

8.

Telling Tales: What Is a *dit*?

Helen J. Swift

Mon cuer si doucement resjoie
Qu'en grant senté et en grant joie
Li change mal, u tu me dis
Que pris en gré sera mes dis.
Or doit Dieus qu'en bon gré le prengne,
Et qu'en li servant ne mesprengne. (fol. 58^v)

[Hope] so sweetly cheers my heart that its sorrow is changed to great joy and comfort, when you tell me that my *dit* will be welcomed by her. Now may God grant that she accept it gladly, and that I never err in serving her.¹

The closing lines of Machaut's *Remede* are one of many moments in his poetry where the persona refers to the product of his composition as *dit*.² Here, it designates the preceding text in narrative and lyric verse as a collective and in some measure coherent entity. But what exactly does *dit* mean? 'Mes dis' can be translated literally as 'what I have said' or 'my words'; the wordplay on 'dis' between lines 4297 and 4298 (between second-person present tense indicative verb and plural noun) underscores association with the spoken word and highlights the act of

¹ *Remede de Fortune*, trans. Wimsatt and Kibler 1988, 408 (lines 4295–300).

² Other such moments include, for instance, the *Prologue* (Hoepffner 1908–21, vol. 1), ballade 1, line 5 (p. 1); ballade 2, lines 6 and 24 (p. 3), etc., where mentions of 'dis' look forwards prospectively to Guillaume's output of 'new, pleasing tales [dis] of love', and the close of Machaut's *Le Livre dou Voir dit* (line 9073); Leech-Wilkinson and Palmer 1998, p. 624; where, as in the *Remede* quotation above, 'ce dit' evokes retrospectively the persona's foregoing account of events.

By 'persona', I mean the first-person voice of a text, a literary *je* who usually fulfils a narrating function and is often denoted in medieval French by the term 'l'Acteur'. I prefer 'persona' to 'narrator' as a default term because a narrating role is not exclusive to the first-person voice – it can be fulfilled by other characters; correspondingly, the persona does not always or only narrate.

telling. In reading ‘dis’ as ‘what I have said’, one could privilege either the *what* or the *how*: the account itself or the manner of its recounting. I want to foreground the latter – the telling of the tale rather than the tale itself – as a way of orientating our approach to *dit* as a literary category. Reflection on this *how* can help us better understand aspects of Machaut’s poetics and their presentation in MS C.³

In Machaut studies, *dit* is the term applied by scholars to the narrative verse texts in which the author’s first-person literary persona recounts adventures in love. Whether they are primarily his own experiences or those of others that he has overheard or had told to him, the persona is nearly always cast as a lover himself. These are the ‘new, pleasing tales [*dis*] of love’ that textual Guillaume is exhorted to compose in the *Prologue*, Machaut’s latest narrative poem that he famously placed at the start of collected-works MS A as a kind of positioning statement to preface the series of *dits* that take up the following 350-plus folios.⁴ *Dit* is an extremely loose category designation. As we shall see, there has been considerable debate as to whether or not it denotes a genre. Given its difficult-to-determine distinguishing features in terms of form, content, or theme, there is often a tendency to define it negatively rather than positively, regarding what it is not: for example, spoken, not sung; narrative, not lyric. I want to explore how to situate the *dit* in relation to the various binaries that are brought to bear to describe it, and to ascertain its most meaningful distinctive characteristics. What are the specific properties of the *dit*? I propose two features: its handling of narrative voice as a particular kind of tale teller, and

³ I look here exclusively at the French tradition of *dits*; the question of the extent to which the form is distinctively French lies beyond the scope of the present chapter, though one might consider Sylvia Huot’s glance at the German tradition (Huot 1987, 337) and Laurence de Looze’s comparison of Machaut’s *dits* with ‘pseudo-autobiographies’ in German, Italian, and Spanish (De Looze 1997).

⁴ *Prologue*, ballade 1, line 5 (Hoepffner 1908–21, 1: 1). See Swift 2012, 19–24.

its relational approach to what constitutes the poetic text being told. This proposition will be borne out through examination of patterns of text-image relations and page layout in MS C.

The *dit* as ‘archi-genre’

While most of this chapter will consider the fourteenth-century use of *dit*, and specifically how we understand it in Machaut’s poetics, we should acknowledge the term’s much longer history of use by medieval writers/scribes and the broader scope of its application by modern critics.

Monique Léonard, in her important work on its earlier medieval usage, lists 684 instances before 1340, from Hélinand de Froidmont’s *Vers de la mort* (1195) to the works of Jean de Condé.⁵

Cognisant that its use covers, in reality, a wide range of forms (p. 10), Léonard nonetheless delineates a set of traits that distinguish poetry carrying the term in this period:

une œuvre littéraire rédigée en vers, non chantée, plutôt brève, dont l’auteur cherche à transmettre une *senefiance* grace à quelques procédés stylistiques éprouvés et dont le locuteur intervient dans le corps du texte. (p. 344)

a literary work composed in verse, not sung, fairly short, whose author seeks to convey a meaning by means of certain tried and tested stylistic processes and whose speaker intervenes in the body of the text.⁶

Léonard’s contribution to *dit* scholarship is not simply archival compilation; she also inflects conceptual reflection on the term’s use. Noting that late-medieval theoretical texts on vernacular verse composition, known as *arts de seconde rhétorique*, do not include it as a category (p. 11), she surveys literary historians’ deployment of it (pp. 12–30), and debates whether or not it

⁵ Léonard 1996. Subsequent references are incorporated in the text.

⁶ Unless stated otherwise, translations into English of French are my own.

constitutes a genre.⁷ None of her responses to the latter question concludes that it does, but some talk interestingly around the question. Perhaps least helpfully, she suggests that the *dit* encompassed all other defined narrative genres (fabliau, lai, roman, etc.), which diffuses the term's meaning beyond useful definition.⁸ Percipiently, however, she identifies how critics' recourse to *dit* as a 'for want of anything better' categorisation results in a self-fulfilling circle: works that do not readily fit a recognised genre are susceptible to classification as *dits*, cumulatively becoming representative of what constitutes a *dit* and thereby resulting in our sense of a *dit* as 'any item [...] whose "distinguishing feature" is [...] that it doesn't belong to any specific "genre!"' (p. 350).

Why is it so difficult to define? As several critics have noted, there is no way of delimiting a *dit* by reference to type of verse form (strophic or non-strophic), content, or style; as Anthime Fourrier remarked, 'when it comes to tone and subject matter, none is excluded'.⁹ Useful attempts to re-orientate scholarly attention have switched focus from subject matter to 'style of writing';¹⁰ or from a restrictive and reifying *what it is* to a more mobile *what it does* ('tradition' to 'function', in Daniel Poirion's terms);¹¹ or have considered it relationally as a 'composite form', 'fusion', 'synthesis', or 'compromise'.¹² While one might view the latter approach sceptically, as risking a poor solution (making of the *dit* a bit of everything else, with no something of its own), hybridity is certainly pertinent to the most significant shift in the identity of the *dit* in the 1330s or so, concerning the relationship between lyric and narrative,

⁷ Any discussion of parameters of a particular medieval genre should of course be prefaced with acknowledgement of the slipperiness of 'genre' as a concept in, and applied to, the period: see Busby 2008.

⁸ As Duval notes (2014, 17).

⁹ Fourrier 1979, 13.

¹⁰ Léonard 1996, 353; see also Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980.

¹¹ Poirion 1980.

¹² Lechat 2005, 12 and 73; Poirion 1980, 150; Ribémont 1990, 7.

sung and spoken material.¹³ What prompts the *terminus ad quem* of Léonard's study is her observation that nearly all *dits* before 1340 'characterise themselves in opposition to song' (p. 56),¹⁴ whereas, thereafter, and 'essentially starting with Guillaume de Machaut', song is often included in the poem, notably in the *Remede* and *Voir dit*. Hence the most frequently employed relational term for the *dit* in modern criticism is 'lyrico-narrative',¹⁵ though this qualifier indicating hybridity – the co-existence of difference, 'the simultaneity of two-ness'¹⁶ – gets used in two quite different ways. First, and most often, it refers to the formal composite resulting from lyrics, intended to be sung, being inserted into narrative verse (especially if accompanied by their melody in musical notation, as with seven of the lyrical insertions in MS C's copy of the *Remede*).¹⁷ This use situates Machaut's *dits* in the longer history of what have come to be called 'hybrid narratives', narratives interlarded with lyrics, that reaches back to Jean Renart. Second, however, 'lyrico-narrative' is sometimes used to depict the nature of *dit* narrative verse itself, with or without intercalated lyrics, as a fusion of features of the two forms, thereby emphasising the role of the poetic persona as lover and as first-person anchor of the tale, which is held to distinguish it from other narrative genres (such as the third-person *lai*) and to mark its affinity with trouvère song (such as the lyric *I* of Gace Brulé or Thibaut de Champagne). Two important contextual factors are sometimes brought to bear when discussing 'lyrico-narrative' in this second use – one material and the other literary-historical. The material record of the lyric tradition, alongside poems' appearances as insertions in formal composites, is such that some

¹³ A further development noted is increase in length: Lechat (2005, 11) averages out Machaut's *dits* at 3200 lines and Froissart's at 4500 lines.

