: there is no mention of either king (Behaingne or Navarre), and the passage that follows could be seen to take issue with elements of both: the judgment poem of Machaut the poet whose court decided in favour of a knight who argued that the dead are soon forgotten so the heart can recover,²⁷ and the judgment promulgated by Guillaume (textual Machaut) who picks up this point in *JRN* against Happiness (*JRN*, vv. 1629-69). *JRN*'s revised verdict may be seen as profeminine; the Champion's corrective is as much anti-man as it is pro-woman, situating mention of Machaut in the context of an argument that a

²⁶ In addition, Free Will expresses appreciation of Machaut at two other moments: alongside Chartier as proponents of true courtliness, set against the vicious Jean de Meun and Matheolus (vv. 6913-20); and in tribute to his rhetorical mastery as love poet, citing the refrain of Deschamps's *Deploration*: 'la mort Machaut grand rethorique / Les facteurs amoureux lamentent' (vv. 18963-64).

²⁷ *Le Jugement dou roy de Behaingne*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1984), vv. 1110-21; 1716-23.

lover must never be false, citing after it examples of those who proved unfaithfully forgetful. Whether or not Machaut's specific practice of response to an earlier work factored into Le Franc's composition of *C*, he is clearly operating within a very similar poetics, intertextually and metatextually, around a thematic of judgment, in the spirit, to quote Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet's felicitous coinage, of a 'serious game'.²⁸ He treats seriously the materials with which he plays; for example, given the overall sacramental rather than erotic tenor of love in *CD*, assimilating defence of the lady's rightful mourning to the virtue of intercessory prayer for the dead (*CD*, vv. 12793-97).

Author-book relations: intersubjectivity and materiality

Readers of Machaut's *dits* emerge with a distinctive sense of narratorial personality, or, at least, a cluster of characteristics accreting around *je* Guillaume: clerkly, self-deluding in love, ambitious (sometimes misplaced in chivalric aspiration)... For Le Franc, this is absent from the *Champion*, whose narrator is a more simple mobile eye and ear onto the debate. The protagonist is Free Will (*Franc Vouloir*), whose name has provoked speculation that he represents 'le Vouloir de Le Franc'.²⁹ However, any

²⁸ *La Couleur de la mélancolie: la fréquentation des livres au XIV^e siècle, 1300-1415* (Paris: Hatier, 1993), p. 49. 'Coinage' in a relative sense, given the existing notion of *serio ludere* in Renaissance theory. Cerquiglini applies the term to the social status of poetry in the *cour d'amour*.

²⁹ Marc-René Jung, 'Situation de Martin Le Franc', in *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XV^e siècle*, ed. Monique Ornato and Nicole Pons (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération internationale des instituts d'études médiévales, 1995), pp. 13-30 (p. 21).

development of the Champion's personality pertains not to his character so much as to his oratory, through the narrator's remarks on his style of delivery: he is, because he speaks. Neither figure is endowed with emotional subjectivity in an erotic sense: the narrator, whilst marvelling at what he sees and hears, commending the Champion and reproving his adversaries, has no individual psychological narrative; Free Will's emotionality is manifested through spiritual devotion to the Virgin Mary, incantatory prayer to Love (understood as the Holy Spirit), and invective against his adversaries. Whatever bisection of implied authorial identity may or may not be occurring through the narrator/Free Will in the *Champion*, there is, in *C*, a fascinating bifurcation of poetic I-hood between Book and Author, which develops the character of both somewhat intersubjectively. On the one hand, the two are opposed as distinct, antagonistic entities by dint of their blame-shifting debate. Book alleges flaws in content, for which Author lies responsible:

Se bouté m'eusses en mon sain
Maint brocard et mainte sentence
Dont on a entendement sain,
Gaignié j'avoye l'audience (*C*, vv. 201-4).

('If you'd stuffed my belly with many a quip and many a judgment that are readily accepted, I'd have won over the audience')

Author has, in fact, committed betrayal:

Ne m'as tu fait lettres porter
Comme David fist a Urye? (*C*, vv. 199-200).

(‘Didn’t you make me carry letters like David did to Uriah?’)

Book alludes to the letter King David wrote to Joab to position Uriah the Hittite in the front of the army where fighting was fiercest, and then to withdraw from him so that he may be struck down and die.³⁰ Book tends towards hysteria in his reactions, which ties in with Author’s mocking criticism of its poor presentation of the work’s content – the fault lies in the delivery, not in the package:

Tu as cuidié du premier sault

Que l’en cryast a la trompette:

*A l’assault, dames, a l’assaut!*³¹

Ha! mors ta langue et ta lippette (*C*, vv. 177-80).

(‘You believed from the first sally that one should cry out with trumpet blast: *Attack, ladies, attack!* Ha! Bite your tongue and your little lip’)

Book is deemed to have been overambitious and egotistic:

Tu as volu trop hault parler

Et ainchoiz que tu feusses né

Dessus tous les aultres voler (*C*, vv. 166-68).

(‘You wanted to speak too boldly and soar above everyone else before you were even born’)

³⁰ 2 Sam 11: 14-15.

³¹ The opening line of *CD*.

Pronounced division between *je* and *tu* is reinforced by the materiality of Book, emphatically a codicological object, redolent of Guillaume's concrete collection of quires in *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*:

[...] mon dit livre la survint,
Crepuy en feulletz plus de vingt,
De grifs et de couteaux navré,
Et en ma presence devint
De tous ses membres dessevré (C, vv. 28-32)

(‘[...] my aforesaid book popped up, crumpled into more than twenty folios, slashed by claws and knives, and before my eyes it became detached from all its members’)

But it is ‘subject’ rather than ‘object’, given its dramatized, narrativised subjectivity and, at times, anthropomorphism. A discourse of chivalry yields further conflict between the interlocutors, with Book, as seen above, perceiving himself to have been abandoned on, and sent ill-equipped to, the front line, while Author reproaches its cowardice:

[...] Ha, mon filz tendre,
Qui les horyons va craignant
Il ne doibt la guerre entreprendre (C, vv. 62-64).

(‘[...] Ah, my dear son, he who fears blows should not undertake the battle)

Author's often caustic criticism is tempered by his reference to Book as ‘my dear son’: whilst there is bickering and separation, there is also affection and filiation in

this complex fictionalisation of author-book relations, complicated yet further, of course, by its presentation within a further copy of that same book's text. Authorship is here dialogic through dialogue not only with the court audience, but also with a further agent in the transmission process, the book itself. Book relays the patron's view, whereas, in *JRN*, Guillaume's interlocutor Happiness represents the patron, as well as assuming responsibility as Guillaume's teacher.³² Book's authority is unsteady; through his exaggeration, he is a travesty of the conventional oneiric instructor. That he is not a figure for the patron facilitates this humorous presentation: a role of comic butt sometimes associated in Machaut's work with the narrator-persona himself.

Poetry and politics: controversy at court?

In the midst of *C*'s diverting, intertextually and metatextually alert dialogue, we find Book's primary accusation, that it was rejected on account of its author's support of Basel, Le Franc being secretary to antipope Felix V (Amadeus VIII of Savoy) whom the Council had elected in 1439 after deciding to depose Eugenius IV; the latter convened a separate, papal council in Ferrara to which most European rulers expressed allegiance, while support for Basel amongst secular princes depleted.³³

Item, tu as esté a Basle;

Pour tant, comme a Basilien

³² Palmer, 'Metafictional', pp. 87-88.

³³ Norman Tanner, *The Church in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Tauris, 2008), pp. 23-25.

Condempné à la triquebale,

On m'a rompu bas et lyen (C, vv. 229-32).

(‘Item, you were at Basel; and on account of this, as if punishing a Basilien by torture, they tore me to shreds’)

Book couches his accusation in characteristically though oddly sensational terms; his evocation of torture, likening his figurative dissection by the Burgundian audience to punitive treatment inflicted upon conciliarists, adds drama rather than referential value, given the absence of violence from the Council’s events.³⁴ It is not clear from this passage alone that Book is implying that there is anything disagreeable within the *Champion*’s covers, only behind them, in the authorial intention that ‘fathered’ it. Indeed, it is only through inference that we can determine reportedly offensive content. When Book lashes out:

Tu as parlé de sainte eglise,

Je ne sçay en quele maniere (C, vv. 209-10),

(‘You have spoken about holy church in I-don’t-know-what manner’)