¹⁴ See also Zink 1999, 38.

¹⁵ Poirion (1980, 149) attributes the coinage to Pierre Le Gentil. Another frequently cited qualifier is Pierre-Yves Badel's 'mi-narratif, mi-didactique' (for example, by Cerquiglini-Toulet (1988, 86)).

¹⁶ Walker Bynum 2005, 30.

¹⁷ See, for example, Boulton 1993.

chronologically earlier lyric poetry can be seen to be contemporary with developments in the *dit*, since the former only starts to be compiled into chansonniers in the course of the thirteenth and into the fourteenth centuries.¹⁸ An important literary-historical influence in this same period is *Le Roman de la rose*.¹⁹ The *dit*'s identity as erotic pseudo-autobiography is often seen to fuse together the lyricism of Guillaume de Lorris with the clerkliness of Jean de Meun.²⁰

The second use of the qualifier 'lyrico-narrative' entails reflection on the scope of meaning of *dit* in the later medieval period. If the first use, designating a formal composite, maintains a distinction (albeit complementary rather than oppositional) between *dit* and *chant*, the second suggests that *dit* could itself embrace both. Elizabeth Eva Leach notes that *dire* 'can be used to describe oral performance anywhere along the spectrum from spoken recitation to singing'.²¹ Julia Drobinsky's close reading of the *Remede* finds certain of its lyrics, those whose performance is not dramatised in the plot (such as the lai and the *complainte*), to be prefaced by collocations of *dit* with 'faire', whereas lyrics whose delivery is staged are introduced by vocabulary relating to their oral performance as sung items.²² Wherever one situates *dit* on the spectrum of orality, a crucial further component of its meaning in a post-1340 lyrico-narrative context is its rootedness in a writerly art of composition.²³ Writing verse is what is connoted by 'faire' in Drobinsky's analysis of the *Remede*. Fabrication of the text, 'fis je ce dit qu'on

¹⁸ Gaunt 1999, 244; Swift and Stone 2020.

¹⁹ Huot 1987, 83–105; Lechat 2005, 57–77; Poirion 1980, 148.

²⁰ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 160–61; Lechat 2005, 73.

²¹ Leach 2011b, 27.

²² Drobinsky 2004c, 60–61. Later in the fourteenth century, Eustache Deschamps's *Art de dictier* (dated 1392) uses 'diz' to mean fixed-form lyrics that are recited, not sung (Sinnreich-Levi 1994, for example, p. 271); Deschamps's use of 'dictier' is in the sense of 'versify' (Lechat 2005, 39–40). In the poetic vocabulary of Machaut and Froissart, *dit* is usually seen to have been used in near interchangeability with *dittié* and also *traitié*; see Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 92; D. Kelly 2014, 126–37; Poirion 1980, 148; and Ribémont 1990, 7.

²³ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 163; Huot 1987, 4.

claimme lay' (I composed this piece that is called a lai; fol. 26^r, line 430), precedes its being read aloud, 'qu'elle me commanda au lire' (she ordered me to read it; fol. 28^v, line 693), and, as we shall see further below, is highlighted in MS C, whose rubric 'Comment l'Amant fait un lay de son sentement' (How the Lover composes a lai about his feelings; fol. 26^r) prefaces a two-column miniature of the persona inscribing the piece onto a scroll (Figure 4.1).²⁴ This presentation elevates the idea of writing to something creatively compositional, not simply transcriptional, and thereby promotes the image of the word as something read and seen, not (only) heard. In Machaut's *Jugement dou roy de Behaingne*, the character of the Knight is famously invested with awareness of his oral argument being written material, and of his foregoing debate with the Lady being a spatially locatable section of text:

Et si avions fait maint argument,
Si comme il est escript plus plainnement
Yci dessus. (fol. 17^v)

And we made many arguments, | Just as it is written more fully | Here above.²⁵

The framework of the text, the codex, is thereby brought into play as a written performance space. Poetry is concretised and visualised as material artefact, with 'livre' (book) serving as a synonym for *dit*.²⁶ Sylvia Huot posits as related phenomena the *dit* and the rise of the single-author codex in the fourteenth century, such as Machaut's MS C.²⁷ The writerliness of the *dit*

²⁴ Wimsatt and Kibler 1988, 190–91 and 206–07.

²⁵ Palmer 2016, 117 (lines 1594–96).

²⁶ See, for instance, Deborah McGrady's discussion of *Voir dit*, lines 490–525 (McGrady 2006, 91–94). Note also the rubrics in MS E framing Machaut's *Dit de la fonteinne amoureuse*, fols 83^r and 91^r: 'Cy commance le livre morpheus'; 'Explicit le dit de la fontainne amoureuse'.

²⁷ Huot 1987, 213; she declines to specify further the nature of the relationship (in terms of identifying the influence of one on the other, etc.).

thus re-directs the kinds of literary reflexivity familiar in vernacular lyric poetry since the troubadours' thematisation of literary creativity, such as the famous 'Farai un vers de dreyt rien' (I shall make a verse about nothing at all) of Guillaume IX.²⁸ A significant impulse for this new direction may be the *Roman de la rose*, whose later thirteenth-century continuation by Jean de Meun thematised the process of writing in a specifically clerkly vein as part of an intellectualisation of courtly love poetry.²⁹ Such a sense of intellectual or scholarly compass features frequently in delineations of the late-medieval *dit*'s key features. Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay cast it, in its widest definition, as 'a kind of "archi-genre" in which knowledge is always at stake';³⁰ for Poirion, it 'assumes a certain scholarly ambition'.³¹ In this light, it does not seem incongruous that Christine de Pizan, in her *Chemin de longue étude* (1402), should refer to Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* by the word 'dit'.³² However, this should not mislead us into seeing the *dit* as mere vehicle of knowledge transfer. It stands instead as a promotion of the capacities of vernacular verse to carry, critique and debate knowledge and ways of knowing. We shall explore how this often entails a promotion of uncertainty – for example, through unresolved plot conclusion or narratorial ambiguity.³³

The Late-Medieval *dit*: Machaut and Beyond

In scholarly study of late-medieval poetics, Machaut is most often the fulcrum around which analysis of the *dit* turns, which accords him, rightly or wrongly, a defining role in our

²⁸ Swift and Stone 2020, 112–113.

²⁹ Huot 1991. See also Armstrong and Kay 2011; and Lechat 2005, 56.

³⁰ Armstrong and Kay 2011, 198.

³¹ Daniel Poirion posits that the *dit* thereby responded to the tastes of the court for 'games that were more intellectual than emotional' (1980, 150).

³² Noted by Lechat (2005, 53); this occurs in line 279 (see Tarnowski 2000, 104).

³³ Douglas Kelly (2014, 88–89) sees *dits* functioning to raise open questions, presenting quandary and irresolution as prompts for reflection and discussion.

understanding of the term's literary use and our conceptualisation of it as a category. On one hand, there is a straightforward case that Machaut offers us a rich repertoire of fascinating poems that are designated *dit* either textually, by him as author, or paratextually in manuscripts whose compilation we believe that he supervised; for instance, the explicit rubric on fol. 102^v of MS C reads: 'Ci fenist le dit dou vergier' (Here concludes the tale of the orchard). On the other hand, one could find methodological fault with according his output so dominant a role. It risks imposing too fixed a privileged template, such that subsequent compositions are configured subordinately as versions of or variations on a Machaldian model. It can also lead to blind spots in our critical gaze. Douglas Kelly, in a 2014 monograph on Machaut, remarks that,

in analysing the medieval *dit*, we are today about where we were in the late 1950s and 1960s when Chrétien de Troyes emerged as the central author of Arthurian romances [...]. Similarly, today Machaut is the central author and the principal reference for *dit* composition, while some of his epigones await more study.³⁴

His point about prominence is valid, but I would argue that the blind spot here is in fact partly Kelly's: his configuration of Machaut's successors as 'epigones' already relegates them to inferior status (and so hardly encourages further study) and somewhat unjustly disregards a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century industry of critical re-evaluation (and re-edition) of Froissart's narrative verse and, moving into the fifteenth century, of Alain Chartier.³⁵

Among Machaut's corpus, the work most often spotlighted in *dit* discussions is the *Voir dit*, most famously in Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet's seminal article, 'Le clerc et l'écriture: le

³⁴ D. Kelly 2014, 232.

³⁵ For Froissart, one may note Kristen M. Figg and R. Barton Palmer's bilingual edition (2001) and Didier Lechat's monograph (2005). Chartier's narrative poetry has received increased attention since the seminal doctoral work of Emma Cayley and Joan E. McRae in the 1990s, culminating most recently in Delogu, Cayley, and McRae 2015.