³⁴ Antony Black, ‘Popes and Councils’, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume VII c. 1415-c. 1500*, ed. by Christopher Allmand (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 65-86 (p. 85).

this could be construed either to refer to the author's speeches at Basel, whose substance Book does not know because he was not there,³⁵ or to refer exasperatingly to Free Will's discourse in the poem, in which, especially in Book V, he affirms the Council as the holy body of the Church when defending as dogma the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, which the historical Council declared in September 1439.³⁶ 'Holy Church' may also denote the personification whom Le Franc makes speak in Book II as an apparition before the debating parties (vv. 9561-10184). She enjoins a Burgundian return to Basel:

C'est a vous princes seculiers

Que je parle principalement

[...]

Revenez y! Qui vous destourne?

Mandez y vos sages prelas! (CD, vv. 9873-74, 10057-58),

('It's to you, secular princes, that I speak above all [...] Get back there! Who's steering you away? Send your wise prelates there!')

³⁵ Council records register his incorporation on 1 July 1440 and name him speaking in support of Felix V on 7 August 1441: *Concilium Basiliense, Studien und Quellen*, ed. Johannes Haller, 8 vols (Basel, 1896-1936), vol. VII (1910), pp. 194, 404.

³⁶ Thomas M. Izbicki, 'The Immaculate Conception and Ecclesiastical Politics from the Council of Basel to the Council of Trent: The Dominicans and Their Foes', in *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*, 96 (2005), 145-70.

accusing those who have seceded of having wrongfully provoked ‘division’ (v. 10054), instead of blame for schism being attributable to the Council itself for having elected a different pope.

To what extent should we accept this ‘principal cause’ at face value? It makes sense and is consistent with the political reality of the moment, but our sense of coherence may be too neat a lure. It is, after all, the opinion of a fictionalised character with a tendency for melodrama, whom the author-persona wishes to prove wrong, with both characters contained within a dream vision, and, as we know, ‘dreams work on (*oeuvre*) the mind’ (*C*, v. 470).³⁷ *C* itself is only 472 lines long, but within its short span it proves extraordinarily slippery in nimbly tripping from one point of argument to another, in part a result of its dialogue form, but also because of a constantly shifting focus within Author’s arguments in response to Book’s accusations. I shall trace through some of this fancy footwork, to determine whether we should put greater trust in the words of one party over the other or whether, whatever the dramatic effect of their clash in generating an impression of *pro* and *contra*, there is in fact, if not synthesis of the two, then at least elements of both to be taken at face value. The broader objective remains ascertaining what Le Franc aimed to achieve by supplementing his *Champion* with an apparent advertisement of its problems.

Subtlety and slipperiness: how (deep) to read?

³⁷ cf. Christiane Marchello-Nizia’s discussion of the role of the dream-vision in political allegories: ‘Entre l’histoire et la poétique: le “Songe politique”’, *Revue des sciences humaines* 46 (1981), 39-53.

Before considering how *C* is intended to situate the second presentation copy of the poem (P1) in relation to the first (B1), we need to note carefully exactly what is the reported judgment of B1 by the court. Book speaks extravagantly of ‘this extraordinary rebuff’ (*C*, v. 46), whereas Author considers alleged rejection actually to have been premature withdrawal on Book’s part. Book counters this allegation by relaying the courtiers’ advice to the duke (clearly surmised, because whispered):

[l’en] dit a l’oreille du sire:

Faictes cestui bruler ou frire,

Car il porte au ventre poisons,

Et si le commandez rescripre

A Martin pour pluseurs raisons (*C*, vv. 139-44)

(‘[they] whispered into the lord’s ear: *Have this one burnt or fried, for it carries poison in its belly, and order it/me to be rewritten by Martin for several reasons*’)

There is no systematic setting out of these ‘reasons’ nor, of course, is there any ‘rewriting’, in terms of revisions to the text, only in the sense of a recopying of the work into a second manuscript. Nothing changes in the content, and Author simply directs Book to return to the fray:

Or prenons, dis je, que tu saches

Certainement que tu seras

Batu de bastons et de haches

Et de mort ne reschapperas,

Doibs tu reculer? non feras.

Mieux vaut honnestement morir,
Ce tousjours me confesseras,
Qu'en plus vivant honte merir (C, vv. 401-8).