Voir Dit de Guillaume de Machaut et la définition du *dit*'.³⁶ The tale traces the arc of a clerkly persona's love affair conducted through a lyric and epistolary exchange with his beloved, which ultimately constitutes the book that he offers as his gift to her. The *Voir dit* seems to embody perfectly all the aspects of the 'archi-genre' discussed thus far: its hybridity (here as multi-faceted formal composite, adding prose into the mix of lyric and narrative verse), its writerly consciousness, and its clerkly casting. But we should beware of seeing it in any way as a representative example. It is, as Cerquiglini-Toulet herself recognises, a 'borderline case',³⁷ and this applies in several senses. For example, it is by far Machaut's longest *dit* at over 9000 lines of verse alone; its title is also unusually formulated as *Le Livre dou Voir dit* and not, for instance, 'Le Dit dou voir', in accordance with the usual template (*Le Dit dou vergier*, *Le Dit dou lyon*, etc.).³⁸ The title is obviously provocative in more than just its word order, making explicit as it does a truth claim that we find implicit or thematised across a range of *dits*.³⁹ They tend both to broadcast their fictionality (for instance, through a dream framework or dialogue with personifications) and point up moments of realism, such as references to historically true people and places.⁴⁰ The result is question raising: what kinds of truth are being told, and should we be attending to truth lying in the tale or in the act of its telling? It is seductive to perceive the *Voir dit* as the acme of Machaut's ambition as an author of *dits*, and the arrangement of collected-works manuscripts in which it appears initially seems to support this perspective: in MSS **A**, **F**, and **Pm**, the *Voir dit* is the final *dit amoureux* in a sequence – but in none of them is it in fact the

³⁶ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980.

³⁷ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 165–66. See also Lechat (2005, 57), who sees the *Voir dit* to 'call into question the very definition of the *dit*'.

³⁸ Poirion 1980, 148.

³⁹ McGrady 2006, 93; Taylor 1993.

⁴⁰ Leach 2011b, 26–33.

final *dit*.⁴¹ Another reason why we should be cautious about ascribing it undue status as a touchstone is that we risk retroactively framing Machaut's other poems as precursors, valued only insofar as they anticipate, along a teleological trajectory, the ultimate achievement of the *Voir dit*. Studying *dits* in MS C is salutary in this regard, in that the *Voir dit* does not feature, having not yet been composed at the time of the manuscript's compilation.⁴² We should nonetheless be careful that we do not create a narrative for the 'archi-genre' according to its presence in MS C that is itself retrospectively conditioned by the *Voir dit*'s future appearance.

The *dit*'s suppleness as a literary category lends it to being applied to works well into the fifteenth century for which no contemporary textual or paratextual evidence exists designating it thus. François Villon's *Testament* (c. 1461), a famously bewildering mid fifteenth-century mock will, is identified by a number of critics as a *dit*;⁴³ this is perhaps best seen as an instance of Léonard's 'for want of anything better' classification. That the *Testament* is a first-person strophic narrative poem with inserted fixed-form lyrics is about the only unambiguous statement that one can make of the work. The parameters of the *dit* can be considered spatially as well as chronologically: is a *dit* only constituted by a single work or can it also be defined transtextually? Since Machaut's *Remede* has been cast as an anthology on account of the range of lyric forms that it includes,⁴⁴ conversely, then, can one see a cluster of poems that form part of an anthology as a *dit*? One may think, for example, of the narrative-verse *Retenue d'amour* and *Songe en complainte*, which book-end a sequence of ballades in Charles d'Orléans's personal manuscript

⁴¹ In all cases, the *Dit de la rose* is still to come: in MS A, after *La prise d'Alexandre*; in MS F, after *Dit de la marguerite*; and in MS Pm before the *Dit de l'alerion*.

⁴² Six of what will feature as inserted lyrics in the *Voir dit* already figure in the *Loange des dames* in MS C.

⁴³ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 90; Léonard 1996, 354. 'Ce dit' is also used by Villon's persona to refer to his will-writing project in line 827; see Cerquiglini-Toulet and Tabard 2014, 85.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Brownlee 1991.

of lyric poetry.⁴⁵ In a multi-author anthology, what about the first-person narrative poems and lyrics of the *Jardin de plaisance et fleur de rethorique*: are these collectively a/several *dit(s)*, and is viewing them thus helpful to our perception of the poetics of their composition and the principles of their structural coherence?⁴⁶

The Poetic *I*: ‘Now I shall speak of my own life’

The key structural feature of the *dit* is its anchor in a sustained first-person discourse that furnishes both personal narrative and commentary.⁴⁷ Michel Zink consequently casts it as a ‘romance of the self’,⁴⁸ but we should be careful as to how we interpret such a classification. It is in some sense an ‘internalized romance’, affording anecdotal biographical detail of the persona’s experience, but is predominantly theatrical in offering ‘a display of the self in the face of others and society’.⁴⁹ The *I* is defined by interactions with others, and looks and listens without itself to glean ‘its’ narrative. The ‘moi’ concerned is thus neither self-contained nor unitary; it is, rather, plural, as Cerquiglini-Toulet indicates when specifying that we encounter ‘both an *I* representing the speaker and an *I* of the utterance’.⁵⁰ Such multiplicity can be illustrated by a passage from the *Dit de l’alerion*. After reflecting generally on human character traits, manifested through hypothesised third-person examples of childhood behaviour, the ‘speaker *I*’ turns to himself as ‘*I* of utterance’:

Des or mes diray de mon estre

⁴⁵ See Arn 2008.

⁴⁶ See Swift 2016b, 120–45; and Taylor 2007, 229–91.

⁴⁷ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 87; Lechat 2005, 11.

⁴⁸ Zink 1999, 54.

⁴⁹ Zink 1999, 55 and 50.

⁵⁰ Cerquiglini-Toulet, 1980, 164.

Comment en jonesse jouay
Et quelle enfance desnouay. (fol. 60^r)

Now I shall speak of my own life | and of how I played when I was young, | and what my
childhood showed of me.⁵¹

Plurality of person and tense compose a complex first-person identity: the present-tense *I* adopts a scrutinising gaze on his past *I*; the narrative account of that past, together with accompanying commentary, is promised to be delivered in the forthcoming text. I said ‘*present-tense I*’, but there is in fact no verb in the quotation to support this,⁵² which reminds us that the *je* is not a pre-existing subject but is constituted by the act of telling ‘his’ tale, whose material is mediated by its organisation into a particular account (for example, by the prefatory intention to recount the ‘how’ (‘comment’) and the ‘what’ (‘quelle’)).⁵³ Similarly, the *Vergier* concludes with the persona’s pledge of unending devotion to his lady, which corresponds to his continual self-constitution as a compositional subject: ‘And so I shall never cease’.⁵⁴

I placed ‘his’ in quotation marks in the preceding paragraph as a way of acknowledging the relational constitution of the *I*: the story that he tells is always in relation to others, and so marks an appropriation of others’ story material as his own (such as the way in which the persona of the *Jugement Behaingne* takes charge of the Knight’s and Lady’s debate), and the identity of the teller is mobile, in formation in the moment of utterance.⁵⁵ The complexity of first-person utterance results, in turn, in a complex relationship with the text’s audience. We

⁵¹ Gaudet and Hieatt 1994, 48 (lines 118–20).

⁵² There are also no first-person pronouns in the medieval French of this passage, which is not unusual, as personal pronouns were not mandatory.

⁵³ The mediating role of first-person recollection, which results in greater focus on the mediating subjectivity than on what is being remembered, is explored in particular by Froissart: Kay 2007, 137.

⁵⁴ In Hoepffner 1908–21, 1: 56 (line 1281).

⁵⁵ On this mobility, see Swift 2016a.

cannot fail to be engaged by the persona, but it is not a simple connection of identification; there is critical distance provoked by a range of factors relating to the social role in which he is cast as *clerc*.⁵⁶ He is a scholar as well as a lover, and the two are often an uneasy mix. The position of social subordination to his lady that this entails may be accompanied by a form of personal inadequacy – resulting from age, ill health, or physical impairment – that is deployed in a comic vein, undercutting the authority he purports as narrator.⁵⁷ As someone who engages intellectually as much as emotionally with his circumstances, he is also positioned to the side of events as a witness, whether of his own asserted life experience or that of others.⁵⁸ Bearing sideways witness to events specifically as a writer, he is moreover the force that shapes them – indeed, creates them, which brings into focus the relationship between the *dit* and truth.

Deborah McGrady argues that ‘truth is no longer what resides in the text but in what is taken from the text. That is, truth is in the delivery and interpretation of the work, not in the material evidence inserted into the *dit*’.⁵⁹ The vehicle for truth is the teller of the tale, who authorises its veracity from his own experience, and, in turn, validates that experience by dint of recounting it in the first person.⁶⁰ It is not only in the *Voir dit* that the nature of this truth told is called into question; two moments in the *Remede* are particularly pertinent to our discussions. The first moment is the ending, which returns us to the quotation with which I opened this chapter. Critics have frequently noted lingering uncertainty as to whether a relationship is

⁵⁶ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 165.

⁵⁷ See Cerquiglini-Toulet 1984.

⁵⁸ Armstrong and Kay 2011, 174; Cerquiglini-Toulet 1984, 483–85. For example, both the *Jugement Behaingne* and the *Vergier* set up their narrator-persona as a listener with intent, who sets out ‘in order to hear’ (*Jugement Behaingne*, line 36; *Vergier*, line 20).

⁵⁹ McGrady 2006, 62.

⁶⁰ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 167; Huot 1987, 212. See also Sinclair 2011, 139–49.

successfully forged by the aspirant lover-persona with his lady at the poem's close.⁶¹ In addition, I perceive an implied authorial critical distance from the tenets of erotic desire. This calls into doubt whether the lover-persona is correct in devoting himself so completely to Hope that it totally transforms his outlook from despair to joy. Is this transformation justified or foolish wish-fulfilment? Might the poem's concluding pledge of service be seasoned with irony, in that he promises not to spoil his service with any mistake, but his decision to serve amorously may itself be misplaced? The second pertinent moment is a couplet voiced by the persona that is oft-quoted in criticism as articulating the principle of poetic sincerity: one must compose always 'de bon et de vray sentement' (from true and virtuous sentiment; *Voir dit*, line 262),

Car qui de sentement ne fait,
Son oeuvre et son chant contrefait. (*Remede*, fol. 26^r)

Because he who does not compose according to his feelings falsifies his work and his song.⁶²

But there is an authorially contrived paradox in the persona's sententia. Poetic expression itself entails the feigning ('contrefait') that is compositional artifice, and the kind of composition promoted through the *Remede*, with its mini-anthology of varied lyrics, valorises literary craftsmanship: 'the truth of the *dit* [...] is the truth of a creation, which is to say the truth of an artifice'.⁶³ Indeed, as Huot observes, it is the persona's 'career as poet-singer', rather than a love relationship, that determines his identity;⁶⁴ though I would argue that this poetic career in the *dit*

⁶¹ Huot 1987, 158.

⁶² Wimsatt and Kibler 1988, 188 (lines 407–08). He avers the same in Letter 35 of the *Voir dit*; Leech-Wilkinson and Palmer 1998, 436.

⁶³ Lechat 2005, 181, speaking of the *Voir dit*.

⁶⁴ Huot 1987, 258.

is anchored more in writerly composition than in musical performance, given the role of the persona as recounter of his narrative story, as well as maker ('faire'), reader ('lire'), and, at times, singer of his lyric texts. The *dit* has been seen to forge a new kind of hero through its clerkly protagonist: 'the hero of the written word',⁶⁵ who succeeds above all as a writer of love, regardless of – or, indeed, to the detriment of – his achievement as a lover. His accomplishment lies in the art of telling tales: versifying and recording, such that he may, at the drop of a hat, detach himself from one set of circumstances to move on to the next, as in the *Jugement*

Behaingne:

Ci finerai
Ma matiere, ne plus n'en rimerai,
Car autre part assez a rimer ai. (fol. 22^v)

Here I intend to end | my account; I will rhyme no more, | for I have enough other matters
to put in verse.⁶⁶

Art defines life; experience is perceived through a compositional prism as material awaiting literary mediation in each 'new, pleasing tale of love'.⁶⁷

Relational Textuality

As I indicated above through use of quotation marks qualifying 'his', the act of telling constitutes both the tale *and* the teller. The identity of the persona is so fundamentally bound up with a compositional writerly function that the parameters of that identity are determined by what he

⁶⁵ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1984, 489.

⁶⁶ Palmer 2016, 137 (lines 2052–54).

⁶⁷ On poetry as an essential intermediary to experience (primarily in relation to Froissart), see Armstrong and Kay 2011, 143–44.

does and how he does it rather than by any pre-formed sense of who he is. This entails slippage between any one persona and the next across Machaut's narrative verse output, especially across works that are explicitly connected – notably the *Jugement Navarre* as a response to the *Jugement Behaingne* – as well as those that are picked up intertextually, such as the *Fonteinne* in the *Voir dit*.⁶⁸

The persona is also defined by interrelation in terms of his interactions with other characters in each *dit*'s fictional world. To judge by the frequency and variety of dialogue situations that he stages, and also, as we shall see, by the prominence of their visual rendering in manuscript miniatures, Machaut was keenly interested in acts and modes of communication, a feature fostered in some cases by the *dit*'s formal hybridity. One might bring to his *oeuvre* the expectation that a narrative mode permits a kind of direct communication between two or more figures that cannot be enacted in the stasis of singular subjectivity in lyric. But Machaut's *dits*, as a further facet of their rightly 'lyrico-narrative' identity, mix things up more interestingly: for example, in the *Voir dit*, a lyric scenario permits direct speech, as the persona is unable to speak to his beloved in her presence (line 2010) when he first sees and hears her in the narrative ('ie vi', line 2011; 'ie oy', line 2018) until she has guided him into the *locus amoenus* of an orchard (line 2041); this locational shift into a lyric topos enables him to utter a single rhyming couplet (lines 2080–81). The ultimate compositional mediation of the lovers' physical interaction occurs when the persona's secretary interposes between their kiss a 'feuille' (line 2521): a leaf of foliage, which also evokes through synonymy a leaf of paper on which their love is inscribed.⁶⁹

We are brought thereby to reflect not only on the boundaries between literary forms, but also on

⁶⁸ Lechat 2005, 195–201.

⁶⁹ The savvy secretary exhorts his master to kiss the leaf, as a way of physically engaging him in the moment, but then pulls it away at the last second such that the lovers' lips meet. He as it were pushes Guillaume from lyric into narrative modes of interaction.

the boundaries between characters' bodies: the *Voir dit*'s persona discloses to us that, prior to meeting his lady, he had intended to enlist someone else ('un homme estrange', line 1996) to act out his part to test whether Toute Belle would recognise him. She, we are told, had considered the same (lines 2004–05). This raises the question of how securely and singularly the identity of a role (here, 'lover') is held within a given body, and prompts us in particular to consider the role of tale teller as a mobile entity within the text. On one hand, as transcriber and authorial shaper of his adventures,⁷⁰ the persona ultimately appropriates all the voices he hears; his act of arrogation is itself an interpretative mediation, as is demonstrated in the *Jugement Behaingne* when he initially mistakes the debating Knight and Lady for a pair of lovers (line 53). On the other hand, narration is a function that passes between characters; still in the *Jugement Behaingne*, on arrival at the Castle of Durbuy, the persona spies a seemingly incidental figure in the king's entourage:

Et ot un clerc que nommer ne saroie
Qui li lisoit la bataille de Troie. (fol. 16^r)

And some clerk whom I cannot name | Was reading to him the battle of Troy.⁷¹

He is another clerkly figure, configured as a tale teller, of uncertain identity and suggestive anonymity. We may fruitfully see in him a further literary refraction of authorial Machaut, but may more specifically perceive him as a further narrative agent to whom the persona passes on

⁷⁰ See Lechat 2005, 182–83.

⁷¹ Palmer 2016, 111 (lines 1474–75).

the narratorial role, since the ‘clerc’ will be witness to proceedings in the court to which the persona seems not to be granted access, being held on the threshold.⁷²

Such character slippage is one example of the kind of relational textuality that I see to characterise the *dit* as a tale about telling. ‘Relationality’ is my conceptualisation of a key feature of Machaut’s *dit* poetics that other critics, especially Cerquiglini-Toulet, have pointed to through terms like ‘discontinuity’ and ‘montage’ in terms of the text’s spatial organisation.⁷³ There is a structural tension between temporal forward movement through the tale and the spatial composition of its elements, which involves multiple forms and codes (such as narrative verse and lyrics in the *Remede*). But there is also, more interestingly still, a tension in how one conceives of that spatial heterogeneousness: is this fragmentation or collocation, dispersal or assembly? ‘Relationality’ could be seen negatively as a compromise or hedging answer, in that it commits to neither one nor the other. More positively, though, it usefully places emphasis on interaction between elements. The hybridity of Machaut’s *dits* invites to consider *how* their elements relate to each other and, thereby, what constitutes each element. This reveals Machaut’s play with category boundaries and expectations as a way of experimenting with or testing his literary materials, enabling the poet to pick apart the processes of poetic composition, especially lyric utterance. In the *Remede*, for example, the lai was both ‘composed’ and ‘read’ as a literary and codicological process and not simply spontaneously uttered.⁷⁴ The dual role of the persona,

⁷² Swift 2012, 26; also Brownlee 1984, 158–70.

⁷³ ‘The spatial organisation of the text declares itself to be anti-romanesque, bespeaking rupture and discontinuity’: Cerquiglini-Toulet 1980, 156; Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 90.