(‘Now let’s imagine, I said, that you know for sure that you’ll be beaten with batons and hatchets and will not escape death: should you withdraw? No you will not. It is better to die honourably, you’ll always tell me, than to merit shame by living on’)

Tapping into Book’s penchant for self-dramatisation, he paints the noble trajectory of a hero, whether a *chanson de geste* warrior or a hagiographical martyr. It is uncertain whether this is foreseen as Book’s destiny, or just speculated as a scenario, with the hypothesising opener ‘prenons [...] que tu sache’, juxtaposed with the line-initial adverb of certitude. There is, therefore, no straightforward narrative to be deduced of what has happened and what is envisaged to happen next. Le Franc plays upon those very Machaldian signals of indeterminate truth: emphasizing the act of reporting, as in *JRB*’s multiply relayed tale of the knight’s and the lady’s dispute, and speculating possibilities, like the angst-ridden Guillaume of the *Voir Dit* wondering what has or has not happened in his relationship with Toute Belle.

Author suggests that Book will be better prepared second time around not to launch himself forth with undue gusto:

Ne sonne mot jusques a tant
Que quelque adversaire s’atourne
Et viegne a mort combatant (C, vv. 386-88).

(‘Don’t say a word until an adversary turns in your direction and comes fighting to the death’)

This is line with Author’s anticipation that Book would have, on first presentation, proceeded with greater shrewdness:³⁸

Je te cuidoye estre advisé

Pour dissimuler long et court

A l’encontre du plus rusé (*C*, vv. 113-15).

(‘I thought you were shrewd enough to dissemble, whether briefly or for a while, against the most cunning’)

Somewhat at odds with *C*’s spotlighting of controversy is his apparent expectation that Book would have practised concealment. There are elements in the material context of P1 that could support a shift from more prominent attack to dissimulation. The art historian Pascale Charron has explored the pro-Burgundian propaganda value of the programme of sixty-six illustrations incorporated into P1, where B1 featured only two.³⁹ Philip the Good is cast as the Champion, for instance, by showing the character dressed in black; iconography of the Order of the Golden Fleece (coats of arms, mythological vignettes) figures prominently on the presentation and early pages of the manuscript.⁴⁰ In addition, most miniatures illustrate emblematic scenes from

³⁸ Paris makes a point of Le Franc’s youth in offering B1 aged 31 (p. 393); could the poet be evoking here a learning curve of his own having come with age?

³⁹ Charron, pp. 21-27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the lives of the women picked up in the debaters' *exempla* (such as Portia swallowing hot coals), playing up the surface defence-of-women argument. Charron notes an interesting alteration in visual hierarchy between the presentation miniatures of B1 and P1: the former shows a conventional scene of the poet knelt before patron and courtiers;⁴¹ the latter uses differentiation in character size and position to reorientate the dynamic and direction of communication: the duke is centralised and seated, with the poet immediately in front of him and three courtiers of diminished size relegated to the bottom left-hand corner. It is very tempting to read this change – assuming that Le Franc oversaw the production of both manuscripts – in conjunction with Book's report of reaction to the work (C, vv. 139-44, above). Whilst one of the diminished trio in P1 makes a whispering gesture, it can only be heard by the other two and is well distanced from the duke, who, in B1, is far more susceptible to his courtiers' remarks. Indeed, the animated attitudes and hand gestures of the assembly in B1 already visualise discontent, which could be seen to be reinforced by its other miniature showing the besieged castle of Amour that opens the text (fol. 4); alongside soldiers of Foulmouth firing arrows, the artist innovates clerics throwing books. Could this packaging of the first copy with images of conflict have been one of the referents of Author's criticism of how Book flaunted itself too conspicuously 'from the first sally'?

⁴¹ Indeed, this is the earliest miniature to represent presentation of a manuscript to Philip: Hanno Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400-1550)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), p. 242, n. 134.

The role of the duke is also addressed in *C*: blame for rejection is imputed uniquely to – indeed, strategically displaced to – his courtiers,⁴² with an unequivocal distinction made by Book between their insidious conduct and his rectitude: ‘so courteous and benign is he’ (*C*, v. 132), effectively offering a (wish-fulfilment?) gloss on P1’s presentation miniature. Author takes the opportunity to echo this praise in response to Book’s report:

Plaisir me fais quand le duc loes,

Lui respondis je prestement,

[...]