⁷⁴ On the codicological dimension, see Anne Stone’s chapter in the present volume.

as source of individual experience and as creative *faiseur* in the artistic shaping and delivery of that experience, is key.⁷⁵

Machaut's use of poetry to reflect on the processes of poetic creativity has implications for the kind of didacticism that it mobilises. Cerquiglini-Toulet asserts decisively that 'the *dit* instructs',⁷⁶ but what does it teach, and how does it do so? I spoke previously about ways in which *dits* raise open questions and present quandaries rather than resolve debate.⁷⁷ Kay acknowledges that we might initially demur from assessing Machaut's narrative verse as didactic, given the author's playfulness and equivocality, but also notes how his poetry is continually in dialogue with didactic models, such as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. She goes on to make the important point that 'Machaut is the first major French poet to extend the remit of didacticism so that it includes directions as to how to write poetry'.⁷⁸ I would extend it yet further to include directions for thinking about what poetry is and does, thereby substantially broadening the scope of contemporary *arts poétiques* – which primarily addressed methods of versification – to introduce a conceptual dimension of reflection.⁷⁹ This is part of Machaut's 'scholarly ambition' for his *dits*, and also bears out how the *dit* as 'archi-genre' is more usefully defined in terms of how it handles its materials (and thus prompts consideration of processes of composition) than with regard to what it contains. 'The *dit* is thus not defined by its subject

⁷⁵ On the poet as *faiseur* and the grounding of poetic art in the personal, see Lechat 2005, 34, 38; and Kay 2007, 98–99.

⁷⁶ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 87.

⁷⁷ D. Kelly 2014, 88–89; Poirion 1980, 149.

⁷⁸ Kay 2007, 95. See also Earp 2014, 34.

⁷⁹ See also Lechat 2005, 33–34. One could also perceive this development in the existence of the *Prologue* and its positioning in MS A ahead of the other *dits*: concern for form precedes content, with Nature visiting Guillaume before Amours, foregrounding the former as a key matter for reflection. See Armstrong and Kay 2011, 143.

matter, but by the manner in which the elements that make it up are brought together.’⁸⁰ This ‘manner’ is not only a textual phenomenon, but is also constituted by ‘elements’ of the *dits*’ material presentation in manuscripts.

Dits in MS C

A *dit* is, as we have seen, all about words, but, as we have also seen, Machaut raises through his poems a consciousness of speech and writing as visual entities, whether implicitly through the equation of *dit* with *livre*, or explicitly through diegetic reference to text being ‘seen’ as well as, or as part of, being ‘read’. One aspect of *dits* that depends on a visual engagement with text, and has received much critical attention, is the use of anagrammatic or numerical signatures which the reader is sometimes explicitly invited to unpick, usually at the end of a work.⁸¹ The anagram in the *Jugement Behaingne* lies in the final line of the poem, and is flagged over twenty lines earlier as appearing ‘at the end of this book [*livret*]’ (line 2055). The *Alerion* prefaces detailed instructions for numerical reading with the promise that discovering ‘who has composed all of this rhyme’ (line 4802) is a straightforward affair:

C’est chose legiere et si plainne
Que la saiez a pou de painne (fol. 92^v)

It’s easy and quite plain to see; | you will not find it difficult.⁸²

⁸⁰ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1988, 86. See also Kelly’s discussion of Machaut’s art of poetry in relation to the rhetorical *forma tractandi* (2014, 130–37); and Léonard 1996, 353.

⁸¹ See Earp 1995, 202; and McGrady 2006, 72–75.

⁸² Gaudet and Heatt 1994, 165 (lines 4803–04).

This is, of course, as much an ironic challenge as a promise, both inflaming readerly curiosity and laying down a gauntlet to our interpretative expertise. A similar, but implicit challenge is offered by unannounced anagrams, such as that contained in line 4297 of the *Remede* in this chapter's opening quotation. McGrady evaluates critics' different approaches to this self-signing strategy; their solutions are often difficult or held to be indecipherable, the code offered failing to yield the name desired. She determines that it is designed as an authorial strategy of control.⁸³ I argue further that, in denying direct access to the authorial self – by furnishing solutions that do not match perfectly with his name – Machaut uses this visual device to underscore the mediating, shaping role of textuality and the creative role of writerly representation that is at the core of the *dit*'s activity.

Beyond the visuality of the poetic text, the material presentation of the manuscript brings us to issues of ordering and layout, rubrication, and illustration. In the case of the latter, it is interesting to consider the extent to which our conception of the Machaldian *dit* – an affair of words both auditory and visual – also involves or has been conditioned by pictorial representation in manuscript miniatures.⁸⁴ For example, how has the visualisation of narrative voice as an embodied, particularised human figure with a certain style of dress influenced our apprehension of its identity and function?⁸⁵ MS C is an especially rich case study in this regard, given that its pictorial programme was clearly intended as a key component of the codex's

⁸³ McGrady 2006, 73.

⁸⁴ I specify 'Machaldian' *dit*, since the same question could not be posed of Froissart, whose works' manuscripts are very sparsely illustrated.

⁸⁵ See Leo 2005; and Swift 2016a.

identity: it carries the greatest number of miniatures amongst Machaut manuscripts for four out of five of its *dits* as well as for the *lais*,⁸⁶ and these seem to have been part of an authorial plan.⁸⁷

There are three particular features of MS **C** that we should keep in mind when considering how (and whether) it bears out the characteristics of the *dit* that we have identified through discussion of text alone, as well as how it may, in turn, shape our understanding of *dit* poetics. First, it is difficult to make any judgment based on its ordering of the *dits*, since each is copied as a separate fascicle unit, so re-arrangement or removal of other poems might conceivably have occurred over time;⁸⁸ nonetheless, we may note an interesting coincidence (?) between this codicological fact and the diminutive used in the *Jugement Behaingne* – Machaut’s most numerous circulated *dit* – to designate the end of that poem: ‘livret’, since its last line is indeed the end of the booklet or fascicle. We may also note that the manuscript, like some other single-author Machaut codices, places *dits* first before the lyric section.⁸⁹ This potentially suggests a certain privileging of the form and perhaps a definitional role (made explicit in the later *Prologue*) in how we are to apprehend Machaut’s poetics: lyric poetry mediated by narrative poetry, both within individual *dits* and within the manuscript as a whole? The second feature of note is that only the minority of what we now call *dits* are labelled thus in MS **C**; this occurs, for the *Vergier* and *Lyon*, in their explicits (fols 102^v, 120^v).⁹⁰ Such infrequency is not

⁸⁶ Only the *Lyon* has more illustrations elsewhere, in MS **Vg**. MS **C**’s *Remede* and *Vergier* exceed by far the total in other manuscripts (*Remede* having almost three times as many as MSS **A**’s and **Pm**’s twelve each, and *Alerion* having over double the eight of MS **Vg**). MS **C**’s *lais* include fifteen miniatures, compared to three in MS **J** (Earp 1995, 187).

⁸⁷ Leach 2011b, 72; Leo 2005, 87; Avril 1982a.

⁸⁸ Huot 1987, 243.

⁸⁹ For the list of manuscripts which reverse this order, see Leach 2011b, 12 n. 14, to which add MS **E**.

⁹⁰ The *Alerion* does not have one, though one may well not see this as a lack, given the poem’s final, self-naming line: ‘[...] dit des .iiii. oysiaus’ (Tale of the Four Birds; fol. 92^v, line 4814). Gaudet and Hieatt 1994, 166. The *Jugement Behaingne*’s final rubric reads ‘Ci fenist le temps

unusual, and cannot necessarily be construed as inconsistency or as a factor troubling our understanding of the poems' identity; indeed, it could support the case for viewing the *dit* as an 'archi-genre' rather than a genre category. The third feature is of much greater importance for our scholarly understanding: MS C, completed for the most part in the mid-1340s, does not include the *Voir dit*, which, as we saw above, has been so central to scholarship on the *dit*.⁹¹ One could therefore see the manuscript to offer us an opportunity to refresh our perspective on the 'archi-genre'. We should also guard against any temptation towards teleology that its absence might induce, inclining us unduly to condition our perspective as an anticipation of the *Voir dit* as a future culmination of the form. In an attempt to cultivate fidelity to what MS C gives us, rather than what it does not, the textual examples that I have used in this chapter have deliberately mostly been drawn from the *dits* that it contains.

Two characteristics of the *dit* that scholarly discussion of the *Voir dit* has influenced especially strongly are its material self-consciousness, given the poem's thematisation and staging of book compilation, and the notion of 'montage', in light of its three-way formal hybridity between narrative verse, lyric, and prose. MS C, on the other hand, has been seen to present a 'lyrical rendering' of Machaut's works.⁹² Should we, therefore, be querying the pertinence of clerkly writerliness as a defining feature of the *dit*? I structure the analysis that follows into three sections that keep this apparent discrepancy in mind and examine whether or not it is only apparent. The structure broadly echoes that used for the previous part of this chapter, on texts. I first home in on one specific pictorial feature, the scroll, which is, at least

pascour' (fol. 22^v, quoting the opening line of the poem), whilst the *Remede* closes: 'Ci fenist remede de fortune' (fol. 58^v). On 'ci fenist' as a concluding formula, see Cerquiglini-Toulet 2011, 44.