Car il n’a soubz le firmament

Plus cler ne plus noble courage,

Sauve la paix entierement

De chascun prince preux et sage (*C*, vv. 153-54, 157-60).

(‘You please me in praising the duke, I answered immediately, [...] For there is not beneath the firmament a more distinguished or noble character – save the peace of each virtuous and wise prince’)

This laudatory portrait could be seen to offset critical remarks in *CD*, cited above, when ‘secular princes’ who have abandoned Basel are targeted for reproach.

However, once again there is potential light-footedness by Le Franc, as what Author commends is not necessarily Philip, but a category of noble and wise princes,

⁴² As a positive counterpoint, Author commends Book to Isabel de Portugal and Jean de Créquy (*C*, vv. 433-56). Wijsman argues for their active role in championing *CD*: pp. 225, 313, 372.

presumably intended as those who respond positively to the persuasion in *CD* to return to the Council? Whilst there certainly seem to be grounds for discerning that deliberate revision of the poem's material presentation sought to conceal its more provocative material, the presence of *C* in that same copy flagging up that matter remains problematic.

The displacement of blame onto Burgundian courtiers attributes them, by the same token, with greater subtlety of intelligence than the duke, since, whilst he was welcoming, it was they who proved more shrewd (*rusé*) in perceiving how it may carry deeper messages 'in its belly'. But Author is quick to deny that there is, in fact, any poisonous heart to the work:

Toutes fois n'as tu riens porté

(Soyes en seur, je le te jure)

Blechant aucune auctorité

Ou faisant a personne injure (*C*, vv. 249-52).

('However, you haven't carried anything (be certain of it, I promise you) wounding any authority or damaging anyone unjustly')

Here again, though, there is dexterous handling of expression that furnishes a more subtle, itself dissimulated, meaning: l'Acteur does not state that there is nothing provocative in his work, only that there is nothing to wound any authority or damage anyone unjustly. There may well, therefore, be justified criticism, or, equally, material that, far from seeking damage or injury, aims at correcting behaviour and restoring (the Church's) authority and strives to work for the common good rather than

targeting a particular body or individual. Concern for *la chose publique* is a commonplace in fifteenth-century polemical literature;⁴³ Helen Solterer has written of Christine de Pizan playing the role of ‘public advocate’, after a Ciceronian model of oratory,⁴⁴ as an enabling template for civic action that makes a virtue of injurious language, since the speaker who blames is identifying the forces that jeopardize the state and thereby safeguarding the body politic. Blaming is not a divisive speech act, but acts in the interests of coherence.⁴⁵ In the prologue to *CD*, Le Franc cites certain Classical authorities to buttress his own rhetorical project, including Cicero, but also Persius and Juvenal,⁴⁶ remarking, for instance: ‘I won’t ever deny that I said many things through indignation, like Juvenal, satiric poet, who, writing against the vices of his time...’ (*CD*, p. 6). It is possible, therefore, to see him casting at least elements of *CD* as invective, in light of this prefatory admission and of the above-cited stanza in *C* denying injury to any individual.⁴⁷ The most arresting invective content of *CD* is

⁴³ Also *le bien publique/commun*; related, of course, to the figure of the body politic, a commonplace in medieval political discourse.

⁴⁴ ‘Fiction versus Defamation: the Quarrel over the *Romance of the Rose*’, *Medieval History Journal* 2.1 (1999), 111-41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Jung, pp. 20-21. The Prologue merits more detailed treatment, not least since it and *C* could be seen to book-end *CD* in P1 and function together as liminary pieces.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, discussing the political potency of Roman verse satire, Matthew Roller notes that neither Persius nor Juvenal ‘*explicitly* attacks or praises any contemporary figure who holds an influential position in government’ (my emphasis): ‘Politics and Invective in Persius and Juvenal’, *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*,

found in the speeches of Lady Holy Church imprecating her false sons for betraying their true mother, and also of Lady France exclaiming against those responsible for devastating France and issuing angry imperatives to repair damage inflicted during the Hundred Years' War (vv. 3122-60).⁴⁸ Both play on the figure of the body politic, most strikingly in Holy Church's representation of her 'precious body' being pierced by the 'false tongues' of traitors (vv. 9655-56). Furthermore, in *C*, immediately preceding lines 249-52, Author lays bare to his interlocutor the object of his rhetorical art:

Or saches, fieulx, que ma science

N'est pour oreilles affoler:

Je n'en eulx oncq experience;⁴⁹

Ains est pour langues affiler (*C*, vv. 245-48).

('Now take heed, my son, that my skill is not in delighting ears – I've never had experience of that – but in sharpening tongues')

So, however provocative or not the poem's content (and in whatever manner), his aim is to stimulate discussion,⁵⁰ with the sharpening of tongues evoking an aggravated

ed. Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 283-311 (p. 284).

⁴⁸ One recalls, for instance, Dame France in Alain Chartier's *Quadrilogue invectif* (1422).

⁴⁹ A reference to the poet's youth, if one follows Paris? (see above, n. 38, and below, n. 58)

response,⁵¹ such as the raising of objections evoked by the courtiers' animated postures in B1's presentation miniature. If it is intended to incite debate, this suggests that it carries material of concern to a broad audience, with the poet acting in the interests of 'our public good (*chose publique*)' (CD, v. 9972). Vehement denial of injurious substance in Author's parenthetical reiterated assurance, 'be certain of it, I promise you' (C, v. 250), whether accurate or misleadingly overdetermined, in and of itself draws attention to what is being asserted and suggests that subtle interpretation may need to be brought to bear. As Solterer pithily remarks, 'fiction always carries political weight. Especially in the denial of it'.⁵²

Intertextual and political mapping: the path of virtue

In a further shift, Author moves into moralising mode in the second half of *C*, allegorising Book into a figure of Virtue, beginning with the personal encouragement that it is 'in the first labours of virtue' (C, v. 297), before a series of three stanzas structured around sentential expressions of Virtue's worldly struggles, its resilience, and ultimate invincibility:

Vertu ne puet estre sans guerre (C, vv. 301-3)

Vertu ne repute deux neffles

⁵⁰ The idiom (*avoir la langue affilée* ('to be talkative')) was already current in the fifteenth century.

⁵¹ cf. *The Satires of A. Persius Flaccus*, comm. and trans. John Conington, ed. H. Nettleship (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 1.107-10.

⁵² Solterer, p. 141.

Se Male Bouche la combat

[...]

Vertu en guerre a son esbat (vv. 309-10; 313)

Tout est a vertu transitoire;

Vertu passe tout et endure

Pour acquerir honneur et gloire

Et renon lequel tousjours dure (vv. 317-20).

(‘Virtue cannot exist without conflict; Virtue doesn’t give a fig if Foul Mouth fights her [...] Virtue thrives in war; To Virtue, everything is transient: Virtue outlives everything and endures to acquire honour, glory, and everlasting renown’)

This moralisation’s direct addressee is Book, its explicit function being to embolden it to return to court; there is also quite dense intertextuality directed at the implied audience, the court itself, to persuade them not only to accept, but also to value more considerably the work on offer. Its virtue is pitched against the curial culture of envy and trifles, its lasting merit opposed to their taste ‘for transient tales and events’ (C, v. 56). The figure of Virtue proposed could be seen as specifically Christian, promising eternal reward for virtuous deeds, but also evocative of worldly ambition, and perhaps also, in line with other Classical resonances in the poem, playing off the Roman sense of *virtus*,⁵³ whether quite generally, in terms of an ideal of courageous, manly conduct;⁵⁴ or more intricately, regarding the contribution of *virtus* to the interests of the *res publica* (thereby tying in with above discussion of concern for the *chose*

⁵³ For glory necessarily ensuing from a thirst for virtue, see, for example, Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.38.91.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.18.43, for the relationship between *virtus* and *vir*.

publique); or even playing upon the *clerc/chevalier* dichotomy, as the poet-clerk submits the humble product of his labours to the aristocratic patron: Cicero determined that *virtus*, earned by merit not birthright, was accessible to the *novus homo*;⁵⁵ Le Franc's Author refers to Book's first steps down the path of virtue, above, and also explains its rough treatment by the court in terms of its status as a 'newcomer' (*C*, v. 256).⁵⁶

The most intriguing intertextuality ties *Virtue* in with Le Franc's own œuvre. Most straightforwardly, mention of 'Foul Mouth' (*C*, v. 310) immediately conjures up *CD*, casting Free Will himself as *Virtue*, with the 'conflict' being his ultimately victorious war of words against *Foulmouth*'s representatives. More complex, because potentially more significant in its ramifications, is implied interplay with Le Franc's only other known vernacular work, a prosimetrum debate *L'Estrif de Fortune et Vertu* (c. 1447-48, *EFV*). I have argued elsewhere for the strength of echoes of argument and expression in making this link,⁵⁷ so will focus here on its implications. *EFV* was

⁵⁵ Neal Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 94-95.