⁹¹ On the dating of MS C, see the Introduction to the present volume, as well as the chapters by Elizabeth Eva Leach, Domenic Leo, and Kyunghye Pyun.

⁹² Huot 1987, 272; Drobinsky 2004c, 61.

according to how the manuscript's miniatures have appeared in scholarly publications, so distinctive of MS C's visual programme.⁹³ It offers a crucible for debating how we should interpret the implications of this iconographical device for the lyrical and/or writerly identity of the *dit*, as does the subject of the second section, the codicological presentation in both rubrics and miniatures of the persona as an embodied human figure with both clerkly and courtly aspects. Visualisations of the *je* also enable us to consider whether we see a distinctive figure emerging to characterise the *dits* as opposed to the lyrics. Looking transvisually across the manuscript leads us into the third section's concern with relationality: how might we understand 'montage' in terms of patterns of interaction between the codex's visual elements?

Scrolls and manuscript performance

Figure 8.1: MS C, fols 38^v–39^r

<on facing pages>

In the critical discourse of manuscript studies, including scholarship on Machaut, the vocabulary of theatricality has come to be used in order to dynamise understanding of the manuscript page's features.⁹⁴ This sometimes privileges orality, seeing the book as a 'virtual theatre' gesturing towards or embodying a performance of song or debate:⁹⁵ 'as a form of performance space in

⁹³ On scrolls in MS C, see also Elizabeth Eva Leach, Kate Maxwell, Kathleen Wilson Ruffo, and Tamsyn Mahoney-Steel in the present volume.

⁹⁴ In medieval French studies, Nancy Freeman Regalado in particular pushed for the application of ideas of performance to the book; see, for instance, Regalado 1993; and the volume of essays in her honour (Doss-Quinby, Krueger, and Burns 2007), esp. Cynthia J. Brown's contribution (2007).

⁹⁵ Huot 1987, 260.

dialogue with contemporary live spectacle’,⁹⁶ and sometimes visually, perceiving the *mise en page* to be a theatre of writerly and/or pictorial performance.⁹⁷ It is interesting to consider representations of the scroll in MS C in light of that conceptualisation. The proliferation of scroll images prefacing lyric texts points to oral utterance,⁹⁸ such as the scene in the *Remede* of Esperance holding and attending to a scroll (fol. 38^v), before the text and melody of her *chant royal* (fol. 39^r), on hearing which, the persona falls asleep; see Figure 8.1. But the presence of musical notation should not necessarily be assumed to have ‘required or even anticipated an actual performance of the music’,⁹⁹ and may be viewed in visual terms as a graphical animation of the page.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the scroll itself can stand metonymically for the work as a written text, betokening ‘a material form that enables the poem’s circulation’.¹⁰¹ An important factor conditioning whether one tends more towards an oral or a writerly reading of the scroll, is the presence or absence of a pen; on occasion, we see the persona writing on a scroll rather than reading from it (for example, fols 26^r, 30^v, 47^v). Laurence de Looze judges the association between scroll and stylus to be a ‘mixed iconography’,¹⁰² marrying a symbol for oral speech with a signifier of the act of writing. I argue that what is most significant about these occasions is less a matter of tension between oral and written modes, and more what their collocation lays emphasis on, namely an articulation of the processes of composition, with the inditing image

⁹⁶ Cruse 2011, 3.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Leach 2011b, 73. Cruse (2011) can be seen to do both in his study of Bodley 264: considering it as a “theater in parchment” (p. 24) in relation, for instances, to practices of prelection (p. 53) as well as to ‘the copying of narrative into manuscripts [as] a kind of performance’ (p. 9).

⁹⁸ Huot 1987, 246 and 251.

⁹⁹ McGrady 2006, 144, referencing Dillon 2002b, 29–64 (esp. 55–61).

¹⁰⁰ ‘A music to be seen more than to be sung’, to quote Dillon 2002b, 61.

¹⁰¹ Drobinsky 2004c, 62. For lyrics circulating on swatches of parchment enclosed in small boxes, see Earp 1995, 73, and Cerquiglini-Toulet 1991.

¹⁰² De Looze 1997, 86.

providing a visual gloss on ‘faire’, as in ‘fis je ce dit qu’on claimme lay’ (I composed this piece that is called a lai; fol. 26^r, the last line of text in the right-hand column of Figure 4.1).¹⁰³ This writerly phase is itself still lyrical in its bucolic setting,¹⁰⁴ but it highlights the lyric form as a crafted compositional product that finds its genesis in written text rather than spontaneous sonic utterance; the act of inscription signifies reflection on the mediating activity of representation. What the scroll miniatures of MS C therefore dramatise is the art of poetic production, with emphasis falling on work in process, whether composition or delivery, rather than on the completed product; for instance, the persona as creative writer is always shown at work in the *middle* of a scroll, which recalls our discussion above of ‘him’ as an *I-in-*formation, being constituted by the continual effort to ‘compose new, pleasing tales of love’. It might also, in terms of the image of the poet figure that Machaut wishes to communicate, suggest continual occupation, a busyness betokening success, as well as self-promotion as a particular kind of effortful artist – a form of modesty topos? A valorisation of artisanal craft?

Picturing the persona

Figure 8.2: *Jugement Behaingne* opening, MS C, fol. 1^r

The notion of an *I-in-*formation frustrates any desire to seize upon a single snapshot of the persona, such as one of the half-page miniatures opening each *dit* in MS C, to define his identity: ‘here is the persona’ would be too unitary and monolithic a statement. We thus need to

¹⁰³ Drobinsky (2004c, 62) speaks of the manuscript illustrating ‘the lay’s two phases of coming into being’.

¹⁰⁴ Huot 1987, 272.

reorientate how we respond to the visualisation of the poetic *je* as a pictorial entity, namely as an embodied human subject.¹⁰⁵ This figure is clearly accorded prominence – for example, being the first character encountered on the first folio of MS C, when reading the *Jugement Behaingne*'s opening miniature from left to right (Figure 8.2); but quite *how* we should construe the functioning of 'his' identity and 'his' role is less immediately clear. 'His' identity should not be considered restrictively, self-contained and within a single image, and 'his' role should not be bound to one body, as we shall examine in the third section on relationality.

Our conception of poetic *I*-hood is thus slippery and plural rather than neatly bounded and singular. One aspect of such plurality that has garnered much critical attention in MS C concerns the persona's social status as courtly and/or clerkly. Signifiers of courtliness are discerned in his attire,¹⁰⁶ and of clerkliness in his posture or activity, such as writing. This multifacetedness is not a tension that needs resolving: we are not being posed the question of whether he is of noble or non-noble status,¹⁰⁷ but are being shown variation in the persona's participation in or exclusion from court society *qua* poet. At times, he is able to take part, such as when he is shown joining in a carol in the *Remede* on fol. 51^r (Figure 5.2).¹⁰⁸ At others, he assumes, or is obliged to assume, a distance, as when he stands apart from the Lady and Knight, separated from them by foliage, at the start of the *Jugement Behaingne* on fol. 1^r (Figure 8.2). This affords him a measure of mobility; his separation on fol. 1^r is strategic, to enable him to

¹⁰⁵ Though see also discussion below of the opening miniature of the *Lyon*.

¹⁰⁶ Leo 2005, 103.

¹⁰⁷ This question seems to be posed in the presentation of the numerical signature at the end of the *Alerion*: the persona says that in solving the puzzle his readers will clearly see 'se cilz est clers ou damoysiaus | Qui fist dit des .iiii. oysiaus' (if he's a clerk or a young knight who wrote this 'Tale of the Four Birds'; fol. 92^v, lines 4813–14). Gaudet and Hieatt 1994, 166. I would argue, however, that this is more a gesture of intrigue, as part of Machaut's promotion of the nobility of the clerkly state.

¹⁰⁸ Huot 1987, 257.

overhear without being seen (line 55), and, whilst textually described as being squeezed inside the bush (line 54), and so physically and comically diminished, he is shown pictorially erect and equal in size to the nobles on whom he spies. Indeed, his status, to use Cerquiglini-Toulet's phrase, as 'the hero of the written word',¹⁰⁹ as their superior in some sense, is implied by their relative postures and gesture. The Knight is turned towards him, and the Lady's hand, while it could simply be read in the context of her engagement in conversation with the Knight, in effect gestures in the persona's direction, evoking how the aristocratic pair's conversation, the tales they tell, serve the clerkly persona's activity as tale teller.¹¹⁰

The persona's identity as a lover is ambiguously represented in a couple of respects. Still within the fol. 1^r miniature, we find the first of many instances of the persona with arms folded – he approaches the carol on fol. 51^r in similar posture (Figure 5.2),¹¹¹ which one may construe iconographically in different ways. On one hand, folded arms may denote melancholy,¹¹² a quality befitting any fourteenth-century literary lover worth his salt (provoked by unrequited desire, absence from his beloved, etc.); on fol. 93^r (Figure 8.3), the persona of the *Vergier* stands thus, and is described as being 'full of amorous malady' (line 19). On the other hand, and in the context of what Domenic Leo has termed the 'iconography of exclusion' in MS C,¹¹³ folded arms can be seen to signify a barrier that underscores the persona's position as audience, as spectator of others' amorous experiences. One way of interpreting this multiple resonance is as a gesture towards the plural narrative levels on which we understand the persona to be operating: the *I* represented as well as the *I* representing. This is further evidenced pictorially by the scroll-

¹⁰⁹ Cerquiglini-Toulet 1984, 489.