⁵⁶ The scope of reference for virtue is potentially vast; in the *Policraticus*, virtue is heralded as the greatest good, and is related to liberty in terms of free speaking (7.25) that could have interesting pertinence for understanding the role of Free Will and the response intended to be elicited from the duke in patiently permitting criticism in the name of virtue.

⁵⁷ 'Martin Le Franc et son livre qui se plaint: une petite énigme à la cour de Philippe le Bon,' in *L'écrit et le manuscrit à la fin du Moyen Age*, ed. Tania Van Hemelryck and Céline Van Hoorebeeck (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 329-42; 'Competing

commissioned by Philip the Good, and was very successfully received; over thirty manuscript copies survive.⁵⁸ The subtle argument that one could see this connection to construct would be that, in *EFV*, Virtue's victory in debate with Fortune, arbitrated by Reason, buttresses Author's certainty in *C* that Virtue, representing *CD*, will triumph – will experience renown – in the end. Of particular interest is the political context underlying the chronology of Le Franc's interactions with the Burgundian duke: first offer of *CD* in 1442; presenting *EFV* around 1447-48; and submitting the second copy of *CD*, with *C*, in 1451. In 1447, Le Franc was chosen by Felix V as apostolic legate to the court of Burgundy. In March 1447, Nicholas V succeeded Eugenius IV and worked towards repairing the schism. Le Franc was involved in these negotiations, in his capacity as papal secretary. In 1449, Amadeus VIII stood down as pope; the Council dissolved. Amadeus died on 7 January 1451.⁵⁹

Codes of Authority in Mid-Fifteenth Century Burgundy: Martin Le Franc and the Book that Answers Back', in *Authority in European Book Culture 1400-1600*, ed. Pollie Bromilow (London/New York: Ashgate) (forthcoming). We may also note Author's specification that 'one of my books' (*C*, v. 6) appeared to him, implying the existence of at least one other.

⁵⁸ *L'Estrif de Fortune et Vertu*, ed. Peter F. Dembowski (Geneva: Droz, 1999), pp. xvii-xxviii. Such successful reception would thus contradict Author's assertion that he's never had the experience of delighting an audience's ears (*C*, v. 247), making the latter an ironic, disingenuous protestation?

⁵⁹ *EFV*, pp. xvii-xix. For relations between the papacy, Council and Burgundian court at this time, see Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), pp. 214-16.

But what does this coterminous sequence of events mean for our reading of *C*? It gives us a likely scenario for Le Franc's composition of *EFV*; it does not tell us whether the reason for this commission derived entirely from his presence in 1447 or was linked to the earlier (therefore successful) presentation of *CD*. It tells us that *CD*'s alleged political hot potato of basilien sympathies had cooled by the time of P1; it does not tell us why Le Franc chose still to foreground this aspect of the work or with what attitude towards the Council P1 was presented: a sense of desperation after its disbandment? A sense of hope under the new pope? If we were to see *C* as part of an ongoing relationship rather than a re-attempt at entry, we might see Le Franc to be building on the success of *EFV* to establish an identity of Burgundian sympathy (hence the rash of insignia at the opening of P1), rather than *CD* being open to the charge of being too pro-French⁶⁰ through its support for Basel and personification of Lady France. Alternatively, one could construe *C*'s overall tone as more playful, its recollection of *EFV* a collusive nudge from poet to patron,⁶¹ its flagging up of Basel a knowing bite that has lost its teeth, and at least part of its reference to a need for time (for Virtue to flower, for Book to be patient (*C*, v. 290)) looking backwards to the lapse of time between B1 and P1, and thus to the change in circumstance between the two moments.⁶² However, one might alternatively start from the fact that there was,

⁶⁰ Wijsman, p. 225, n. 33.