¹¹⁰ For other readings of the combination of courtly and clerkly signifiers in the portrayal of the persona in MS C, see Leo 2005, 92–95 and 103–08; and Huot 1987, 252–57.

¹¹¹ Huot (1987, 344) identifies another figure, participating in the carol, as the persona.

¹¹² See Korte 1997, 89.

¹¹³ Leo 2005, 117–24.

writing miniatures which dramatise the *I* in the process of composing – in all senses – his *I*. Not all paratextual material works to open up the identity of the persona; the *Remede*'s rubrics seem to close it down by identifying him uniquely as lover ('l'amant'), creating a tension thereby with some of the miniatures that they accompany: as Drobinsky notes, 'the single signifier thus represents two distinct speaking figures, the character and the narrator'.¹¹⁴ However, and as Drobinsky also notes in respect of similar use of 'la dame' to account for Esperance and the beloved lady, we do not need to view this restrictively. 'L'amant' does not, therefore, limit the persona's identity; indeed, it can be seen to extend it intertextually: Huot proposes that the *Remede*'s use of character rubrics to identify the lover imitates that found in contemporary manuscripts of the *Roman de la rose*, visually evoking a connection with the lover-protagonist of that work who is also echoed textually in Machaut's *dits*.¹¹⁵

Figure 8.3: *Vergier* opening, MS C, fol. 93^r

'The persona' is thus a significant and malleable entity whom we should approach not just within, but also across images, whether in a single codex or between manuscripts. In MS C, the opening miniatures of the five *dits* convey this significance in diverse ways and, as images functioning interpretatively, cue the viewer/reader into the multi-levelled, interrogative approach to poetic *I*-hood that the texts will demand. One miniature that initially seems out of place in that context is fol. 103^r opening the *Lyon*, the fifth and final *dit*, since it includes no visualised persona – indeed, no human figures whatsoever; see Figure 6.1. Seemingly a marked discontinuity with what precedes, this creates a pictorial quandary; however, its innovation does

¹¹⁴ Drobinsky 2004c, 56.

¹¹⁵ Huot 1987, 250.

not come out of nowhere.¹¹⁶ In the preceding two *dits*, the role of landscape is brought increasingly to the fore and the mobility of the *I* underscored.¹¹⁷ The *Alerion* (fol. 59^r, Figure 7.1) offers a quartet of human figures whose relationship is not clear and is complicated by the image's spatial composition.¹¹⁸ We might search amongst them to identify 'the persona', whom we do not definitely find until the following miniature on fol. 62^r (Figure 7.15). The opening image thus invites us to look *differently* and to reconsider *how* we view its elements. Similarly, the *Vergier* (Figure 8.3) challenges us with something unfamiliar. On one hand, the figure to the left is immediately recognisable as the persona, and recalls that of fol. 1^r (Figure 8.1). On the other hand, what is placed at the centre of the image, to his left, are not other human figures, as in the *Jugement Behaingne* or the *Remede*, but an empty bower.¹¹⁹ The significance of the miniature thus seems to hinge on lack or absence: for Leo, it betokens the persona's exclusion from love, since he is obliged to remain the bower's observer instead of its occupant.¹²⁰ He must tell *of* it, since his own tale of unfulfilled desire will not bring him to sit *in* it; yet again shown with arms folded, as spectator, and we look at both it and him. On fol. 103^r (Figure 6.1), we look *with* him at a broader landscape scene devoid of human occupation; the persona is not pictured within the frame of the image since we are sharing his spectating gaze without, looking upon the

¹¹⁶ For the interpretation that follows, I am assuming that the extant ordering of the poems is the product of intended design, whether established prior to the copying and decoration of the individual fascicles or in their organisation thereafter, on which, see Earp 2014, 37. It is also important to recognise that the five opening miniatures were not illustrated by the same hand (on the artists of MS C, see Earp 1995, 132), so, in positing some kind of progression between them, I am assuming a level of artistic oversight in the codex's design by the *chef d'atelier*, the *Remede* Master.

¹¹⁷ Earp raises the possibility that aspects of the landscape scenes may have been intended to reflect Bonne's home at Vincennes (Earp 2014, 34).

¹¹⁸ See Leo 2005, 158–59; and Leo in the present volume. Earp associates the *Alerion* in this manuscript with the education of Bonne's children (Earp 2014, 30–31, 34), so one may discern a didactic function in the figures populating fol. 59^r.

¹¹⁹ We find an occupied bower on fol. 109^r in the *Lyon*.

¹²⁰ Leo 2017.

springtime scene that the opening lines of the poem's text evoke.¹²¹ Should we find ourselves looking *for* the persona, we find his *I* here aligned with our *we*.¹²² The opening miniatures of the *dits* thus invite us to juggle between different apprehensions of the multi-levelled and multi-form persona, constituting the facets of 'his' identity relationally, across the pictorial montage.¹²³

Material relationality: 'that in a book we'll find life'

Having seen the persona to be relationally constituted across the opening miniatures of the *dits*, we turn to consider the *I* across both sections of MS C to consider whether the manuscript's portrayal of a hybrid poetic persona is distinctive to its narrative verse.¹²⁴ The first image of the lyric section (fol. 121^r, Figure 9.1), prefacing the *Loange des dames*, promotes continuity by presenting us with the familiar motif of a writerly composing persona, who has one scroll in process and four others already indited scattered around him in a landscape setting, perhaps betokening the lyric utterances to follow.¹²⁵ Compositionally, in terms of its single-column size and use of a patterned background, the miniature is set in continuity with the majority of those inserted in the bodies of the preceding *dits*. In that light, and thinking back to earlier discussion

¹²¹ See also Leo 2005, 137 and 150. Certain amongst the *Vergier*'s miniatures foster an awareness of spectatorship and observation of the persona, by including in three images (fols 95^r, 96^r and 100^v) a number of bystanders. One could see this simply to be rendering visually the text's mention and development of six young noblemen and women (lines 159–62, and from line 605), but it is striking that none of the other manuscripts' pictorial programmes for the *Vergier* does so, and that these bystanders are, amongst the three images, positioned variously as onlookers in relation to the persona and what he sees.

¹²² For an alternative reading of the *Lyon* opening miniature, see Swift 2016a, 30–31.

¹²³ For analysis of how the persona's narrating role slips between characters in the sequence of miniatures for *Jugement Behaingne* in MS C, see Swift 2016a, 37–39.

¹²⁴ The lyric section miniatures were executed by the same artist as the *Alerion* and *Vergier* (Earp 1995, 32). See also Huot 1987, 272.

¹²⁵ Huot 1987, 244 and 246.

of the scope of a *dit*, might it be possible to conceive of the whole of MS C as an archi-dit?¹²⁶ Such a view is fostered by several aspects of the portrayal of the *I* in the lyric section that may be construed as relational. A multi-levelled persona is evoked, not only through images of the act of composition (*I* writes *I* also on fols 170^r and 194^v, Figures 3.4 and 3.19), but also through the montage of *mise en page*. Besides the *Loange* image, the other miniatures in the lyric section all pertain to the *lais*, which are the only musical texts to be illustrated in MS C outside the *Remede*.¹²⁷ Most show their persona alone, which may appear a marker of difference from scenes of interaction in the *dits*; however, pictorial devices ensure that we do not conceive of this figure – whether male or female – as self-contained, but rather defined in relation to other elements of presentation. Several figures look directly towards the text and music that commence to their left and thus ‘ahead’ of them in terms of the viewer’s reading gaze moving across the image from left to right: the lyric is thus set up as their composition and also what will compose their being through its unfolding.¹²⁸ The composing *I* on fol. 170^r (Figure 3.4) has his body inclined towards the text and music of ‘Pour ce que on puist miex retraire’ (L3), rendering the relationship between what he looks down to compose within the image and what follows without the image on the manuscript page. The figure in the miniature preceding ‘Par trois raisons’ (L6/5, fol. 176^v, Figure 3.10) points towards the lyric and music, as if raising his finger to make the three arguments of the ensuing text.

A special case of interrelation between *dit* and lyric sections, which also promotes relational subjectivity, concerns *Qui bien aime*, also known as the ‘Lay de plour’ (L22/16).

¹²⁶ The relative paucity in MS C of rubrics prefacing lyrics with an identification of their form (in the *Loange*, there are rubrics for rondeaux (beginning on fol. 127^v), and then once for the next ballade after a rondeau, fol. 138^r) contributes to continuity with the *dit* section.