⁶¹ Of the kind we construe for Machaut – for example, when his narrator in *JRB* highlights his acquaintance with the Castle of Durbuy (vv. 1364-501), Jean de Luxembourg's historical residence.

⁶² This change may not, in fact, primarily be related to matters political; as Wijsman explores (pp. 223-38), there is little evidence for Philip's active interest in books before 1445.

even if B1 was accepted, felt to be the need for a second copy of *CD*: perhaps to reinforce its messages – whether specifically the rightness of the Basilien cause or a more general suing for peace in relations with France – as a serious *speculum principis*; references to time being assurance of the future glory (for Martin? For Philip?) ensured by adopting the course of action promoted by the poem.

‘It may be’: supplement and status

It is tempting to respond to this aporia by recourse to Cerquiglini-Toulet’s formulation of the ‘serious game’, but important to consider whether this would amount to a resolution of the questions raised by *C* or a retreat from them into a substitute conclusion. Returning to the parallel with *JRB* and *JRN*, the status of *C* is that of supplement to *CD*, but not, like *JRN*, a work surviving in its own right, as *C* does not feature in any of the seven later manuscripts of Le Franc’s poem. Palmer notes how, both artistically and codicologically, the meaning of *JRB* and *JRN* is collective: ‘they cannot be considered adequately in isolation’.⁶³ Despite, as suggested above, complex intertextual relations, the same cannot be said for *CD* and *C*. Later copies of *CD*, particularly those intended for a Burgundian audience,⁶⁴ maintain the connection with Philip the Good: no new dedicatory prologue is substituted, and one manuscript

⁶³ ‘Transtextuality’, p. 284. *JRN* is juxtaposed with *JRB* in all surviving copies that include both poems: Earp, pp. 77-128.

⁶⁴ Seven out of the nine extant copies are associated with the Burgundian court: Pascale Charron, *Le Maître du Champion des dames* (Paris: CTHS/INHA, 2004), p. 195; cf. Wijsman, pp. 225, 242, 288, 372.

includes an *Epitaphe* poem in memory of the duke.⁶⁵ It does not seem, therefore, as if *C* was excluded because *CD*'s value as an occasional poem had expired, but it may have been that, the particular relationship between poet and patron having ended, it had lost its pertinence. Perhaps *C* was seen as redundant, given that subsequent manuscripts, no longer able to play on the alleged rejection of the previous copy (that is, B1), already, by dint of their existence, attested to *CD*'s success.

JRN concludes with an apparent admission of error and pledge of penance:

Je, Guillaumes des sus nommez,
Qui de Machau sui seurnommez,
Pour miex congnoistre mon meffait,
Ay ce livret rimé et fait (*JRN*, vv. 4199-202).

(I, the Guillaume named above, who has the surname de Machaut, in order the better to understand my fault, have composed and rhymed this little book)

However, in light of the fancy footwork discussed above in respect of *C*, one could read contrition as self-promotion: the wish 'better to know' (*congnoistre*) one's fault as a desire 'to make better known' (*faire congnoistre*) through further literary production. Therefore, whilst Machaut's *livret* (*JRN* and the *Lay de plour*) at least superficially transform the argument of *JRB* and Le Franc's (P1) does not change the content of *CD*, one could posit a similar outcome for both of authorial self-assertion through fictional representation of an apparently beleaguered writerly self.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Grenoble, Bibliothèque Municipale, 352 Rés.

⁶⁶ For *JRN*, see Palmer, 'Metafictional', p. 88.

C does not offer us a unitary, consistent narrative of *CD*'s first reception, nor are we able to construct a single, coherent story about the relationship it entertains between poetry and politics. This should neither disappoint nor surprise us. Assuming the artistic mettle of Le Franc is equal to his Champion's reflections on the subtlety of literary creation, we should not expect or demand his text to yield to (our) desire to digest its workings into a concise synopsis determining clearly what to take at face value and what to question. Book begs of Author a 'safe conduct' (*C*, v. 393) to guarantee its passage into the Burgundian court; he is denied any additional support⁶⁷ – any equivalent of the 'fitted-up dog' – as it appears that *C* itself is intended as the safeguard of *CD*'s success, albeit not a key to our critical unpicking of its subtlety.

⁶⁷ Cf. above, n. 42.