¹²⁷ Huot 1987, 260.

¹²⁸ For the fusion of poem and persona at the *end* of the first lai, see Huot 1987, 262.

Composition of this lai is commissioned in the narrative fiction of the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre* as Machaut's partial 'amende' (fine; line 4210) for the alleged antifeminism of the *Jugement Behaingne*, though its actual composition may predate the second *jugement* poem.¹²⁹ The *Jugement Navarre* does not itself feature in MS C; given uncertainties in dating the compilation and final completion of the manuscript, it is not possible to know whether the *Jugement Navarre* was completed before or after, and whether any resonance of that poem is intended by the compiler to inform the appearance of the 'Lay de plour' in its lai section. It is accompanied by a miniature showing a man and woman conversing (fol. 187^r, Figure 1.6). Huot has considered some potential resonances of this illustrated dialogue and between whom it may be understood to take place.¹³⁰ Additionally, if it is informed by knowledge of the *Jugement Navarre*,¹³¹ could we see it depicting a man representing the personae of the *Jugement Navarre* and the *Jugement Behaingne* issuing an apology to the *Jugement Behaingne*'s Lady, before Machaut ventriloquises the 'Lay de plour' lady's voice in the lyric that follows? Alternatively, the image may body forth the discursive situation of the 'Lay de plour' itself, wherein the lady apostrophises her deceased lover and imagines his appearance in her mind's eye: 'Et vis a vis | Te voy, ce m'est vis,' (And I see you | Face to face, so I think; fol. 188^v, lines 180–81).¹³² In that light, one could see fol. 187^r's miniature to fulfil the Lady's concluding exhortation to God: 'qu'en livre soions de vie' (fol. 189^r) (that we may feature in the Book of Life; but also, that in a book we may find life); and to do so quite concretely in the material context of the 'livre' that is MS C.

¹²⁹ Earp 1995, 187 and 365–66.

¹³⁰ Huot 1987, 265–66.

¹³¹ For factors of chronology and patronage affecting this, see Earp 2014, 31; Earp 1995, 210; and Huot 1987, 247.

¹³² Trans. Palmer 2016, 349.

Within the lai section, the presentation of the ‘Lay de plour’ is also relational in other interesting respects pertaining to the poetic persona’s identity. It follows *Un mortel lay* (‘Le Lay mortel’, L12/8), and may be connected to it not only thematically, but also narratively, possibly serving as a response to the death of the protagonist of the preceding item.¹³³ The alternation of male and female voices produced by the sequence of the ‘Lay mortel’ and ‘Lay de plour’ is continued into the following poems, a pair of declarations of love: *Ne say comment commencer* (L14/9, fol. 189^r) and *Se quanque Diex* (L11, fol. 191^r). The *mise en page* of these latter two lais is exceptional in MS C, in that they each receive a marginal illustration as well as a framed miniature (Figures 3.16 and 3.17). The illustration of *Ne say comment commencer* in fact intertwines it with the ‘Lay de plour’, since its images of a woman and a man straddle the text residuum of the preceding poem, which leaves open the possibility of reading the images doubly: as a response to the man and woman directly conversing within the miniature at the start of the ‘Lay de plour’, and as an anticipation of the virtual conversation of *Ne say comment commencer*, whose male speaker declares his love for his female beloved, explicitly addressing the god of Love, but implicitly, through Love, his lady. The latter lai is known as the ‘Lay de l’Ymage’ owing to the prominent and recurrent figure of the lady’s ‘douce ymage’ (also called ‘figure’ (fol. 190^v, line 182) and ‘pourtraiture’ (line 187)) that the speaker carries in his heart.¹³⁴ In its text, emphasis falls less on projection of his desire onto/as an image of his beloved, than on the extent to which that image nourishes his being:

[...] c’est le fruit

¹³³ Huot (1987, 266) is cautious in suggesting narrative continuity; I think one can be less hesitant, building on Huot’s own observation of Machaut’s interest, in other manuscripts, in creating dialogues between pairs and triplets of lais (p. 266 n. 22).

¹³⁴ Chichmaref 1909, 2: 389–96.

Dont soustenir
Me vueil et norir. (fol. 190^v)

[...] it is the fruit that I wish to sustain and nourish me.¹³⁵

In that light, a picture of her is tantamount to an expression of his being, such that the representation of his lady in the miniature on fol. 189^r depicts the source of his composition and his existence; it is thus still a representation of the poetic *I*. *Se quanque Diex*, also known in other sources as the ‘Lay du Mirouer Amoureux’,¹³⁶ similarly privileges the nurturing power of a visual image of the beloved, here nourishing not only the lover (here female), but also others:

Dont on l’appelle tout à fait
Miroir qui les bons parfait. (fol. 191^r)

And thus he is called precisely the mirror which perfects the good.¹³⁷

The female voice, in language echoing that of the previous lai, discloses the sustaining force of ‘sweet thought’ (line 74) ‘by which I am satisfied and consoled’ (lines 76–77), which similarly makes him constitutive of her *I*.¹³⁸ The pair of lais seem to celebrate mutual devotion, and in any case comprise together reciprocal expressions of love,¹³⁹ as well as depicting the intertwining of lover/beloved identities.

That the persona as poet-lover is constituted by the beloved reveals a further aspect of relationality in the manuscript book’s performance of lyric self-hood and its slippery bodily

¹³⁵ Translation mine (lines 203–05).

¹³⁶ Chichmaref 1909, 2: 362–70.

¹³⁷ Translation mine (lines 14–15).

¹³⁸ For a different interpretation of the two lais’ miniatures, see Huot 1987, 266–67.

¹³⁹ Huot 1987, 267.

boundaries. More broadly, we see emphasis throughout the manuscript on interaction and dialogue: processes of communication and transmission.¹⁴⁰ MS C's pictorial programme for the *Remede*, for example, is unique amongst Machaut manuscripts in displaying so many scenes of conversation between the persona and his various interlocutors in its miniatures, as well as highlighting in its rubrication the acts of communication ('parle', 'dit', 'en oiant chanter', 's'en va chantant', etc.).¹⁴¹ In the lyric section, a visually striking moment of communication is the miniature introducing the 'Lay mortel' (fol. 184^r, Figure 3.13),¹⁴² whose persona is shown looking at a bush in which the face of another figure is visible and looks back at him.¹⁴³ He is thus shown defining himself in relation to another, and the precise identity of that figure does not much matter – I see it to be indicative rather than denotative. It could be, as Huot posits, Mesdis, who is identified in the poem's text, close to the miniature, as cause of the persona's woes (line 9). But, if one takes its gender to be indeterminate,¹⁴⁴ it may also represent the 'douce ymage' of his lady, which is what first subjugated him 'with the mortal arrow' and which he sees continuously. Indeed, he concludes by addressing her directly: 'Dame, mort m'ont [...] | Vostre dous oeil' (Lady, your sweet gaze has tormented me; fol. 186^r, lines 234–35),¹⁴⁵ with wordplay on 'mort' as 'death/dead' and as the past participle of 'mordre' (to bite, gnaw away at).

The relationality of identity within the scenarios of the poems may be seen to gesture outwards to the experience of the reader/viewer, whom it invites to engage in a dialogic process

¹⁴⁰ See discussion above about the start of the *Jugement Behaingne*, fol. 1^r.

¹⁴¹ One could also relate the dominant visual template of scenes of dialogue to Huot's posited influence of manuscripts of the *Rose* on the 'Amant' rubrics of MS C (Huot 1987, 250).

¹⁴² In Chichmaref 1909, 2: 371–79.

¹⁴³ The face in the bush becomes a recurrent feature in later Machaut manuscripts for illustrating the concealed eavesdropping persona in the *Jugement Behaingne*: see Swift 2016a, 36–37.

¹⁴⁴ Earp (1995, 187) states it is the face of another man; so little is visible of the profile that I would argue that it is not possible (or necessary) to determine the gender.

¹⁴⁵ Translation mine.

of interpretation in their relationship with, and the relationships that they construct between, the different elements of the manuscript book. Whilst readers are obviously positioned as spectators to the whole, at a distance from the poet-persona both textually and visually, they are also to some extent called to identify with his compositional activity as a creative process of tale telling: they compose the page that they read and construct how it tells its tales through poetic and pictorial quandaries.¹⁴⁶ If MS C is a ‘theatrical’ rendering of Machaut’s poetry, it is a theatre for the art of composition, not as product, but as a process that is constitutive of poetic identity itself. And in the materiality of the book, this art comes to life: ‘en livre soions de vie’.

¹⁴⁶ The sorts of puzzles and aporias considered above in the opening miniatures of the *dits* (on which, see also Huot 1987, 258; and Leo 2005, 139–42 and 153–56) support the idea of didacticism working less obviously prescriptively in MS C: for example, other manuscripts’ initial miniatures for the *Remede* show an image of instruction (Earp 1995, 152).